

**Challenges and Resolutions to Early Years Literacy
Approaches in two selected sites in Norway and England**

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Abstract

The study considered how contemporary global forces and drivers from international organisations led to the formulation, according to Kennedy (2006:299) of ‘universalised norms and best practices’. In order to explore this contention an aspect of practice, namely early years literacy approaches, was scrutinised. It was discovered that international recommendations promoted literacy as a crucial skill and as a holistic approach. These recommendations were incorporated into national policies in Norway and England, where approaches to early years practice were deemed by OECD (2006) to differ in the respective contexts. The empirical study sought to scrutinise this aspect of early years provision in order to attempt to identify challenges posed by a similar global context and European guidelines on differing national contexts and the subsequent challenges and resolutions involved in the implementation of the international recommendations and resulting national policies at a local level. The major research question was therefore;

What are the challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches in two selected sites in Norway and England.

Qualitative methodology was used for the empirical study based on case studies of two sites in the different contexts, which included scrutiny of documentation, interviews and observations of practice. Validity, reliability and ethical issues were addressed. Analysis of the findings considered the two literacy elements. Literacy as a crucial skill concerned formal literacy skills and child-initiated activities. Literacy as a holistic approach featured

consideration of the whole child and the team around the child. It covered aspects incorporating children's learning, the adult's role, professional liaison, diversity, parental influence, accountability, resources and competition. Resolutions to the challenges were noted throughout the thesis, including the pragmatic strategies devised in the settings. It was found that new aspects of practice were implemented within existing philosophical approaches, the values and beliefs of practitioners working in the contexts and reflected the communities served by the settings.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Interest in this study began when, as the leader of a large early years unit attached to a primary school in England in 1998, pressure was exerted by colleagues teaching older children to incorporate the National Curriculum Literacy Hour into planning for early years children, as they claimed this would support the work towards the national tests taken by their children. This challenge led to a study as part of my M.Ed research based on *Government Legislation and Good Practice in Early Years Literacy: Perceptions of Early Years Teachers in Hull Schools*. The study explored changes taking place following the introduction of the government legislation and the consequences and challenges for early years teachers resulting from it. Findings from the questionnaires and interviews revealed a formal instructivist approach towards early years literacy, which contrasted with approaches used by colleagues visiting the area from Norway, who described how they enabled children to construct their own learning through access to the outdoor natural environment. Since then my awareness and understanding of the impact of global forces, recommendations and European policies on early years provision has developed. For example the Children in Europe policy paper (2008:2) which claimed ‘The search for a European approach to services for young children is justified’. Kennedy (2006: 299) cites Dahlberg and Moss (2005); Moss and Petrie (2002); and Popkewitz and Block (2001) who:

‘propose that the significant driver for early education...is a desire to ensure that institutions, like kindergartens and schools, help to produce global citizens or workers through the sanctioning of universalised norms and best practices.’

This study provides an insight into the challenges posed by global forces and possible ‘universalised norms and best practices’, through the incorporation of international recommendations and European guidelines into differing national contexts and the resolutions in the local contexts to implement them. It explores the challenges and resolutions of early years literacy approaches through studying literary sources discussing global forces and national contexts, observations of practice and interviews based on the perceptions of those involved in dealing with the changes and resolving them in local practice. In order to enhance an understanding and formulate assumptions regarding theories at a macro level ‘we must first scrutinise findings but also theorise about the possibilities of these findings’ (Kogan et al. 2000: 5). The study identifies how practice is changing in two early years sites in Norway and England to meet macro recommendations and guidelines and the consequent similarities and differences between the challenges faced, with resolutions devised. It will therefore scrutinise an aspect of early years provision, namely literacy, in order to attempt to identify the challenges.

1.1 Research Objectives

The major research question attempts to explore the challenges and resolutions posed to early years literacy approaches in two European countries reflecting differing learning philosophies yet following similar international guidelines for provision. These include a scrutiny of the challenges arising from global forces and international recommendations on different national policies. It considers how they have influenced approaches to early years literacy in the two selected sites, through observations of practice and the perceptions of those involved with the local work of the early years settings in the respective countries.

A comparative study enables analysis concerning globalisation forces, international policies and European frameworks on different structures and raises insights from both countries of possible future developments. The main purpose of the research was to identify the challenges faced by both countries and the ways they have been resolved in the implementation of international policies on differing existing practice. The resolutions are identified with recommendations cited as positive outcomes of the challenges experienced. The research evolves from the following major research question.

1.2 The Major Research Question:

What are the challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches in two selected sites in Norway and England?

The research considers six specific sub-questions.

1.2.1 Research Questions

Question 1 What challenges are suggested by an investigation of the global context for early years literacy approaches?

Question 2 How does a study of national context contribute to our understanding of challenges in early years literacy approaches?

Question 3 What are the most appropriate research instruments to investigate an understanding of these challenges?

Question 4 How does a study of local contexts contribute to our understanding of challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches?

Question 5 How does a comparison improve our understanding of the challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches?

Question 6 What are the resolutions for practice in the two sites?

Question 1 considers how changes brought about by globalisation and international and European recommendations have resulted in challenges for early years literacy approaches. These include the need to provide for an increasingly diverse group, with flexible facilities to meet the needs of working parents, a common framework for literacy to enable children's ease of transition when parents are seeking jobs and changing roles and training for those working in early years to meet those needs. Recommendations will focus on the approaches used to promote literacy as a crucial skill and as a holistic approach. The literature review in chapter 2, based on the global context, considers question 1.

