

**Experiences of Sure Start Children's Centre  
Teachers: emerging roles and identities in a  
collaborative setting**

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**DECLARATION**

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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## Abstract

Sure Start Children's Centres deliver a wide range of services to families with young children. For over a decade an important aspect of Sure Start has been collaborative work involving diverse practitioners, professionals, agencies and organisations. The role of Children's Centre Teacher (CCT) was established in 2005 with the aim of improving children's social and cognitive development. This qualitative study examines the experiences of individual CCTs, paying attention to their descriptions of role, their professional identities and how they experience and understand collaborative working.

The study uses two methods to collect data, iterative email interviews and personal interviews conducted on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. A total of 15 informants provided data through emails, interviews or both.

In terms of role, the study finds that respondents report considerable differences between the centre-based role and that of a classroom teacher. Uncertainty, variability and change pervade their accounts. Despite this it is possible to identify key characteristics of the nature of CCT activity through CCTs' comparisons of their new role and their previous work. In terms of identity, CCTs clearly position themselves as professionals and place themselves as senior members of the Children's Centre team. However, identifying the CCT role as a unique profession, teaching specialism or discrete occupation is found to be problematic for a number of reasons.

Informants endorse collaborative working, which they describe as part aspiration and part achievement, reporting a mixture of successes and barriers. Children's Centre Teachers invoke two modes to describe the collaborative work they undertake, the first appears close to traditional models of interprofessional working, the second, which describes the majority of the work they undertake, casts CCTs as advisors and consultants to staff members they see as subordinate. The study also comments on how email interviews might be used in future research.



## Dedication

I would like to lovingly dedicate this work to my father and to my sons, in the hope that they might be as proud of me as I am of them. I also dedicate it to all family, friends and colleagues who have supplied endless encouragement and cups of tea.

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## Introduction

Sure Start is an ongoing programme of local initiatives in England for families with young children. Sure Start Children's Centres (SSCCs) and their predecessors, Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs), are area-based schemes providing services ranging across childcare and early education, child play and development, health services and promotion, parenting classes and family support, training and employment support and a range of community activities. A range of workers are directly employed to deliver services collaboratively with other professionals and practitioners from the local area. SSLPs and SSCCs employ workers involved with the organisation and running of the centre and also those that are involved in providing services to families. However, directly employed staff groups are not large (10 to 15 members might be typical in 2012). They may include workers from well-defined and pre-established occupations (e.g., nursery workers, health visitors, managers, administrators) and those which have been created specifically to perform a specific range of tasks within a specific Sure Start setting (e.g., participation workers, centre workers, general assistants). The role of Children's Centre Teacher emerged in response to national guidance issued in 2005 as the first SSCCs were initiated and existing SSLPs were transformed into SSCCs.

### Initial reasons for this study

I spent nearly ten years working in SSLPs and SSCCs from 2000 to 2009; first as a local evaluator and later as a centre manager. I found centre-based practices to be complex, fascinating, variable and rapidly changing. There is a growing body of research concerning various aspects of Sure Start activities, the primary focus of which understandably tends to be on service evaluation, outcomes for families and the development of process and policy. Whilst I shared these interests, I also became aware of the work-related anecdotes of my colleagues. These accounts seemed to be essentially linked to the centre services they developed and the way these were delivered. I worked with people who, after starting new jobs in Sure Start, seemed to undergo a series of rapid transformations in terms of their knowledge, attitudes and

abilities; many, (including myself) underwent significant changes to their job role and sense of professional identity. Whilst these transformations might be attributed to individual factors and / or by the high levels of contextual change that pertained, I felt they were occurring to a far greater extent than might be expected in other public service occupational settings. Thus I became interested in the experiences of Sure Start workers both for the effects they had on the individuals concerned and for their actual or potential consequences for the services that were delivered.

The current Coalition Government continues to regard SSCCs as an important device for delivering services to families. Working roles and practices in SSCCs and elsewhere have begun to change in response to pressures for increased collaboration and other drivers. A picture emerges of an increasingly flexible workforce; this, together with the ongoing climate of austerity is likely to prompt policy makers to re-examine how services are best commissioned and targeted in regard to particular child and family interventions, and which occupational groups should be involved in these interventions. Such an examination needs to be based on accurate understandings of existing roles and on evidence of how workers (including professionals) can best be deployed, controlled and supported. Thus the experience of being a professional within SSCCs and of applying professional knowledge in that context seem to be important to current and future policy and practice.

### **The purpose, aims and scope of the study**

A study of this size must necessarily be limited in its scope; this study seeks to add to knowledge about Sure Start by focusing on the experiences of one group of workers therein. It does this in the belief that the experiences of workers themselves are important, beyond and in addition to any impact on services. The particular group selected for this study was Children's Centre Teachers (CCTs); this group of workers was selected for a number of pragmatic and methodological reasons:

- The (then) mandatory nature of the role meant that most SSCC teams should contain a CCT (either part-time or full-time).

- That the CCT role was first promulgated in 2005 becoming more established in 2006, meaning that many CCTs would have been in post for around two to three years by the time the fieldwork was taking place.
- That the CCT role was to some extent defined in guidance unlike many of the other novel jobs that emerged in SSLPs and SSCCs; this meant that there should be some level of consistency between research sites.
- That CCTs by definition had to be professionally qualified and experienced teachers; this meant that they would both be able to reflect on their current and previous roles and relate this to their on-going career trajectory.
- That the CCT role was a novel but potentially important role which had thus far not been the subject of significant research or investigation.

The study aimed to address a number of broad questions:

- How do Children's Centre Teachers describe the purpose, content and activity of their work?
- How do Children's Centre Teachers understand their work, their identity and their development in terms of constructs such as profession, specialism or occupation?
- How do Children's Centre Teachers situate themselves, their knowledge and their work within a diverse Children's Centre workforce?
- How do Children's Centre Teachers' describe their experiences of collaborative working in children's centres?

The study does not seek to investigate the effectiveness of CCTs and SSCCs or their impact on families; nor does it seek to examine the perspectives of the whole team working in SSCCs. Whilst this study is focussed on teachers working in Sure Start the study does not seek to contribute to the sociology of education, nor to pedagogical understanding of the role; nor does it set out to contribute to childhood or family studies.

Instead, the study is about the emergence and experience of one group of workers (CCTs) and thus aims to investigate how these individuals experience their transition to

a new role in a new setting where they are tasked with collaborating with workers from a number of different backgrounds.

### **Outline of the thesis**

The thesis begins with an exploration of selective literatures in Chapter One. In particular, literature relevant to the development of SSCCs is examined along with sources which explore issues related to the professions and the professionalisation of occupations. Collaborative working is a central tenet of Sure Start and various aspects of this are addressed in the literature review. Chapter Two addresses the methods used in this study; it describes the methodological approach, the study design, processes for accessing informants, data collection and the approach to analysis. This is followed by three findings chapters, the first of these, Chapter Three, looks in detail at how the informants describe the role of CCT and how they categorise their activities in relation to their previous roles. Chapter Four examines how these CCTs construct and experience the identities they occupy within their new role; this chapter also examines how these identities can be conceptualised in terms of profession, specialism or other occupational group. Chapter Five reflects on CCTs' experiences of collaborative work within centres and their successes and challenges in this regard. The thesis concludes with a discussion which reflects on the research process, the key insights gained and potential areas for further research.

## Chapter One: Focussed Literature Review

### The policy and practice context of Sure Start Children's Centres

This review examines literature relevant to the experience of teaching professionals moving into a novel role within a new working environment and context. The review largely focuses on issues of professionalism, professional change, role and identity; however, the chapter begins by examining the policy context of Sure Start. The review pays particular attention to the development of professional knowledge and the influence of occupational context and environment on professional knowledge and practice. Brief selective examples are used where these are thought relevant to CCTs. It then focus on emerging models of interprofessional collaborative working, a central tenet of Sure Start Children's Centres. The review concludes by considering the relevance of these issues for CCTs as they become established in their new role.

There are in 2012 near to 3500 Sure Start Children's Centres in England; these succeeded Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs), a policy initiative first announced in 1998 in a comprehensive spending review by the then New Labour Government. The initiative was a response to findings of a cross-departmental review of early years provision:

*Many children are not receiving the help they need to have a decent start in life. The provision of services to support young children and their families is at best patchy, particularly for 0-3 year olds. As a result, many children are falling behind even before they reach school, and many parents are finding it hard to cope.*

*Evidence has accumulated, both in the UK and around the world, showing that investment in early childhood can make all the difference to a child's lifetime opportunities, reducing health inequalities, helping performance at school, preventing truancy and reducing the risk of unemployment, drug abuse and crime. (H.M. Treasury, 1998 par. 21.1-2)*

In 1999 £450 million was allocated to develop 250 pathfinder SSLPs (Eisenstadt, 2002; H.M. Treasury, 1998). Initially located in areas of highest deprivation, Sure Start aimed to bring together diverse professionals and other workers to deliver services for families with pre-school age children. For more than a decade the then government's intention was to provide children with access to high quality early years services with the aim of addressing child poverty, breaking cycles of social exclusion and improving children's and families' lives and futures (H.M. Treasury, 1998; DfES, 2005b; DfES, 2006; Tunstill *et al.*, 2002; DfE, 2010b). The scope of Sure Start initially encompassed educational attainment, social, economic and health dimensions including parenting, antisocial behaviour, child abuse, unemployment, basic skills, child health, teenage pregnancy and other areas. As well as being tasked with direct provision of this support, Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) were mandated to share good practice with all those providing services to young children and their families (Tunstill *et al.*, 2002).

Significant change took place in 2005 with the introduction of Sure Start Children's Centres (SSCCs); this was in response to the emerging Every Child Matters agenda (H.M. Treasury, 2003; H.M. Treasury, 2004b; H.M. Treasury, 2004a) which proposed first that there should be a children's centre in all of the 20% most deprived areas (phase 1), later that these should be rolled out to the 30% most deprived areas (phase 2) and later in a less intensive format to all communities (phase 3) (Scales, 2007). These changes were presented by the then government as a major extension of the programme with the aim of reaching more communities and more children (H.M. Treasury, 2004a). With the change from SSLPs to SSCCs, strategic responsibility for delivery of SSLPs passed from individual programme boards to local authorities and the Department for Education and Skills announced that they had commissioned the organisation Together for Children (TfC) to provide support to local authorities throughout the expansion of the children's centres programme (see DfES, 2006).

Despite the requirement to extend services to 'all communities' little additional funding was announced. This led some commentators to assert that what was being presented as an expansion of the project was in fact a dilution of resources and services, corresponding with a shift in emphasis away from community-driven models

and towards a more prescriptive and centrally-driven model which privileged aims such as getting mothers back to work (Glass, 2005; Lewis, 2010).

The speed of the transition from SSLPs to SSCCs was also criticised in several sources; reflecting on the expansion at a later date a House of Commons Select Committee concluded that:

*The expansion of Children's Centres has been an ambitious programme with laudable aims. We support the Government's goal of universal coverage, but the speed of the rollout has posed serious problems in some local authorities in terms of buildings, staffing and community engagement which could have been ameliorated by a more measured approach. (Children's Schools and Families Committee, 2010, p. 40)*

The transition from SSLPs to SSCCs also marked the emergence of the CCT role; the first children's centres guidance (DfES, 2005b) included the requirement that each centre in the 30% most deprived areas (phases 1 and 2) would employ a qualified teacher on at least a half-time basis, with the intention to employ a full-time teacher within 18 months of the centre opening. The current Coalition government has since reduced this requirement to an expectation that a CCT or an Early Years Professional will be employed on a half-time basis:

*We know that it is the quality of support that makes the biggest difference for children's development, so we still expect there to be at least one Early Years Professional or Qualified Teacher. However, we trust professionals to use their local knowledge and professional judgment to decide what level of graduate support they need in their own centres. (Education Committee, 2011)*

The introduction of the CCT role was influenced by the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study (Sylva *et al.*, 2004). This study had concluded that the presence of a qualified teacher in a pre-school environment who worked for a substantial proportion of time with young children and as a pedagogical lead, led to a positive impact on children's social and pre-reading development. This study was frequently cited within the rationale for the introduction of Children's Centre Teachers

(see for example DfES, 2005b; TfC, 2007). Thus the role of the Children's Centre Teacher was to help:

*Drive up cognitive development and close the gap between the most disadvantaged and other children (TfC, 2007, p. 1).*

The role of the CCT was delineated in a short document (TfC, 2007). This document outlined significant additional elements of work that it suggested were likely to be unfamiliar to most teachers who have experience of working with children in nursery, infant and primary classes. These elements included working with babies and very young children, advising and supporting childcare settings and working directly with parents and carers. Early years teachers have experienced considerable change in the demands placed upon them in recent years; consequently experienced teachers have had to frequently adapt their practice (Moriarty *et al.*, 2001). However the additional elements of work identified in the Together for Children document seem to suggest that professionals taking on this role would experience further significant change.

There is now a growing body of literature related to Sure Start, this includes a range of reports from the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) and various outputs from local evaluations (see <http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/>). Most of this literature tends to be focussed on SSLPs or SSCCs as an intervention; that is, interest has been limited to the development of policy and practice or the effectiveness of the services provided. Very few writers have taken a significant interest in the experience of workers in these settings. Where this has been done, it tends to be in the context of understanding how these experiences may impact on successful working; for example, there have been a small number of studies which investigate collaborative working in Sure Start settings, either within a team of practitioners or with specific groups (Edgley and Avis, 2006; Morrow *et al.*, 2005; Malin and Morrow, 2007; Whelan, 2010; Hemingway and Cowdell, 2009; Potter, 2010; Garrick and Morgan, 2009). These sources are discussed in later sections.

This study is concerned with the experience of CCTs and includes detailed consideration of the nature of their role and identity. A key component of their identity is likely to be their view of themselves as a teaching professional; their

experiences are likely to include ways of thinking and acting to assert, defend or maintain a preferred type of professional identity or personhood (Dombeck, 1997). Therefore this review now turns to the corpus of work around the professions; this literature has a long and rich history.

## Professions

Archetypal professions are most frequently considered to be law and medicine and to a lesser extent clergy (Abbott and Wallace, 1990; Broadbent *et al.*, 1997; Schön, 1983). In the early 1970s Johnson viewed professions essentially as social strata, noting that most writers at that time used the construct with relatively little critique (Johnson, 1972). Many authors have provided descriptions of the ‘characteristics’ or traits which are associated with (and therefore indicative of) the professions, whilst others have criticised this trait-based approach as being over-simplistic or essentially sterile (Johnson, 1972; Hoyle and John, 1995). Such an approach has some facility in respect to this study since it may describe important identifiers aspired to by occupational groups and the individuals within them. The seminal work of Parsons (1954) described characteristics through which occupations come to be recognised as professions and enjoy a position of privilege and public trust. These characteristics, as they might apply to an idealised profession are summarised briefly below.

**Training and knowledge** – Perhaps the most fundamental identifier of ideal professions is possession of a distinctive knowledge-base. Professions are characterised by a period of extended training, usually academic and university-based (Abbott and Wallace, 1990; Dorros, 1968; Seigrist, 1994). This is frequently followed by supervised practice which promotes enculturation into the values of the profession (Broadbent *et al.*, 1997). These processes offer a portrayal of a knowledge-base which is extensive, unique and uncontested (Schön, 1983). Critics view professional knowledge as intentionally arcane or esoteric; suggesting that professionals present their knowledge as incomprehensible to ‘lay’ people, politicians, managers and officers of the state in order to maintain their own power (Broadbent *et al.*, 1997).

**Autonomy and professional agency** - Because of their unique expertise, it is argued that only professionals can be the judge of the quality and rectitude of their own

practice; thus professionals require to be afforded significant autonomy or professional agency (Seigrist, 1994; Freidson, 2001). Where the activities of individual professionals must be judged or limited in any way it has been argued that this should be done within and by the profession, by senior peers rather than by the state or an external agency (Abbott and Wallace, 1990; Freidson, 2001; Baxter and Brumfitt, 2008b). However, critics point out that the archetype of a solitary autonomous professional is rarely a reality; most professionals are situated in organisations which to an extent control their work and most have close proximity to peers (Seigrist, 1994).

**Exclusivity** - Professions are awarded the right to monopolistic practice in a particular area of work. These monopolies are maintained through 'occupational closure' and 'credentialism', that is, the demarcation of an area of work which can only be performed by people with the correct licence, qualifications or registration (right to practice) (Perkin, 2003; Witz, 1992; Baxter and Brumfitt, 2008b). Professional organisations also control entry of new individuals into 'the profession' by defining entrance requirements beyond academic ability, such as suitability to work within an ethical code or possession of personal values, characteristics and inclinations such as impartiality, altruism and honesty (Hoyle and John, 1995; Dorros, 1968; Perkin, 2003). Professional values such as these are often regarded as the basis upon which public trust in the professions is founded (Svensson, 2006). Critics regard this exclusivity as self-interested and frequently prejudicial (Davies, 1995; Davies *et al.*, 2000; Witz, 1990; Anning *et al.*, 2010). Whilst noting that occupational closure is viewed with suspicion by some, Freidson also argues that it is functional to the extent that it promotes quality, efficiency and order (Freidson, 2001).

**Status and rewards** - Despite frequently having an overtly stated orientation to serve the common good, professionals are paid for the work that they do and are rewarded with high social status (Abbott and Wallace, 1990). Professions are thus seen as a 'paid vocation', their existence represents a contract between the profession and society; professionals are awarded trust, remuneration, high status and other privileges in return for services which are valued by society.

There have been many critiques of professions and professionals; for example, the New Right have been critical of professions as creating dependency among their users; further criticising professionals as anti-market monopolies involved in restrictive practices, reduction of choice, suppression of free trade and maintenance of high costs (Abbott and Wallace, 1990; Freidson, 2001; Alaszewski and Manthorpe, 1990). Conversely a Marxist perspective suggests that professions are a means of control within society; for example, the teacher's role in producing a competent but compliant workforce (Abbott and Wallace, 1990). In this view professionals are given their status by ruling classes and are motivated by the desire to become quasi members of the ruling class (Abbott and Wallace, 1990; Broadbent *et al.*, 1997). Michael Foucault's (2008) idea of governmentality presents the role of the professional as generators and imposers of 'truths' and norms in areas such as family life, health, education, work, poverty and crime. Ivan Illich (1977; 1971) suggested that professionals both define human need and control access to the means to meet that need; in this way professionals 'disable' individuals by taking away their ability to make choices for and/or care for themselves (Abbott and Wallace, 1990; Illich *et al.*, 1977). Feminist writers criticise the desire of occupations to achieve professional status; claiming that some occupations, notably caring professions such as nursing and social work attempt to justify their claims to professional status by emphasising 'masculine' attributes and technical aspects above caring and physical aspects of their work, thereby propagating inequalities in respect of gender and potentially race and social class (Abbott and Wallace, 1990; Witz, 1992; Davies *et al.*, 2000; Davies, 1995).

### **Different types of profession**

Not all occupational groups will be successful in achieving the highest levels of professional autonomy, status and prestige; for example, several authors have described professionals who are highly constrained by the structures and processes of the organisation in which they work. Various terms have been used to describe groups of workers in these situations, including 'programme professionals' (Wilensky, 1964), 'semi-professionals' (Etzioni, 1969), 'organisational professionals' (Larson, 1977), 'bureau professionals' (Parry and Parry, 1979), and more recently 'situated professionals' (Noordegraaf, 2007). Teachers have been included in occupational

groups described in this way; however, in the context of this study, these descriptions could also be applied to occupations such as the new 'Early Year's Professionals' (EYPs) and to teaching assistants who perform some of the more basic tasks previously performed by teachers (Dunne *et al.*, 2008). It has been argued for example, that EYPs are far from achieving parity of power with teachers or from securing other markers of professional status such as a clearly defined area of work, a professional body, registration or indeed enhanced financial rewards (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010). Indeed Lloyd and Hallet (2010) note that teaching unions have consistently resisted claims that EYPs have equivalent status to teachers. Of course, the introduction of a new tier of semi-professional workers who 'require' supervision could bolster the claims of teachers (and CCTs) to full professional (and managerial) status, whilst simultaneously weakening EYPs' claims to professional status (Barkham, 2008; Dunne *et al.*, 2008).

Noordegraaf (2007) further identifies an emergent group he refers to as 'hybrid professionals' who will develop and use their skills in interdisciplinary settings, drawing on the knowledge and expertise of other groups to construct new meanings and responses. Baxter and Brumfitt (2008a) and others talk about a new 'interprofessionalism' requiring a new set of professional skills; they see this as being a positive process of re-professionalisation. This perspective may be particularly relevant in the context of this study due to the fact that SSCCs are largely premised on a philosophy of collaborative working.

### **Occupations becoming professions, individuals becoming professionals**

Many occupational groups have striven to become professions by engaging in activities and processes deemed to help realise this goal; for example, Wilenski's (1964) influential model of professionalisation, describes a number of steps required to attain professional status; these are the demarcation of particular work activities, recruitment of suitable candidates, training of individuals, establishment of a professional organisation, formulation of an ethical code and securing the recognition of the state. Wilenski's and similar models describe intentional collective activities pursued by occupational groups aspiring to be seen as professions; other potential routes to professional status seem less common. One such model, 'top-down'

professionalisation, describes the situation whereby the state instigates the formation of the profession (Seigrist, 1994; Neal and Morgan, 2000). A recent example of a 'top-down' model could be argued to be the recent Labour Government's attempts to professionalise limited numbers of the early years childcare workforce through the afore mentioned Early Year's Professional Status (EYPS) (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010).

Within teaching, Goodson and Hargreaves (1996) suggest that there seems to be uncertainty and ambivalence as to whether the occupation already possesses professional status, or indeed whether teachers want it. For example, Goodson and Hargreaves suggest that in the UK context although teaching became an all graduate occupation in the 1970s (a typically professional attribute) teaching continues to be highly unionised (which is atypical of professions).

The terms professionalism and professionalism are at times used almost interchangeably; Evans (1998) provides a useful distinction. She suggests that professionalism describes behaviours, strategies and mechanisms through which the members of a profession collectively promote their profession's ongoing professionalization. By contrast, professionalism describes strategies and mechanisms through which individual members of a profession gain or maintain their own position as part of that profession. The behaviours of individual workers are thus linked at least in part to their motivation to secure a professional identity.

Taylor and White (2000) focus on how professionals 'accomplish' professional identity through successful performance of a range of symbols, behaviours and narratives, both by making reference to their individual 'professional' knowledge and judgements as well as authoritatively citing the collective opinions of the profession or their institution. This may include the giving of 'a good account' using the 'oral traditions' of a professional group (Pithouse, 1987). In the context of teaching, Evans (1998) also uses terms originally described by Hoyle and John (1995) to describe two modes of professionalism: extended professionalism describes the characteristics of teachers who practice by reference to theoretical, academic and cognitive intellectualising whilst restricted professionalism describes the characteristics of teachers who practice with reference to pragmatic, practical and experiential frames of reference.

## Emerging challenges to professions

In recent years writers have reported challenges to traditional models of the professions and professional power, many describing factors such as individualism, uncertainty, increasing availability and accessibility of knowledge, scrutiny, shifting structures, loss of trust, erosion of role and identity and the emergence of new relationships between professionals, their employers and the people who use their services (see for example Perkin, 2003; Davies *et al.*, 2000; Colyer, 2004; Freidson, 2001).

### Managerialism

Citing various rationales, governments may challenge aspects of professional power and autonomy; for example, the status of public professionals may be threatened by drives towards efficiency, competition and market forces (Davies *et al.*, 2000; Freidson, 2001). Professionals are increasingly expected to perform or comply with processes such as performance management and audit. These processes often infer the oversight of work done by professionals by managers, an inspector or an outside body. Given that there may be an implicit power difference between the watcher and the watched (Foucault, 1977; Shore and Wright, 2000), managerialism can be seen as a process whereby power shifts from professionals to general managers. Examples include teachers who are required to gather and report pupil assessment data and comply with OFSTED inspections, social workers who must comply with performance management systems, hospital nurses and doctors required to take part in clinical audits and various contractual requirements placed on GPs. However, despite the fact that professional bodies may publicly endorse these mechanisms, individual professionals may resist or subvert them (Lipsky, 1980; Wastell *et al.*, 2010). For example, Black and Thompson (1993) found that despite initially describing audit in positive terms, many doctors went on to report negative experiences, suspicions about how findings are used and the belief that resources could be better spent on providing services.

It has been suggested that the threat posed by managerialism could be dealt with in a number of ways. Porzsolt (2009) argues that where external controls are justified by

claims to greater efficiency, professionals should insist on measures of outcome alone, whilst remaining free to determine processes themselves and Woolf (2009) suggests that professionals can resist over-regulation by enlisting public support by being active in the civic sphere and working with patient and service user organisations. Not all writers agree that managerialism need be seen as a threat, Luntley (2000) contends that there need not be dichotomy between external accountability and a closed guild of professionals; suggesting that it is possible to put in place preliminary systems of external scrutiny which trigger subsequent investigation by professional peers.

In the context of teachers, Day and Smethem (2009), suggest that many teaching professionals have found managerial reforms to be deskilling and feel that they have been forced to implement reforms which they felt were misguided. Some writers see mechanisms such as prescribed curricula, standardised teaching methods and test-based accountability as a post-Fordist response to the need to educate large numbers of students in large institutions (Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Beck, 2009). Other authors support this view suggesting that teachers now operate with a constrained professionalism which allows them only limited autonomy (see Wills and Sandholtz, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Fish and Coles, 1998). Beck (2008; 2009) further suggests that under the guise of modernisation and standard-raising, recent educational policy has been a cynical, attempt to de-professionalise teachers, whilst also claiming that recent changes to teacher training have had the effect of suppressing critical awareness and inducing compliance.

### **Consumerism**

In addition to managerialism, the development of a growing consumerism has also been viewed as a potential threat to professional status (Davies *et al.*, 2000). Svensson (2006) notes the extent to which society's assessment of professionals is now increasingly based on 'objective' measures of performance rather than professional status alone. Initiatives such as citizen charters, performance indicators, league tables and inspection reports encouraged users of professional services to view themselves as 'customers'. Neo-liberal policy makers have long believed that critical consumerism will drive-up quality and efficiency, (Conservative Party Research Department, 1991;

DfE, 1994). Consumerism may be a doubly seductive philosophy, purporting both to empower service users and improve the services they use. However, in respect of education a number of authors provide evidence that these mechanisms rarely provide meaningful choice or influence (for example Bauch and Goldring, 1996; Crozier, 1997). Renewed attempts to empower parents and students as consumers and indeed as service providers, appear in the current Coalition Government's recent White Paper (DfE, 2010a) which frequently asserts parental rights to more information about school functioning and performance and states that parents will be supported in opening new Free Schools and Academies.

### **Evidence-based practice**

A further potential threat to professionalism is the growing demand for evidence-based practice. Whilst many contemporary professionals claim to use 'evidence-based practice', the notion presumes that evidence is both available and uncontested which is often not the case (Davies, 2003). Writing forty years ago in the context of education Etzioni noted that:

*There are few settled matters in pedagogy. If greater agreement prevailed, superiors could, through mastery of that consensus assert the right to prescribe for subordinates. (Etzioni, 1969, p. 9)*

Of course 'evidence' in some form does exist and has undoubtedly influenced policy, practice and indeed legislation. Clegg (2005) argues that professional practice has always been informed by evidence but that evidence-based practice runs the risk of implying that there is a single gold standard evidence, thereby restricting professionals' freedom to make their own assessments of the relevance of evidence to each particular case. Clegg suggests that this gold standard evidence base will become increasingly prescribed by external bodies such as government departments.

### **Professional thinking, knowledge and learning in the real world**

Given the fundamental importance of knowledge to professional identity, it is important to consider how knowledge may be experienced by the individual. Knowledge can be conceived of as a set of propositions which a person believes to be

true. Individuals also use 'theories', these are propositions in which a number of concepts are related together as explanations or predictions. Argyris and Schön (1974) differentiate between those theories which people use to produce explanations which are communicated to others (espoused theories) and theories used to guide action (theories-in-use). They suggest that espoused theories are often based on ideas which have been sanctioned by formal learning and that theories-in-use are often based on a broad range of generalised assumptions which may be acquired through formal learning, informal learning and experience. They suggest that theories-in-action are difficult to communicate and contain unconscious elements. Polanyi (1962; 1983) used the term 'tacit knowledge' to describe the proportion of knowledge that cannot easily be expressed in words, he provides examples of the importance of tacit knowledge in problem-setting, problem-solving and in appreciating the likeliness that the solution is correct. Several authors have claimed that tacit knowledge is an important component of professional knowledge and there have been many studies of tacit knowledge as it relates to everyday professional practice (for example Collins and Evans, 2007; Easen and Wilcockson, 1996; Spratt *et al.*, 2006; Sternberg and Horvath, 1999; Eraut, 2000).