Question 2 addresses the policies formulated in different ways in the two countries to meet international policies and recommendations. This highlights the challenges which could be perceived by those involved with early years settings as changes to existing practice are needed to incorporate new initiatives concerning literacy as a crucial skill based on a holistic approach. Chapters 3 and 4 address the challenges posed in the national contexts in Norway and England respectively.

Question 3 scrutinises the methods used to research the empirical study, including the rationale for a case study basis, ethical considerations, reliability and validity. This is covered in chapter 5 based on methodology.

Question 4 explores how practitioners at a local level view the challenges, what factors are involved and whether there is a concern over changing pedagogies and practice. Chapters 3 and 4 introduce the selected sites for the empirical study, while chapter 6 explores the findings from the settings through a study of documentation used at the sites, interviews with those concerned with the local practice and observations of practice.

Question 5 compares the early years literacy challenges and resolutions, the approaches used at the respective settings and the underlying pedagogy, including reference to a holistic perspective. It identifies similarities and differences between practice in the two sites in the respective countries. The analysis is discussed in chapter 7.

Question 6 provides a consideration of the resolutions to the challenges in the respective settings. The resolutions are discussed in chapter 7 and listed in chapter 8.

The research results, based on a review of literature and observations and reflections from those involved with work in the settings, have practical implications in informing policies and practice through cross national networking, while sharing and disseminating views of challenges and recommendations of successful strategies for early years literacy. They also provide recognition of the complex challenges faced by early years teachers and the insight required to resolve approaches when implementing policies devised at an international level, into existing practice for;

'the number and speed with which new initiatives have been introduced over recent years has made significant demands on practitioners' Laurie (Beckley et al. 2009: 12).

1.3 Qualitative Research Study Methods

The qualitative methodology for my case study research uses insight into the perceptions of early years practitioners involved with the two settings at a local level, to gain an

understanding of their interpretation of the challenges and rationale behind the resolutions they have formulated to meet guidelines for early years approaches. Analysis of observations of findings forms, in Yin's terms (2009:4), enquiry in 'real life events'. Comparative design 'embodies the logic of comparison' when studying 'two or more meaningfully contrasting cases or situations', while Hantrais (1996:3) states cross-cultural research can lead to a 'deeper understanding of issues that are of central concern in different countries.' Specifically the research will concern one site in each country. As Academic Co-ordinator 3-7 age phase on the PGCE Primary course at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln my work involves partnerships with schools in Lincolnshire and liaison with colleagues abroad, including those in Norway. The inclusion of partnership settings creates problems of theory generalisation as only two sites were studied. The recognised problems in the sampling include awareness that only two settings were used and that they were part of partnerships in Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, England and Hedmark University College, Norway. They were already recognised as demonstrating good practice. This would promote the relevance of the findings, with strategies adopted in other settings where appropriate. The two sites represent widely differing practice and would provide meaningful insights into how the different philosophies and practice have resolved the implementation of similar macro frameworks. It could inform future approaches and be of interest to those involved in early years at local, national and international levels.

1.4 Dissertation Structure

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the thesis. It includes the rationale for the study, the research objectives, identification of the major and specific research questions, a

description of the qualitative research method used and an overview of the research structure. Chapters two-four comprise a theoretical discussion, supported by relevant literary sources, of challenges drawn from a global context and European policy guidelines.

Chapter 2 considers how global forces and international recommendations have had a significant impact on early years literacy approaches, causing challenges concerning their implementation. These are discussed in terms of economic, political and cultural perspectives. From this basis, specific recommendations and targets from international organisations are identified. Consideration of these targets includes discussions of the challenges they could foster for national contexts in Europe, including those in Norway and England. The challenges focus on the promotion of literacy, from a holistic perspective.

Chapter 3 examines approaches to early years literacy in Norway. It opens with consideration of the context for the provision, discussed in economic, political and cultural perspectives. Global challenges and European guidelines on approaches to early years literacy in Norway are discussed followed by analysis of recent national policies on early years literacy, from an holistic approach. The setting in Norway used for the empirical study is described.

Chapter 4 reflects the structure of chapter 3, while focusing on a discussion of approaches to early years literacy in England. Consideration of the context is discussed from economic, political and cultural perspectives, followed by an examination of the provision in sociological terms. The challenges of global forces on early years provision

is discussed, with an analysis of literacy from a holistic approach. The case study site in England is described.

Chapter 5 provides a description of the framework of the research design and consideration of the rationale for adopting a qualitative approach. It incorporates a discussion of ethical considerations, an exploration of the research design, specific research questions emanating from the major research question and addresses the reliability and validity of the study.

Chapter 6 reports and scrutinises the findings of the case study research. It raises key issues arising from the interviews undertaken in the selected sites in Norway and England. Observations from daily routines and child tracking data are used with the interview information. The use of findings from documentation in the settings is taken with observations and interview data to triangulate results.

Chapter 7 covers the analysis of the empirical findings. Similarities and differences between the respective sites in their national contexts are discussed in terms of empirical research findings and pedagogical perspectives. This includes challenges to the implementation of new literacy initiatives, such as frameworks introduced, transition issues and the use of the learning environment and a holistic approach incorporating inclusion matters, accountability measures, inter-professional working and partnerships with parents.

Chapter 8 scrutinises findings from each of the sub-questions in turn, to answer the major research question and the focus of the study.