Schön (1983) contrasted two descriptive models of professional thinking, the prevailing technical-rational model and a model of professional artistry based on reflection-in-action. Schön argued that in real world situations professionals frequently encounter problems that cannot be addressed by actions prescribed by a corpus of standardised knowledge. Real problems are too complex and messy, requiring negotiation, experimentation and reflection. The thought processes involved may be more or less explicit and may draw on formal knowledge, practically acquired knowledge and unconscious knowledge; with the latter potentially being perceived as creativity or intuition (Schön, 1987; Svensson, 2006). Similar distinctions are made by Eraut (2000) who distinguishes between knowledge codified through formal learning and personal knowledge acquired through non-formal learning.

In respect of professional education, Gaiser (2009) further differentiates between the 'stated curriculum' and the 'hidden curriculum', the hidden curriculum being learned by exposure to real working environments and assimilated through a process of enculturation and socialisation. Bromme and Tillema (1995) suggest that on entry to

the workplace the novice finds a gap between their theoretical knowledge and the practical knowledge required to function. They and others suggest that the supervised practice of novice professionals can help fill this gap whilst also imparting normative aspects of professional judgement, perspective and behaviour (van Mook et al., 2009). However, some authors point out that knowledge acquired in practice may both be idiosyncratic and fluid, since it is filtered through local tradition and exposure to the ideologies of individual colleagues in influential positions (Thompson, 1995; Flores and Day, 2006). Furthermore, learning may depend on the quality of relationships and the support given to novice professionals and this may also vary (Hoy and Spero, 2005).

These context effects challenge the traditional view of professions as custodians of an uncontested and fixed body of knowledge; indeed Schön (1983; 1987) and others hold an opposing view, suggesting that improvements in professional services should be brought about through the individual's ongoing reflective practice. This includes both reflection-in-action which takes place during an activity and reflection-on-action usually taking place after an activity, both involving a critical examination of one's practice. Reflection-in-action may involve both conscious and unconscious elements whereas reflection-on-action is generally completely conscious. Increasingly reflective practice has become 'de rigueur' in social care, health services, education and a range of other professional areas. For example, in a standard contemporary text for teacher education Pollard *et al.* (2008, p. 5) state:

*The process of reflective teaching supports the development and maintenance of professional expertise. We can conceptualize successive levels of expertise in teaching- those that student-teachers may attain at the beginning, middle and end of their courses; those of the new teacher after their induction to full-time school life; and those of the experienced, expert teacher. Given the nature of teaching, professional development and learning should never stop.*

Other writers have noted that reflective practice is itself a disparate if not disputed concept; for example, in nursing and social work reflection may typically focus on the practitioner's personal thoughts and emotions whereas in education it may typically focus on cognitive aspects of performance (Quinn, 1998). Some writers feel that

reflective practice is in danger of becoming little more than a buzz word, over-diluted by incorporating 'everyone's favourite ideas' (Calgren, 1996, p. 28). Similarly Fish and Coles (1998) claim it is a mere shibboleth and that professionals have always spent time thinking about what they do.

### **New professionalisms – collaborative working**

The shift towards increased joint working of various kinds appears to be a sustained policy trend in many areas, including education, social care and health (see for example, DfES, 2005a; DoH, 2005; DoH, 2006). Indeed Couturier *et al.* (2008) describe what they see as an increasing hegemony of interprofessional work in social and health care. Collaborative work, in various guises has been a prevalent characteristic of much policy related to Sure Start (Tunstall *et al.*, 2005; Morrow *et al.*, 2005).

Several terms and phrases have been used to describe the different ways in which professionals work together. These descriptions often combine suffixes such as 'inter', 'multi' and 'trans' with concepts such as 'agency', 'professional' or 'disciplinary' or may involve more generic terms such as 'collaborative' (Orelove and Sobsey, 1991; Berridge *et al.*, 2004; Malin and Morrow, 2007; Ovretveit, 1997a). Authors describe a number of important distinctions between these terms, including the extent to which they imply that professionals share tasks, work together, report to the same hierarchies and are co-located as well as the extent to which responsibility and accountability are evenly distributed (Lorente *et al.*, 2006; Atwal and Caldwell, 2003; Ovretveit and Thompson, 1997; Anning *et al.*, 2010). For the purpose of the following discussion the terms collaborative and interprofessional will be used interchangeably as generic descriptors of the broad phenomenon.

D'Amour *et al.* (2005) conducted a review of literature related to interprofessional collaboration in healthcare with the aim of identifying ideas which might help to delineate the concept. They found that the literature frequently made reference to five key concepts; sharing, partnership, power, interdependency and process.

Ovretveit (1997b) suggests that collaborative working can be very successful but underlines the need for careful clarification of aims, structures, ways of working and professional roles. Various authors point to the benefits of interprofessional working; it

is claimed to be more efficient in that it can improve communication, avoid duplication and promote sharing of scant resources (Pollard *et al.*, 2005; Irvine *et al.*, 2002; Tett *et al.*, 2003; Atwal and Caldwell, 2003; Anning *et al.*, 2010). It is also claimed that by working together professionals can be more effective, responding more sensitively and fully to complex needs and offering services which recipients experience as being more holistic, seamless and complete (Irvine *et al.*, 2002; Tett *et al.*, 2003). Some studies have found that interprofessional working gives professionals opportunities to learn and to extend their skills, both through formal training and through working alongside other professionals (see Ovretveit *et al.*, 2002; Morrow *et al.*, 2005; Easen and Wilcockson, 1996; Axford *et al.*, 2006). Other authors claim that interprofessional working provides a supportive network of professionals able to enhance the identity of group members, share difficult problems and reduce stress (Finlay, 2000; Morrow *et al.*, 2005).

A number of authors have however, concluded that collaborative working conflicts with the traditional models of professionalism described earlier in this chapter, since to be successful it is necessary for each professional to share power (for example Davies *et al.*, 2000; Braye and Preston-Shoot, 1995; Hart, 2011; Lorente *et al.*, 2006; Tett *et al.*, 2003; Irvine *et al.*, 2002; Anning *et al.*, 2010). As well as sharing power, professionals may have to relax boundaries around the tasks they perform and be prepared to allow some of the work they have traditionally controlled to be performed by other workers (Hopkins *et al.*, 1996). Indeed Braye and Preston-Shoot (1995) suggest that professionals must be willing to share control and that this will depend on feeling able to openly discuss disagreements and concerns. Biggs (1997) offers a postmodern analysis of collaborative working, seeing it as a response to the erosion of traditional boundaries and the reduction of confidence in professional knowledge. Such an analysis suggests that roles may become increasingly fluid and flexible with professionals undertaking more and more interchangeable tasks (Colyer, 2004). This has led some commentators to fear that services will become confused and ineffective; however, researchers such as Baxter and Brumfitt (2008b) have found that blurring of professional boundaries and occasional substituting of roles did not appear to lead to role-confusion or a weakening of professional identity.

Professionals may have to work with colleagues who have very different ethical frameworks and values (Hudson, 2002; Edgley and Avis, 2006; Irvine *et al.*, 2002). Various authors acknowledge that this has led to difficulties, for example, suspicion of other professionals' motives, reluctance to share information and disagreements about service aims, priorities and practices (Spratt *et al.*, 2006; Irvine *et al.*, 2002; Finlay, 2000). Couturier *et al.* (2008) draw attention to the fact that diverse professionals may have very different epistemological frameworks, which lead them to formulate different (and potentially inconsistent) conceptualisations of problems and potential solutions. Other authors suggest that in order to communicate with other team members, professionals may feel that they need to modify the language they use, effectively 'dumbing down' the finer points of their knowledge, this may be de-skilling or lead to ineffective communication (Bokhour, 2006). What is more, within interprofessional teams the prevailing epistemology may hold sway in decision-making. For example, some researchers have reported that those professionals claiming to have more robust or science-based knowledge-base may impose their perspectives and dominate decision-making (Farrell *et al.*, 2001; Axford *et al.*, 2006; Atwal and Caldwell, 2003). Spratt *et al.* (2006) also draw attention to the overall composition of teams, for example, if numerically outnumbered by members of another profession, a lone professional may feel less able to express a view or take an active role in decision-making.

A number of authors draw attention to the hierarchies which develop within teams, suggesting that these may reinforce pre-existing differences due to salary, gender or social class differences (Hean *et al.*, 2006; Morrow *et al.*, 2005; Axford *et al.*, 2006). Cott (1998) examined social identity within collaborative teams, using the example of nurses in a hospital-based team with doctors and other practitioners; despite being part of the team these nurses habitually referred to other nurses as 'we' and other team members as 'they'. Cott suggests that unless the team is structured in a way which is overtly equal, lower status professionals such as these nurses may be increasingly alienated and disenfranchised. Robinson and Cottrell (2005) found that some professionals' poor experiences of collaborative work will have a negative impact on their motivation and self-image and that they may feel excluded, both from the

team and from external members of their own profession. Several authors have drawn attention to the role of effective leadership and management in ensuring that collaborative work is successful and that all team members can participate effectively (for example Sasnett and Clay, 2008; Bagley *et al.*, 2004).

Professionals themselves may also have more pragmatic concerns about the effects of collaborative work, for example, they may worry about their prospects for career advancement if they 'step outside' of normal career progression routes for their profession. Indeed, Lorente *et al.* (2006) note increasing trends for interprofessional training and fears that this both erodes academic standards and threatens the unique knowledge-base of professions.

## Chapter Summary

Sure Start Children's Centres have been developed to meet a range of needs for families with young children. Although successive governments have subtly changed the emphasis of their work there continues to be a strong commitment to various forms of collaborative working. The government initiated the creation of a new role, of CCT citing the EPPE study (Sylva *et al.*, 2004) in support of the advantages of having an experienced and qualified teacher in SSCCs.

The chapter explored literature related to professions, finding it to still be of relevance to the contemporary arrangement of work. Many workers, including teachers, still appear to want to be seen as professionals. A number of traits or characteristics are typical of professions and may serve as markers for aspiring occupational groups. Perhaps the most fundamental and normative characteristic is a unique corpus of knowledge which must be mastered along with a set of cultural norms by new entrants to the profession. Throughout their working lives individual professionals will continue to develop their knowledge and skills in response to ongoing training but equally to new situations, new problems, new policies and sometimes new ways of working.

Most professionals work within organisations and have close contact with professional peers. Those who move from traditional settings to interprofessional settings may therefore experience dramatic changes to their working culture and context. They may

for the first time be co-located with other professionals and workers from different backgrounds and may be required to work in different ways. Children's Centre Teachers potentially provide a good example of this: they are selected on the basis of having significant experience as an early year's teacher; they are relocated to SSCCs where they are likely to be the only teacher within an interprofessional team; they are asked to work collaboratively with a wide range of practitioners from social care, health and childcare backgrounds; they are required to work more with parents whilst their overall contact with children is potentially dramatically reduced. Furthermore, they are subjected to new structures of management, given new aims and targets and asked to undertake new tasks. In short, their new role, their new environment and their new professional context are potentially very different from that of a classroom teacher. Children's Centre Teachers are likely to gain new skills and knowledge and adapt to their new environment; this study asks how this process will be experienced by CCTs, how they see their new role and what they will gain and lose as they move further away from their classroom experience. The following chapter describes the methods used in this study along with the methodological approach.



## Chapter Two: Methods and Methodology

### Introduction

As outlined in the introduction, the study aimed to address a number of key questions:

- How do Children's Centre Teachers describe the purpose, content and activity of their work?
- How do Children's Centre Teachers understand their work, their identity and their development in terms of constructs such as profession, specialism or occupation?
- How do Children's Centre Teachers situate themselves, their knowledge and their work within a diverse Children's Centre workforce?
- How do Children's Centre Teachers describe their experiences of collaborative working in children's centres?

These research questions seek to understand and describe a range of experiences and beliefs. To achieve this, the study used a qualitative approach incorporating email interviewing and personal interviewing of individuals and small groups. Details of these methods and methodology are described in this chapter. The informants in this study were in the main practising CCTs, two had recently been CCTs but were now working in other roles, anonymised details of the informants and the sampling process are outlined later in this chapter (see Tables 1 – 3).

### Methodological stance

The overall ontological and epistemological approach to this research was informed by a critical realist perspective. Critical realism (CR) stems from a philosophical perspective which takes an approach that is neither wholly positivist nor relativist. Approaches similar to CR have been described by Hammersley (1992) in his discussion of 'subtle realism' and by Taylor and White (2000) in their depiction of 'realistic realism' which they alternatively refer to as 'sturdy relativism'.

Argued originally in respect to the natural sciences, CR is also applied to the social sciences (Bhaskar, 1989; Bhaskar, 1978). Critical realism asserts the a-priori existence

of 'real' phenomena (people, objects, relationships, laws etc) but suggests that a researcher's knowledge and understanding of these is necessarily constructed, language-bound and provisional and that it may be influenced by existent attitudes and ideas. In other words knowledge is contingent and theories are fallible in that they may be more or less accurate representations of real world phenomena (Danermark *et al.*, 2002). In addition to physical objects and natural laws there are *social* phenomena or social structures (Williams and May, 1996). Social structures cannot however exist without people, they are a consequence of human association and are recreated through various complex mechanisms requiring human actions and interactions which may either reproduce or transform the structures. There is some debate within CR about the *extent* to which mechanisms are *causal* and the extent to which their apparent causative power resides in the human agents acting within the context of social structures (López and Potter, 2001; Harré and Bhaskar, 2001).

Social phenomena exist in highly complex open systems whereby an almost infinite number of different mechanisms interact (Sayer, 2000), as a consequence CR often rejects prediction in favour of explanation. If attempted at all, prediction can only be probabilistic, not fully determined (Houston, 2001). The mechanisms involved in social phenomena are rarely amenable to empirical observation or measurement and must be theorised, resulting in theories that approximate to the real world to a greater or lesser extent. Critical realism would not however attribute equal status to all possible theories or explanations of a particular phenomenon, as all are fallible some must be closer to reality. Critical realism is optimistic about social enquiry and that through careful investigation and study, knowledge will generally shift towards a closer understanding of the empirical world (Bricmont, 2001).

In the context of this methodological stance this research seeks to understand and explain a highly limited realm of social phenomena. The study's theoretical approach to the data is first that it contains informants' provisional knowledge (descriptions, explanations and observations) of real phenomena and second that it allows the researcher to develop and propose provisional theories about those phenomena and some of the mechanisms that produce them. Thus within the analysis the aim is to go beyond description of how things are portrayed at the semantic level to a deeper

interpretative analysis which identifies how these concepts have been socially constructed, understood and (re)produced (Sayer, 2000). In this way the study aims both to delineate aspects of the social structures involved and to theorise the observable and less visible mechanisms which bring these about.

## **Methods and sampling**

In order to address the research questions outlined in the introduction to this chapter a programme of qualitative research was designed which would make use of innovative methods as well as more established methods. The researcher was keen to use electronic communications as an initial medium for gathering data and to use a method which could enhance the validity of observations through a process of checking-back with respondents. At the same time the researcher wanted to retain the option to use more established (and predictable) methods to ensure the sufficiency of data and to provide further depth if required. The two methods selected for gathering data were iterative email interviewing and semi-structured (face-to-face) interviews; these are discussed in detail after a consideration of the sampling procedure and a contextual summary of the background characteristics of the informants.

### **Sampling procedure**

The target population from which to derive a sample comprised all CCTs in children's centres in England. Data is not available about how many CCTs there are in England. However, it was known that at the time of the sample recruitment there were between 3000 and 3500 children centres in England. Children's centres were developed in three 'phases', only phase 1 and 2 were mandated to employ a CCT, although practice in different local authorities varied and some included a part or full time CCT in all their centres. Most centres encountered in the researcher's previous experience and in this research were employing part-time CCT (0.5 full time equivalent). In addition, it is known that many CCTs work full time and that many of these cover two children's centres, finally some centres were reported to have had difficulty recruiting a CCT. Bearing these factors in mind a speculative estimate of the number of individual CCTs in England might be around 1500.

Contact details for Sure Start Children's Centre Leaders were obtained from the online search facility at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) (Directgov, 2009). Directgov provided contact details for designated Sure Start Children's Centres (SSCCs), through a search facility rather than as a single list. The search facility is based on named geographical regions and areas, or on postcodes. Three broad areas (North West England, South East England and South West England) were selected on the basis that they were capable of providing a potential mixture of urban and rural conditions across a range of different regions and also pragmatically they were reasonably accessible for the researcher. The following named geographical regions from Directgov were searched:

- Cumbria
- Lancashire
- Greater Manchester
- Harrogate
- Sheffield
- Bradford
- Bedfordshire
- Cambridgeshire
- Hertfordshire

471 SSCCs in these ten areas were identified through Directgov and listed alphabetically. It was hoped to develop an initial panel of around 15 to 20 CCTs, predominantly from phase 1 and 2 centres. To achieve this it was decided to approach approximately 50 centres. In order to generate a sample of approximately 50 SSCCs, every 9<sup>th</sup> centre was sampled, starting from a random number (generated at [www.random.org](http://www.random.org)). This yielded 54 SSCCs. Email addresses of centre leaders (centre managers) were identified for these SSCCs. This gave 51 unique contact details. Whilst most of the email addresses generated in this way were personally named accounts, a number were not; for example, some were *info@centrename* type addresses. Where this was the case, attempts were made to get the name of the manager through web resources or telephone contact. In the event, these managers covered somewhat in

excess of 51 SSCCs since some were responsible for more than one SSCC. Indeed some contacts given by Directgov proved to be locality managers covering several SSCCs; this was dependent on how the local authority organised its SSCCs.

Directgov was known to be not completely up to date, to test the extent of this, a number (19) of SSCCs were contacted by phone to check the accuracy of the details on direct.gov. These were found to be mostly accurate, however, a small number of corrections were made.

Initial emails were sent to these 51 unique contacts, explaining the research and asking for their help to approach CCTs. Six email addresses were returned as invalid / no longer valid for a number of reasons. After a period of three weeks a total of just four CCTs had been identified who were willing to be involved. A second call for members went out four weeks later. Again sampling every 9<sup>th</sup> centre yielded 43 further unique email addresses for CCMs. In addition, the four CCTs identified were asked to suggest colleagues that might be interested. At this point additional contacts were made through the researcher's social networks with line managers of a small number of CCTs in South West England. These processes added a further five CCTs giving a total of nine initial informants, it was hoped that more informants might be recruited to the study over time, indeed this was the case with the follow up interviews which involved a further six respondents. One respondent did not send any responses beyond initial background information and did not respond to emails attempting to get in contact, it is assumed that s/he left their post or decided to drop-out of the study for other reasons.

## **Informants**

Background information about the informants was collected by means of a short questionnaire in the case of the email panel, or extracted from comments made during interviews. Some informants provided detailed biographical information, others less so; consequently more information is available about some respondents than others. All informants cited in this study were women. The General Teaching Council for England reported that in 2009 / 2010 men represented only 3% of nursery and 12% of primary registered in-service teachers (GTC, 2010). Similarly a survey conducted in

2006 of children’s centre childcare provision showed that just 3% of staff therein were male (BMRB International Ltd, 2007).

Tables 1 and 2 below provide information about the areas from which the informants came. This data has been presented in aggregate form, separated from the information in Table 3 to reduce the risk of identification.

**Table 1. Geographic distribution of informants**

| <b>Broad Location</b> | <b>Number of informants</b> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| North West England    | 10                          |
| South East England    | 2                           |
| South West England    | 3                           |

**Table 2. Informants by area type**

| <b>Children’s Centre area type</b> | <b>Number of informants</b> |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Semi-rural                         | 5                           |
| Rural                              | 2                           |
| Urban                              | 8                           |

Table 3 below, summarises details of the age group and background of informants and indicates their modes of participation in the study. This information is given to contextualise the following data and discussions rather than to infer typical characteristics of CCTs.

**Table 3. Background information and mode of participation**

| Pseudonym | Age yrs | Background   | Email | Interview |
|-----------|---------|--|-------|-----------|
| Susan     | 46-55   | CCT for approximately three years, previously an experienced nursery teacher, also had experience as a tutor and development officer and a variety of community roles. | ✓     |           |
| Rose      | 46-55   | CCT for two years, previously was experienced infant / primary teacher.  | ✓     |           |
| Polly     | 46-55   | CCT for three years, recently moved to new centre. Experienced infant and nursery school teacher having previously been a foundation stage leader.                     | ✓     | ✓         |
| Liz       | 46-55   | CCT for nearing three years, previously infant and primary school teacher.   |       | ✓         |
| Christina | 36-45   | Became a CCT six months prior to interview, previously taught in an infant and primary school.   |       | ✓         |
| Donna     | 46-55   | CCT for over two years, previously experienced foundation stage leader in infant school.   |       | ✓         |
| Zoe       | 26-35   | CCT for over two years, previously several years experiences as an infant teacher.   |       | ✓         |
| Nancy     | 46-55   | Currently a CC manager, was CCT for two years and previously a primary school teacher.   |       | ✓         |
| Amy       | 36-45   | Was CCT for three years, previously a nursery class teacher for 12 years in the same school since starting work.   | ✓     | ✓         |
| Jo        | 26-35   | Currently a CCT, for two years, previously reception class teacher for approx five years.  | ✓     |           |
| Margaret  | 46-55   | CCT since nursery became a children's centre (approx two years) prior to that worked as nursery teacher / Deputy Headteacher in same setting.                          | ✓     | ✓         |
| Martha    | 26-35   | CCT for two years approximately, previous nursery school teacher.  | ✓     |           |
| Sylvia    | 46-55   | CCT for nearly three years. Previously foundation teacher in an infant and primary school, also had experience of being a proprietor of a private nursery.             | ✓     | ✓         |
| Jackie    | 56-65   | Currently college lecturer, had been CCT for 18 months. Previously infant school teacher and SENCO.  |       | ✓         |
| Melanie   | 56-65   | CCT and Headteacher of a nursery school. Previously lengthy experience as an infant / nursery teacher.   | ✓     |           |

## **Method 1 Iterative Email Interviewing**

The method used is related to Delphi investigations but uses electronic communication rather than personal interviewing. The Delphi method, named after the mythic Oracle of Delphi, was originally used as a forecasting technique to provide information to improve decision-making in business. It has since been used in social research including research conducted in the policy, health and education fields. The Delphi method is based on a repeated series of interviews with informants who have expert knowledge of a particular topic (Sarantakos, 1998). At each stage of the process interim findings are presented to informants to seek their comments in order to further refine understanding. The ideal end point of a Delphi investigation is one in which there is an overall consensus in views expressed by various respondents. In this way the researcher is increasingly confident in the validity of the findings. One particular advantage that is reported for this technique is that since panel members never meet they are not subject to group pressures that might otherwise constrain their input, therefore they are able to offer uncensored opinions (Williams and Webb, 1994). Researchers using the Delphi method have made increasing use of written media such as postal questionnaires, rather than the original face-to-face interview format, a small number of Delphi studies have now been conducted online. Most contemporary Delphi studies focus on a single issue or a very narrow range of issues; for example, to seek agreement on priorities for intervention or research. The aim in this study was to follow a process which had similarities and differences from the Delphi method, these are outlined below.

Similarities to Delphi method–

- Establishing a panel of informants who had ‘expert’ knowledge of the topic area
- Presenting a series of themed communications asking for their thoughts
- Conducting further contacts with respondents as necessary to clarify or check comments made
- The panel did not meet each other, either online or in the physical world
- Additional communications asked for further comment

Differences from Delphi method include –

- Use of email interviews rather than personal interviewing
- Scope was considerably broader than a single issue
- More emphasis on exploration of experience and meaning rather than eliciting judgements
- Less emphasis on reaching consensus

Markham (2004) describes three distinct ways in which the internet is conceptualised: firstly in a straightforward way as a simple communication tool similar to letters, memos or notes, secondly as a cultural or social space in which interaction can take place and thirdly as a world in which to exist, where one can 'be' a self or selves which may or may not be connected to the physical world . While many commentators state that the internet is a place where one is empowered, enabled or allowed to be oneself, it also provides the possibility of self-censure and of careful control of the image that is presented. Since the early 1990s the internet has become both a medium or tool for research and itself an object of study (Markham, 2004). For example, research has included studies of online behaviour (Dibbell, 1993) and of techniques used in internet communications (Witmer and Katzman, 1998) as well as its use as a mechanism to extend the reach of the research (Mann and Stewart, 2000).

This research primarily conceptualises the internet as a tool for communication and uses it in this way whilst retaining a critical awareness of these other aspects, in particular in respect of how the medium may impact on the way the respondents interacted with the researcher. Email interviewing was used because in this case it was believed that the potential advantages outweighed the potential disadvantages. Mann and Stewart (2000) provide an extensive discussion of the advantages and disadvantages or challenges of online methods, the most relevant of these are discussed below in relation to this research.

## Advantages

- Geographical distance presents fewer problems when using online methods. This was a useful consideration for this research as it reduced the travel time and costs which would have been inherent in other methods either for the researcher or for the respondents. Effectively this enabled the researcher to have a series of contacts with each participant; if travel had been necessary this would have been constrained, perhaps to one or two visits.
- Emails are 'respondent friendly'; use of email is a necessary and familiar part of the daily professional life of these respondents, each having easy and reliable access to email as part of their job. Some of these respondents also used second personal (home) accounts either as their preferred main contact or in conjunction with a work account.
- Emails allow communication either to individuals or to groups. This facilitated the process by allowing generic emails (for example, introducing new themes and stimulus materials) and individual follow ups for clarification of responses or further information. Group members can remain anonymous by use of the blind copy (BCC) function.
- Email interviewing can be asynchronous and allows informants to respond at a time most convenient for them. They can start and stop their response if they need to attend to other things and pick-up easily because of the persistence of a history or thread (Markham, 2004). As well as being more convenient for the respondent this method may encourage them to spend more time on their replies and to give responses that are more fully considered. This was an important consideration with this group of informants.
- Respondents may feel more comfortable about giving sensitive information or offering accounts which contradict or resist prevailing views than when taking part in face-to-face research. For example, this allowed respondents to discuss terms and conditions of work, opinions of line management or future career plans which may have been sensitive subjects.

- The method can facilitate contact with 'hard to reach' groups. Whilst the respondents in this study were hardly a hidden group they were busy and had few opportunities to interact with researchers.
- Email interviewing circumvents the need to spend research time on transcription and thus avoids a potential source of error, inaccuracy or bias. Raw data are in a format which is easy to handle and requires minimal preparation for analysis.

### Challenges

- Initial contact can be difficult for email interviewing, particularly gaining access to accurate email addresses since there are few directories or lists available. Also email addresses may be changed frequently, the resultant churn may make it difficult to initiate and maintain continued contact with respondents. This did seem to be a problem with initial contacts for this research but less so for maintaining ongoing contact as respondents mostly used work email address which were not subject to frequent change.
- Computer systems may incorporate 'spam' filters and firewalls which may interrupt communication. In this study attention was paid to construction of emails which avoided elements which might trigger spam filters by:
  - Avoiding common spam phrases or words,
  - Avoiding irregular syntax or presentation such as excessive use of exclamation points, capitals or multi-coloured text,
  - Not sending emails to very large groups of contacts or recipients,
  - Using plain text format email unless sure that the recipient was able to receive HTML emails,
  - Avoiding large file sizes and the use of images,
  - Including a 'stooge' copy email address to check receipt of emails.
- Email interviewing assumes that respondents are literate and have at least basic computer skills, thus it may exclude those that do not. Bias may be introduced if certain groups do not have equal access to email facilities, computer training or support. Differences in the use of the internet by people

of different ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds have been noted (Mann and Stewart, 2000). In the context of these respondents, all were children's centre staff with 'work' email addresses, who used computers as part of their daily working life, thus these problems seemed unlikely to apply to them.

- Email communication tends to encourage language structure that is different from other forms of communication such as written or spoken language. Tending to be less formal than much written communication but lacking non-verbal aspects of spoken communication. However, many researchers have concluded that these differences need not be problematic (for example Witmer and Katzman, 1998; Gaiser, 1997; Baym, 1995). This group of respondents tended to use full sentences without atypical syntax and made no or very little use of paralanguage.
- Ethical concerns can arise if the research requires excessive use of the work email account or of informants' working time in responding. This was not thought to be a significant issue in comparison to these respondents general email utilisation. Furthermore, respondents were initially approached through their line managers and were advised in the research information to consider speaking to their line managers about the research before agreeing to take part. Informed consent in this case was not assumed from an email response; potential informants were emailed an information and consent form and were asked to print, complete and sign a 'hard copy' and to return this by post. Only those who did so were included in the email interviewing.
- Authenticity has been raised as a potential problem with email interviews. In this study the researcher accepted the claims that respondents were who they said they were. There was no reason to conclude that the views expressed were not the personal views of the respondents or even that they had discussed the issues widely with colleagues.

## **The emails**

Stimulus material mainly in the form of open questions was developed for the emails. The material was developed with reference to the literature and the researchers' own experience of working in children's centres. The material was designed to promote broad discussion rather than short responses in order to elicit responses capable of giving sufficient insights to the research questions. The material was divided into six separate themes; each theme formed the basis of one round of emails. The themes and component materials were discussed with a small number of staff working in children's centres after which small changes were made. Each theme was prefaced briefly and informants were asked to write freely on the subject or to be guided by the questions. The majority of informants chose to use the questions as a guide, but some occasionally wrote in more general terms around the subject matter of the theme.

The six iterations of emails were sent approximately two weeks apart to allow ample time for completion. Each theme was sent to all members of the panel, whether or not they had responded to the previous theme. On occasions an informant missed a theme but caught up later, sometimes returning simultaneous responses to two or three themes. Follow-up questions for clarification or further information on responses were occasionally emailed to individual informants. Further small changes were made to stimulus material in subsequent emails to reflect responses already received, in the main this was limited to changes in phrasing rather than content. The final stimulus material for each theme is included as an Appendix.

## **Method 2 - Semi-structured interviews (individual and group interviews)**

After successive rounds of email interviewing the researcher reviewed the data for sufficiency in order to determine whether further data should be sought through semi-structured interviews. A decision to go ahead with a small number of interviews was made based on three considerations, firstly the fact that fewer CCTs had joined the panel than had been hoped, secondly not all panel members responded to all rounds of emails and thirdly there was considerable variation in the level of detail given by panel members. Whilst some had written relatively detailed and lengthy responses others tended to give brief answers. In addition, there was a further benefit in

performing interviews, at this stage, in that it allowed a more nuanced development of understandings, ideas and explanations emerging from the researchers' reflections on the data received thus far.

In total, three individual interviews with email panel members and two group interviews were conducted. Group interviews consisted of five informants (group interview #1) and two informants (group interview #2). Each of the group interviews included one email panel member and any local CCT colleagues they cared to invite. The informants in one individual interview and in group interview #2 were known to the researcher as previous colleagues.

Semi-structured interviews are usually based on a flexible topic guide rather than a rigid list of questions which must be asked in the same order and in the same way as in structured quantitative interviews (Bryman, 2004). This form of interviewing gives respondents the opportunity to give detailed responses focussed on areas which they feel are pertinent or important, at the same time it ensures that areas of interest are covered. The interviewer is free to pursue areas of interest that come up during the interview and to ask additional questions for clarification or for further input. In this way the interview is somewhat like a conversation, albeit a purposive conversation which is steered by the interests of the researcher.

This type of interview was selected for this research for a number of reasons. Firstly, as the interviews were conducted after email interviews in order to gain further data and to follow up on a number of points; there was by now, a clear idea of the areas of interest. However, this type of interviewing would not exclude the possibility of identifying new ideas and explanations. Secondly, it was felt that this type of interviewing was particularly suited to these informants who would have sufficient confidence and experience of discussing detailed issues, which they would have gained through their daily interactions with colleagues. Thirdly, it was felt that the researcher's previous experience in these settings would facilitate a rapport with informants, demonstrate likely understanding and help to gain the informants' trust, together it was hoped that this would encourage informants to give responses which were full and open.

The interview topic guide was based on the stimulus materials used in the email interviews. It consisted of six topic areas, each with a small number of questions (see Appendix). Not all questions were asked in all interviews; sometimes this was due to time constraints but most often because these issues had come up naturally in conversation. At least one or two questions from each of the six areas were asked. Considerable use was made of follow-up questioning and probing for more information or for clarification and development of the responses given. At times the interviews followed areas of interest of the informants.

At the start of each interview a general introduction was given to the structure of the interview, explaining that there would be a few questions in each of six areas, but the interview would be very free ranging and that respondents should feel able to talk at length if they wished or to give examples or other information as they saw fit. It was explained that the interview would be recorded and efforts were made to ensure the respondents were comfortable with the presence of the digital recorder. At this point it was again checked that informants had received and understood the research information and had completed consent forms, they were then given a further opportunity to ask questions before the interview proceeded. Finally informants were asked a few brief conversational questions to help them become comfortable talking in the presence of a recorder.

## Data

Email responses varied in length, whilst most respondents responded to stimulus questions some preferred to give general thoughts on the area under discussion. Thus responses varied in length and degree to which they were structured. Raw data from email responses were processed to remove extraneous information (email headers, electronic signatures, business logos, local authority confidentiality statements etc.) the data was then saved as .txt or .docx files to a research folder and named to identify the respondent and the theme being discussed.

Raw data from interviews was in the form of digital recordings made on a Zoom Handy H2 recorder set to record in two channels to MP3 audio medium quality format. These recordings were transferred as soon as possible to computer for secure storage in the

research folder. Audio files lasted from 45 to 70 minutes. Interview data was transcribed for content verbatim by the researcher to Word .docx files. Express Scribe software was used to support this process. These files were again named and saved to the research folder.

Email respondents also completed consent forms and background information sheets which gave contact details and basic information. Data from these were recorded on a short SPSS 17 database stored in the research folder.

To facilitate analysis all textual data sources were copied into a new QSR Nvivo 8 project stored in the research folder. Individual files were entered as 'internal' sources retaining their file names for identification.

All electronic data were stored on a password protected laptop computer. This folder was backed-up at regular intervals using two methods, the first was to send data by email for storage on the personal area of a secure university server; the second was by making occasional copies to compact discs (CDs) or a portable hard-drive. All physical media in the form of paper originals (consent forms etc) and back-up CDs were stored securely under locked conditions.

## Analysis

As previously mentioned QSR NVivo 8 was used to support the analytic process. This software is an example of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). This version is a development of earlier versions of NVivo and NUD.IST software. The software is code-based and was originally developed to facilitate a theory-building or Grounded Theory approach (Glasser and Strauss, 1967; Lewins and Silver, 2006). It can however, be used to support a range of different analytical approaches. It is crucial that in using this software that the researcher is mindful of their own analytical approach and their own methodology so that the analysis does not become driven by the capabilities of the software (Coffey *et al.*, 1996; Carvajal, 2002).

When using Nvivo 8, data sources are imported to a 'project', the researcher is then able to identify sections of text and assign them to one or more 'codes' which identify

the text as examples of themes created by the researcher. New codes can be created as required. The codes used can be arranged hierarchically or left 'free'. As the analysis proceeds relationships between themes can be established, codes can be merged where concepts are thought to overlap or split into finer divisions if required. Coded sections of text can be retrieved, further coded or un-coded as required. Sections of preceding or succeeding data either side of coded sections can be retrieved as required. Further functionality includes word and phrase searches, word frequency analyses and the ability to assign attributes to sources, attach notes and comments, run various queries and create various models and visualisations (Lewins and Silver, 2006). For this research NVivo was primarily used as a store for data, to support coding and data recall and to collate developing themes and relationships.

A thematic analysis was conducted involving both deductive theory-driven elements and inductive data-driven elements (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Initial themes were formulated from consideration of areas identified in the literature search and from the researcher's initial thoughts during data collection along with further familiarisation with the data which was achieved through several re-readings of textual data and re-listening to interview recordings several times.

Each item of data was then examined in detail for instances of themes, which were 'coded' for later recall. As the analysis progressed the researcher formed further ideas for themes or sub-themes; these were added to the coding scheme and previous data items re-examined in the light of these. Similarly, as links and relationships between ideas were formed texts were re-examined and codes either consolidated or expanded as required. In summary there were four processes through which a set of ideas was shaped into a model which used the data to shed light on the research questions:

- Firstly according to initial themes as described above (from literature and initial impressions).
- Secondly a process similar to Strauss and Corbin's (1998) 'open coding' whereby new themes and sub-themes were created and refined created to capture the full variation within the data.

- Thirdly by linking related themes and identifying instances which helped to establish links between concepts, similar to ‘axial coding’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).
- Fourthly identifying key sections of data which exemplified the ideas being developed and provided a coherent overall picture, similar to ‘selective coding’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

These four processes were initially sequential but eventually overlapping since the analysis was an iterative process with many cycles. Three particular cognitive strategies were used to maintain the momentum of the analysis; these were drawn from a range of analytic traditions and are described briefly below.

- Questioning (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Asking simple ‘who, what, where, why, when, how’ questions such as ‘who is (and is not) involved, holds these views etc.’, ‘where does (and doesn’t) this happen’, ‘what is the context of events being described’ or ‘when did this or will this take place’.
- Comparison (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Silverman, 2006). Examples of sections of data and of resultant ideas or themes were compared to identify similarities and differences. This took place at a number of levels, firstly within individual texts, secondly between texts from the same individual, e.g. subsequent email texts or interviews, thirdly between different individuals and fourthly with instances in relevant external literature sources.
- Complementarity and completeness. For example, what Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to as ‘flip-flop’ whereby ideas and themes are reversed and the data are searched for supporting examples, or what Silverman (2006) refers to ‘deviant case analysis’ whereby the data is searched for contradictory material.
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Limited use was also made of NVivo’s capacity for text searches and queries to help identify and relocate relevant sections of data. Before beginning to ‘write up’ findings, all data were reviewed in the light of the whole coding scheme. However, as the findings chapters were written and ideas crystallised further the data was again

revisited from time to time to test ideas or find further examples; no further codes were developed as a result of this latter process. In summary, the analysis could be portrayed as messy, layered and complex; however, within this *mélange* a general trend from initial descriptive work to later inductive work could be clearly discerned (see Patton, 1990; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

### **Ethical considerations**

Cardiff School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee gave approval for this study. The informants in this study were not thought to be especially vulnerable. They were all adult employed professionals who did not depend in any direct way on the findings of the research or the good favour of the researcher for their future wellbeing. Furthermore, it was highly unlikely that these informants would fear being exposed about any illicit or wrong activity as part of this research. As all were teachers in England, it was not anticipated that there would be any significant barriers to communication such that it was presumed that they were all fluent in written and spoken English and thus that information and consent documents in English would suffice.

Potential informants were given information in written format. This explained that participation was voluntary and that consent could be withdrawn at any time. As this research took place in the workplace and used work-based email accounts the information also included the suggestion that potential participants may wish to discuss their participation with their line manager. Potential informants were given time to reflect and an opportunity to ask questions about the research, before seeking their consent to take part. Those wishing to take part completed signed consent forms. Personalised data (contact information, consent forms, background information on individuals and non-anonymised data) was stored securely under locked conditions and electronically on password-protected systems.

It was not considered that participants would be at significant risk of physical harm or of psychological distress. However, the researcher was concerned about the potential identification of individuals and subsequent breaking of confidentiality and a small risk of potential detriment to them. This concern arose from the fact that the numbers of

informants was likely to be relatively low and that they were approached initially through their line managers. For example, a line manager or other colleague reading the study might have been able to guess the identity of an individual if detailed information on their location, age or background was given, and thereby quotes and views might be attributed individually to them. Several steps have been taken to guard against this: the districts and type of areas in which informants work have been aggregated and presented separately rather than attributed to individuals; names have been anonymised; descriptors of informants refer only to broad age bands and basic background information.

### Quality, validity and reliability

The question of assessing quality in qualitative research is itself not straightforward (Bryman, 2004). Whereas in quantitative research, concepts such as reliability and internal and external validity are relatively uncontested indicators of quality, the nature of most qualitative research neither allows repetition nor uncontested readings of data (Hammersley, 2008). The formulation of a list of quality criteria whereby the quality of reported research might be assessed is also problematic, since qualitative research covers a wide range of methodologies and methods. This has resulted in diverse approaches, as Hammersley puts it:

*Some writers have tried to apply what they see as traditional quantitative criteria, such as (internal and external) validity and reliability to qualitative work. Others have reformulated these epistemic criteria and sometimes, added non-epistemic ones, whether in terms of 'giving voice' to the marginalised or bringing about practical or political outcomes...at the same time, there are some writers who appear to reject the very possibility of criteria...*  
(Hammersley, 2008, pp. 158-159)

Hammersley's approach is to reject a firm set of rigid criteria in favour of a number of guiding principles to help researchers to reflect on their work. For example, research reports should be clear, sufficient and relevant, findings should be significant credible and supported by evidence, methods should be effective and competently carried out

and conclusions should be proportionate, theoretically plausible and not over-generalised (Hammersley, 2008).

In the context of the current research it is hoped that a number of factors help to indicate quality:

- The data collection and data analysis methods used have been discussed clearly and in sufficient detail.
- The use of more than one method for data collection has allowed observations to be compared, both for consistency and to enable triangulation of different perspectives.
- Throughout presentation of the findings, sufficient data (quotes) are provided to support observations, and where appropriate information is given about the extent to which similar accounts are prevalent or exceptional.
- The gathering of data across time, with repeated approaches to informants allowed a degree of 'member checking' to take place, by discussing insights and interpretations with informants in follow-up emails and by bringing up these issues in interviews.
- Finally the researcher's previous occupational exposure to Sure Start provided useful context to promote insight and to help in assessing data, whilst the rigor of the research and analytical processes prevented pre-existing opinions or values unduly influencing the findings.

Thus, the conclusions offered in this study, drawn in light of the above, are intended to be credible and proportionate within the limitations of the research discussed in this and later chapters. Furthermore, the findings are examined in relation to cognate research and literature in order to support and extend the relevance of the interpretations made

This chapter has discussed the methodological underpinnings of the research and sought to justify the methods used; it has discussed ethical issues identified and given basic information about the informants. The following chapters address the findings of the study. These are presented in three chapters, the first of these addresses various aspects of the CCTs' conception of their role.



## Chapter Three: Defining the CCT Role

### Introduction

Throughout this and subsequent chapters the people who participated in this study are referred to variously as informants, respondents or CCTs (children's centre teachers) in order to avoid excessive repetition. To maintain anonymity individuals will be referred to by a fictitious first name as indicated in the methods chapter where information can be found about the backgrounds and working contexts of informants.

Using data collected from 15 respondents via two group interviews, three individual interviews and 30 email responses, this chapter comprises an examination of respondents' experiences of identifying, understanding and developing the role of the CCT. The chapter presents descriptions of tasks, responsibilities and working arrangements through which informants typically delineate the CCT role as something qualitatively unlike their previous role as classroom teacher. The main purpose of this chapter is to address the CCT role by drawing and analysing a necessarily partial understanding of what CCTs 'do' and to grasp the nature and extent of role-change experienced by these respondents. In chapter four there is then a focus on the implications of role change for children's centre teachers' identities.

### Role and identity

It is perhaps useful to begin by differentiating between role and identity, here the term 'role' is deployed to describe a series of written, verbal or normative descriptions of an individual's purpose, responsibilities and spheres of appropriate activity. In the context of a working life, role may go beyond contractual obligations to include a range of activities, behaviours and attitudes deemed to be normative. Roles tend, conceptually, to be visible and public (Weber and Mitchell, 1996), they are overt and can form the subject of negotiation between individuals and organisations (Castells, 1997). Role can be contrasted to the notion of 'identity' which can be understood as an individual's image of or expression of their 'self' or how they 'define themselves to themselves and others' (Day *et al.*, 2007, p. 102).

Role and identity are of course interrelated and significant changes in role may require or cause changes in identity. It seems likely that these respondents have experienced significant change as they moved from their role as classroom teacher to a new role of CCT. In their accounts of these changes, the informants identified a number of key differences between the work of a classroom teacher and that of a CCT. These differences are important for several reasons, firstly they demonstrate dimensions of change experienced by these respondents, secondly they begin to serve as a partial definition of the CCT role and lastly they provide a context in which to understand aspects of individual identity and potentially an emerging group identity for CCTs. The chapter begins by examining one pervasive characteristic which has threaded itself throughout the accounts given by these respondents in their emails and interviews. This dominant characteristic is 'change and uncertainty'.

### Changing roles and uncertainty

A significant body of literature examines aspects of uncertainty in working life, including studies which address uncertainty in regard to the work itself and uncertainty related to workers' perceptions of their own abilities or status. Examples include studies exploring how workers strive to achieve outcomes which are inherently unpredictable, as in the case of medicine (Nevalainen *et al.*, 2010; Harvey, 1996), other studies examine the unpredictability of work task demands, such as burgeoning performance management (Wastell *et al.*, 2010; White *et al.*, 2010), or the unpredictability of service demand in posts such as social work (Ben-Zur and Michael, 2007; Cole *et al.*, 2004). Further studies focus on workers' uncertainty about their own abilities. For example, following job promotion (Chari, 2009), or when faced with an expanded role as in the case of the developing role of practice nurses (Elsom *et al.*, 2008; Hammer *et al.*, 2004). A number of studies relate to workers' uncertainty about their status or that of their occupation. For example, occupational therapists uncertainty about the power and influence of their own profession relative to others (Clark, 2010) or a range of uncertainties that may result from changing roles and collaborative working (Atkins, 1998).

The informants in this study consistently described significant levels of uncertainty in their work including many of the dimensions noted above. However, their accounts appear to be somewhat unusual because of the extent to which they focus on one particular (and very fundamental) dimension of uncertainty, the exact nature of the CCT task itself. As the first of their kind, they frequently described their lack of a clear and consistent understanding of what they *should* be doing and contrasted this to the relatively clear and stable understanding they had in relation to the role of classroom teacher:

*... it was never clear cut what was expected of us or what they wanted us to do so they have, as Liz said we have kind of learned the job as we've gone along (Polly, group interview #1)*

Most respondents found this unsettling, they wanted to be more certain about what their job *was*, not least as this would enable them to judge whether (or not) they were performing the role as they should:

*... you know, 'cos when you go in a classroom I know what I've got to do, when I came into this... [Pauses and shrugs] (Donna, group interview #1)*

Uncertainty about their role appeared partly related to an insufficiency of formal descriptions of their role. Whilst formal sources such as job descriptions and role descriptions are inevitably fallible in their representation of reality, they do provide imperfect models against which workers can judge their activities (Guimerà *et al.*, 2006; Nelson and Morrison-Beedy, 2008). The CCTs in this study did not believe they had these benchmarks, for example, respondents highlight the near absence of national guidance in respect of CCTs. One document which may have been relevant is a relatively brief discussion of the CCT role issued by the support agency Together for Children (TfC, 2007). This document was intended to provide advice to local authorities. It outlines in very broad terms some of the outcomes expected from the work of CCTs along with three domains in which they are likely to spend time working. However, the document is neither detailed nor prescriptive and its status is now unclear since TfC is no longer commissioned to provide this type of support. Few

respondents seemed aware of this document and those that were did not draw on it as a source of guidance or structure about their role.

Informants in group interview #1 were asked to what extent their written job description reflected their work. Whilst they noted that it captured part of their role, most suggested that it had little relevance in informing the development of their work. For example, CCTs in group interview #1 shared the following exchange explaining that for the first two or three years each had developed their role in different ways, despite the fact that they shared the same job description:

*Polly           ... each place that we are in is very different... we're very different from each other, in our areas of focus.*

*Donna           But if you look at it now though, it is right.*

*Polly           It's probably come closer.*

*Donna           We all did our own paths.*

*Polly           I think it's closer now than it was three and a half years ago, because I've had to change the way that I work because I've moved areas and because the CCTs themselves have become, we do a slightly different job, um in less places, so I think it [the job description] probably resembles the job that I do now, but that's only recently.*

They went on to explain that their local authority managers recently instituted changes to their work which had the effect of reducing differences between them and incidentally bringing them closer to what was originally encoded in their job descriptions. They further suggested that the absence of a nationally prescribed description of the CCT role allowed job descriptions to vary from area to area.

Informants in group interview #1 felt that their job description had been constructed as a political or tactical document and that the lack of national guidance had allowed local managers to construct the CCT job description in a way which protected the status quo by controlling the boundaries of CCT work, for example, to avoid overlap

with the role of existing staff. These particular respondents asserted that in practice their role *necessarily* did cover some of the tasks and responsibilities previously performed by other staff. They suggested that their job description was therefore insufficient and contestable; it failed to describe the extent of their real role leaving important aspects of their work unrecognised. Furthermore, the fact that other workers were afforded a nominal occupation of areas of work, which were in reality performed by CCT, evidently irritated these respondents.

Some informants reported that they did not have a written job description or were unsure if one existed, in one case this was explained as being an artefact of how the respondent had been appointed to her post. Margaret had previously been a part-time class teacher and a part-time deputy head, but had given up the class teacher element to become a CCT when it had been mandated that the centre should have one. In an interview she explained that she was unsure whether a job description existed. Furthermore, she thought that a separate job description would be meaningless as her CCT activities and deputy head duties were hard to differentiate 'because the edges are so blurred'.

Other written sources which might provide descriptions of the role, including those from research are also markedly absent. One recently published study discussed the role of two CCTs as pedagogical leaders in early years settings (Garrick and Morgan, 2009). Due to the timing of the fieldwork, it is unlikely that any of the respondents were aware of Garrick and Morgan's study or had read their discussion. Furthermore, whilst providing interesting insights into this important aspect of the role the article does not cover other areas such as direct work with children and families.

Uncertainty also seemed to be propelled by the informants' experiences and awareness of inconsistency. For example, when asked (in group interview #2) to describe the role of a CCT Sylvia laughed, stating that she had experienced several changes of emphasis and direction during nearly three years in post. She described the role as 'a changeable feast' rather than a fixed and settled idea. Similarly in another interview Amy said that when she applied for the job she had not clearly or fully understood what was involved, but this was irrelevant because the job had

continuously changed since she started and was now very different from when she had begun three years ago.

In the absence of a clear and fixed representation of the role of CCT, the informants were highly interested in what they saw as marked differences in the role as it was enacted in different locations and to the significant changes in role they had experienced over a relatively short period of time. For example, the respondents reported that different local authorities had significantly different approaches to the CCT role and that individual centres differed significantly. This view is supported by the high levels of variability that have been noted by researchers studying a range of characteristics of children's centres (Anning and Ball, 2008; see Lewis *et al.*, 2011a; Lewis *et al.*, 2011b; Cameron *et al.*, 2009).

As professional workers it might be expected that CCTs would be able to defend, or at least explain, these variations in their practice. In one email Polly (an experienced teacher) made sense of these differences in three ways, by citing structural issues in the authority (such as pre-existing jobs), as a response to different statutory requirements<sup>1</sup> and lastly due to different types and levels of local need. Derivations of the last of these explanations (henceforth referred to as the 'local needs rationale') were also prevalent in other informants' accounts. Margaret's comments were typical:

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<sup>1</sup> Only those centres in the 30% most deprived localities were mandated to have a CCT DFES (2006) *Sure Start Children's Centres Practice Guidance*, London, Department for Education and Skills. However, in 2011 the Coalition Government removed this as an absolute requirement; they specified that it remains an expectation. EDUCATION COMMITTEE (2011) *Sure Start Children's Centres: Government Response to the Fifth Report from the Children, Schools and Families Committee*. London, House of Commons Education Committee.

*We actually had a visitor earlier on [day of the interview], and she came from another children centre and was a CCT, to find out what I did. And what she does over there, where they don't have nursery classes as such, it is day care, and the children's centre is different again to what I do. So every children's centre CCT will be unique...*

*... I was liaising with a lot of people in similar situations and all of us had, different cohorts and different client groups and different expectations of what we were doing. (Margaret, interview)*

Similarly, Polly who had experienced working in three very different children's centres; suggested that each centre had developed services 'where the chinks are' (i.e. service gaps). Amy, who had worked full time in one children's centre for three years, also invoked a local needs rationale when she gave an account of the unusually high levels of CCT staffing levels in her local authority area. She presented this as a planned response to local need, explaining that her area had a high proportion of children who were perceived to have special educational needs.

Whilst many respondents drew on this rationale, their narratives were not detailed. For example, none provided details on how local needs had been identified, none spoke about heterogeneity of need or diversity within their area and none explained why their locality need was somehow different to other localities which might otherwise be thought comparable in terms of deprivation, urbanity etc. However, it seemed that the local needs rationale provided a useful heuristic device which helped the CCTs to make sense of and perhaps tolerate some of the uncertainties in their work. It is also plausible that these explanations provided suitable and acceptable public accounts of the obvious variability which may otherwise have appeared puzzling to researchers, families and others (Buttny, 1993; Antaki, 1994a; Antaki, 1994b).

### **Other dimensions of uncertainty**

The respondents' uncertainties were not restricted to the content of the CCT role, but included uncertainty which they attributed to situational instability and changeability of working environment and context. In group interview #1 a number of informants

emphasised this, describing children's centre context and environment as 'shape shifters', 'you can't ever pin it down' and 'it's always moving'. Most respondents again used a local needs rationale to make sense of this apparent flux, but a few also drew attention to the changing financial or political climate which had impacted on centres. For example, in an email Melanie (who was a CCT as well as being Headteacher of the nursery school) raised the impact of the (then) recent change of UK Government in 2010 and subsequent shifts in welfare priorities. She felt that the new Coalition Government's intention for children's centres was to refocus them away from education towards health and social aspects. She was anxious that this would threaten the CCT role and the prominence of pedagogy in children's centres.

The informants were clearly sensitive to and concerned with the high levels of uncertainty in their new job. This is perhaps unsurprising given that they have moved from a role where they had achieved what Jacklin *et al.* (2006) see as 'confident professional proficiency' to a situation more akin to Jacklin *et al.*'s earlier stage of 'merely surviving and coping' as they would have been in the first few years of their working life.

Most of these informants were mid-career teachers who would have been socialised into the teaching profession within school settings. This experience would have promoted the acquisition of what Day (1999 p61) refers to as 'a series of implicit expectations and norms of thinking and behaving'. Their school experience may have equipped CCTs with many skills and much knowledge relevant to their new role, however, its normative value in their new setting seems to have been limited, particularly given the flux inherent in their new role:

*The job's changed a lot though, you know it has sort of evolved and every time you think you've just got it, it changes, and a little bit of that's to do with finances and a little bit is to do with need, 'cos we used to cover ALL (her emphasis) the children's centres between four teachers and now we only work in the main 30% areas. (Donna, group interview #1)*

Even within the relative stability of the school environment, change and educational reform has been shown to increase stress and reduce morale (Day *et al.*, 2006; Day,

1999). Ironically several respondents reflected on the fact that a desire for a 'change' from teaching and the burdens that came with it had in part motivated them to become a CCT. Yet it was apparent that the level of change they now experienced was uncomfortable for several of them. Whilst their decision to move into a CCT role had been their own it seems likely that the continued high levels of change was stressful and may have impacted on their morale. Several respondents provided anecdotes about other CCT colleagues who had been adversely affected by the extent of change and ongoing uncertainty.

### **Approaches to uncertainty**

Having a clear role model can provide a useful source of certainty; as Eraut (2007; 1994) points out early practice alongside experienced colleagues provides opportunities to acquire specific knowledge and skills and learn professional norms of attitude and behaviour. The benefits of working alongside experienced colleagues has been evidenced by researchers in many fields: Epstein and Hundert (2002) highlighted the benefits of mentors in training and assessment of doctors; Glass and Walter (2000) found that peer mentoring in nursing promoted both personal and professional growth; Glazer and Hannafin (2006) revealed that situated learning alongside experienced staff benefited new teachers; Bellinger (2010) drew attention to the importance of practice learning in social work.