Chapter 9 considers possible limitations of the study. Recommendations are noted, to foster debate and support practitioners to incorporate aspects of proven good practice into existing strategies where relevant and appropriate, in the changing challenges of initiatives and responses to the demands of society and resulting policies at macro and micro levels.

Chapter 2 Globalisation and the Challenges to Early Years Provision

This chapter focuses on research question 1;

(RQ1) What challenges are suggested by an investigation of the global context for early years literacy approaches?

It opens with an examination of different theories regarding globalisation followed by consideration of the impact of challenges to early years provision discussed in economic, political and cultural forms. Macro drivers influencing early years literacy approaches through international and European recommendations and policies are discussed as further challenges for nation states to accommodate and practitioners to implement into early years literacy approaches. Specific recommendations are identified, consisting of a framework for literacy and a holistic approach.

Waters (1995:3) describes globalisation as ‘a social process in which constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding’ while Lauder et al (2008:4) argue, ‘It is a world of collective consciousness, where we see our problems as interconnected.’ These views suggest a sharing of ideas globally.

Writing in 1979 (foreword), Woodhead noted ‘Only in recent years has pre-school education gained sufficient status to be included in national, never mind international, programmes of study.’ Yet by 2005:235 Gammage stated ‘In the twenty-first century it is probably evident to every parent, professional childcare worker, kindergarten and primary teacher that early childhood is high on the political agenda almost everywhere.’

What has caused this heightened discussion? Changing patterns of work, where both parents sought employment, led to an increased need for childcare arrangements to

support this. Also, a growing desire to help children from families perceived to be disadvantaged created childcare requirements. Oberhuemer (1997:6) noted there was ‘a common underlying thread’ in Europe, where ‘provision sprang to meet perceived needs.’ This was followed by questions of training or quality, which were viewed as a ‘second step’ leading to a ‘diversity of provision’ possibly causing a need for further discussions concerning the quality of the provision devised, with considerations of ways this is achieved in other countries. This concern over the provision provided at a local level, promoted debate at a macro level.

However, Parsons (1995: 236) emphasised the global and European sharing of views and cites theorists to support this. Lasswell’s ‘world politics’ (1951), Etzioni’s ‘emergence of supra national and sub-global systems’ (1960s) and Wallerstein’s ‘world system’ (1974) are mentioned. He further highlights another layer of influence identified by Anderson and Eliassen (1993), who consider a ‘Europeification of national policy-making’ where policies are discussed in a collaborative European context (ibid). Therefore the diverse early years settings which were developing in Europe not only sought to exist in the locality but questioned the quality of provision by sharing pedagogical ideas with colleagues further afield. This ‘Europeification’ would have significant implications for practitioners attempting to implement relevant policies, and would pose different challenges, particularly when philosophies appear to be at differing sides of the spectrum as in those chosen for the empirical study in Norway and England. How macro policies are disseminated concern national and local interpretation which can, in turn, feed into global and European understandings of issues.

Cole (2008:28) considers globalisation from a Marxist perspective. This standpoint could have implications for early years as a provider for a future workforce, with market forces paramount. Cole quotes Blair from a pre-2005 Labour Party Conference Speech to the Cabinet who states 'we have to secure Britain's future in a world...driven by globalisation. We have to change and to modernise ...to equip everyone for this changing world' (ibid). This view, proposed by New Labour, possibly to support arguments for wage cuts, policy changes, and unpalatable decisions for an electorate, was a shift in policy from 'Old Labour' to 'New Labour'. The notion that globalisation affects early years provision is implicated in the argument, through a response to changing forces in the contemporary world, possibly driven by a capitalist desire to ensure an acquiescing workforce. This influences the curriculum taught and the manner in which it is delivered in order to prepare young children for their future working lives as part of a compliant workforce. However, it does not address the shared dialogue between local practitioners and national, European and global forces.

According to Cerny (2007:16) 'world politics ...in the century are increasingly dominated by a range of institutional strategies rooted in neo-liberalism that... makes sense of the uneasy and uneven interaction of convergence and diversity in a globalising world.' Early years provision does have aspects of private-public partnerships and Hursh argues 'Many have acquiesced to the notion that we live in a globalised society in which neo-liberal economic policies are inevitable' (Satterwaite et al. 2003:50). However, the neo-liberal paradigm is in question in an uncertain economic climate where national states strive to support failing private enterprises, maintain levels of employment and provide appropriate early years requirements.

While Lauder et al (2008:16) cite many effects of globalisation which have implications for early years provision, including the child's need to be prepared to meet the challenges of the future, they claim 'at the heart of educational quality means meeting learners' diverse needs and opening rather than foreclosing opportunities to develop as individuals and as valuable members of local and global society.' This stance would require a broad learning framework to address the needs of the developing child and provide challenges to learn through personal constructions of the world. It would also require a continued dialogue, to question what a broad learning framework would entail in the continually changing contexts of future needs.

There are suggestions that global forces take the form of McDonaldisation where early years provision becomes similar and standardised. Ritzer (1996:79) suggests a McDonaldised society expects standardised 'order, systemization, formalization' and 'routine'. Shared discussions between those interested in early years matters fostered collaboration of ideas and practice but possibly developing within local deliberations regarding provision. Naisitt and Aburdene (1988) contest 'even as our lifestyles grow more similar, there are unmistakable signs of a backlash: a trend against uniformity, a device to assert the uniqueness of one's culture and language, a repudiation of foreign influence' (cited in Parsons 1995:240).