Since the CCT role is effectively prototypical, these informants began their new roles without established role models to act as reference points. Despite being situated within an interprofessional team several informants suggested they were in effect isolated because the colleagues they had most contact with did not provide a wholly suitable collegium:

*That's not to say that I wouldn't have those sorts of discussions but I do find it more um, isolating here, than I did on school. Um... I get on quite well with all of the staff here but I know other ed leads [CCTs] that have found it, found that difference in professionalism very, very difficult. (Amy. Interview)*

In the absence of suitable role models and peers within their own children's centre most respondents had found ways to have regular contact with CCTs from other local centres. Whilst these peers were similarly inexperienced in the role, they provided support through listening, sharing adversities and informally counselling each other (McGuire, 2007). It is interesting that in a comparative study of several occupations Vogl (2009) found that a sense of camaraderie and community was of particular importance to teachers. Many of these respondents seemed to value highly the camaraderie of these CCT peer groups. For example Donna explained that contact with other CCTs served as a partial replacement for the supportive camaraderie of the school staff room. In one area CCTs from different centres came together informally every two weeks and worked on small projects. In addition, they had recently begun to have monthly meetings as a 'CCT team' with their line managers where they wrote joint plans and reflected on their shared priorities. Liz explained in group interview #1 that this peer support had been very important to her, stating that without it 'I wouldn't still be here'.

In emails, Polly and Martha both contrasted their earlier experiences of peer relationships in school with their current experiences as a CCT:

*There is a definite sense of cohesion here but we are all doing our own bit whereas when I worked in a small infant school I knew every child and most parents, the staff was very steady, we worked together for many years and new staff were welcomed. There were no staff room politics, it was a bit like being in another family. This role doesn't feel like another family but I do feel valued and an integral part of the team. (Polly, email)*

*I don't feel close to my new colleagues in one setting at all. In the other centre, I feel more comfortable and relationships are growing. I still talk to and have contact with my previous school. I contacted them the other day for some support when I was writing a policy. (Martha, email)*

Later Polly added:

*... the thing I miss is not having a staff room, where you can come together almost on a daily basis. (Polly, group interview #1)*

A number of work-related benefits have been reported from having positive relationships with work colleagues. For example, greater effort is put into tasks (Kerr and Seok, 2011), performance is improved (Lee *et al.*, 2011) and workers experience greater job satisfaction (Adams and Bond, 2000).

These informants felt that contact with peers allowed them to reflect and compare practice, learning from each other about 'what worked'. As with other professional groupings (see for example Edmondson, 1999) having close and friendly contact with colleagues allowed these respondents to feel secure enough to seek help or advice from peers. Regular contact allowed them to learn about each other's specialism and likely ability to provide relevant knowledge or help (Borgatti and Cross, 2003).

Engaging in interactions with peers also seems to have promoted a collective reflection on their role, forming clearer narratives and rationales for their work and reducing feelings of uncertainty. It seems that where uncertainties remained, peer discussion allowed them to be defined, shared and collectivised in a way which made them less threatening.

In another district Susan described in an email how CCTs had termly network days which involved short formal training slots, dissemination of district level news and presentations by CCT colleagues. Conversely in group interview #2, Sylvia described how (in a third district) because of new instructions from local authority managers, CCTs had to reduce the number of times they met, despite the fact that she described such meetings as 'really, really helpful'. As a result she now felt particularly isolated in her centre where a neighbouring CCT had recently left and not been replaced. To help overcome this sense of isolation she had developed strategies such as frequent telephone conversations with CCT colleagues from various centres. Nancy from the same area emphasised:

*I do think that CCTs can feel isolated, even more now than before, they don't get together as a group very often, they don't see each other much, and as I said, they still have some barriers between them and other team members,*

*historic some of them, so it can be isolating for them and they can feel they don't know where their loyalties should lie. A bit like being piggy in the middle half the time, you know, it is difficult in a way. (Nancy, interview)*

One evident drawback of using other CCTs for peer support was that whilst this promoted periodic access to a close and supportive peer group, it seems to have underlined the daily sense of isolation that a number of respondents described. For example, in her interview Nancy characterised the CCTs as belonging to 'another team' which had become separate from other centre-based staff. She suggested that CCTs felt isolated from the colleagues with whom they had daily contact and found it difficult to be a full team member. She attributed this in part to the fact that CCTs' work was more clearly specialised and differentiated from that of other team members whose work tended to overlap to a greater extent. Because of this, CCTs were effectively 'absolved' from involvement in the routine tasks of running the centre which most other team members shared. It seems that such visible differences of status marked CCTs as 'separate from' other team members and made their relationships difficult. In addition to the impact on the individuals concerned these status differences are likely to have had a negative impact on collaborative work – as noted in other interprofessional contexts (e.g. Cott, 1998; Kvarnstrom and Cedersund, 2006); this will be discussed in later chapters.

Lack of integration into the team may also have derived from the respondents' own attitudes and choices, for example, Amy suggested that colleagues in the centre were unable to provide her with appropriate support and that opportunities for reflective 'professional discussions' with other team members were rare:

*... no disrespect to anybody else, because there's nobody here at the same professional level as me... I have found the difference in professionalism very, very difficult, because they [CCTs] were used to having, everybody at school having, this respect for each other and it didn't always happen in, in this sort of situation. (Amy, interview)*

A small number of CCTs had found more appropriate peers. Rose was unusual in that she worked in a centre which had a co-located speech and language therapist (SLT).

She had formed a strong working relationship with the SLT, whom she appeared to view as a suitable peer. For example, her discussion of the SLT's knowledge-base suggests that she saw this as theoretically informed and scientifically rigorous. By contrast it seemed that other staff were seen as having knowledge primarily derived from practical experience. These status-related issues are discussed further in the following chapters.

Professional bodies and occupational associations might also be viewed as potential sources of support, able to promote the interests of the 'profession' as a whole as well as guiding, protecting or supporting individuals (Seigrist, 1994; MacDonald, 1995). Thus they might have been a mechanism which CCTs used to help cope with uncertainty. Currently (2012) all CCTs must have qualified teacher status (QTS) and be registered with the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) which then described itself as the professional body for teachers<sup>2</sup>. The websites of some large teaching unions (e.g. NUT and ATL) suggest they do potentially have CCTs among their members, but there appears to be little information or activity aimed specifically at CCTs. None of the CCTs in this study made any reference to QTS, the GTCE or its (then) imminent demise, or to teaching unions or other national associations. This lack of reference to external bodies seems a little surprising given their potential roles in defining or regulating their work or in giving support to members (see MacDonald, 1995).

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<sup>2</sup> The UK Coalition Government in 2010 announced plans to abolish the GTCE and introduce new ways of regulating the teaching profession DFE (2010a) *The Importance of Teaching; the Schools White Paper*, London, Department for Education. The Stationery Office..

## Changing roles and the loss of the class

The role of the teacher has been described in many different ways; master / mistress, leader, class manager, educator, facilitator of learning, transmitter of knowledge, lesson planner, entertainer, assessor, carer, emotional labourer and even parent (see for example Ben-Peretz, 1996; Sugrue, 1996; Schepens *et al.*, 2009; O'Connor, 2008; Jacklin *et al.*, 2006; Isenbarger and Zembylas, 2006). Fundamentally each of these roles presupposes interaction with, or at least the presence of a child. Whilst teachers do take on other roles such as administration or the supervision of junior staff, some commentators have argued that having responsibility for a class of children is a defining point of professional identity, quickly understood by the neophyte teacher (Schepens *et al.*, 2009; Sugrue, 1996).

Indeed, having a group of children seems to have retained special value for the CCTs. Respondents often identified that they no longer had their own class of children and had much less contact with children. Significant reductions in direct work with children was also noted in Garrick and Morgan's study of CCTs (Garrick and Morgan, 2009). All respondents in this study suggested this was highly significant, in the main it was presented as a negative change. The only divergent account came from Susan who explained how not having constant responsibility for a group of children can be a relief:

*On paper they are the same but in reality it is much better being a Children's Centre Teacher. We don't have to plan lessons, we don't have to have a whole class to ourselves for hours on end, we don't have any real responsibility. It is completely different. (Susan, email)*

During her interview Nancy described this change as 'a real loss', 'a special thing' and a feeling that 'you have left something behind'. Themes of *ownership* and *responsibility* were particularly prevalent in these respondents' descriptions of working with a class of children. Nancy had enjoyed being in charge of a class, but as a CCT on the occasions that she had contact with children she saw them as 'someone else's children' either the responsibility of a nursery leader or a parent. Polly expressed similar feelings in an email; she talked about the children she meets now as 'belonging' to someone else.

She missed having responsibility for the children and having ownership and control over the classroom environment and activities that take place. She went on to say:

*... the difficulty for me at first was that of ownership - it wasn't my room and these were not my children [...] This was a huge change from being in school where it was my room and I was solely responsible for the children in it. (Polly, email)*

Melanie's dual role as CCT and head of centre (and nursery school) appeared to confound the problem for her; she was very busy and felt remote from the children:

*I no longer know the names of the children in my school [centre], nor can I match them to their parents. (Melanie, email)*

She vindicated this loss by referring back to her overall objective - to promote wellbeing of the children and families. Martha also explained in an email how she missed frequent close contact with children but stated that some aspects of her current role such as running groups with families compensated to some extent for the loss:

*I miss the contact I had with older children. I could have a great conversation with a 4 year old. It's just very different but I do miss my old role in many ways. Running the sessions is important for me as this is when I have the most contact with the families. I ran a family book/scrapbooking course with adult learning and this has been great. (Martha, email)*

Relinquishing of ownership and responsibility for the physical classroom environment also appeared as an important factor for these CCTs. This seemingly fundamental divorce from the typical teacher's ownership and responsibility for a class space might signal a loss of opportunity for individual agency. During group interview #1 Zoe explained that in school she had been able to change her classroom environment without consulting anyone, but now if she were to propose a change to any spaces within the children's centre there would have to be:

*... a full team meeting, planned a few weeks ahead, with many arguments to support why you want to do what you want to do, and then an action plan (Zoe, group interview #1)*

In a similar account Amy explains that certain things are now out of her exclusive control:

*I think a lot of the time I'm always thinking we could be doing this, and we should be doing that, because I'm less in control about what happens in the centre and the nursery I often find I can't do the things I want to because it you know, needs staff meeting time, and that's not always down to me, and there's other things happening that are out of my control. So I feel a bit less in control that I don't have as much say as I would like. (Amy, interview)*

### **Changing roles and working with parents and families**

All guidance for Sure Start children's centres prescribes early contact with families, focussing work on children from birth to five years and with expectant parents during pregnancy (DfES, 2005b; DfES, 2006; DfE, 2010b; H.M. Treasury, 2004a). Equally the small amount of existing guidance on the role of the CCT (TfC, 2007) refers briefly to work with families. In particular children's centres seek to attract and engage with what have been termed 'hard to reach' or 'difficult to engage' families who may be most in need but reluctant to participate (DfES, 2006; DfE, 2010b).

These respondents clearly felt that some kind of work with families was an expected part of their role, but they were less clear about what this should entail. The idea of working with families seemed appealing to most respondents. However, Polly explained in an email that she was uncertain about how to work with families and exactly what was expected of her. Furthermore, the amount of time she could spend on work with parents had been less than she had initially anticipated, as her time was dominated by her work within early years settings, where she felt her responsibilities were more clearly defined.

Where work with families was described it tended to be based on pre-planned group-based activities rather than one-to-one work. These group activities focussed on pedagogical themes such as family learning, learning journeys or play schema and were often explicitly linked with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). All CCTs

described being involved either in the direct delivery of group activities for families or in planning sessions to be delivered by other staff.

CCTs reported enjoying this aspect of their work but there were challenges. For example, some were concerned that they found it difficult to attract vulnerable or 'hard to reach' families to these group activities and that this lack of engagement limited their overall impact (see also Evangelou *et al.*, 2011; Belsky *et al.*, 2006). In group interview #2 Sylvia explained that she ran a regular group for families:

*... and that really, err, sorted out that part of my role - because I was obviously working with parents (Sylvia, group interview #2)*

However, despite having addressed 'that part of her role' at a superficial level, she felt the group did not attract those families who would most benefit and that she needed to work with a wider range of families. Sylvia reported using additional and alternate strategies to engage these families, such as regularly spending time in the children's centre cafe:

*...they still see that as somewhere that they feel relaxed in, and their children come in and have access to the toys. And I think that was an important thing as well for those families that may not necessarily have got into the sessions, their children were playing on the café floor and I'd bring toys out and sit down and do a jigsaw with them and use that as a way to chat to the parents, so they get to know me. (Sylvia, group interview #2)*

Interestingly Sylvia viewed this type of informal contact with families as primarily aimed at promoting attendance at a more structured group rather than being intrinsically a worthwhile intervention. It may have been easier for Sylvia to portray her structured group activity as appropriate (and evidence based) since the activities were pre-planned, explicitly linked to the EYFS and formulated to achieve specific outcomes. However despite these efforts Sylvia and other informants reported that much of their work was with families who were easier to engage.

Writers from several fields have highlighted benefits of building relationships with service users which are less hierarchical and more collaborative (for example

Broadhurst and Holt, 2010; Fraenkel, 2006; Lister and Gardner, 2006; Reinders, 2010). Relationships between CCTs and parents in Sure Start children's centres are likely to differ over a number of dimensions from the relationships between school teachers and parents. For example, attendance at school is obligatory (home education not prevailing) whereas use of children's centres is non-compulsory. Furthermore, children's centres are often delivered through a broader community development approach which overtly prioritises the empowerment of parents.

The relative informality of the children's centre setting would appear to provide valuable opportunities for CCTs to form different types of relationships with families and several informants stated that they were striving to find collaborative and less formal ways to work with parents. However, this was something which most found difficult, in part due to other demands on their time and for some because they found these new relationships with parents difficult to establish and maintain. Many respondents seem to have viewed working with families as an area for their own development. For example, Amy suggests that it had been 'good for her' to do more work with parents and that this experience would be valuable in her future work.

Nancy described her new relationships with parents as being 'more equal' than those she'd had with the parents of school children. She thought that CCTs typically found this difficult since in school they had needed to present an image of being 'in charge', but their role in the centre required them to step back and allow parents to make the decisions. Nancy suggested that this changed relationship was especially difficult when some of the families visiting the children's centre were already known to the CCT from previous contact within a school context, for example if there were elder siblings.

In general terms it appeared that these respondents had thus far been unable to capitalise on the unplanned and more flexible opportunities presented in a children's centre. For example, on the rare occasions these respondents described one-to-one encounters or work on non-pedagogical themes, this was generally presented as an intrusion to their work:

*For example, this morning I was due to go in day care, but as it happened, landed at the centre, we had an issue with domestic abuse, and I spent the*

*morning at the refuge miles away, which isn't my role but I was there and I'm part of that team, so, but that wouldn't happen at a school. (Christina, group interview #1)*

Christina clearly saw herself as the person of last resort in this instance; under normal circumstances she suggests that other workers in the team were better suited for this task. Christina portrays this incident as a disturbance to her purposive work with a day care provider and underlines that as a teacher she would be protected from this type of occurrence in school.

There could also be difficulties over arranging for contact with families; the respondents explained that as class teachers contact with parents was generally limited to 'dropping off' or 'picking up' times. The compulsory nature of education (for most children regular school attendance) had meant that as school teachers they had been able to 'catch' parents and initiate discussion at their convenience and often in their own classroom. By contrast, as children's centre teachers the informants worked in spaces which were communal and in which the presence of parents tended to be unpredictable since attendance was always voluntary.

Ironically this less formal situation meant that if a particular concern or issue arose, a special arrangement needed to be made. Some respondents felt that that this produced a particular contrast to the general informality of contacts with parents at the centre and suggested that 'making an appointment' had the potential to give the interaction formality, undue weight or significance which was unhelpful in some cases (see similar accounts from Williams and Churchill, 2006; Evangelou *et al.*, 2011).

Children attending childcare and nursery settings within the children's centre had a somewhat more predictable pattern of attendance since these occasions tend to be pre-planned. However, the voluntary nature of these attendances together with the fact that parents were often paying for the service appears to have given interactions between these parents and CCTs a somewhat different character. Parents are likely to view themselves as a customer or consumer in this situation rather than a client or service recipient (see McLaughlin, 2009) and although the CCTs were not funded by

parental contributions it seems likely that some parents regarded them as part of the service that they were 'buying'.

### Changing roles and working with the youngest children (0-3 years)

CCTs work mainly with children aged 0-5, most had previous experience of working with 4 and 5 year old children in nursery and reception classes. These informants drew particular attention to the fact that they were now also required to work with babies and children under the age of three. As Polly explained this had been an initial source of anxiety for several CCTs as they had no prior experience or training for working with this age range. Indeed she described it as her 'biggest anxiety at first'. The link between being able to display expert knowledge and professional identity (Eraut, 1994) was underlined by Zoe:

*Yeah I think if you're knowledgeable that will carry you a long way with a lot of other stuff because ultimately if you know what you're talking about it's difficult for people to, to not take you seriously, really isn't it? (Zoe, group interview #1)*

Several informants suggested that their inability to claim expert knowledge of this age group initially reduced their confidence, for example, when dealing with staff in early years settings many of whom had considerable experience with this age group.

Several CCTs mentioned attending multiple training activities related to babies and very young children which were provided early in their new role and reported that subsequently they had felt less anxious about this part of their role, Donna explained that over time she had come to realise that the same general principles could be used with babies as with older children:

*... it's just they are a different age, the whole process is the same isn't it, you know, the way that you find out where they're at, you plan and so on (Donna, group interview #1)*

Some CCTs also drew attention to the fact that they now needed to be continuously aware of the needs of children across a relatively wide age bracket (0 to 5 years)

whereas in their teaching experience they generally spent a school year being focused on a narrow age range such as a class with a twelve month age range.

### Changing roles and procedures

As Seigrist (1994) pointed out, much of the work performed by most professionals takes place within organisations (public or private), typically this requires compliance with prescribed procedures and participation in formal routines of control and accountability. Managerialist approaches such as those inherent in New Public Management (NPM) promote greater control over public sector professionals with explicit aims such as increasing efficiency and effectiveness (Kitchener *et al.*, 2000). In contemporary public services NPM approaches may impose a series of managerial tasks through practices such as performance management. These can include paper-based or computer-driven recording processes which aim to both prescribe action and produce a data-trail to record performance. Proponents of NPM point to apparent improvements in services or outcomes resulting from targets and performance indicators, for example, in reducing hospital waiting times or improving exam results (see Propper *et al.*, 2008; Hauck and Street, 2007; Boyne and Chen, 2007). Critics draw attention to the fact that performance management may itself be highly bureaucratic and that there is a potential for targets to divert effort and resources to a narrow range of more easily measured concerns at the expense of wider services (Bevan and Hood, 2006; White *et al.*, 2010; Propper and Wilson, 2003). Some critics of NPM point out that despite giving a superficial appearance of consistency it is likely that the inherent rules, targets and performance indicators are interpreted differently and applied selectively in different localities (Wastell *et al.*, 2010; Lipsky, 1980; Smith *et al.*, 2003; Taylor and Kelly, 2006). Others draw attention to the potential for these processes to produce unintended consequences or increased risks (Broadhurst *et al.*, 2010a), to divert practitioners from their primary goals (Broadhurst *et al.*, 2010b; Biesta, 2009), or to reduce workers' ability to engage emotionally, intelligently or critically with the work that they do (Taylor and White, 2006; Broadhurst *et al.*, 2010a). Tschannen-Moran (2009) observed that the growth of bureaucratic demands imposed in schools has the effect of constraining teachers' agency and their development as

autonomous practitioners. Several informants in this study referred briefly to what they saw as a growing administrative burden faced by classroom teachers, such as recording assessments of children, preparing lesson plans and materials and preparing for Ofsted inspections. Some informants suggested that dislike for these activities was part of their reason for leaving school teaching, effectively these activities had become what Jacklin (2006) refers to as 'push factors'. However, several respondents reported that their new role was also becoming increasingly bound up in prescribed forms of practice.

Respondents reported a growing sense of external intrusion and provided examples of new management procedures that sought to exert some control over their functions. For example, Sylvia described a new system for reporting her visits to settings. This was part of a computerised package implemented by her local authority to collect evidence for the (then) new Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme (known as EQISP) (see DCSF, 2008b). Whilst Sylvia explained that she always had to report on her work, the new system for doing so changed her role and the work that she did by forcing her to report her activities in a particular way. She gave an example, stating that she was no longer able to briefly 'drop in' to early years settings, since if she wrote a report on this type of activity, the report would be judged as lacking planning and unlikely to yield a fully evidenced assessment of performance and consequently the visit would be seen as a poor use of her time. Previously she had found short visits to settings a good way to build relationships with workers. Sylvia was particularly uncomfortable with this change as she was aware of an implicit coercive element to her compliance, since her manager had told her that one of the aims of the new system was to collect evidence which might support the continuation of her post:

*The whole of the EQISP process hinges on the report writing, hinges on the evidence, 'cos that's the only way it can see it as evidencing that the support that settings are getting [from CCTs] is having an impact. (Sylvia, group interview #2)*

A number of authors have drawn attention to the tendency for performance indicators to focus attention on what can be easily measured, counted or described (White *et al.*,

2010; Koretz, 2002; Wilson *et al.*, 2006). Nancy who was working in the same district as Sylvia also explained how the new system had required CCTs to change the way they performed (and thought about) their work, by prescribing the way in which reports must be written. Previously reporting had been 'touchy feely' but now CCTs had:

*... to write up, everything they do and there is a right way and a wrong way, the reports have to follow a pattern, they have to provide evidence. And some [CCTs] find it hard to write in an objective way. (Nancy, interview)*

These respondents felt they were being required to construct a particular type of narrative which reduced complex work in order to produce accessible organisational accounts (see White *et al.* 2010) that would justify interventions and judgements. In adopting this new system, aspects of the CCTs' role which were focussed on monitoring the settings' compliance with the EYFS were valued more than aspects such as building relationships with staff or working directly with children. In effect the content of their work had shifted towards what was reputable and reportable.

Amy, from a different area, worked with similar reporting systems, but despite an apparently heavy administrative workload her perspective was much more positive. During her interview she described how she had to monitor all of her contacts with children, recording the names of each child seen on each occasion, this data was then entered onto a database with the purpose of providing evidence for the local authority 'so that they can measure our impact'. In addition, she went on to explain that each time she made a visit to an early years setting she had to write a report about the visit, this report was shared with other local authority staff because 'they don't want to go in and have the same conversation'. Amy found that these accounts also served as a useful record so that she knew what advice she had given to the setting and could monitor whether it had been acted upon. Another administrative task for Amy was to complete and maintain her online diary 'so that everyone knows how much time I'm spending in the reach area and in the setting'. Amy also listed other paperwork she prepared for meetings:

*I'm the one doing the minutes of those and a lot of the actions as well, you know, it's all relevant stuff but it can take up a long time. (Amy interview)*

For Amy, as for some other public service professionals where uncertainty features highly (see Broadhurst *et al.*, 2010a), it seemed that compliance with a set of prescribed bureaucratic tasks was to some extent comforting, compensating for what she saw as a lack of suitable supervision and support. Nonetheless, for Amy and other informants, a great deal of time and effort was spent generating evidence required by their managers. This level of reporting would seem to stand in contrast to the image of the autonomous or agentic professional, as discussed in the next chapter (Ball, 2003; Biesta, 2009).

### **Changing roles and working in an advisory and training capacity**

Another dimension of role change was the far greater extent to which these respondents now worked in an advisory, consultancy or training capacity compared to their previous posts. Whilst some had experienced an advisory aspect to their work in schools, for example, if they had been a curriculum subject or a key stage lead, these respondents indicated that their new role had a much larger advisory component. Although informants described working in this way with a wide range of workers within the centre, they consistently reported that the usual focus of this work was staff members in early years childcare settings. Most respondents explained that they were mandated to have a large input into one main setting at the children's centre and lesser input into other settings in the catchment area. For some informants this was extended to providing occasional advice and support for local childminders.

Undertaking advisory or consultancy work and providing training, would seem to cast the CCT in a role as 'expert'. Experts are seen as having acquired special knowledge through extensive periods of training and experience and often lengthy and heroic effort (Davies, 1995). Mastery of their special knowledge renders the expert capable of offering guidance worthy of attention and of selecting and sharing appropriate insights in order to educate non-experts (Collins and Evans, 2007). This in turn, places the expert in a position of relative power and creates a situation which, potentially, could be oppressive for recipients (see Brown, 1993; Freire, 1970; Hey and Bradford, 2004; Hilferty, 2008). This is particularly likely to have been the case for these respondents given their dual role of providing advice and support whilst also monitoring

performance and reporting back to the local authority (Eddy Spicer, 2011). The respondents in this study seemed to demonstrate considerable sensitivity to this point, preferring to characterise the advisory and training components of their work using language signifying a more moderating than directive role, such as ‘supporting’, ‘working alongside’, ‘agreeing action plans’ and ‘helping other staff to be more reflective’.

Respondents based the advisory and training aspects of their work on what they saw as their area of expertise, i.e. early years pedagogy, in particular the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum (DCSF, 2008a) to which the CCTs made frequent reference. For example, ‘observation’ is a core skill described in the EYFS which was often mentioned by the CCTs:

*As a teacher, I have a good knowledge of the EYFS. Many members of staff have a wealth of experience for activities, groups etc. but don't know the EYFS as well as I feel I do. Observation is a skill I have sharpened. This is an area where I have supported staff. I have been asked to check observations and planning by staff. I can see due to my input into planning, observations and evaluation, staff have moved forward. (Martha, email)*

Nonetheless, providing advice was a frustrating experience for many of these respondents, particularly where it was not possible to also offer practical support. Rose, in group interview #1 explained that she preferred to be able to give hands-on practical support as well as advice, suggesting that for her, a role totally focussed on advisory work alone would be unsatisfying. In group interview #1, Polly, Donna and Liz characterised this aspect of work as being a ‘facilitator of change’ which required them to use new skills such as ‘persuasion’ rather than practical skills. As with other professions, CCTs had to acquire skills in negotiation and persuasion (Axelsson and Axelsson, 2009; Edgley and Avis, 2006). Zoe suggested that CCTs had to be diplomatic and ‘go around the houses to get what they want’. The need for diplomacy was reported to be especially critical when working with settings from the private sector since commercial interests also needed to be taken into account (McDonald *et al.*, 2011), this is discussed further in the chapters that follow.

One particular problem reported by the respondents was the extent of their influence, in that they held no power to enforce change. Yet at the same time they had to monitor and report on the quality of provision in the very settings where they had provided advice such their own performance and effectiveness could be inferred according to the extent to which these settings had improved. Informants reported that the response to their advice was varied; some settings welcomed their input and made changes in their work, whilst others were reported to be either resistant or simply dismissive. Some displayed clear frustrations with a system that gave them little power through which they could have a significant impact on practice:

*I worry about what is happening, I do worry about what was starting to get put in place, I worry about the EYPs, um the lack of teeth they have and the CCTs' lack of teeth (Jackie, group interview #2)*

Polly and Liz both related anecdotes about other CCTs who had found this aspect of their work highly stressful and frustrating, one of these colleagues had left the job after only a short period of time; the other remained but 'hated' this element of her job. The extent of the advisory component of the CCT role was emphasised during group interview #1 when it was suggested that the title 'Children's Centre Teacher' did not describe the role:

*Yeah it is a big advisory role, I mean, when was the last time you taught, you know? (Zoe, group interview #1)*

### **Delivering training**

All of these informants were involved in delivering some form of training for various groups of workers. Most often these were staff from early years settings but in some cases respondents also provided training for members of the centre staff team such as play workers or family support workers. Typically training was focused on aspects of the EYFS. Sometimes respondents co-delivered training with other workers such as Headteachers, Speech and Language Therapists, Family Support Workers or Childminder Co-ordinators. As with providing other forms of advice, some informants reported that their training role raised tensions and frustrations. Sylvia described a

course of training she had delivered for a group of play workers. She explained that this training had been formulated and initiated by local authority managers as an area-wide initiative to improve the quality of play provision in parent and toddler sessions and to bring it in line with EYFS principles. Sylvia reported that she was mandated to perform this task despite the fact that she was aware that many play workers saw this as a top-down imposition:

*... the feedback I got was there was nothing wrong with the way they did it before. (Sylvia, group interview #2)*

As a result Sylvia found the initial sessions very difficult, but as the course continued she felt that the workers became more positive and later reported to her that they had used what they had learned.

Although all respondents reported being involved in delivery of training, the validity of this as an aspect of the CCT role was contested in at least one area. In one email Polly described how her line manager had told her that she was not 'really expected' to deliver training despite the fact that this appeared on her job description, since this was already the responsibility of existing staff in the local authority. Polly had previously explained that she was disappointed that she was not assigned any formal senior responsibilities within the children's centre whereas in school she had a number of senior roles. Being told by her line manager that she should not provide training to early years staff seems to have been experienced as a further loss of face for Polly (Goffman, 1967) and an overt removal of a desired responsibility. This incident illustrates both the contested nature of the CCT role and the potential this had to impact on individual CCTs' professional identity. However, Polly's reaction was both resilient and potentially subversive; she continued to deliver training by applying a rather pragmatic interpretation of the new rule (see Lipsky, 1980):

*If it's something I feel confident to lead then I do but I call it a 'staff awareness session' so I don't step on anybody's toes! (Polly, email)*

## Chapter summary

A key theme that permeates this chapter is the complex uncertainty that pervades the CCT occupational experience. Uncertainty about exactly what the role consists of and a lack of shared benchmarking appeared to undermine the confidence that many respondents reported in relation to their performance. They stated that they did not have a clear model of the CCT role from statute, policy, guidance, managerial rhetoric or occupational folklore. In the absence of specific guidance the informants suggested that local authorities and SSCCs have relied on general centre guidance to develop services in ways which best respond to their perceptions of local need. Respondents pointed out that this has enabled and encouraged many different versions of the CCT role to emerge, indeed many informants appeared to be somewhat transfixed by the differences between them. Respondents reported their level of uncertainty as being significantly greater than during their experience as a classroom teacher. In school they experienced relative stability and security and when change did occur it was experienced collectively, either at school level with close colleagues or in respect of national policy changes with the whole teaching profession. Furthermore, even though the CCT role has only existed for a short time, respondents felt they have been subjected to continuous shifts in management and policy which required them to make changes to their work. These shifts have not impacted on all CCTs in the same way, as each individual in this study reported being exposed to a unique set of local circumstances and dimensions of change. In effect any uncertainty in their lives as a school teacher tended to be experienced collectively, whereas as a CCT uncertainty appears to have been markedly more individualised in its impact and understanding.

Uncertainty and variability meant that many respondents were unable to define the CCT role with precision or to specify clearly what tasks should be included, what the aims of the role are and what constitutes good performance across their various activities. Furthermore, most informants were increasingly uncertain about whether their job or the children's centre environment was 'secure' within an environment of far reaching public service reform and austerity (DfE, 2011a).

CCTs are not able to use many of the options which might help other workers cope with uncertainty (e.g. controlling the environment, recourse to written guidance, access to established peers, or knowledgeable managers). Instead, these respondents sought support from CCT peers. In some areas this has been encouraged and small collectives of CCTs appear to offer effective mutual support. However, in other areas it seems that managers have discouraged this from happening. Less helpfully, peer networks with other CCTs seem to have further complicated or hampered collaborative working within children’s centres by marking CCTs out as separate from other members of the team. The informants in this study reported having very little contact with CCTs beyond their local area and do not describe being involved with professional associations or unionised activity.

Further to the high levels of uncertainty and variation, these respondents identified a number of characteristic differences between their current work and that of classroom teachers, some of these are summarised in Table 4 below.

**Table 4. Characteristic differences between the CCT role and that of classroom teachers**

|   |
|---|
| CCTs clearly see themselves as no longer ‘teaching’ children.   |
| CCTs mourn the loss of responsibility for a class or group of children, a marked overall reduction in contact with children and the loss of a physical space (classroom) for which they felt ownership and control.               |
| CCTs note changes to the ages of children within the scope of their work (including pre-school 0-3 years) and the challenges that this presents.  |
| CCTs are also challenged by changes in the frequency and nature of contact with parents and the different relationships with parents that pertain, typically these appear more equal in status and power.                         |
| CCTs draw particular attention to significant increases in the amount of consultancy, advisory and training work they perform and note changes in the quality and nature of relationship they have with co-workers.               |
| CCTs have experienced differences in the quantity and nature of bureaucratic tasks required, typically they report a marked reduction in their bureaucratic workload, but suggest that this is increasing over time.              |
| CCTs also see differences in the context of their work, including the people using their services, the physical working environment, the type of team within which they were embedded and the types of support available to them. |

This chapter has shown that CCTs experience their new role very differently from their former role as school teacher. It might be surmised that the extent of this change is probably greater than they would have encountered had they followed another career path such as moving on to become a Deputy or Headteacher. Whilst these roles would

undoubtedly involve significant changes in the tasks performed, the context of their work would remain broadly similar; furthermore, clear models and expectations for such roles are abundantly documented. By contrast it is difficult to define the functions of the CCT with precision. However, by examining key differences between this role and that of the classroom teacher this chapter provides a partial description of the complex role-set of the CCT and provides rare insights into how these respondents experienced their transition to children's centre teacher. The next chapter will explore a number of aspects of their working lives and consider matters of identity in the different contexts of a CCT as occupation, specialism or profession.



## Chapter Four: Developing CCT Identities

### Introduction

Identity can be seen as the definitions, arguments or explanations used by people to understand and describe themselves, answering questions such as ‘who am I’ and ‘where do I fit in’ (Day *et al.*, 2007; Oyserman, 2004; Brewer and Hewstone, 2004). This chapter considers how the experiences of CCTs in their new role impact on their occupational and personal identities. It is important to consider this for a number of reasons, not least because identity has important implications for individual wellbeing, behaviour and commitment and effectiveness in work (Day *et al.*, 2007). Of interest in this chapter is how these CCTs construct their identities at work, how they position themselves vis-à-vis other members of the children’s centre staff and the processes and actions they take to maintain their sense of a ‘professional personhood’ (Dombeck, 1997). Given the likely importance of a professional identity, the chapter considers the informants’ accounts in relation to key themes commonly associated with professions. Some of these, such as the role of professional bodies have been discussed in the previous chapter; here the focus shifts to key signifiers of professions such as knowledge and theory, agency and autonomy, and status and hierarchy before considering terms and conditions of work. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings in respect of the informants’ identities as members of the teaching profession, as members of an emergent teaching specialism or as members of a new profession or occupational group.

The chapter also identifies an apparent absence of a collective ‘professional project’ (Freidson, 2001) suggesting that this may be due both to the relatively novelty of the role and its initiation by government rather than development by CCTs themselves. In creating the role the (then) Labour government specified its purpose, aims and activities only in vague terms; as we have seen, this allowed considerable scope for (re)interpretation by local authorities. This in turn had consequences for how CCTs provide a consistent and plausible narrative for their work; how they should perform and be accountable for their duties and how they might define and protect the boundaries of their role. Contrariwise, this high level of complexity and uncertainty

could potentially be cited within a construction of a CCT professional status, given that it seems to imply and require a high level of discretionary specialisation (Adler and Kwon, 2008; Freidson, 2001) .

Identity should not be regarded as a single, fixed and unchanging characteristic of an individual; rather it is a complex of fluid characteristics which develops and is redeveloped through various interactions, experiences, cultures and contexts. Identity itself has been conceived of in several ways (e.g. social, cultural, professional etc.). It seems useful at the start of this chapter to briefly describe two dimensions of identity, performed identity and self-identity. Performed identity describes identity as presented externally (Hogg, 2004). In the context of work this is likely to include performance which portrays the individual's competence, accountability and accomplishment of their role. Self identity by contrast is used to describe the internal view or image of the self (Day *et al.*, 2007). This is likely to change over time and to be a product of a complex array of factors such as personality, life history, mood, interactions with others (e.g. pupils, parents and colleagues) and by reflection on one's own knowledge and abilities. This aspect of identity is critically related to self-esteem, wellbeing, commitment and effectiveness (Day *et al.*, 2007; Day and Kington, 2008).

### **Identity, expertise, knowledge and theory**

Perhaps the most signal characteristic associated with 'professions' is the existence of a unique and special body of expert knowledge, often acquired through an extended period of learning. Indeed, Eraut (1994) has argued that whether viewed from a functionalist or a critical perspective the fundamental purposes of professions is the regulation and control of specialist knowledge. Individual practitioners are not expected to be fully conversant with the whole universe of ideas relevant to the profession; rather each person is likely to possess a standardised core of knowledge, together with some specialist sources. The ideas of Eraut (2000) in respect of knowledge and theory are helpful; by knowledge is meant those concepts or ideas which through various processes we believe to be true; by theory is meant a set of related concepts we use to explain how things are or to predict how things may be brought about. Action, such as the work performed by occupational groups is

underpinned by the practitioner's knowledge and the theories they hold. It is argued that professionals use their highly developed inferential skills to generalise from the broad principles contained in their knowledge to find solutions to unique and complex real-world cases (Schön, 1983; Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011; Adler and Kwon, 2008). Both knowledge and theory may vary in the extent to which they are codified by an external body and the extent to which they are consciously or unconsciously held. Consequently when discussing knowledge and theory with informants it is important to recognise that whilst some aspects will be 'espoused' relatively easily, other aspects will not (Argyris and Schön, 1974) and also that some concepts have high status since they have been sanctioned by external authorities, whereas others do not. Such discussions may be further complicated by the popular use of the phrases such as 'in theory' or 'theoretically' to connote formalised or idealised knowledge as compared to practical or real-life knowledge.

Informants were asked about the knowledge and theories which underpinned their work. Most respondents seemed to be rather hesitant when formulating responses to direct questions about knowledge. This was particularly true when this was posed as a direct question during interviews whereas slightly more developed responses were given by email, perhaps because informants were able to have more time to reflect and formulate what they deemed to be appropriate accounts. The informants' apparent difficulty in this matter is likely to have been related to two factors, first as inhabitants of a relatively new professional area they were unable to draw on a ready-made body of codified knowledge, secondly the high levels of uncertainty and variability they had described in their work is likely to have required considerable use of tacit knowledge which was inherently difficult to describe. Such that it may have been especially difficult for respondents to recognise or describe commonly used theories or repeated application of explicable knowledge (Eraut, 2007). However, despite their difficulties and hesitations, by drawing on responses that were received to these questions and from other comments made throughout interviews and emails, it was possible to identify several sources of knowledge and theories favoured by these informants. These sources include informal consultancy with particular colleagues,

internal processes such as reflection and study opportunities; these are discussed below.

Research has suggested that rather than consulting with those peers who may have the greatest expertise, workers often consult with people they find likeable (Casciaro and Lobo, 2005) or those who are most readily available (Rappolt, 2002). However, despite their obvious availability, it was rare for respondents to mention consulting with, or learning from, other workers from their centre-based teams. Rose was unusual in that she referred to utilising ideas learned from a centre-based colleague, a speech and language therapist (SLT)<sup>3</sup>;

*More recently I have become more involved with SLC [speech, language and communication] and a lot of the current (probably been around for years in one form or another) theories, face to face, child led activities, imitating etc. - do inform a lot of my work, particularly with parents. (Rose, email)*

Rose was the only informant who referred to learning from a colleague other than a fellow CCT. Comments from Amy and other informants (reported earlier) suggested that CCTs may identify more easily with the knowledge-base of other graduate professionals including SLTs. Most workers in children's centres do not hold degree level qualifications. This is particularly true in early years settings where CCTs spend a high proportion of their working lives; in such settings only 27% of staff below supervisor level have a qualification at NVQ level 3 or above (CWDC, 2008). It was notable too that Rose was the only respondent who made reference to initial teacher training, suggesting that her working knowledge and theories were:

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<sup>3</sup> In the researcher's experience it is relatively rare for a SLT to be based at a children's centre other than those that developed from early phases of Sure Start Local Programmes.

*...probably a lot from my teacher training many years ago but I can't remember distinct ones – you tend to do (or know) things instinctively as time goes on!  
(Rose, email).*

Rose's response also suggests she is aware that aspects of her practice are informed by tacit knowledge and theories (Eraut, 2000; Argyris and Schön, 1974). Susan also alluded to this, describing knowledge and theories as being:

*... absorbed throughout my career and I am not even conscious of them now.  
(Susan, email)*

Several respondents described the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) as their area of 'expertise', yet it was interesting that they did not identify this policy or its associated documents and resources as a *source* of knowledge or theory. They seemed to regard their expertise as being *about* the EYFS as policy or practice guidance rather than being *informed by* the EYFS as a significant repository of information or theory. It is arguable that this rather restricted use may have suggested that the informants viewed any evidence-base associated with the EYFS as being prescribed by government rather than one which they had identified or critically selected using their own professional skills (Clegg, 2005).

The informants' responses to enquiries about reflective practice and evidence-based practice produced affirmative but somewhat vague responses. Various respondents suggested both were important. For example, Amy was typical in stating (during interview) that she hoped she was a 'reflective practitioner' and would like evidence to inform her work. Rose gave a more detailed response than most informants:

*Reflective practitioner to me means someone who is able to look back on their work and reflect on the effectiveness of it – I think it is something many practitioners do without even realising it as they are constantly assessing what they've done along the lines of 'did that go well?', 'did the children learn from it?', 'what did they learn?' etc. and then use this analysis to plan their next steps – that's how I do it anyway. (Rose, email)*

With the exception of earlier comments from Rose and Susan, most respondents did not suggest that previous or ongoing work experiences were significant sources of knowledge or theory. This is not without a little irony given that some repeatedly stressed the value of experiential learning for children (see below). Indeed respondents rarely expanded upon how their own practice could be seen as either reflective or evidence-based, beyond a small number of comments about the potential of peer discussion to promote and support reflection.

There has long been an expectation that teachers will seek to maintain up-to-date knowledge either through independent study or through continuing professional development (CPD) activities provided or supported by their employer (Day, 1999); although some authors have criticised CPD activities as being frequently related to organisational agendas rather than to professional issues (Eraut, 1994). It is common for recent learning to have a proportionately high impact on practitioner thinking (Eraut, 1994) and this seems to have been true for many of these respondents. For example, Amy's email response states that her work is informed by 'whatever seems current at the time' and that theoretical perspectives are likely to be:

*... different for everyone [other CCTs] but I am particularly interested in experiential learning. (Amy, email)*

Susan listed a range of ideas from early years pedagogy, such as promoting access to the outdoors, parental involvement and attachment theory. She named two influential thinkers who had influenced her understanding of the ways in which young children learn through play and activity (Nutbrown 2011) and through experiential learning (Laevers 2000). Several of the other informants also named these two theorists; indeed respondents from all three areas had recently attended conferences, lectures and seminars in their localities delivered by the Belgian academic Ferre Laevers who they saw as a leading expert:

*... it was amazing that here we were able to have him, over at [location] and then we had a seminar with him the following day. (Sylvia, group interview #2)*

*... it was like three days, then I learned so much from him about following the child's lead. (Amy, interview)*

The enthusiasm and recall that these informants displayed for these particular training opportunities with academics of renown was striking. From an analysis of their accounts several reasons were identified many of which accord with other commentators' observations about what promotes effective knowledge exchange:

- The learning had been a relatively recent experience (Eraut, 1994).
- The learning was viewed as being at an appropriate academic level. The CCTs appeared to particularly value the fact that the training was delivered by someone they viewed as an eminent academic, a 'prototypical expert' in their field (Sternberg and Horvath, 1995; Collins and Evans, 2007).
- The training addressed a perceived gap in knowledge at a critical time in their career. Given their change of role and the resulting uncertainties, the respondents seemed particularly appreciative of ideas which provided an authoritative and coherent rationale for much of their work (Goodwin, 2011; Day, 1999).
- The training was delivered by a charismatic leader in a manner which they enjoyed and found inspiring, relevant to their current experience and accessible (Jayakody, 2008; Kudisch *et al.*, 1995).
- The conferences and seminars were commissioned by various local authorities specifically for CCTs in their areas; the content was therefore seen as being intrinsically endorsed and approved by line managers and employers.

Further to the conferences and seminars described above, several respondents explained that their overall access to CPD training had been far greater as a CCT than in their previous school-based experience. In particular they suggested that during the first year or two of their new role they had been provided with access to a wide range of training opportunities including generic interprofessional courses aimed at all children's centre workers (e.g. safeguarding, domestic abuse and first aid) as well as

training to help them in specific areas of their work (e.g. children aged under three and parents):

*One of the benefits is that there is no issue about being able to attend training compared to school (supply cover and cost) the CCTs have an annual budget so we select our training and pay from our own pot. My line managers give me lots of autonomy to choose what I need to attend even if I haven't identified that need through my PDR, things just come up and I'm free to book myself on.  
(Polly, email)*

The informants had valued this access highly, but some reported that more recently they had found that budgetary constraints meant that access to training opportunities was becoming increasingly difficult:

*... but no one can go on training outside of [local authority area] now, due to the cut backs it all has to be in-house or maybe brought-in (Nancy, interview)*

This was seen as a particular problem for newer CCTs such as Christina who had not benefited from the more extensive training opportunities that had been available at earlier times.

A key trait of professional status which underpins claims to competence is credentialised training; both at entry to the profession and often thereafter. As previously mentioned, all CCTs hold qualified teacher status and are expected to have significant experience in a nursery, infant or primary school, beyond this there are no qualifications or credentials specifically required for CCTs. Garrick and Morgan (2009) question the extent to which current training prepares CCTs for their new role which is dissimilar in many ways to that of a school teacher.

Many of the respondents had recently completed the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) and several were in the process of studying for a Masters degree (usually a Masters in Early Years Education). However, neither course is mandatory, nor is the content specific to the needs of CCTs. EYPS and Masters qualifications were however considered by most respondents to be highly desirable within a CCT identity and context.

EYPS is a competency based degree level qualification for practitioners in early years childcare. The (former) Labour Government aimed to have at least one practitioner holding the EYPS qualification in every early years setting by 2015 (CWDC, 2011) and the current Coalition Government continues to support EYPS as a way of increasing skills in the early years workforce (DfE, 2011b). Informants reported that they had been encouraged to undertake EYPS for three reasons, firstly to increase their knowledge of work with very young children, secondly so that they could more effectively support practitioners in early years settings (many of whom were currently undertaking EYPS by various routes) and thirdly to help nominally fulfil the commitment to have an EYPS qualified practitioner in the centres in which they worked.

Whilst most respondents felt that EYPS training was at an appropriate standard and relevant to the needs of CCTs, this position was not shared by all respondents. During an interview Margaret referred to her experience of EYPS training in derisory terms suggesting in particular that the academic level of this qualification was too low for qualified teachers. She had attended only a few sessions before opting out and her centre now routinely avoided the qualification for staff at all levels:

*I don't need to know how to make play dough and gloop, I need something more. (Margaret, interview)*

Whilst EYPS appeared unable to match Margaret's view of her professional 'self' and allied knowledge needs, she had recently completed the National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) an award at postgraduate level aimed at children's centre managers and future managers. Although this did not directly focus on her role as a CCT or on pedagogical matters she felt that this had been an invaluable experience. No other respondents mentioned the NPQICL qualification.

One participant who had recently been unsuccessful in gaining Early Years Professional Status was considering whether to try again; however, she had recently begun a Masters course which she was enjoying more, reportedly because of the depth of knowledge of the tutors. She observed:

*... It's really nice to hear somebody who has a lot of knowledge on something.  
(Anon, interview)*

Many informants made reference to undertaking Masters studies, their comments about the content and level of Masters courses were generally favourable although some were less enthusiastic about the workload involved or the length of time it would take them to complete the degree. When asked how much longer they had to complete their Masters, respondents in group interview # 1 replied:

*Polly            Three years*

*Zoe              About 20 years me, [laughs] the speed at which I'm flying  
                     through it*

*Donna           And it will definitely take me the five [years]*

Polly's Masters training also featured in her email accounts, where she cited a number of formal concepts and sources. She stated that she gained knowledge through current study for her MA which she felt informed her practice. She briefly rehearsed key ideas of Bourdieu, Foucault and Freire that allowed her to:

*... develop a better understanding of aspects of my job, and that of others,  
through another lens and therefore another perspective. (Polly, email)*

These respondents seemed to feel that postgraduate qualifications were particularly satisfying and appropriate to their learning needs.

### **Summary: Knowledge and Theory**

Notably, when instigating the role of CCT the government did not identify a body of knowledge on which it was to be based, beyond citing the EPPE study (Silva *et al.*, 2004) which states that the presence of qualified and experienced teachers in early years settings makes a positive difference to children's outcomes. It is therefore of some interest that neither teaching qualifications nor prior experience are invoked to any great extent by these respondents as key sources of the knowledge they apply in their everyday work. They made little reference to their initial teacher training or to

occupational experience as a classroom teacher or indeed as a CCT. These respondents did however enthusiastically embrace a small number of recent learning experiences related to specific theoretical perspectives. Whilst these respondents seemed unable to identify a codified corpus of knowledge which uniquely underpinned their work they did identify a number of favoured theoretical perspectives. The accounts given by these respondents suggest that there may be scope for the development of a national postgraduate qualification which is vocationally specific to CCTs (perhaps similar in format to the NPQICL favoured by Margaret). From a CCT perspective, the establishment of such a qualification would appear to have other advantages; it could begin to clarify what constitutes the unique CCT occupational area, the knowledge-base which underpins it and also provide a credential through which practitioners might claim entry to a unique professional status. However, there was no evidence from these informants that they were pressing for such a qualification or were aware whether one was being planned.

### **Identity, agency and autonomy**

#### **Arrangements for line-management and supervision**

Autonomous, agentic, self-directed practice is often seen as an important trait of the 'pure' professional (Noordegraaf, 2007). However, the extent to which this trait applies to all groups claiming professional status varies considerably. Ovretveit (1997a p24) described professionals as:

*Self-managing within the parameters set for them, they match their time and skills to the needs and demands they face.*

Seigrist (1994) similarly argues that most professionals (including teachers) are employed in large organisations and are consequently subject to bureaucratic constraints and direction, suggesting that the prototypical image of the fully autonomous professional is largely mythical. Teaching has increasingly been subject to government prescription and control; particularly over the last 30 years with initiatives such as the National Curriculum, OFSTED regimes, SAT testing and mandated strategies for numeracy and literacy; such that, teaching has often been described as being a

semi, programme, organisational, bureau or situated profession rather than a fully autonomous profession (see for example Wilensky, 1964; Parry and Parry, 1979; Etzioni, 1969; Noordegraaf, 2007; Larson, 1977; Jacklin *et al.*, 2006; McCulloch *et al.*, 2000).

Many authors have noted shifts in the way in which public sector professionals are managed, often contrasting custodial (or collegiate) forms of management which aim to preserve and reproduce existing professional practice with managerialist forms of public sector management such as those associated with new public management (NPM) introduced in the previous chapter. Here consideration turns to how different styles of management and supervision impact on CCTs. In custodial forms of management (see Ackroyd *et al.*, 1989) superiors and subordinates are typically members of the same professional or occupational group with different degrees of seniority; managers derive their credibility and their authority from the fact that they are seen as experienced expert practitioners (Kitchener *et al.*, 2000). The relationship between workers and managers tends to be collegiate rather than directive, with senior staff coordinating the activities of practitioners whilst mentoring them and providing protection from controls external to the profession (Kitchener *et al.*, 2000). In schools for example, this model could be applied to the activities of head teachers or subject leaders who coordinate the work of teachers through processes characterised by Busher *et al.* (2000 p5) as 'leadership from the middle'. Custodial management has been criticised in some instances for serving the interests of professionals in maintaining what may be seen as non-responsive services based on custom rather than on more innovative approaches which respond to changing needs (Kitchener *et al.*, 2000).

New public management was ostensibly a response to this critique; it prioritises concepts such as efficiency, goal-setting and rational organisational strategy. Managers in NPM systems gain their authority primarily from their ability to ensure that resources (including workers) are used effectively and efficiently to obtain outcomes desired by the organisation (Kitchener *et al.*, 2000; Coulshed *et al.*, 2006; Brooks, 2003). This form of management is typically directive and involves practices such as target-setting, standardisation, formalised supervision and explicit monitoring of

performance. Most writers suggest that over the past three decades there has been a shift in public services from custodial styles of management towards NPM. Whilst various critics have portrayed this as a growing assault on professional agency and autonomy, some argue that custodial management has in fact been remarkably resilient in some professions such that the forward march of NPM has been neither universal nor uniform (Kitchener et al., 2000).

The style of line-management and supervision experienced by workers has been shown to have an impact on affective aspects of work including motivation (Herzberg, 1968), 'job comfort' and satisfaction (Evans, 1998). Formal supervision activities are likely to occur in both custodial and NPM approaches with various aims to address matters such as organisational and personal goals, resources, plans, anxiety and problems, progress monitoring, professional performance and development (Hines-Martin and Robinson, 2006; Busher *et al.*, 2000; Coulshed *et al.*, 2006; Bourn and Hafford-Letchfield, 2011).

These CCTs reported a mixed picture of supervisory arrangements, with some being line-managed by centre managers from a range of occupational backgrounds, others being managed by head teachers or managers from the local education authority and others being dual line-managed. We should perhaps recall that school teachers are usually line-managed by other members of the profession (head teachers or other senior teachers) and it is likely that these informants have experienced this as a norm in their earlier careers. Receiving formal supervision from someone outside the profession may help to provide useful new perspectives but can be hampered by a range of problems including misunderstandings and a lack of shared language (Townend, 2005).

One common experience reported by several CCTs was that of having dual line-management. These arrangements were intended to ensure that CCTs received professional supervision from an 'education' professional (e.g. head teachers, early years consultants or advisory teachers) in addition to management from a children's centre manager who may come from a different occupational background. Rose, who experienced dual line-management from the centre manager and from the head

teacher of the school where the centre was situated, felt that her supervision was overly complicated and ineffective. Susan also found dual management problematic, she explained in an email that she had to contact different people for different management purposes. A process which she found confusing and time consuming, often finding herself 'in the middle' of clashes of ethos between early years staff and managers from health or social care backgrounds who 'didn't understand the EYFS principles'. Equally, whilst her non-education managers did not understand pedagogical issues, her education managers did not understand her role in children's centres and often imposed inappropriate monitoring:

*The discussion [in former school setting] was collaborative whereas now it is much more autocratic 'why haven't you done this?' not understanding the changing nature of the [CCT] job. I didn't have to account for my day's work (diary) in the past where as I do now! ... I think I just wish that my managers at Early Years understood the complexities of the job and supported me on an emotional level and recognised the skills needed to do the job and had those as part of supervision discussions or even PM [performance management] targets. (Susan, email)*

Susan clearly felt that her autonomy was increasingly constrained by goals which lacked relevance and frustrated her attempts to work more proactively to address family needs. Aspects of her experience seemed to show clear features of NPM, she contrasted this with her earlier experiences in schools where her management was more straightforward and perhaps, characteristically custodial.

Nancy reported in an interview that despite what was ostensibly dual line-management the work of the CCTs had in fact become largely driven by education authority managers at the expense of the needs of the children's centres. She characterised this as being a 'top down' regimen. Since becoming a centre manager herself she reported that she had fought to gain more influence over the work of the CCT in her centre against resistance from local authority managers who seemed motivated to define and standardise the activities of CCTs across the local authority.

These experiences of standardisation also seem to challenge the rational of responsiveness to local needs used by many of these informants.

In a third area Amy reported that initially she had received supervision from the centre manager; however, supervision arrangements had been changed in her local authority so that CCTs now received professional supervision from an education specialist who was a member of the local authority school improvement team. As with Susan, Amy questioned these managers' credibility since although they were specialists in education they were unable to grasp the full context of the CCT role, none of them being directly experienced in delivering such a service. Kitchener *et al.* (2000) found similar views among staff in residential care settings, where managers with relevant experience were seen to have more authority than those without. Amy was frustrated that she did not have opportunities for informed discussions through which she could display (and ratify) her CCT identity and her performance. She stated that as a consequence she felt that no one had a well informed understanding of her work; she was not confident in this situation and wished for more support, guidance, feedback and direction. In particular Amy wanted affirmation of her work and to have confidence in her standing in relation to other staff. Without this, she reported feeling that any apparent authority she held within the centre and any professional discretion she seemed to have were illusory or ambiguous at best.

The involvement of appropriate education professionals in the line-management of CCTs might have been expected to produce custodial or collegiate forms of supervision. However, it seems that several respondents experienced it as bureaucratic management by the local authority rather than professional supervision capable of supporting a continued sense of professional personhood as a teacher (Dombeck, 1997).