Bryman (2004:2) suggests Disneyization could occur as global standardisation which 'rides roughshod over local cultures and practice.' He claims Disneyization could be 'the process by which the principles of the Disney theme parks are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world' (ibid:1) However, this would assume that early years practitioners are prepared to accept policies and fail to

question inappropriate strategies foisted on them. If discussions were a two-way process local debate would be heard along with macro recommendations.

Burgi (2000), contests the notion of a weakening of state power, rather that 'the role of the state has been redefined' (Le Monde Diplomatique). He suggests 'In Europe, state power has been redeployed in accordance with the logic of globalisation to achieve economic unification.' This influences early years policies as a desire to demonstrate a unified European standard of provision and implement the policies in the sites chosen for the study.

Cerny (2007:2) considers the effects of globalisation as a possible conflict, where there are two sorts of boundaries, 'vertical' or those concerning physical or territorial locations and horizontal which covers social stratification or functional differentiation.' This would require early years practitioners to accommodate early years literacy provision by 'shoehorning the horizontal into the vertical' where they attempt to implement macro policies into existing local, possibly differing, existing provision. Within the complex role of early years practitioner there is a challenge to devise strategies where macro policies are accommodated within a local remit.

Moss (2003:5) notes the 'co-ordination for the advancement of a social Europe' which has 'potential relevance to Britain as an EU member state.' This may be the case but both Moss (2003) and Neuman (2005) recognise the need for further research into cross national comparisons to ascertain the effects of contemporary forces on national provision in early years. This would consider cross national trends and developments and assess 'the consequences of different governance arrangements for policy outcomes that

affect children's early learning and development, quality, access and coherence' (Neuman 2005:138).

The next section will consider how different forms of globalisation impact on nation states provision for early years, to determine the forces that are affecting the provision in the respective countries and the challenges they might pose. Chapters 3 and 4 consider how these forces have been implemented in Hedmark, Norway and Lincolnshire, England to ascertain how they have been disseminated within local perceptions of provision.

2.1 Globalisation Challenges to Early Years Provision

Waters (1995:124) suggests that 'there are essentially three forms of globalisation – economic, political and cultural.' These forms are interconnected and influence each other. Historically, macro systems have been affected by trade, nation state negotiations and the sharing of ideas. Cerny (2007:6) states 'The first real 'globalisation' in the -centuries ...actually meant attempting to organise the political architecture of the planet as a whole around discrete, sovereign and mutually recognised states with clear boundaries.' However, these boundaries have become blurred through environmental concerns, faster transport links, internet access and international organisations and companies. Communication links can forge an international sharing of ideas regarding early years provision. According to Woodhead (2001) 'Early education is now part of the process of globalisation' (Lauder et al 2008:7), through networking and sharing of ideas and practice. Prospective headteachers in England were encouraged by the NCSL to consider approaches used in other countries.

‘Our children will become world citizens. The similarities between issues for education within a similar economic and developmental framework are appreciable whilst cultural differences can bring new thoughts to approaches to development in our countries.’
Anon. NPQH Think Piece, National College for School Leadership, 2006.

The ‘similarities between issues’ will be considered in terms of global economic, political and cultural forms. These areas provide a background for the understanding of the formation of early years provision.

2.1.1.Challenges from global economic forces for early years provision

Globalisation appears in literature regarding early years (Dahlberg, 2007, Lauder, 2008) in terms of the need of the provision to prepare for future challenges. Musgrave stated as early as 1965 (307, 311) that, ‘change is now built into our economic system’ and warned ‘the very basis of advanced industrial systems –namely the supply of fossil fuels that form the main source of power, is limited and may be nearly exhausted.’ In the current credit crisis, awareness of the desire to maintain and sustain economic viability is evident, as demonstrated in a number of G20 meetings. This strengthened world leaders power in an age where private profits are uncertain. The uncertainty helps to drive discussions concerning the purpose of provision for young children, including a spectrum of views ranging from whether it should have a narrow curriculum focus as a means to gain specific skills or in broader terms as a period of childhood to enjoy in its own right. The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) 2002 urged ‘no nation today can afford to ignore opportunities for maximising investments in education in a competitive economic environment based on knowledge, flexibility and lifelong learning’ (Dahlberg et al 2007:5).

Musgrave had claimed the future might 'require the personal attributes associated today with zero production growth rather than with inevitable and endless development' (1965:334) while Lauder et al (2008:3) considered what skills might be needed to meet future challenges, consisting of 'a highly skilled workforce with knowledge, enterprise and insight.' Skills needed by the changes from an industrial base to those requiring knowledge based or creative skills for employment could be viewed as important to ensure future success in competitively securing work. Literacy skills, with an increased use of the Internet, would be crucial for such employment, with those not achieving basic skills finding grave difficulties in gaining work. These skills would need to be identified and considered in a framework of learning for early years children, then subsequently implemented by the practitioners in the settings. This could pose significant challenges for the practitioners organising and managing such settings, to determine what was required in the framework of learning and how it should be delivered.

The provision for early years reflects changes in society as a response to economic factors. Fukuyama (1996:9) notes 'economics is grounded in social life and cannot be understood separately from the larger question of how modern societies organise themselves.' Parental need for the desire to obtain and keep employment poses increased pressure for early years provision, which in a challenging economic climate would concern social welfare states to maintain parental employment therefore providing parental access to early years facilities at a feasible cost to enable this to happen. Moss et al (2003:11) state 'the ageing of the European population is of profound consequence for any study of services for children.' Ageing populations put further demands on workers to financially provide for them and have welfare states assistance at the possible expense

of early years provision. Rui (2007) states ‘Within such a climate, politicians have tried to reduce spending on public services’ (Bray, ed, 2007:242).