In a fourth area Polly, Donna and Zoe's experiences with supervision appeared significantly more positive than those of their contemporaries above. In group interview #1 they described having regular supportive contact with supervisors which they felt promoted their ability to work autonomously:

*The CCT team have had consultation days with our line managers, centre managers and strategic lead about developing our role in the future. We have changed the way we work as a direct result of the CCT team discussing our role with line managers... People do listen to our suggestions as the role is still developing. (Polly, email)*

Donna stated that she saw the main purpose of supervision as information-sharing rather than as being monitored or receiving direction. This group of informants additionally had appraisal meetings with a local authority manager once every six months when individual work targets were set. Zoe explained that the rapidly changing context of her work made these targets quickly become irrelevant:

*See, the targets that are set are the targets of that time, like we just explained, it changes so often that actually that target might not even be relevant (Zoe, group interview #1)*

She explained that they were not rigidly enforced and often were eventually redundant and ignored. The exercise of setting targets continued despite the knowledge that many would be abandoned; these informants were not however dissatisfied with this form of supervision. It seems that being permitted to modify or abandon targets enabled them to experience feelings of control and to feel that they were equal with their supervisors. On the surface, this joint behaviour seems to have created a convenient facade of managerialism which was largely symbolic, with both parties being happy to continue the ceremony of setting and subsequently ignoring targets. However, whilst superficially these practices seem to have been substantively non-functional, they evidently had some latent purpose, perhaps providing a more harmonious context for supervision meetings and allowing both parties to affirm suitable professional identities.

The informants in group interview #1 felt that they had good experiences of supervision and overall that they had more professional discretion and agency than when they had been classroom teachers. They saw this freedom as an intrinsic virtue and a necessity given the highly variable and unpredictable nature of their work. In an

email Polly described how as a class teacher she planned her work around a defined curriculum, whereas in the centre:

*...planning tends to be needs-led [working with] all sorts of groups and activities and other children's centre workers [we have] a lot of freedom to support them in the best way possible. (Polly, group interview #1)*

It was notable that this particular group of respondents reported not only better experiences of supervision but particularly effective experiences of CCT peer groups. Their peer group meetings were recognised and encouraged by managers and had become a forum through which they were able to present collective opinions or negotiate with their line-managers. This contrasts markedly to the experience of CCTs in another area who, in a climate of austerity and increasing managerial control, had been told to stop meeting on any regular basis. It is notable too that informants in this group interview seemed to have relatively positive experiences of integration into their centre teams.

### **Other potential constraints on professional agency**

In addition to the constraints placed upon CCTs by their managerial structures or the physical arrangements of their work some informants noted other factors which strongly influenced and bounded their work. During group interview #1 informants suggested that a pervading concern with safeguarding, child-protection and risk acted as 'trump-cards' which frequently diverted them into targeted work as opposed to more preventative and universalist pedagogical provision and leadership, which they saw as their core purpose (see also Munro, 1999):

*... we came along as an intervention service going to step in there and make it slightly better and nobody was ever going to get on the child protection register, and none of our jobs have ever been like that, we have always worked with children who are very much at the high end of need, and I yeah, feel less that I've done anything with the universal services side and more the targeted side than I expected, so it's safeguarding. (Donna, group interview #1)*

Similar findings have been noted in other public service occupations, for example, Butler (1996) drew attention to the concerns of public health nurses who felt that involvement in child-protection issues both distracted them from their role in promoting health and risked compromising their relationships with families in their care.

Respondents did not identify significant macro level constraints on the content or conduct of their work; for example, none identified government policy or guidance as constraining, and the only mention of financial cuts or resource constraints was in the context of access to training or personal job security.

### **Agency and Autonomy - summary**

Whilst respondents in different areas seem to have different perceptions of the level of agency they had in their working lives, several themes were apparent. In changing jobs many experienced a shift in the style of line-management they received from typically custodial approaches towards managerialist approaches. In one area although management styles were superficially akin to NPM they were enacted in ways which were experienced as flexible and which promoted an agentic professional identity. There were differences in the amount of contact informants had with their supervisors; perhaps counter-intuitively those informants who appeared to receive relatively frequent supervision were also those who identified themselves as having greater control over their own work. Those who received little or poor supervision described the encounters that they did have as autocratic, unsupportive and constraining.

Other constraints to autonomous working included those associated with the demands of collaborative work and for some, overriding concerns with safeguarding. Notably, the respondents that perceived their job as allowing greater agency and discretion were those who saw themselves as being relatively well integrated into a centre team and those that felt they were part of a strong network of CCT peers.

## Identity, hierarchy and status

The essence of a profession is its ability to identify its members as different from other workers and in some ways, superior to them (Hart, 2011). The separation is achieved through various strategies of occupational closure such as controlling entry, creating a monopoly of skills and knowledge and striving to acquire and maintain an exclusive area of work (Witz, 1992). The implications of this for collaborative working within children's centres will be discussed briefly in the following chapter; here we focus upon how CCTs identify themselves and their occupation within the structures of their work place.

In their accounts, these informants frequently portrayed an identity of relative seniority in relation to other centre staff. Their justifications for this fell into three themes: their claim to advanced knowledge and expertise, membership of superior professional and social groups and, for some, having greater formal responsibility. As with many other professional groups, the most prevalent explanation offered by these informants was that they possessed advanced knowledge and superior expertise (Freidson, 2001). The following extracts are typical and demonstrate how three CCTs conceptualised their own knowledge in relation to that of various other staff including managers:

*As a teacher, I have a good knowledge of the EYFS. Many members of staff have a wealth of experience for activities, groups etc. but don't know the EYFS as well as I feel I do. Observation is a skill I have sharpened. This is an area where I have supported staff. I have been asked to check observations and planning by staff. I can see due to my input into planning, observations and evaluation staff have moved forward. (Martha, email)*

*Many of us here have similar backgrounds i.e. working in primary schools so I feel that we have similar knowledge, mine might possibly be a bit more in depth and I have possibly a bit more knowledge of the EYFS than some others... staff in the nursery and pre-school ask for help and advice if it's needed about children in their care that they have concerns about, getting further professional help for children – form filling, paper work etc. and for help with*

*their ongoing professional development (a lot are studying for foundation degrees, degrees and EYPS). (Rose, email)*

*... the [centre] Director and other managers didn't understand the EYFS principles, as they were from different professional backgrounds like Health and Social Work... Over the years we have educated them by attending conferences together, giving presentations and having lengthy discussions. (Susan, email)*

In addition to claims to superior knowledge, some respondents justified senior status relative to other staff members by reference to the range of formal responsibilities which they held or to levels of influence that they had. This was most obviously the case with CCTs such as Margaret and Melanie who held additional named roles:

*Um, and I think for me um, I, part of what I am doing is management as a deputy head, I'm also covering for the head when she's not here and the head is the head of the nursery school and the CC so I need to have my head round what's going on in both sides... My role is wider, I take on more things, yeah. [int. Like?] Well, organising staff, leading really, sorting out the groups, making sure everything runs smoothly, having an input into the direction of things and planning. (Margaret, interview)*

In addition, some informants appeared to justify their senior status by claiming distinct social backgrounds:

*... the majority [of staff] are young enough to be my children, and from a different social group. They are lovely people but not one that I could meet up with after work or share my home life interests with. Even the (Centre) Director who I have met socially with from time to time, grew up on the estate and apart from work I have nothing in common with her. (Susan, email)*

Similarly when talking about a local setting Jackie described staff there as needy and impoverished:

*[setting] has got a lot of very needy staff recruited from the area, and as a consequence the vast majority of the staff in the setting are impoverished in every sense... (Jackie, group interview #2)*

Respondents tended to characterise their relationships with other staff as friendly, informal and benign; other staff were generally portrayed as deferring to the CCT and valuing their expertise:

*... I walked in before when [name], one of the centre workers was doing some planning for a swimming group tomorrow so she said 'oh, while you're here can I just ask you if I've done this right.' (Amy, interview)*

*Advice tends to be as they need it and is usually requested informally through conversation or email if they haven't seen me for a few days. They seem to value my opinion and usually follow my suggestions to the letter even though I will always say it's up to them to decide. I think they value my opinion and that I will try to help if I can. (Polly, email)*

However, whilst most informants suggested that other team members deferred to them on most occasions, a small number reported minor challenges to their professional authority. Polly explained that she had limited influence over staff in early years settings who tended only to implement changes while she was present and that:

*...when I wasn't there staff had other priorities and the things we agreed didn't always happen. (Polly, email)*

Similarly, in her interview, Amy described arriving at an early years setting where staff were chatting together rather than working, she was shocked that they were untroubled by her presence and continued to chat rather than resuming their duties. Amy was troubled by this difficulty in asserting her authority; her account of this and similar experiences suggested that she had experienced them as a loss of face (Goffman, 1967).

*... so it is really hard, to judge each individual character and personality, and where they view you in the pecking order really. And some staff basically*

*without saying the word have basically stuck two fingers up at me and said I don't care what you think. (Amy, interview)*

In emails Amy had suggested that many workers with whom she had frequent contact did not share her 'passion and vision' and lacked 'professionalism'. She had discussed these issues with other CCTs and related that many shared her view:

*... and no disrespect to anybody else, because there's nobody here at the same professional level as me, I think, and I've spoken to the other ed leads [CCTs] about this, we can feel quite isolated, if you want to have a professional conversation with somebody about, I don't know, children's development, it's hard to do that in this sort of environment, whereas I think it was easier in a school situation where you were all more or less on the same level... I think it's because we think that we're these very professional people, which we are, and we want a certain amount of respect for the professional that we are I suppose, but I don't think a lot of nursery practitioners value it... (Amy, interview)*

Despite being very clear to establish the validity and superiority of their own expertise, many participants seemed somewhat reticent to make what might be seen as insensitive comparisons about the expertise other workers. For example, in one email Polly described the training and expertise of other centre workers as 'different, not necessarily better or worse' whilst at the same time describing her own knowledge as 'deeper' and her understanding as 'more secure'. She went on to suggest that these workers have had 'very little training opportunities since their college days'. In doing so, it seems that Polly is seeking to avoid attribution of blame, whilst simultaneously maintaining a distinction between other workers' professional training and her own. Whilst avoiding crass claims of pre-eminence, respondents repeatedly described the CCT role in ways which tended to infer an implicit superiority. For example, in their characterisations of their work as 'checking', 'correcting' and 'reviewing' the activities of other workers.

It is possible that these respondents engage in what Hart (2011) refers to as 'emotion management' by outwardly displaying a range of respectful, emollient and deferential behaviours with the intention of smoothing relationships and facilitating team-work.

Hart suggests that these behaviours are more prevalent when there are clear differences in power and status, but suggests that they are most typical of lower status workers. In their study of CCTs, Garrick and Morgan (2009) note that CCTs recognised the need to attend to the emotional needs of their colleagues. Hence, the sensitivities demonstrated by Polly and several other respondents reflect a central dilemma for CCTs. Their commitment to collaborative working and being a member of the children's centre team demand that they show sensitivity and respect to other workers; yet at the same time, they retained a professional imperative to demonstrate themselves as an expert, not least because part of their role is to 'improve' the knowledge, skills and work of other workers. This corresponds to Hart's observation of the fundamental dilemma brought about by the tension between professionalism and collaborative work:

*... the idea of professional hierarchy is fundamentally at odds with assumptions of interprofessional collaboration. Indeed, the notions of shared leadership and the softening of professional silos that underpin interprofessional teamwork are in tension with the protectionism that is at the heart of the professional project. (Hart, 2011, p. 373)*

Engaging in collaborative interprofessional work may require behaviours which clash with the culturally determined ideal characteristics for a profession, what Dombeck (1997) refers to as 'professional personhood'. The 'professional personhood' of the teacher is largely bound-up with helping others to acquire new skills and knowledge, therefore it seems likely that teachers who must defer to the pre-existing expertise of the very colleagues whose skills and knowledge they are tasked with developing experience this as significant status inconsistency.

Despite these apparent tensions most informants seemed to be assured of their seniority in relation to other team members. However, when considering how their seniority was viewed by managers a number of respondents were less confident, for example, in an email Susan stated that:

*I am not given credit, by my employers (the Early Years Service at [LA]) for the work I do and how I do it. (Susan, email)*

A number of respondents reported feeling excluded from strategic decision-making in children's centres. In particular, some noted that they had not effectively participated in formal processes of decision making as in the following exchange from group interview #1:

*Christina: The centres have advisory boards.*

*Polly: There are people who say we should be involved in those, but there are other people who want to keep us off.*

*Donna: Things like, some of them, they've tried to keep the staff out as well, you know, there's a minimum number of staff in them which is actually better. I think it's actually a parent's forum not an advisory group, you get invited to go and support. And you have, you've done things like that?*

*Zoe: I have, yes, I've done things like that.*

*Donna: Yeah, you get invited to certain bits but, we're not in there with the decision making like that level.*

In an email Polly explained that although she felt she did have influence with her immediate colleagues she was unable to contribute to the strategic direction of the centre. This was a particular frustration as she had previously held specific, named responsibilities in school which she felt were prestigious and relevant aspects of her role:

*In School I was Foundation Stage Leader and Art co-ordinator and on the senior management team. I had much more responsibility in my previous role than I do in this one... In some authorities the children's centre teacher is on the centre advisory board and is part of the management team of the centre but not in my authority. Having been used to this type of role in school previously it does feel strange not to be part of the formal decision making process especially as I feel I could contribute in a positive way. (Polly, email)*

A typical path for career development in schools is through taking additional responsibilities. For example, many teachers take roles such as leaders for curriculum areas, departments, key stages, year groups, special needs or pastoral care (TDA, 2011; Hammersley-Fletcher and Kirkham, 2007; Bennett *et al.*, 2007). Teachers holding these roles participate in meetings and are involved in decision-making at different levels such that the existence of these roles structures a number of hierarchies within the school. CCTs are likely to equate similar opportunities in children's centres with professional development. It is clear that these informants experience children's centres as hierarchically structured and that they identify themselves as rightfully senior staff within these. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that some informants express frustration when they feel excluded from decision-making.

By contrast, Melanie and Margaret both had additional roles as well as CCT (head teacher and deputy head teacher respectively), these two respondents described being part of senior management teams and having considerable strategic influence; neither reported feeling that they had no influence or low status. These additional roles may have conferred a symbolic identity which confirmed their seniority within the hierarchy (Giddens, 1990).

Lewis *et al.*'s (2011b) study of different children's centres found considerable differences between them; one dimension of difference being the prevailing disciplinary orientation. This was seen to depend on a range of factors, for example, on whether the centre developed from a Sure Start Local Programme; which agency or organisation (e.g. health, social care, education, charity or community group) took the lead role in the development of the centre; whether centre managers have a strong affiliation for some particular disciplinary field (Lewis *et al.*, 2011b). It is possible that the resultant culture or orientation of the centre had an impact on the responsibilities deemed appropriate to be allocated to CCTs. The circumstances of Melanie and Margaret who both worked in centres which had originated as large nursery schools, are relevant here. Given the variation that has been noted, it is likely that these centres were characteristically focussed on a primarily educational ethos. Whilst in order to be designated as a Sure Start Children's Centre each would have to offer a range of community, health and social care functions; these may in some ways be

regarded as secondary to nursery business. Contrariwise, in centres developing through other routes, nurseries are often seen as an adjunct to community, health and social care functions (Lewis *et al.*, 2011b). This 'nursery first - children's centre second' approach seems to have provided Melanie and Margaret with a somewhat different environment and privileged their position as education professionals and as head or deputy head teacher.

### **External image and identity**

Commentators from a range of theoretical back grounds have asserted the importance of job title both to how the role is seen by others and to the worker's own professional identity (for example Kanellakis and D'Aubyn, 2010; Van Meurs *et al.*, 2007; Caldwell, 2002; Reid and Krpan, 2001). Polly and Donna suggested that 'Advisory Teacher' or 'Educational Lead' may be a more accurate title than CCT. Indeed 'Educational Lead' was a title used in another area covered by this research. However, in that area the title Education Lead was thought to be vague and lacking in meaning. In an email Susan also indicated that she felt the title 'Children's Centre Teacher' was counter-productive, limiting and constraining the work she could perform and people's expectations of her:

*If we had not been called Teacher and given Teachers' conditions of service then I could be doing a more effective job. (Susan, email)*

Informants reported that job titles were relevant to their interactions with parents, the public and workers beyond the immediate children's centre team. Respondents reported finding that many people did not understand the job title 'Children's Centre Teacher'. Unlike the title of 'Teacher' which has an almost universal cultural resonance, the titles 'Children's Centre Teacher' or 'Educational Lead' neither had symbolic or intrinsic significance for the majority of lay people and often needed to be explained, even to families who used children's centres.

Many respondents related an impression that teachers in primary schools rarely understood what was connoted by the CCT job title. In an email Polly suggested people did not understand her work, but when she was able to explain her work in detail, then

people think it is a 'fantastic job'. This lack of appreciation and understanding of their job by other members of the teaching profession led some informants to describe themselves as separated from their former colleagues; some worried about the potential consequences of this for their career development. Liz explained:

*I feel that I have learnt twice as much maybe even more so than if I had stayed at school and I feel very privileged that I have been allowed to do all this training, it is just unfortunate that if we did have to go back into school that I think that schools don't recognise that, I don't think they see how skilled we are, I feel very proud that I have got a lot more knowledge than I would have had if I had stayed at school. (Liz, group interview #1)*

These CCTs clearly reported that they had developed wider experience and a broader range of knowledge since joining children's' centres. While they did not feel that their experience as a CCT had been de-skilling (indeed they believed the contrary to be true), they did fear that other teachers and crucially head teachers may perceive it to be so. Whilst it is not possible to say with certainty how head teachers would regard experience gained as a CCT, other authors have reported that leaders in some professions do fear that working or training in interprofessional groups may be de-skilling and may dilute specialist knowledge (Bokhour, 2006; Lorente *et al.*, 2006; Hymans, 2008). Indeed Liz confided that she had been turned down for one school teaching post (foundation stage leader) on the basis that she had been out of the classroom for too long (12 months at that time). Zoe saw this as a consequence of specialisation:

*I don't think we'd be appealing for the primaries, we'd have to be infants, because I think we're so specialised, in early years, I don't think they'd see the value in that in a primary school would they? So in a way we have kind of narrowed our options... I think like Polly was saying I would see myself as a much more rounded practitioner, with so much more knowledge than I ever would have had sat in a school, so I actually think, you know, maybe that's the problem maybe we're a bit too far ahead (Zoe, group interview #1)*

Christina offered an alternative perspective:

*It depends what school you were applying for, if you were applying for one in the middle of, I dunno, [notorious estate] and it was non-teaching, I think they would be more likely to recognise the skills that you would have for a management role within that area, I think they would see that as more relevant, but a normal teaching post they'd see how many years you've got 'cos they're more insular as schools. (Christina, group interview #1)*

### **Hierarchy and Status – summary**

Respondents identified CCT as a role which should rightfully be seen as a senior position within what they perceived as explicit or implicit occupational hierarchies within children's centres. Often their experience with other staff supported this identity; however, many reported occasional feelings of dissonance arising from indifference to their contribution or challenge to their status by various colleagues. Several respondents also reported that external appreciation of their role was poor. For example, service users and head teachers did not appear to assign proper significance to their status. A small minority of informants who enjoyed an additional role and status such as head teacher or deputy head teacher appeared, perhaps predictably, more content with the regard in which they were held.

### **Identity and terms and conditions of work**

It has been asserted that terms and conditions of work are limited in the extent to which they can contribute to job morale and satisfaction; whilst poor conditions may act as disincentives, especially favourable or generous conditions have been shown to be less effective at motivating workers than various intrinsic and context factors (see for example Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2011; Nance and Calabrese, 2009; Evans, 1998; Herzberg, 2003; Herzberg, 1968). However, terms and conditions are briefly covered here since two markedly different contractual arrangements are applied to CCTs (Teachers' contracts and Soulbury contracts). This section seeks to explore whether these different arrangements have implications for CCT identity.

Soulbury pay and conditions are applied by local authorities in England and Wales to non-teaching professionals such as educational psychologists and education improvement specialists; they are negotiated by the Soulbury Committee which consists of employer representatives and representatives of professional associations. A brief comparison of Soulbury and Teachers' terms and conditions is available from the National Union of Teachers (NUT, 2011). Around half of informants in this study were on Soulbury contracts and the others on Teacher contracts. Whichever contract applied was determined by the policy of their local authority. Interestingly each of the respondents appeared to assume that their contracts were typical of CCTs more widely (and therefore unlikely to change), a few were aware that some CCTs in other areas were on different contracts but tended to see these as exceptions. In general terms it was notable that informants on Teacher contracts perceived Soulbury contracts to be less desirable than their own, whilst those who held Soulbury contracts appeared more ambivalent about the merits of either.

**Leave entitlement** - A significant difference between these two contractual arrangements is that teacher contracts include longer holidays (approximately 13 weeks, usually at fixed times in the year). Soulbury contracts by contrast include four to five weeks flexible annual leave, plus around two weeks of public holidays or closure days (see NUT, 2011). However, respondents on Soulbury contracts did not see this as unfair. For example, Donna acknowledged in group interview #1 that the Soulbury leave entitlement was fair since it was equal to most other workers' experience in the public and private sectors. Polly explained in an email that her switch to a Soulbury contract had not been as difficult as she had anticipated; whilst she missed the opportunity to 'step off the treadmill' for a while, she felt that the need to do so was less than it had been at school where she had tended to 'crash and burn' at the end of term.

Some respondents suggested that Soulbury holiday entitlement was relatively more difficult for parents of school age children who benefited most from having leave while their children were off school; but that it was better for those without young children as they gained the opportunity to take leave during term-time when holidays were often cheaper and quieter. In one area CCTs on Teacher contracts had retained their

entitlement to 13 weeks leave but had negotiated flexibility to use some of this during term time rather, so getting the best of both worlds. However, Sylvia suggested during an interview that this arrangement was now somewhat precarious as it 'was not written down' and had recently been scrutinised more closely by managers with outcomes yet to be known. Unusually Susan who had a Teacher contract, explained in an email that she was frustrated by 'having to' take long periods of time away from her work whilst the centre remained open:

*Also, because we work in a children's centre which is open 50 weeks of the year we should be able to work when the children are there, not be constrained to Term time only. It is so stupid! The teacher pay and conditions put too many constraints on the role we should be playing to raise the outcomes of all the children in the CC reach area (Susan, email).*

**Retirement** – For members of teacher pension schemes (all respondents had been existing members at the time of the fieldwork in 2010) there was an expected retirement age of 60 years. Under Soulbury contracts employees are required to become members of the Local Government Pension Scheme where normal retirement was 65 years. The issue of retirement age may be particularly relevant to many CCTs as by definition they were experienced teachers and consequently many had already accrued numerous years of pension membership. Not all respondents were aware that by accepting Soulbury conditions their retirement age was likely to be raised. Amy stated during her interview that she assumed retirement age was the same under both sets of terms and conditions however during group interview #1 respondents explained the difference to Liz who seemed surprised and rather disconcerted. Most respondents who spoke about this matter showed a preference for their former contract as is illustrated in the following extract:

*Zoe: Personally it's a pain for me um I wanted to keep my pension in.*

*Donna: Yeah I think that's true for all of us, we wanted to keep our teacher pension.*

*Liz: Can't we leave it there though if we go back into teaching?*

*Donna: Within four years, yeah.*

*Int: OK, does it make any other difference, is it just the retirement age or is it...*

*Zoe: Yeah that's the key; we've got to go till we're sixty five not sixty if you're out for more than four years.*

In one email Polly offered a more pragmatic view:

*One of my concerns about leaving teachers pay and conditions was that I have added five years on to my working life. I could retire at 60 if I stayed in school but it's 65 on the local authority pension scheme. I don't know how I'll feel about that when the time comes, I may be happy to work till I'm 65 - I suppose I'll cross that bridge when I come to it - maybe I need to go back into school when I'm 59! (Polly, email)*

**Salary** - Salary is self-evidently a critical dimension of an employment contract although its link to status, motivation or job satisfaction is complex (Evans, 1998; Hogue *et al.*, 2011; Clark *et al.*, 2009); equally it is a somewhat sensitive area to research especially in less private forums such as group interviews (Lee, 1993). Teacher contracts and Soulbury contracts have broadly comparable salary scales (NUT, 2011). Furthermore, it was considered unlikely that CCTs would either be offered or accept salaries which were significantly less favourable than those they received for teaching; for these reasons it was decided not to raise the matter of salary directly, but to leave it to respondents to mention if they wished. In the event only one respondent who was on a Soulbury contract raised the issue, confirming her salary was comparable to Teaching contracts. In addition, one respondent who was on a Teaching contract spoke briefly about salaries, suggesting that she expected that if she was ever required to transfer to Soulbury conditions she would be compensated for the loss of holidays by gaining additional pay points. From the data collected across all informants there was no indication that they believed their remuneration was in some way inappropriate.

**Workload** - Day (1999) argued well over decade ago that teachers' workloads had tended to increase as had the tendency for teachers to undertake more school-related

work at home, it would seem this continues to be the case (Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2009; Barmby, 2006). This invasion of work into the home has become such that Day (1999) described work as the 'epicentre' of many teachers' lives. Day and Gu (2009) go on to draw attention to the additional domestic responsibilities that mature teachers may acquire, suggesting that some may seek to reduce their workload as time passes. CCTs are by definition not newly qualified teachers, many could be described as mature. It may be that some saw becoming a CCT as an opportunity to reduce their workload. Indeed, several respondents described excessive workloads when they were class teachers with Polly referring in one email to 'ten hour days being the norm', and others referring to high physical demands and feelings of extreme exhaustion towards end of term:

*... yeah, yeah my weekends and evenings were spent doing school work when I was at school, until kind of nine o'clock at night... (Christina, group interview #1)*

Several informants mentioned that it was now rare for them to take work home to complete during evenings, weekends and holidays whereas in school this had been the norm. Sylvia explained during group interview #2 that there was no longer an 'expectation' that work would be completed outside working hours. In her interview Amy went further suggesting that it was expected that all work would be completed during her contracted hours; however, she added that one manager had suggested that it would be a 'good thing' to do additional work at home. During group interview #1 Christina, who had become a CCT relatively recently explained that she had found not having to take work home a major benefit. Zoe agreed, stating that she was now also much less tired when she got home and more able to cope with family life and home responsibilities. In an email Polly explained that:

*I have a better pace to my work life and my work-life balance is much better – no work to do in the holidays or at weekends. I also like having a start and a finish time and lieu time when I'm required to do extras. (Polly email)*

**Career trajectory** - In their study of primary teachers, Jacklin *et al.* (2006) identified 'pull factors', (reasons to stay in the profession) and 'push factors' (reasons to move on). Pull factors tended to centre on the enjoyment of teaching young children and it is

clear from the findings in this study that these informants experienced a sense of loss in this respect (see previous chapter). Push factors in Jacklin *et al.*'s study tended to collect around workload, intrusive government initiatives, poor child behaviour, low pay, low status and lack of career prospects. In respect of 'pushes' to leave teaching, the CCTs mostly cited workload demands which they often related to increasing administrative burdens. In respect of 'pulls' to become a CCT some cited a desire to engage in a more purposeful way with families and get to the root of problems. That said, informants were also frustrated by what they saw as the barriers that prevented them from working more directly with families, such as the requirement to spend much of their time working in early years settings. For other informants the change was simply a pragmatic organisational change, just part of the transition when the nursery school where they taught became a children's centre.

In terms of ongoing career development, respondents identified various external factors which were thought to have provided a somewhat precarious context for CCTs. The (then) arrival in 2010 of a new Coalition Government and resultant policy changes for children's centres along with new austerity measures led some respondents to fear job cuts (see Curtis, 2011). Respondents were aware that although the Coalition Government confirmed that a programme of SSCCs will continue, it stated that these will be re-focussed on families with most needs (DfE, 2010b). Furthermore, from April 2011 the government removed the 'ring-fence' from the Sure Start Grant, incorporating funding for children's centres into the new Early Intervention Grant (DfE, 2011a). Subsequently some local authorities are beginning to reduce the number of children's centres in less disadvantaged areas (Butler, 2011).

Indeed when the informants were asked to consider how their career might develop over the next five years, the response of many highlighted anxieties about the future survival of children's centres or the CCT role. Respondents who felt they worked in areas with lower levels of deprivation reported feeling particularly vulnerable:

*I think some CCTs will feel insecure in that depending on which phase children's centre they are in. I think I feel pretty secure in [phase 1 centre], umm, possibly not so secure in [other centre] as they have changed it from a 30 to a 70 and*

*they have run it down, so who knows what is going to happen. (Sylvia, group interview #2)*

An additional area of concern and uncertainty was that the EYFS was at that time under review with then unknown consequences for the early years sector as a whole (Tickell, 2011). A sense of precariousness pervaded respondent accounts of local authority recruitment freezes and departing staff (including CCTs) not being replaced. Several CCTs explained that they currently held fixed-term contracts which were shortly due for renewal and were apprehensive about this, others for various reasons were waiting for confirmation that their role would be continued:

*We are in uncertain times! The future of Children's Centres is unsure, but likely to be subject to reshaping with Health Visitors currently being seen as a key priority---is this therefore likely to be at the cost of the teacher? ... 2011 will see a review of EYFS ---what will be the impact? Contracts end at the end of the financial year and I think it is very difficult to predict beyond that for the future direction of Sure Start-----probably the only certainty is the expectation for more to be delivered for less. (Melanie, email)*

In terms of perceived future career trajectories, age also played a key part. Some respondents stated that they enjoyed the role sufficiently to want to stay in the job. Others suggested that since they were relatively near to retirement they hoped to remain in post until then. Several were looking for new if related career opportunities but as Susan explained in an email she felt that there was 'no clear route upwards' from the CCT role. Diverse career routes were discussed by various respondents including lecturing, early years consultant posts, school improvement or advisory teacher roles, children's centre manager posts and deputy or headships in infant and nursery schools. However, no respondents cited specific ambitions beyond their CCT role.

### **Terms and conditions – summary**

Despite key differences it seems that most respondents view their contractual terms and conditions as being generally sufficient and suitable; differences between

Teachers terms and Soulbury terms were not reported as overly contentious and did not appear to challenge the CCTs' identity in any significant way. It is possible that these respondents' previous knowledge of Soulbury terms was restricted to their association with senior job roles in local authority education departments. Differences in annual leave entitlements were not seen as being particularly problematic by a majority of respondents and there was no indication that significant differences existed in salaries or that salary was a significant concern. Many of the respondents on Soulbury terms expressed a resigned disappointment with their new pension arrangements, in particular the fact that their retirement age had changed. In terms of workload, informants cited significant but positive divergence from their experiences as school teachers; none seemed troubled by the loss of an emblematic aspect of identity - the dedicated teacher who works through evenings, weekends and holidays. Although some claimed that some aspects of CCT workload (e.g. administration) were now increasing. In terms of career trajectory, respondents generally saw their transition to CCT as positive, but some were concerned about the future in terms of job security and what related career moves might otherwise be available to CCTs.

### **Occupational identities and CCTs**

In general terms CCTs regard themselves as professionals who are following a path which is, or promises to be, career advancement relative to classroom teaching. They clearly see the role as separate from and fundamentally different to that of classroom teacher. In addition it is clear that these informants view children's centres as being hierarchically organised and position themselves as senior relative to most other workers, many of whom belong to non-professional occupational groups or occupations which might be described as semi-professionals.

Despite noting a clear difference from their previous role, they do not appear to identify 'children's centre teacher' as a distinct profession and no respondents reported activities designed to promote children's centre teaching as such. This is perhaps unsurprising in this small qualitative study which might be unlikely to identify activities which could constitute a professional project for children's centre teachers. As Larson (1977) points out, even the most determined individual member of an

occupational group would not necessarily identify or articulate the activities of the group as a professional project and only with hindsight might such a project be identified. Many writers following Wilenski (1964) see the clear demarcation of an area of work activity as the first stage of professionalisation; however, informants in this study could not impart a clear, or agreed collective understanding of what areas of activity form the CCT role. There was also an absence of other signs that might indicate a CCT professional project; for example, whilst these respondents do seek contact with their peers at a local level there seemed no indication of collectivised activity beyond this. For example, informants made no reference to a national conference, professional organisation, occupational journal, national college or a union specifically aimed at CCTs. In this sense, therefore it would seem that CCTs are not striving for recognition of a distinct new profession.

Professions can be formed in diverse ways, Seigrist (1994) has pointed to the potential for professionalisation 'from above', that is, initiated by the state. The position of CCT was created by the previous Labour administration who specified requirements for the job as possession of qualified teacher status and experience of teaching (primary, infant or nursery). As such, there are no specific credentials which mark the role of CCT as separate from the wider teaching profession (Larson, 1977; Parkin, 1979). This, together with the incorporation of the word 'teacher' into the job title would suggest that in both policy and practice the state does not conceptualise CCTs as being substantially different from other teachers. From the state's perspective the top-down creation of a distinct CCT profession would serve no purpose; firstly because there are insufficient numbers to warrant this and secondly because they do not appear to be seen as possessors of unique expertise or critically sought-after skills which need to be harnessed and controlled. Finally since government placed CCTs into children's centres citing their ability, knowledge and experience as 'teachers', it would seem unlikely that they would embark on a venture to imbue them with a different professional identity.

However, the clear differences between the two roles suggest that in practical terms the work activity, although poorly defined, is substantially different. Furthermore, it seems that in normative terms, CCTs identify themselves as something unique and separate from school-based teachers, even if they currently struggle to define what

this is. Whilst the CCT role was indeed created by a previous Labour administration the successor Coalition Government is somewhat less emphatic about the role and may in time come to question its necessity or desirability, especially given an enduring climate of austerity. Thus for a variety of reasons, it seems both that children's centre teaching cannot be seen as a distinct profession and that in the foreseeable future this is unlikely to happen.

If not a distinct profession, another possibility would be for CCTs to identify themselves as a specialism or branch of teaching. If this were the case one would expect CCTs to make efforts to maintain links with the teaching profession, ensuring that they continue to be seen as members and portraying their knowledge as part of the core expertise of teaching. However, the evidence in this study suggests that CCTs view themselves more or less as having left or escaped from teaching. Whilst these respondents were confident that they retained the necessary skills to return to teaching none were keen to do so. Furthermore, respondents claimed disinterest in the CCT role from the teaching profession more widely. If this is correct it would seem unlikely that the teaching profession as a whole would seek to promote a specialism which it did not recognise or value. The informants did not suggest that they or other CCTs were trying to maintain professional links with colleagues in schools beyond their individual friendships or that they were actively raising the profile of children's centre teaching with a wider professional constituency. The apparent lack of these kinds of links or action to create them seems to suggest that CCTs may be drifting away from the teaching profession as a whole; this may exclude or reduce the possibility of children's centre teaching being seen as a teaching specialism.

It is clear that these informants view their role as unique and distinct and see themselves as a separate occupational group. However, even in this regard the wide variation in the tasks and activities that these CCTs perform means that it is difficult to describe children's centre teaching as a unified occupation. More so, since other pre-existing professional groups in local authorities including educational improvement professionals such as Early Years Consultants may perceive some of the tasks and activities being performed by CCTs (e.g. advice, support and training for early years settings) as rightfully part of their own professional repertoire. Until the boundaries of

CCT work are more settled it will be problematic to present children's centre teaching either as a profession, a specialism of the teaching profession or as a distinct occupation. This, together with the change of government and an increasing drive for austerity appears to make the CCT role vulnerable and its future uncertain.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has investigated aspects of CCT identities by examining respondent accounts in relation to various characteristics often associated with professions and occupational groups. This has included expertise, autonomy, hierarchy and status, terms of work and their own positioning of the CCT role. Albeit with some hesitation, CCTs do identify some areas of knowledge and theory that underpin their work and identify certain types of relevant training, in the main there seems to be a preference for post-graduate certificated courses or short courses delivered by people considered as leading experts in their field. These informants saw themselves as rightfully deserving a high position in a centre hierarchy, but occasionally report that their claim to status was not always recognised by others.

In terms of a profession, a specialism or a unified occupation it is hard to make a coherent claim for children's centre teaching. This is due to the absence of a clear and uncontested area of work responsibility, the as yet un-solidified knowledge-base for the work and a lack of awareness and affirmation from other teaching professionals. Despite this CCTs regard their occupation as something markedly different from that of other teachers.

The following chapter now completes the analysis of findings by exploring aspects of CCTs' participation in collaborative working in children's centres. In particular the chapter considers the CCTs' experiences of moving from an occupational setting dominated by the teaching profession to a setting occupied and led by workers from a wide range of occupations.

## Chapter Five: Experiences of Collaborative Working

### Introduction

In this chapter I focus on the experiences of CCTs when working with a range of colleagues; this is important since a major underpinning idea of the Sure Start model is collaborative interprofessional work (Lewis *et al.*, 2011a; Malin and Morrow, 2007; Hemingway and Cowdell, 2009; Tunstill *et al.*, 2005). This way of working is presumed to have a number of benefits, particularly in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, responsiveness and acceptability to families (Pollard *et al.*, 2005; Sloper, 2004). In policy rhetoric at least, the cardinal virtue of collaborative work is its supposed ability to make services better for recipients (D'Amour *et al.*, 2005). This chapter does not attempt to identify definitive models of collaborative working in children's centres or to measure the intensity or success of collaborative work; rather it examines informants' experiences, understandings and constructions of collaborative working.

The chapter commences by revisiting briefly the policy drivers for collaborative work, this is followed by an overview of the range of colleagues that respondents described working with and the organisational contexts in which this takes place. The chapter proceeds with an examination of the attitudes of CCTs' towards collaboration and the impression they gain of other workers' interest and commitment to this way of working. Three major themes associated with collaboration were identified from the respondents' accounts: roles and boundaries, issues of hierarchy and experiences of sharing expertise. The chapter concludes by outlining key constructions of collaborative working which feature in the accounts of CCTs about the work they perform, and consideration is given to the extent to which these coincide with models apparent in official guidance.

### Why work collaboratively?

Collaborative working has been discussed in some detail in Chapter One both in terms of the different types of collaboration and the claims made for the benefits of collaboration. Couturier *et al.*, (2008) note the increasingly hegemonic and normative nature of narratives of inter-disciplinarity and collaborative work across many

professional spheres. Throughout the development of Sure Start, the former Labour administration and the successor Coalition Government have issued various directives and policy guidance for Sure Start. Whilst the terminology used has varied from partnership and multi-agency working to integrated services, the guidance has consistently given prominence to some form of collaborative work (see DfES, 2006; DfES, 2005b; DfES, 2003; DfES, 2002; DfE, 2010b). These documents have variously advocated collaborative working on grounds of improving accessibility, effectiveness, efficiency and communication. Above all they suggest that through collaborative working, 'better' or more responsive services can be provided for families. Thus since its inception Sure Start has been strongly and consistently associated with collaborative work.

### **Collaborating with a range of different workers**

Respondents were asked to reflect upon the different workers with whom they had regular, frequent or significant contact in children's centres. The respondents usually took the opportunity to contextualise this information, for example, for each type of worker they often described either the location where they were in contact, the nature of the interaction they had, or the frequency or intensity of working together. Indeed their responses were often structured by the places and frequency with which they tended to encounter different people or by the type of interaction they had. It may of course be that these three factors are related, for example, one purpose of the co-location of workers is that it induces more frequent contact (Morrow *et al.*, 2005). Table 5 below summarises key features of the data in regard to the range of workers with whom CCTs engage. The data stems from various discussions and emails and is supplemented to a small extent by the researcher's own experience of working alongside CCTs. The purpose of this table is to provide essential context in which to situate and understand the analyses that follow.

Job titles given in the table should not be regarded as ubiquitous and not all CCTs will have contact with all of these workers. Following the informants' lead, participants are grouped first on basis of location and proximity; for example, the first three groups are typically those whose work-base is within the children's centre. For each category of

worker there is a summary analysis of the core purpose of interaction and a broad indication of the relative frequency of contact that CCTs have with workers from each group. There is also an indication of the intensity of this work which attempts to provide information about the typical degree of focus with which the workers involved purposefully and consciously set out to work together for a particular project or to achieve a particular end.

**Table 5. Range of collaboration**

| <b>Worker</b>  | <b>Location</b>   | <b>Interaction</b>   | <b>Frequency / Intensity</b>  |
|--|---|--|---|
| 1) CC Manager, CC Director, Head of Centre, Assistant Head of Centre.  | Joint work takes place in the CC and these staff are typically based in the CC.   | CCT supports or contributes to planning, training, supervision etc, CCT may also be line-managed or matrix-managed by these workers. | Varied, some CCTs had very frequent and intense contact (throughout most working days), others less so.   |
| 2) CC Admin, Admin Coordinator, CC Receptionist  | Joint work takes place in the CC and these staff are typically based in the CC.   | Information exchange, CCT may also request support from these staff.   | Contact tends to be frequent (often daily) but rarely intense.  |
| 3) CC Core Team, CC Workers, Play Workers, Family Support Workers, Family Workers, Outreach and Participation Workers.                                   | Joint work takes place in the CC and these staff are typically based in the CC.   | CCT helping these workers to improve or enhance aspects of their work.   | Contact tends to be frequent, daily or weekly with occasional periods of intense work related to specific projects.                             |
| 4) Day Care Workers, Crèche Workers, Nursery Staff, Childcare Practitioners, Room Leaders, Pre-School Staff, Nursery Manager, Nursery Deputy.            | Joint work takes place in the early years setting (within the CC or elsewhere), these staff are typically based in the setting.   | CCT helping these workers to improve or enhance aspects of their work.   | Frequency of contact varies depending on perceived quality of service or needs of setting. Includes intense task-based working at times.        |
| 5) Other CCTs  | Joint working usually takes place in a CC, not necessarily the 'home' CC.   | Peer support, with some joint planning and some co-delivery of training or projects.   | Fairly frequent (e.g. monthly or more often) although some evidence that frequency is reducing.   |
| 6) Health Visitors, Midwives, Dieticians, Infant Feeding Coordinators, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Speech and Language Therapists (SLT). | Joint working takes place in the CC. However, currently rare for these workers to be based in CCs, although there is some evidence that initially this was more frequent. | Joint working, planning and delivering specific projects, or mutual-referrals of individual families.                                | Varied, but typically not frequent (weekly or less) unless working on joint project in which case the work could be intense for a short period. |
| 7) Social Workers, Social Care Staff, Staff at Women's Refuge  | Varies, work takes place away from or in CC but workers not based at CC.  | Restricted to co-referral and information exchange.  | Relatively infrequent, but may be intensive for short period.   |
| 8) Local Teachers and Headteachers, Childminding Network Coordinator, Book-Trust Coordinator   | Joint working occurs in various local locations, worker not usually based at CC.  | Information exchange, some joint projects or co-delivery of training etc.  | Occasional contact, (monthly or less) low intensity working.  |
| 9) Extended Services Manager, Early Years Consultant, School Improvement Team, Special Educational Needs Coordinator SENCO                               | Work takes place in CCs, early years settings or at meetings or conferences elsewhere, however, workers are not based at CC.  | Typically information exchange, although CCT may also receive line-management or matrix management from these workers.               | Low frequency but occasionally intense working.   |
| 10) Other local authority Staff, e.g. Procurement and Quantity Surveyors   | Work takes place in CC but staff not based at CC.   | Joint working on project or issue such as development of outdoor play area.  | Infrequent and time-limited, may be intensive.  |

CC = Children's Centre. CCT = Children's Centre Teacher.

## Prevailing attitudes towards collaborative working

CCTs inhabit a professional sphere where interprofessional collaborative working has become a pervasive and powerful doxa (Bourdieu, 1977). Respondents may therefore have felt pressured to align their views to this narrative. Moreover, they were aware of the researcher's interest in this area and may have assumed that this was motivated by an a priori personal belief that collaboration is a 'good thing'. Indeed, the informants in this study frequently espoused collaborative working as something highly desirable or even essential whilst simultaneously discussing various difficulties.

In particular, respondents' narratives frequently included an assertion that collaboration is beneficial because of the value of having a range of different professional perspectives. This positive orientation is typified in an email by Rose who stated:

*I think interprofessional working is beneficial because it enables people with a range of experience to come at things from different angles and offer their input which can be quite enlightening. (Rose, email)*

However, despite suggesting that they themselves were strongly in favour of collaborative work, respondents often reported ambivalence or negativity about this from other workers and in some cases even from their own line-managers. For example, some line-managers from outside of children's centres were described as obstructive to this way of working, either because they were too remote and did not understand the purpose of collaboration in children's centres or because they were opposed to CCT involvement, seeing this as counter to their strategic or managerial interests. For example, Nancy, (below) felt that a line-manager from the local authority education department did not understand collaborative work in her centre. The manager concerned had suggested that Family Support Workers who Nancy had taken pains to involve in an activity should not be involved in future as they were deemed unable to make an appropriate contribution:

*I was very keen that Family Support Workers were involved, as the children are very young this is the ideal time to reach the families, also I made sure that the*

*families were the ones that would benefit most, the hardest to reach. Er yes, the observation report, well, it was a little patronising, it said that family support should not be involved, that it should just be education led. [named Local authority manager] found it difficult to understand all of what was being done. They just see things in terms of learning, what needs to be learned by the end of the session. (Nancy, interview)*

Nancy felt that the Family Support Workers made an additional wider contribution to families' wellbeing which was unrecognised or unappreciated by the manager whose interest was restricted to the pedagogical outcomes of individual children. Likewise, Susan reported that her line managers constrained the range of her collaborative work for strategic purposes:

*We, in [local authority], are very limited in our scope of work, by the officials that employ us (Early Years Service). I would see my role as more far reaching, working with the family development team, crèche and inclusion teams within the centre as well as the other childcare settings in the children's centre reach area, and 'hard to reach' families... I am positively discouraged from multi-agency working and interprofessional working, apart from with the day care staff at the children's centre. (Susan, email)*

Her account does not suggest that her managers were adverse to collaboration per se; instead she suggests that they saw it as something which was outside her remit and which required managerial authority and patronage, such that the initiation of multi-agency work was seen as part of their (official) role.

Several informants reported resistance to collaborative working from other agencies or from individuals in the centre. Rose's experience below suggests that the protection or demarcation of work boundaries may have underpinned some workers' reluctance to get involved:

*I do think that this is still a relatively new way of working though, and some agencies do need to see how it can work well in practice as there is still some*

*fear that people from other backgrounds are 'doing our job' or 'trying to take over'. (Rose, email)*

Issues of roles and boundaries are discussed further below. One particular sector where the informants reported little enthusiasm for collaborative working was private early years providers; respondents often related this to various forms of commercial interest. Whilst collaborative working is often presented as producing overall efficiencies and savings (Sloper, 2004; Pollard *et al.*, 2005), a number of authors have drawn attention to the costs for individual organisations. For example, the financial implications of the additional staff time required (Gordon *et al.*, 2010). Other authors have drawn attention to difficulties of collaboration between private and public sector organisations due to divergent organisational cultures and values (McDonald *et al.*, 2011). The respondents in this study reported cultural differences between themselves and private sector providers. This is illustrated in the extract below in which Sylvia, who wanted to work informally with these providers to improve their services, discusses difficulties in providing this type of support to these settings:

*... and then you try to contact [manager] who is the next one up and she doesn't reply, except when you send a negative report and then you get a reply! 'Can you contact me?' but then you try to contact her and you can't 'cos she's doing all these other places... and then I spot her and say oh [name] great to see you, 'Oh I can't stop now I'm in a rush, when are you in again, I'm in tomorrow, I'll see you then', and then of course she doesn't turn up... you should do it by the book, and should do it all by written reports 'cos that's the only way that they seem to um, get motivated, if they get a report. (Sylvia, group interview #2)*

In most cases the informants did not suggest that staff in private sector settings lacked a desire to improve services, but that they were confined by organisational imperatives such as the standardisation of practice across a chain or by the need to control costs and create profit. In group interview #2 Sylvia and Jackie continued a detailed account of their concerns about larger private providers. They described low levels of staffing, reluctance to send staff on training, low rates of pay, children's needs being secondary to organisational needs, difficulties contacting busy managers, difficulty getting

business owners to authorise change or expenditure and a general procrastination over service improvement. Similar views were reported by several respondents. Polly indicated that she found it difficult to work with some private providers since profitability (or at least financial sustainability) remained their primary concern whilst her concerns centred on service improvement:

*... I'm still working out where I slot in to that, because obviously there are things that I feel strongly about that the business owner doesn't feel strongly about...(Polly, group interview #1)*

Similarly Amy explained that one small private provider had flatly refused to take her suggestions on board:

*... I think they just wanted to be quite isolated and just do whatever they wanted to do, they weren't very open to new ideas, and suggestions... (Amy, interview)*

Whilst it was not possible to independently test the merit of these respondent perceptions as reliable data about practices and investments made in private sector providers, there was a notable coalescence of views on the difficulties this presented for collaborative work. These observations are consistent with those of Garrick and Morgan (2009) who noted that CCTs faced a range of additional challenges when working with 'for-profit' providers. This general view accords with a body of literature in which indicators of low quality including low pay, low levels of qualification, high staff turnover, cost-cutting and high child-to-adult ratios have been most typically associated with for-profit early years settings including corporate-chain providers, as alluded to by Sylvia (see for example Lloyd and Penn, 2010; Cleveland and Krashinsky, 2009; Morris and Helburn, 2000; Sosinsky *et al.*, 2007).

Thus it seems that whilst these respondents consistently espoused their own positive attitude towards collaborative working, they suggest that in practice some of the agencies, providers, managers and workers with whom they had contact were less positive or had other priorities.

## Roles, goals and boundaries

One particular aspect of collaborative working which has been reported as crucial to success has been the development of clear and agreed roles and boundaries (Kennison and Fletcher, 2005). Several respondents highlighted the importance of this in their accounts; for example, in one email Melanie stated that:

*Multi agency working is key, but we still have barriers to overcome around respecting and valuing each other's roles, without becoming 'precious'.  
(Melanie, email)*

Melanie experienced collaborative working as challenging, with elements which were beyond her control. She acknowledged that it was hard to understand the role of a wide range of workers but further stressed the difficulties other workers' experienced in understanding the novel CCT role. This point was also discussed by Donna and Polly in group interview #1:

*Donna: Umm, gaining knowledge of each other's role and where you can fit in is very important 'cos I think at first nobody knew where we fit.*

*Polly: 'Cos we're the new guys aren't we?*

Comments from several respondents suggested that the passage of time was helpful in developing mutual understandings of roles:

*I think working with staff over long periods of time (and much longer than I imagined), as it takes a while to get to know how everyone works and what you can expect of them. (Amy, email)*

However, there was evidence from some CCTs that time alone was not sufficient to develop these understandings. Sylvia related a recent incident in which an administrator with whom she had worked over a number of years enquired about her role, in particular what she did outside of the centre:

*...well I said that I go to all the settings, she said 'What settings?' and this is, you know, someone on reception that hasn't got an idea of all the other hats that the CCTs is wearing...(Sylvia, interview)*

Some respondents felt it necessary to 'educate' other workers, including managers, in their roles and the value of their expertise. For example, Susan in an email explained how she had initially found it difficult to persuade her Centre Director to appreciate the educational and developmental benefits of activities such as messy play, the use of recycled materials and the need for 'real' grass in the nursery since the director came from a disciplinary background other than education. Such tensions may reflect the divergent thinking and understanding of Susan and the Director around fundamentals of purpose and method of intervention; similar differences of paradigm (in this instance between Susan's education and the Director's health orientation) and related tensions have been reported elsewhere (see Couturier *et al.*, 2008). Susan stated that it was not until a team session run by an independent facilitator that she felt she had been able to persuade the (centre) Director of the relevance and importance of her perspective and thereby the value of the CCT role.

Various team sessions were also reported as beneficial in helping to clarify roles in Melanie's centre, she suggested that joint team meetings and training events between the children's centre and school staff had helped to:

*develop team and shared understanding re roles and responsibilities (Melanie, email).*

One reported barrier to developing a shared understanding of roles was the lower frequency of contact that CCTs had with workers from agencies who were based outside of the centre thus supporting the general contention that co-location can be beneficial for collaborative work. Polly mentioned that attendance at formal multi-agency meetings (such as Team Around the Child or Core Group meetings, often held in response to child protection concerns) provided valuable opportunities to learn about the role of others and begin to promote and explain her own work. However, she did not see these occasions as examples of good collaboration since they could sometimes be dominated by one particular occupational group:

*We were talking the other day though about certain meetings where you do feel like people are a bit more in charge. Like anything to do with case reviews and things, it always feels like the social workers have a little bit more say on that, I think. And I know that's a fault in me, 'cos I know that's not really the case, is it? But it's getting slightly easier, it's still hard, to know exactly where you fit in. (Polly, group interview # 1)*

Difficulties arising from explaining the novel and at times nebulous CCT role were compounded by the newness of the children's centre concept itself:

*You know, they understand what nurseries are and what schools are... but with children's centres, well, umm they are still, we are all still making a way, making a way of working together. Working out what we are and what we all do. (Margaret, interview)*

Whilst difficulties prevailed, especially with workers who were based outside of the centre, these were not universal. Some respondents noted particular joint projects undertaken with other workers including a Speech and Language Therapist and a Childminder Co-ordinator. In addition, there were a number of accounts which described generic positive experiences of collaborative working which went beyond a mutual understanding of bounded roles to encompass a limited amount of role-sharing. In these situations workers were reported to not only understand each other's roles, but to adopt some of the content of the work. This was reported to enable a coherent approach which was thought to be experienced by families as coordinated and consistent:

*...everyone is very flexible and willing to help out and get to know one another's roles so that they can speak knowledgeably to parents, carers and partners making sure that the same message is given across the board. (Rose, email)*

## **Hierarchy and relationships**

The previous chapter considered the impact of various hierarchical structures on CCTs' identities and their experience of working life. In this chapter the impact of hierarchy and relationships on CCTs' experiences of collaborative working is considered further.

Differences in status and hierarchy have generally been shown to have a negative bearing on the relationships required for collaborative work in public services (see Baxter and Brumfitt, 2008b; Baker *et al.*, 2011; Robinson and Cottrell, 2005; Reder *et al.*, 1993; Shaw *et al.*, 2005).

These informants were highly sensitive to their position within and beyond the children's centre team, tending to represent themselves as relatively senior professionals. Many informants were clearly on good terms with their colleagues and described strong or close relationships; some also noted maintaining social links with previous colleagues:

*I do feel quite close to current colleagues at work and feel that we all get on well together – we do have 'team' days fairly regularly and manage to socialise on occasions. It is a fairly new team but I do think it has been well chosen!...I do have regular contact with some colleagues from my previous role (one being my husband!) and occasionally meet up with them socially. I do still call in at the school too to see the staff and children I used to teach. (Rose, email).*

*I actually feel closer to my senior management team because as a small school it was really only me before---it has been wonderful to have somebody at that level to share concerns with, celebrate and plan with. (Melanie, email)*

However, this was not the experience of all CCTs, with several having difficult relationships with centre colleagues. Martha who worked across two centres had different experiences:

*I don't feel close to my new colleagues in one setting at all. In the other centre, I feel more comfortable and relationships are growing. I still talk to and have contact with my previous school. (Martha, email)*

Polly also compared her current experience to that of her previous experience in school which she found to be very close and supportive. She suggests that within her centre, staff have fewer opportunities to make close relationships due to the relative infrequency of contact with some colleagues:

*I don't feel as close to my colleagues in this role as in my previous role as a classroom teacher. I've only been at this centre for about a month but I do feel settled and I did know most people before I started here through popping in for meetings, [multi agency] team members where based here before and I knew them. This role is so diverse, I go to many places within a week, people are based here but we don't all work on the same days or are here at the same time of day. There is a definite sense of cohesion here but we are all doing our own bit whereas when I worked in a small infant school I knew every child and most parents, the staff was very steady, we worked together for many years and new staff were welcomed. There were no staff room politics, it was a bit like being in another family. This role doesn't feel like another family but I do feel valued and an integral part of the team. (Polly, email)*

But at times respondents also appeared to manufacture a distance between themselves and some colleagues, using markers of seniority derived from job titles, specific responsibilities, age or social class. Informants frequently articulated their claims to seniority in terms of superior expertise gained through training, accreditation and experience, suggesting that these credentials gave them the authority they needed to advise others such as those in groups 3 and 4 in Table 5.

Many authors have suggested that the presence of overt differences in status can impede communication, such as with junior team members who may become reluctant to share views for fear of exposing some inadequacy (Gair and Hartery, 2001; Malin and Morrow, 2007; Palmeri, 2004). Equally in some teams it has been observed that when lower status members do offer opinions or make suggestions they may be over-ruled (Atwal, 2004; Atwal and Caldwell, 2003). Reder *et al.* (1993, pp. 74-75) note a process which can occur in teams whereby the contributions of higher status workers are attributed growing significance whilst the views or information provided by lower status workers are routinely overlooked; in this way an exaggerated and uncomfortable hierarchy develops. The respondents in this study frequently asserted that their junior colleagues felt comfortable voicing opinions and consulting them on work related matters. Their preferred image of themselves was something of an approachable sage; a source of ideas, expertise and practical advice.