On a global economic scale competition for trade, resources and employment increases. This leads to further scrutiny of costs for labour, production and training. Funds to finance early years provision could be strictly regulated or curtailed. Therefore close account is made regarding the cost of the provision, how it is funded and whether it is economically viable. Related financial aspects need to be considered, such as the cost of training the individuals who are to organise and manage the facilities, the resources used and the running costs of the setting itself. Shortened time scales to train practitioners or strategies such as training ‘on the job’ may be introduced in order to effectively cut training costs. Practitioners need to continually retrain to keep up to date with policy changes. From these financial considerations related concerns grow, such as requirements to ascertain the value for the money given to the settings, with specified ‘outcomes’ of performance to assess this. The use of external regulators has significant implications for the viability of individual settings, therefore consideration of ways to ensure providers conform to the requirements influences what happens within the settings, as practitioners strive to provide evidence to meet them. Emphasis might be given to the formulation of the evidence rather than the practice itself. Funding tied to the results found by the external regulators and successful reports would be vital for the settings to continue as parents move their children readily to those deemed to be more successful.

In order to meet these challenges macro organisations develop as a supportive network for the members involved. Certain European countries, such as Scandinavia, share notions of good early years practice as a united response to international change. Harris

(2002:3) describes ‘social capital which might be converted into economic capital’ through the formation of a stronger group when bargaining. Networks ‘are partly built upon and serve to reinforce, trust between people and the strong likelihood of reciprocity in the relationships between them.’ According to Bottery et al. (2000:6) ‘comparable economic concerns are impelling governments down similar roads in terms not only of education but policy in general, ones that retain strong policy direction from the centre, and which increasingly move away from market driven forces.’ These similar roads suggest change is inherent in the process. The Enterprise Development website maintains ‘for any country to transform itself into a viable, knowledge-based economy, internal, institutional change will be crucial’ (www. govmonitor).

These economic connections foster political ties and alliances to strengthen the position of the individual states within them and therefore influence the policies of the member countries.

2.1.2 Challenges from global political forces for early years provision

National governments need to refer to macro organisations and unions that have strength globally and can determine employment and wealth within the nation states. Dai (2007:4) contests ‘the best way to make supranational institutions work is to have strong and effective governments at national level.’ This is achieved through collaboration between nations to strengthen their own positions. Dai believes ‘The key lies in the shift from a hierarchical approach to a networking alternative’ (ibid.).

Reference to macro forces leads governments to follow a process of governance where states change their roles, withdrawing from acting as direct providers of social schemes to regulators of provision. Yet, private, voluntary or independent companies, partly

responsible financially for the early years provision, are accountable to the government for the delivery of the service. Musgrave, (1965:240) believed, 'Those in power are ensuring through the system that they maintain or have set up that pupils become persons of a certain type and this keeps society going as it is now.'

Changes following the recent credit market collapse could result in governments, by necessity, having to take a more proactive national stance in securing and funding provision, while becoming key players in the global political stage, through alliances and networks formed.

Local and individual settings have responsibility for providing the framework for learning to ensure young children's success in the future but placed within national guidelines. This is measured to ascertain the value of the provision, with providers needing to change, as required, to remain viable in a competitive market and meet the demands of the regulators who assess it. Competition for staff, resources and the children who come to the setting mean time and effort needs to be spent on 'selling' the setting to the locality in which it is housed, at the expense of time taken with other aspects concerning the learning and development of the children in their care. Competition between settings could be fierce as providers seek to fill places to remain viable. Competition could further develop between privately owned companies and maintained settings to secure funding and places for the provision.

2.1.3 Challenges from global cultural forces for early years provision

According to Sutherland (2005:6) culture represents 'core understandings of a group of people who are in communication with each other, and who share, knowingly or not, some common sense of values and purposes.' Fukuyama (1996:41) believes culture

concerns the ‘highly developed ethical rules by which people live, nurtured through repetition, tradition and example.’ However, Wagner (1981) argues ‘culture is not a fixed entity that shapes the lives of the individual’, while Mason (2007) claims ‘Culture functions more as a productive force constituted by a relatively amorphous aggregation of loosely bounded factors that both influence the lives of the individuals who share in it and are influenced by those individuals.’ Therefore, culture is not static, but evolves and changes. Williams (1985) states culture is ‘a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general.’ Keesing (1960) develops the symbolic nature of culture ‘concerned with actions, ideas and artefacts which individuals in the tradition learn, share and value’ (ibid:172).

Masemann’s ideas (2003) have relevance to the empirical study chosen as he states culture refers to ‘ideas people have, relationships they have...with larger social institutions, the language they speak, and the symbolic forms they share such as written language’ (Bray, ed, 2007:172). The importance of literacy as a transference of cultural values is highlighted in Masemann’s argument along with an emphasis on people’s ideas. Boccock (1992) asserted that culture could be demonstrated by ‘the set of practices by which meanings are produced and exchanged within a group’ (ibid.173). This again could have implications for the empirical study and the methodology used to gain an insight into the set of practices for early years literacy. For the purposes of this thesis culture represents the shared values and beliefs of those who are influenced by it, yet exist in a process of change where there is continual shaping of ideas by contemporary forces.

Mason (2007, *ibid.*178) emphasises ‘globalisation by no means leads necessarily to a global society or even to a global culture.’ He suggests it could lead to fragmentation and diversity. This has relevance to the study as a sharing and questioning of ideas both global to local and vice versa.

The interchanges occurring at macro level where ‘new and existing worldviews are redefined’ (Sutherland 2003:9) encourage early years providers to consider changes deemed successful by colleagues at an international level, through cross national links in organisations of early years specialists. Scholte (2008) cites ‘the spread of transplanetary, and in recent times more supraterritorial, connections between people’ (*escrsociety*: 1). These connections can be increased through the ease of internet communications. Cerny (2007:14) highlights the use of the Internet ‘which creates virtual spaces for transitionally connected people to maintain their identities in ways that represent neither the national space of their origins...nor that of their destination country as such, but as complex spaces where both are inextricably intertwined.’ Pedagogy is exchanged through shared discussions between early years colleagues. Cerny coins the phrase ‘glocalisation’ to identify the ‘transnational epistemic communities of experts and professionals’ who play a crucial role across the world in spreading transnational and global knowledge and organisational forms’ (2007:15). In Europe these can include networks for those concerned with the care and education of young children, such as the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA). Moss (2001) writes ‘Being at the heart of Europe means having a mature and sustained engagement with other countries, using this opportunity to exchange experience, discuss issues of shared interest and reflect on policy and practice’ (Pugh, ed, 2008:39). These global communications

influence thoughts of what is required for early years provision, sharing and implementing new ideas.

The character of communities change as migrant workers and their children add new dimensions to the nature of the areas they move to. Inclusive practice in early years settings flourishes, for example incorporation of modern foreign languages from an early age for all children as part of learning about the world. Early years settings need to be viewed as diverse and multicultural environments, employing strategies such as those supporting children who have English as an Additional Language in English settings. However, this could lead to inequalities of resources, with wealthier areas self funding extra resources for early years provision, while poorer areas have to contend with the minimum finance obtained as further funding for the children becomes out of reach.

Global recommendations from international organisations could influence this outcome.

Cerny (2007:13,14) cites the developing awareness of the term 'global governance', or international drivers, which gained usage by the end of the twentieth century. He continued 'bonds, perceptions and discourses are increasingly overshadowing the national in ways that are growing in salience and intensity.' The following section will discuss some of the macro organisations that drive early years policies and identify specific targets relevant to approaches to early years literacy, 'fuelled by an historic convergence of globalisation, knowledge driven economies, human rights-based development and demographic trends, the recognition of the key role of education is growing in countries around the world' (Lauder et al. 2008:3). Resolutions have been formulated by these macro organisations through recommendations, policies and guidelines for early years provision.

2.2 Early Years ‘Universalised Norms and Best Practices’

This section identifies specific macro organisations and describes their recommendations for early years practice. The recommendations are compared to identify features of approaches for implementation into early years literacy practice. Some of the main macro organisations driving early years policies in England and Norway are The United Nations, the World Bank (WB), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Community.

2.2.1 The United Nations

James et al (1997:79) suggest the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) ‘is one of the most powerful globalising influences.’ The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was set up in November 1945, after the second world war, with the aim to ‘build peace in the minds of men.’ It serves to ‘function as a laboratory of ideas and a standard setter to forge universal agreements on emerging ethical issues’ ([.portal.unesco](http://portal.unesco.org)). It provides a means of disseminating and sharing information and knowledge. UNESCO (2003) affirmed ‘that children’s holistic development can only be ensured if there is close co-ordination or preferably integration of the education, social and health sectors, and they strongly urge governments to tackle this integration as part of their social and economic planning’ (Woods 2005: xi). It included Article 6 which stated development should be interpreted holistically, that is including emotional, cognitive, social, cultural and mental as well as physical aspects of development.

In 2007 it had 193 member states. Jarvis (2008: 39, 40) suggests UNESCO is a ‘champion of lifelong learning’ which is always presented ‘within a humanistic

perspective.’ He mentions the Faure Report which was the outcome of a UNESCO Commission on the Development of Education (1972). ‘Throughout the report the whole of the person is constantly emphasised: The physical, intellectual, emotional and ethical integration of the individual into the complete man is a fundamental aim of education.’

The UNCRC is a ‘universally agreed set of non – negotiable standards and obligations. These basic standards – also called human rights – set minimum entitlements and freedoms that should be respected by governments’ (www.unicef.org). In 1989 the UNCRC called for governments to adhere to certain core principles. These included relevant targets concerning approaches to early years literacy.

Article 2 stated that the Convention applied to all children. An inclusive practice was promoted to ensure all children were to be included in provisions made for them. This would require inclusive practice to support those who might need it, to access the available provision. Article 4 stated the adherence to a multi-professional approach where social services, legal, health and educational systems were involved. It recognised a possible need to change existing laws or create new ones to accommodate this target. Therefore early years literacy would need to access other agencies to develop a child’s potential if necessary. Article 29, the goals for education, stated children’s education should develop each child’s personality, talents and abilities to the fullest. It is likely that literacy would be included in such considerations of abilities.

The Convention aimed to address the needs of children as ‘transformation of the family structure, globalisation, shifting employment patterns and a shrinking social welfare net...all have strong impacts on children.’ Burr (2004) argues ‘potentially, the UNCRC has a worldwide influence on the advancement of children’s rights’ (cited in Waller,

2005:5). Boyden agreed for ‘The rights lobby is in the forefront of the global spread of norms of childhood which are integral to the history and culture of Europe and North America’ (James et al 1997:202). Nation states were urged to use the Convention as a guide to policymaking.