Aspects of the respondents' narratives tended to invoke an idealised notion of a centre environment where all workers' opinions and knowledge were of equal value and where all colleagues felt comfortable consulting each other. However, this image did not align with the disclosures by some respondents of resistance to their input (cf. Amy and Sylvia) and resentment about their involvement (cf. Nancy). Garrick and Morgan (2009) also noted that the CCTs in their study reported resistance by other staff to their attempts to engage them in meetings and training. This casts some doubt on the CCTs' portrayal of a fully harmonious environment where junior staff felt able to express their views. It is beyond the scope of this study to determine the extent of these tensions just as it is not possible to state whether lower status team members shared the CCTs' typically positive views of their relationship.

### Sharing expertise

The main benefit of collaborative working highlighted by the informants was the opportunity to share expertise. In their accounts this sharing was largely unidirectional and tended to consist of the CCT engaging with workers from groups 3 and 4 (see Table 5).

The informants drew attention to two notable opportunities for exchange of expertise; firstly these arose due to co-location with other workers and secondly those arising from multi-agency meetings attended by a wider range of local workers and professionals. In general terms CCTs were co-located with workers from groups 1 to 3, some also with group 4 (Table 5). This is contrasted by their experiences of multi-agency meetings they most often met workers from groups 6 to 8 (Table 5). They clearly saw themselves participating in the exchange of expertise differently with two groups. This is illustrated in the following two quotes, where there are differences both in the mechanisms by which expertise is shared and in the direction of exchange. Polly refers first to co-located workers from group 3 (Table 5) and secondly to workers attending multi-agency meetings:

*Advice tends to be as they need it and is usually requested informally through conversation or email if they haven't seen me for a few days. (Polly, email)*

*It's great having all that expertise on tap, we meet officially but there are lots of opportunities for informal discussion when we are in the same place. (Polly, email)*

They reported often being asked to provide knowledge and information in relation to work activities such as planning and delivery of groups or to give an opinion about the needs of a particular child or family. Whilst there were no reports of CCTs seeking advice or information from workers in groups 2, 3 or 4 (Table 5), one informant alluded briefly to a situation where she did learn from colleagues in these groups:

*... you learn something all the time from other practitioners and you still get ideas, even if you're the one stood at the front kind of imparting your knowledge I suppose, you still learn all the time from what people are saying, so I find it interesting. (Amy, interview)*

Similar accounts were given by several other respondents, in group interview #1, Donna and Zoe discussed co-location of workers, suggesting that this facilitated workers who seek informal advice from them. Amy also frequently talked about co-located workers, particularly those with whom she shares an office; she observed that they were both more able and more likely to seek her advice and input:

*That probably wouldn't happen if they weren't here or if I wasn't based here, and the same thing with the nursery manager, lots of very informal chats... (Amy. Interview)*

On rare occasions the informants did report seeking advice or support from colleagues, when this occurred it was generally in relation to workers in group 6 (Table 5). For example, Rose explained in one email that by performing joint accreditation visits to early years settings with a Speech and Language Therapist, they were jointly able to give better advice and support which was more consistent and incorporated a broader range of expert opinion.

Not all respondents had the same opportunities to meet other workers. Amy who often reported feeling particularly isolated, had few contacts with workers from

outside her centre, including local Health Visitors and Social Workers whom she acknowledged would be highly relevant to her work:

*...err certainly links with Health Visitors is something that I've been thinking about a lot because especially... in terms of children with additional needs, you know, it's about me as a SENCO informing them if we've identified any needs, in the same way as I would expect them to inform us if they have identified any needs. (Amy, interview)*

By contrast, Melanie's experience as a CCT and Headteacher put her in a somewhat privileged position in respect of external professionals:

*I, as Head work very closely with my extended services manager, who is from a social care background and we are building our practice around best practice from social care + education---we now have at least monthly individual staff supervision, teaching staff lead on SENCO across service etc. Because of our different backgrounds we do have established links with known faces re health, CIS, women's aid, community police, schools, other centres, SEN services, YMCA etc. (Melanie, email)*

Amy (above) also begins to draw our attention to aspects of information sharing. This was seen by several respondents to be a particularly problematic area of collaborative working. This was highlighted in the context of both practical issues (such as the use of incompatible software highlighted by Liz and Donna) and by differences in professional approach or ethos as explained by Zoe:

*You've got lots of different professionals' ethos mixing, so like health, you know, come differently from education, to social work, um, you know, health don't share information as readily or easily... you have to get used to working together and we're still finding a way. (Zoe, group interview #1)*

It appears that difficulties (or at least perceived difficulties) in information sharing persist, despite this being a frequently trailed benefit of collaborative work as enunciated in a series of key reports and policy initiatives (as noted in Richardson and Asthana, 2006; Hudson, 2005). Furthermore, this seems particularly vexing for policy

makers as children's centres were specifically tasked with addressing such issues, both through formal information sharing protocols and through bringing different workers together (DfES, 2005b; DfES, 2006).

A further point arose in relation to co-location. In her interview, Margaret described women waiting to see midwives at a visiting clinic held in her children's centre as a 'captive audience'. She does not suggest that there is any significant collaborative work with the midwives but she does suggest that the women's attendance provided an opportunity for them to familiarise themselves with the centre and for centre workers to begin to build relationships with these families. This is an interesting account, since it suggests benefits can also arise from the co-location of activities or services, rather than the co-location of workers.

### **Reflecting on collaborative working**

Previous chapters have demonstrated how the role of the CCT is permeated by uncertainty at a number of levels and in different contexts. However, legislation and policy guidance does provide a clear mandate for collaborative working in children's centres and specifies a range of services including childcare, early education, community health, employment support and parenting and family support. Furthermore, the limited guidance and policy references on the role of the CCT (TfC, 2007; DfES, 2006) suggests that collaboration with a wide range of different agencies and practitioners is expected and that CCTs should work with families in a holistic way as a flexible member of the centre team, engaging in work which goes beyond educational activities.

The guidance also suggests that CCTs are required to lead pedagogical practice in centres, working in partnership with childcare and early education providers to improve early years services. This requirement in the guidance is lent particular authority by reference to the findings of the EPPE study (Sylva et al., 2004). These two aspects of the guidance (collaborative work and pedagogical lead) seem to be attributed different levels of importance by CCTs and their managers. The requirement to adopt the role of pedagogical lead seems to be read as a concrete guide to action,

whereas the requirement to work collaboratively seems to be read with little clarity beyond rhetorical claims to its merit and purpose.

### **CCT perspectives on collaboration**

The accounts of respondents in this study suggest that there are two emergent models of collaborative work, used by these CCTs, each being conceived of and experienced differently. The first model of collaborative work that emerges from these accounts is a non-hierarchical and traditional view of collaboration which conceptualises an equal partnership between the CCT and other workers. In practice this model applies to the work these CCTs perform with occupational groups more easily identified as professionals (typically those in group 1 and groups 5-10 of Table 5). In this model, both parties hold valuable expertise which can be shared for mutual learning or deployed in a complementary fashion. The CCTs are strongly committed to the ideals of this model and in a small number of cases report significant benefits and great enjoyment of this part of their work. This model corresponds well with the references made to collaboration in policy and guidance documents, which focus on integration and interprofessional working. However, respondents report engaging in this type of work infrequently and describe a number of barriers and related difficulties, for example, understanding roles, sharing information, time pressures and having few opportunities for contact with these practitioners.

The second model of collaboration used by these informants involves advisory or consultancy work. This is a hierarchical model which conceptualises the CCT as a beneficent expert who collaborates to enhance the work of others (typically those in groups 3 and 4 in Table 5). In this model CCTs supply essential knowledge to a range of recipients who require advice and support to progress towards a universally agreed model of good practice. CCTs suggest that this model of collaboration characterises much of the work they perform. They portray it as highly important, as central to their role and an important part of their professional identity. This model corresponds well to aspects of the guidance which call for CCTs to act as a pedagogical lead. In practice CCTs have diverse experiences of this way of working; there are examples where they feel this work goes well and is enjoyable and gratifying, equally there are times of

frustration or anxiety when the recipients ignore, resist or challenge the advances of the CCT. The conflict within this model results from the fact that the recipients of advice and consultations are in effect mandated to engage and comply.

Both models are seen as collaborative work by the informants. That CCTs categorise their pedagogical lead role as a form of collaboration is interesting in that it may allow them to reconcile the tensions between professionalism and collaboration identified by Hart (2011). Indeed, whilst typical representations of leadership infer a leader who has power and agency at the expense of the group, some models of leadership have been portrayed as being collaborative (Bennett *et al.*, 2007; Hammersley-Fletcher and Kirkham, 2007). These alternate views see leaders and followers as part of collaborative social groups who mutually construct group identity and affirm the role of the leader (Haslam and Platow, 2001). This latter form of leadership requires that the group is able to establish an identity and consensus around a shared purpose. Preferred leaders are those that best represent and advance the aims of the group. In effect, the leader must be an idealised 'prototypical' group member embodying the essence of the group (Reicher *et al.*, 2005).

Children's centre teachers may aspire to this form of collaborative leadership, but it seems likely that they would be faced with a number of difficulties in achieving it. Firstly they do not have a straightforward relationship with a single group, their work as pedagogical lead involves contact with a number of disparate early years providers and with a group of centre based practitioners. The limited time they are able to spend with each of these multiple constituencies constrains their ability to be seen as a full member, let alone a 'leader', of any one group. Furthermore, CCTs allegiances may be questioned, since they may visit a range of providers who feel they are in competition with each other to attract service users (Lloyd and Penn, 2010; West, 2006). Secondly, CCTs have a predetermined agenda, improving quality of early years provision through the principles contained in the EYFS and as interpreted by their local authority. Simplistically such an agenda would be shared with all early years providers, however it may be interpreted differently in different settings and may not encompass all of the aims which are important to certain providers including commercial interests, specific beliefs or approaches to pedagogy. Related to this, many informants report that an

important part of their role is to assess and report on the quality of early years settings to the local authority. This policing role is further likely to make it difficult for CCTs to be seen as group members or potential leaders of pedagogy within individual settings.

These difficulties are apparent in one area where local authority managers decided that CCTs should establish local networks of childcare providers to support their role as pedagogical lead. The purpose of these networks was for local providers to meet together, share expertise and provide mutual support. If successful, these networks might have provided an opportunity to develop a larger shared group identity and purpose that could provide scope for CCTs to acquire the social identity required to be collaborative pedagogical leaders. In one email, Nancy described how the networks were active for around two years. However, commitment and attendance was low especially among staff from private providers. Nancy believed that attendees saw meetings primarily as opportunities for staff to receive updates and training from the CCT, who in turn was seen as an officer of the local authority rather than as a leader of a group or network. Collaboration between network members was limited to agreeing topics on which they would like to request further training in future. Nancy explained that after some time and in an effort to streamline the networks, local authority managers allocated responsibility for their coordination to locality based managers and developed an annual programme of training which could be reproduced across the authority. This process was frustrating for CCTs; throughout they were directed in this work by their local authority line managers, who frequently mandated priorities and the content of information to be cascaded to the networks. Although the CCTs in this area could see potential benefits they were unable to provide flexible and responsive support to the networks or to develop different working relationships with attendees.

### Chapter summary

CCTs are committed to the ideal of collaborative working. Some CCTs describe significant successes in collaborative working, but many allude to a number of barriers and difficulties which echo those reported by other researchers. Perhaps the most fundamental of these difficulties results in tensions and conflicts between their desire

to engage in collaborative work and their need to construct and protect a professional personhood of Children's Centre Teacher.

CCTs appear to respond to this tension by interpreting much of their work as collaborative according to two distinct models. The first model is essentially interprofessional work which accords with many descriptions of collaborative practice espoused in literature, policy and in children's centre guidance. However, the respondents report that this model describes very little of the day to day work they are actually able to perform. The second model describes a large proportion of the work that they perform. This model is unlike traditional models of collaborative work in that it is based upon apparently hierarchical relationships. CCTs see their role here as an advisor, consultant or pedagogical lead. However, since the involvement of other staff can in effect be mandatory, it is likely that some of these staff do not perceive their encounters unambiguously as collaboration.

The models of collaborative working that prevail in the guidance documents for children's centres and those specific to CCTs are premised on partnership working, multi-agency working, integrated services and interprofessional work. These suggest equal partnerships. However, the accounts of these informants suggest that most of their 'collaboration' is enacted through their interactions with colleagues of lower rank. The prevalence of this model of collaboration may have an additional attraction for CCTs in that it may help to support or reinforce their sense of professional personhood.



## Concluding remarks

### The research process

The use of email interviewing in this study was in part an attempt to explore and develop an emerging method. However, the method did not generate sufficient data and it was necessary to collect further information by conducting individual and small group interviews. It is valuable to reflect briefly on these two methods, to compare email and personal interviews, identify any benefits of email interviewing and consider how the method could be used in future.

A number of anticipated benefits were discussed in the methods chapter of this thesis, of these the most important for this research were the ability to achieve greater geographical reach, the opportunity to allow response at the informants' convenience, the generation of raw data in written format (which avoided potential for transcription errors) and greater researcher efficiency via addressing several informants at once. Of the anticipated difficulties, the one which proved most problematic in this research was the difficulty of making initial contact with respondents and in eliciting a sustained and rich source of participation.

There were also interesting differences in the data generated by the two methods. Most of these respondents gave email responses in fairly open free-flowing written format, occasionally giving lengthy and detailed answers. Overall when compared to data gathered through personal interviewing, email responses tended to be briefer, more focussed on specific questions and less likely to cover tangential issues. This was helpful in that it ensured initial areas of interest received considered answers but was unhelpful in that it may have reduced the number of novel concepts and insights that emerged. A further advantage of email interviewing over a number of weeks was that this allowed the researcher to gain an impression of the consistency in each informant's response and to 'get to know' each informant.

The methods were found to be complementary in a number of ways, for example the emails were conducted before the interviews thereby allowing a process of

sensitisation where questions could be refined or focussed and developing ideas formed before the interview data was collected. The email responses, together with interview transcripts comprised a corpus of data which could be revisited iteratively throughout the stages of analysis and reflection. At the analysis stage, the different formats of the data and the different methods of collection undoubtedly impacted on this researcher's understanding and treatment of the data. The process of interviewing and the opportunity to re-listen to audio recordings provided a familiarity with the interview data which became easier to call to mind, triangulate and cognitively interrogate. For example, during analysis when reflecting on certain ideas or questions it was often a spoken response which initially came to mind, often with meta-data about the way it was said or the context or timing of the comment. This in turn prompted further exploration of the written data (both email and personal interview transcripts) to corroborate or refute the developing idea.

Opportunities to improve the email interview method used here would seem to consist largely of changing the way in which informants are recruited and inducted into the study. For example, an initial personal contact either in person or by telephone may have provided an opportunity to reassure wavering informants and to establish a firmer, more committed or more trusting relationship between individual respondents and the researcher. A further refinement may be to reduce the interval between emails from two weeks to help maintain momentum. Equally, it may have been possible to reduce the number of themes from six so that informants received fewer requests for responses. It was noticeable that very few email respondents participated in the first round of emails. Consideration should perhaps be given to ensuring that initial emails do not address sensitive or critical issues, instead including questions designed to 'warm-up' informants. Bearing these factors in mind, email interviewing appears to be a valuable method worthy of consideration by qualitative researchers working with widely dispersed groups of informants similar to these.

## **Key findings**

The role which should be played by professional workers is an important part of debates around collaborative working and potentially includes a re-examination of the deployment of professionals and the division of work tasks, particularly so given the exceptional austerity that currently impacts upon UK public services. The experiences that professionals have at work will inform their understanding of their role, their sense of identity and their willingness and ability to implement policy. This study has explored the experiences of one group of professional workers who are tasked with occupying a relatively new but high profile position within the early years workforce. In doing so it is hoped that this study offers insights which are relevant to current policy discussions about the organisation of public services.

### **Role**

This study has provided an initial description of the CCT role and contrasted this to the role of classroom teacher. The role is shown to be permeated by uncertainty which is often experienced as a lack of clarity and consistency. CCTs do not have access to many of the usual means by which workers reduce or cope with uncertainty, having no access to longer-established CCT peers, little control over the context or environment of their work and little support or direction from either written guidance or from supervisors who fully appreciate the role. Some CCTs are able to manage aspects of uncertainty and to develop their role through contact with other CCTs. Where this has happened it has helped CCTs to work-through changes and novel aspects of their role such as collaborating with a wider range of colleagues, creating different working relationships with parents, working with young children and babies and the experience of new management and performance systems.

### **Identity**

The study also highlighted a number of themes in relation to identity. CCTs individually see themselves as professionals but whilst there is some evidence of an emerging evidence-base which they relate to their work, it is difficult to anticipate whether this will become a sufficient and durable corpus capable of underpinning a new

professional cluster. Furthermore these informants currently find it difficult to describe an uncontested area of responsibility which could provide a clear occupational or professional identity for CCTs. Equally, it is difficult to portray CCT as a specialism within teaching, since CCTs report that other teaching professionals are largely unaware of (or even dismissive of) their work. CCTs view of themselves as professionals is based on their previous accomplishment of the teacher accreditation and role and their perception of the superiority of their knowledge and experience relative to other members of the children's centre team. In consequence, many CCTs locate themselves in the upper reaches of the centre hierarchy claiming in some instances both professional and social distinction. However, CCTs can face challenges to this professional identity from other team members and line managers who for different reasons attribute less significance to the CCT status and authority.

### **Collaboration**

CCTs practice with a wide range of other workers and in most cases CCTs note positive relationships with colleagues. They strongly support the ideal of collaborative work. Whilst some CCTs note successes, some describe barriers similar to those reported elsewhere. These include poor communication, poor information sharing and lack of shared aims or a clear understanding of roles and boundaries. In particular they reported difficulties working with private sector providers.

Two models through which CCTs appear to conceptualise collaborative working are identified in this study. One model is similar to traditional views of interprofessional working and is applied to the CCT relationships with those other workers who are most easily seen as equals. However, this interprofessional model describes only a small proportion of the collaborative work they perform. CCTs invoke a second model of collaborative working which describes the majority of their collaborative work. In this more hierarchical model they share their knowledge and expertise with workers in relatively junior positions in children's centres and early years settings. This model portrays the CCT as a consultant, a sage or a pedagogical leader. The aim of their role being to improve the practice of other workers; the relationship is frequently not entirely voluntary and often involves monitoring of various aspects of performance.

There is some evidence to suggest that this model of collaboration is successful when all parties agree that practice can and should be improved but perhaps unsurprisingly, CCTs report some resistance and resentment from other workers.

The CCT's portrayal of this second model as collaborative work is interesting and challenges more traditional models of collaborative work where partners (notionally at least) are perceived as equals. The attribution of this work as collaboration may help CCTs perceive themselves both as valued authoritative professionals and as successful workers within an environment which frequently places collaboration at the centre of rhetoric. This raises the question of quite what collaboration means in contexts of asymmetric relations and power and whether the popularity and frequency of the term in policy sources has outstripped a clear conceptual grasp of its relevance for complex settings such as children's centres.

### **Important limitations of this study**

The number of informants and the size of the study limit the extent to which the findings can be generalised. Whilst the CCTs in different areas reported many similar experiences there were a small number of significant differences between them. For example, some combined the CCT role with other roles within the centre and where this happened, their experience seemed to differ more markedly. If additional informants had been included, further variation of this type may have been uncovered.

### **Future areas for research**

By identifying and exploring these experiences the study suggests a number of questions for further investigation with other groups and with CCTs across time. For example:

- Do other professional groups have similar experiences when transferring from settings dominated by a single professional group to settings occupied by a wide range of workers and disciplines?
- Is the hierarchical model of collaborative working used by these CCTs shared and used by other professional groups?

- Do other workers within children's centres perceive their relationship with and the activities described by CCTs as collaborative?
- Is there a future for the CCT role in which it will develop into a discrete and secure profession, occupation or specialism?
- Does the work of CCTs adhere closely enough to the model prescribed by the EEPE research to produce the anticipated impacts for children?

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## Appendix

### Email stimulus material

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| <p>Theme 1 – describing the job</p> <p>There are now many examples of job descriptions for CCTs available (e.g. on the web), there is also a discussion paper on the Together for Children website which outlines their understanding of the role. I'd like to ask the panel's opinions of the most important aspects of role of a CCT. I've put a few questions below, you might like to use all or some of these to help structure an answer, but if you prefer just let me know what you feel are the most important parts of the job. Things you might want to think about -</p> <p>Imagine that you bump into an old friend on a train journey, they ask about what you do in your job, how would you sum up your role for them?<br/>What do you see as the key differences between your work as a CCT and previous work you have done (or the role of a class room teacher)?<br/>Does the job you do on a day to day basis reflect what it says on your job description (if you have one) – why is that, is this important?<br/>Before you started as a CCT did you have an accurate picture of what the job would be like?<br/>Day to day, what takes up most of your working time?<br/>Why might the role vary from area to area?</p>   |
| <p>Theme 2 – colleagues</p> <p>For this theme I would like to ask for your thoughts on how it is working alongside your Children's Centre colleagues. I'm interested in the relationships you have with them, whether you discuss work related and non-work issues. And whether your experiences with colleagues in the centre differ from your previous experience. Again I have put some questions below which seem of interest to me, but please feel free to go 'off piste' if there is anything else you would like to cover.</p> <p>Who do you consider to be the key colleagues in the 'Children's Centre team' – i.e. who do you work most closely with?<br/>What are the types of work-based subjects you have discussed with colleagues over the last week or so?<br/>What types of non-work subjects have you discussed with colleagues over the last week or so?<br/>Compared to your colleagues from your previous job(s) do you feel as 'close' to your current colleagues?<br/>Do you still have regular contact with colleagues from your previous role?<br/>What is your opinion of interprofessional working (including multiagency working etc)?</p>   |
| <p>Theme 3 – knowledge and learning</p> <p>I have had some very interesting responses to the first two themes, so thank you very much for that. It is really bringing home to me the challenges and opportunities of the CCT role as well as the diversity of experience. It is fascinating to see how people are developing their roles and their working relationships in unique ways. So I really look forward to your input on the third area which is to think about how you use and further develop your knowledge base. Again feel free just to write as you wish or to use the questions below to structure a response.</p> <p>Are there any particular theoretical perspectives that inform your work?<br/>In what ways do you feel that your own knowledge-base / personal pedagogy differs from (or is the same as) other workers in the CC?<br/>How do other workers in the CC ask for advice and use your opinions?<br/>Which workers consult you most frequently?<br/>How often do you attend training (e.g. CPD)?<br/>Does the training you tend to do now differ from the training you tended to do in your last job(s)?<br/>What informal learning have you experienced in the CCT / what else have you learnt?<br/>Do you read any journals, magazines or books related to your work? More often or less often than before? Same or different journals / books? What journal(s) / book(s) and books would you recommend to a new CCT?</p> |

#### Theme 4 – practice

This theme might be a little quicker to answer, and maybe it overlaps some other areas. Again I have put some questions below, but feel free to go 'off piste' if you prefer. I look forward to hearing from you, whether or not you have managed to contribute much so far, anything you can add is very valuable for me.

What do you understand of the term 'reflective practitioner', do you consider yourself to be reflective, what are the limits or constraints on this?

What do you understand of the term 'evidence based practitioner', do you consider yourself to be evidence based, what are the limits or constraints on this?

How much freedom do you have in planning your work? How do you think this compares to other (non CCT) teachers?

Considering any work you do with adults and with children, what are the differences with your last post?

What aspects of your work do you think make the most difference / have the most impact? Why do you say this?

#### Theme 5 – organisational issues

The next theme [which is the penultimate] one asks you to think about organisational issues, by which I mean how the organisation functions in relation to the CCT role / looking after you etc. I've put some prompt questions below, but as usual please feel free to ignore them or answer in any other way which ever you prefer. As always I look forward to hearing from you and hope all goes well with you and yours.

Can you describe any team meetings that you attend?

Who do you consider to be your (main) line manager and how often are you in contact with them?

What role does 'supervision' play in your current job, how is this different from before?

If you had a problem / issue / difficulty at work (related to work) who would you talk to?

Do you feel able to influence key decision makers?

How does your current workload compare to your workload in your previous job – why is this?

Does your CC have a clear ethos (approach) to which all workers and professionals feel committed? If there are differences what are they and why do they exist.

#### Theme 6 CCT careers

As usual I have put some questions below, but please feel free to answer more widely. Short answers and long answers are all valued highly, so whatever you have time for is great.

How likely is it that you will be a CCT for the next five years?

Thinking about the future, do you feel that you have the opportunity to develop IN YOUR CURRENT ROLE – i.e. without changing jobs?

Thinking about the future, do you feel that you have the opportunity to develop IN A NEW ROLE – i.e. by changing jobs? What jobs might this include?

In general terms how do the 'terms and conditions' of being a CCT compare to those of other teachers?

How do you feel about being a CCT? Are you proud of being a CCT?

Would you recommend becoming a CCT to a friend or colleague?

## Interview topic guide

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| <p>Theme 1 – describing the job</p> <p>*Can you start by outlining the CCT role for me?<br/>Imagine that you bump into an old friend on a train journey, they ask about what you do in your job, how would you sum up your role for them?<br/>*What do you see as the key differences between your work as a CCT and previous work you have done (or the role of a class room teacher)?<br/>* Does the job you do on a day to day basis reflect what it says on your job description (if you have one) – why is that, is this important?<br/>Before you started as a CCT did you have an accurate picture of what the job would be like?<br/>Day to day, what takes up most of your working time?<br/>Why might the role vary from area to area?</p>  |
| <p>Theme 2 - Colleagues</p> <p>* Who do you consider to be the key colleagues in the Children's Centre team – i.e. who do you work most closely with?<br/>What are the types of work-based subjects you have discussed with colleagues over the last week or so?<br/>What types of non-work subjects have you discussed with colleagues over the last week or so?<br/>Compared to your colleagues from your previous job(s) do you feel as 'close' to your current colleagues?<br/>Do you still have regular contact with colleagues from your previous role?<br/>* What is your opinion of interprofessional working (including multiagency working etc)?</p>  |
| <p>Theme 3 – knowledge and learning</p> <p>* Are there any particular theoretical perspectives that inform your work?<br/>In what ways do you feel that your own knowledge-base / personal pedagogy differs from (or is the same as) other workers in the CC?<br/>* How do other workers in the CC ask for advice and use your opinions?<br/>Which workers consult you most frequently?<br/>* How often do you attend training (e.g. CPD)?<br/>Does the training you tend to do now differ from the training you tended to do in your last job(s)?<br/>What informal learning have you experienced in the CCT / what else have you learnt?<br/>Do you read any journals, magazines or books related to your work? More often or less often than before? Same or different journals / books? What journal(s) / book(s) and books would you recommend to a new CCT?</p> |
| <p>Theme 4 – practice</p> <p>* What do you understand of the term 'reflective practitioner', do you consider yourself to be reflective, what are the limits or constraints on this?<br/>* What do you understand of the term 'evidence based practitioner', do you consider yourself to be evidence based, what are the limits or constraints on this?<br/>* How much freedom do you have in planning your work? How do you think this compares to other (non CCT) teachers?<br/>* Considering any work you do with adults and with children, what are the differences with your last post?<br/>What aspects of your work do you think make the most difference / have the most impact? Why do you say this?</p>  |
| <p>Theme 5 – organisational issues</p> <p>* Can you describe any team meetings that you attend?<br/>* Who do you consider to be your (main) line manager and how often are you in contact with them?<br/>What role does 'supervision' play in your current job, how is this different from before?<br/>If you had a problem / issue / difficulty at work (related to work) who would you talk to?<br/>* Do you feel able to influence key decision makers?<br/>* How does your current workload compare to your workload in your previous job – why is this?<br/>Does your CC have a clear ethos (approach) to which all workers and professionals feel committed? If there are differences what are they and why do they exist</p>   |

Theme 6 - CCT careers

\* How likely is it that you will be a CCT for the next five years?

Thinking about the future, do you feel that you have the opportunity to develop IN YOUR CURRENT ROLE – i.e. without changing jobs?

Thinking about the future, do you feel that you have the opportunity to develop IN A NEW ROLE – i.e. by changing jobs? What jobs might this include?

\* In general terms how do the 'terms and conditions' of being a CCT compare to those of other teachers?

\* How do you feel about being a CCT? Are you proud of being a CCT?

Would you recommend becoming a CCT to a friend or colleague?