The 1990 World Conference on Education for All, ‘marked a new start in the global quest to universalize basic education and eradicate illiteracy’ (www.unesco.org). Key targets included a focus on equity, broadening the scope of education and an emphasis on learning outcomes. These are more specific targets related to literacy and would have clear implications for the policies devised and implemented.

UNESCO recommendations cover outcomes which are not solely for economic necessity but for the promotion of a view of early childhood as a crucial stage in its own right. ‘In the field of education, the three strategic objectives for the period 2002-2007 were promoting education as a fundamental right in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; improving the quality of education through the diversification of contents and methods and the promotion of universally shared values; and promoting experimentation, innovation and the diffusion and sharing of information and best practices as well as policy dialogue in education’ (Bray, 2005:25). However, The Education for All Monitoring Report (UNESCO:2007) is cited by Lauder et al. as ‘one that constantly speaks about the economic and social returns to the individual and society of investing in early childhood care and education’ (2008:7). Although the outcomes might be broad the emphasis on economic investment for the future is significant.

A framework for literacy can be identified in the UNESCO World Education for All Monitoring Report 2009. Two of three top policy recommendations for Early Childhood Education and Care included;

- Prioritize early childhood education and care in planning for all children
- Strengthen the links between education planning and health provision

Recommendations for primary education include a need to

- Ensure that all children acquire basic literacy skills and raise quality standards in education

This report includes the concern that progress towards the Education for All goals is being undermined by failure of governments to tackle persistent inequalities based on income, gender, location, ethnicity, language, disability and other markers for disadvantage. It emphasises the importance of good governance to help strengthen accountability, enhance participation and break down inequalities in education.

2.2.2 The World Bank

Bray (2007:28) remarks ‘Since the World Bank is a bank, the emphasis on much of its comparative education research is on matters related to economics and finance rather than pedagogy and curriculum.’ According to Jarvis (2008:36,37) the World Bank and OECD have ‘a more specifically economic concern’ whereas UNESCO, being an agency devoted to world cooperation, is ‘more likely to seek to modify or at least voice concerns about these pressures’. Through such means as the World Bank organisations could possibly attempt to act as agencies of social engineering by promoting strategies that would deliver a compliant workforce for the future. The WB, as a neo-liberal economic

institution, exerts social pressures on governments and serves ‘to reproduce the social and cultural conditions of global society’ (ibid.38).

Therefore, the emphasis from the World Bank is that of providing a workforce which can meet employment requirements. Strategies relating to education and learning are outcome rather than input driven, with reference to skills needed for employment and economic growth. The World Bank website states ‘Information on learning outcomes assists countries in making informed decisions about interventions to improve educational quality’ (web.worldbank.org.). It promotes assessments, such as the Early Development Instrument to assess early child development and school readiness.

2.2.3 The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

The OECD was established in 1960 ‘to achieve the highest possible economic growth and employment and increase the standard of living in member countries, to contribute to economic expansion in both member and non-member countries and to increase world trade’ (Jarvis 2008:42). This organisation could provide a forum for the further understanding of lifelong learning which would be needed in a knowledge economy, for example as the ‘formation of human capital... and issues of social cohesion’ (ibid: 44). An investment in education is perceived as future ‘capital’.

OECD (2006) guidelines for practice incorporate the targets identified in the European Commission report. Ten policy areas proposed for consideration by governments included;

2. To place well-being, early development and learning at the core of ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) work, while respecting the child’s agency and natural learning strategies

8. To improve the professional education of ECEC staff

10. To aspire to ECEC systems that support broad learning.

Lauder et.al. (2008:3) consider the nature of OECD involvement as an economically focused organisation stating ‘those goals are linked to the requirements of a global knowledge economy and economic growth’. These recommendations concern all providers, regardless of local situations and cover universal prescriptions.

Somsen (1996) stressed the economic dimension of the policies. He states ‘The terms of reference of both the European Union (EU) and the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are predominately inspired by economic considerations.’ He believed the OECD was a ‘rather unusual cross-continental alliance of states aiming to promote economic growth, to aid developing states, as well as to encourage worldwide trade’ (Werksman 1996:181).

2.2.4 The European Commission

The European Commission has been included in the discussions as a significant player in macro deliberations. It was believed amongst member states of the Council of Europe that there were ‘as many patterns of pre-school organisation’ as there were ‘terms to describe them,’ where the ‘precise levels and patterns of use reflected national history and policies’ (Woodhead 1979:2). However, Anderson and Aliassen (1993) described a ‘Europeification of national policy-making’ where a level of policy making developed following European guidelines and recommended targets (cited in Parsons 1995: 236).

The European Commission formulated recommendations to provide standards for quality, while giving examples of good practice throughout Europe. This led to the European Commission Quality Targets in Services for Young Children 1996-2006, incorporated

into a ten year plan, for states to achieve within the time scale. The forty targets included those based on the issues concerning a holistic approach and a framework for literacy, namely;

Target 1 Governments should provide a published and coherent statement of intent for care and education services to young children aged birth-six years and explain how such initiatives will be co-ordinated between services.

Target 14 All services should positively assert the value of diversity

Target 18 The educational philosophy should be broad and include linguistic and oral skills

The report stated ‘Most countries in the industrialised world have accepted that children below the age of formal schooling benefit from some kind of collective provision, whether it is viewed as preparation for school, an opportunity to socialize with other children and adults beyond the family, or in order to enable parents to work’ (p.18). National states were strongly encouraged to address the recommendations, or at least attempt to implement many of the targets.

Moss (2001) identified key features of early years policy in Europe;

- Public support for the childcare needs of employed parents
- Public support for at least two years education for all children before they start compulsory schooling (Baldock et al, 2005: 59).

National governments were required to address the growing needs of provision for young children to support working parents, while provision attained certain standards. Esping-Anderson (Moss et al 2003:5) note the ‘open method of co-ordination’ adopted by the European Union at its Lisbon Summit in 2000, which concerned a ‘practice of cross-

national policy' and where the objective was to 'institutionalise processes for sharing policy experience and the diffusion of best practices.' They comment that the 'key advantage of the open method of co-ordination for the advancement of a social Europe lies in its potential of reconciling national diversity and democratic accountability of the nation-state with common policy ambitions and measures of policy effectiveness through benchmarking and monitoring.' Jarvis (2008:44) agrees stating 'throughout the European documents' one of the main aims is 'to create a united Europe'. It also needs 'to provide employment for all its workers and to advance the knowledge and technological level of its workforce.' He continues 'it is ensnared within the dominant ideologies of neo-liberal economics and instrumentalism, the human condition it postulates is one in which the human potentiality is either unacknowledged or unachievable (ibid: 46). Thus, while highlighting specific examples of good practice throughout Europe, the standardisation of provision appears to be at the forefront of the European Commission's recommendations in order to meet the needs of working parents and the children in early years settings. How these recommendations are implemented in widely differing philosophies in European countries would provide useful insights into the challenges faced for early years practice. Throughout all the macro organisations recommendations, the promotion of literacy as a skill is evident. The UNESCO 1990 World Conference highlights this aspect, OECD insist early development and care should be at the core of ECEC work and the European Commission include the development of children's linguistic and oral skills in their educational philosophy. This is viewed in a holistic approach, where literacy is developed through all areas of learning, through play and other meaningful activities. It is also responsive to the literacy needs of children as individuals, concerned with other

areas of their progress such as physical, emotional as well as intellectual development. UNESCO require ECEC planning for all children, OECD support broad learning and the European Commission positively asserts the value of diversity. Learning is required to respond to the individual needs of all children, using a broad approach. UNESCO recommend the strengthening of links between education planning and health provision, OECD require an improvement of the professional education of ECEC staff, while The European Commission urges governments to publish a coherent statement of intent for care and education services to young children and explain how such initiatives will be coordinated. The World Bank stresses the assessment of outcomes of the learning, with implications of accountability. The training of practitioners to meet these requirements, within a financially constricted framework while using inter-professional working, has relevance for the perceptions and delivery of the strategies.

2.3 Macro Drivers on Approaches to Early Years Literacy

Targets identified in global and European organisations indicate approaches to early years literacy, concerned with recommendations to promote literacy skills through a broad learning framework which includes all young children. These targets will be discussed in terms of their influence on approaches to early years literacy.

2.3.1 Literacy as a crucial skill

Key global goals highlighted in Universal Primary Education by 2015 state there will therefore be a need for skills in literacy that will allow individuals to ‘function within society’(Lauder 2008:3). The ‘effects of globalisation on the world of employment has resulted in new work patterns...and has produced a new set of demands on the literacies

we need to function adequately in an environment of global connectedness' (Sutherland et al 2003:19). They conclude that literacy 'is a set of social practices and forms of knowledge that enable individuals to participate and function fully in society' (ibid:32).

Against a background of global competition for jobs, literacy is a key skill where Johnson claims 'different countries have responded to the 'literary crisis' by adopting strategies to raise attainment' (Sutherland et al 2003:19). Therefore, it can be observed that literacy is deemed to be a crucial skill. However in relation to early years provision, in a study by Mullis et al. 2001 it was found 'There is no clear relationship between the age of entry to primary schooling and grade reading achievement' (cited in Lauder, 2008:16). A range of strategies were used in pre-school settings to promote literacy. The desire to ensure children attain a standard of literacy fosters the encouragement of different strategies in settings to be attempted in order to secure this aim.

Insights into how children become literate has expanded greatly following research on literacy skills, such as the Weinberger (1996) study 'which draws attention to the ways in which children's later achievement in literacy in school is linked to wider early literacy experiences, such as parents pointing out environmental print and the number of nursery rhymes known' (David, 2003:28). Research focusing on learning and development has also been a factor, for example Trevarthen's (1995) work on early language development (ibid:37). Practitioners implement their understanding of an appropriate approach to promoting early years literacy within prescribed national frameworks.

2.3.2 A Holistic Approach to Early Years Literacy

Macro drivers highlight a broad, or holistic, approach towards learning. The 'holistic ideology values the whole child and endeavours to understand each young child as an

individual within the context of his or her family, community and culture. With this approach, professionals endeavour to be sensitive and responsive to all of a child's needs and aspects of development- that is physical, intellectual, social, emotional, cultural, moral and spiritual' (Woods, 2005:x). Petrie (2005:294) suggests 'there is a growing awareness of the 'whole' child or young person, rather than the child as the output of the formal curriculum.' Literacy as a holistic skill would emphasise this 'whole child' stance and encompass literacy aspects such as communication with those around the child outside the setting as well as interactions within the designated provision, strong progression of development from a child's literacy background at home and interactions between children or child and an adult where the adult responds to the child's interests. Aspects of literacy would develop as they arise, particularly social language based activities, rather than as predetermined, structured tasks and skills from the adult, often focusing on written evidence of progress. The adult would seek to draw on the child's interests and experiences to incorporate literacy rather than formulating specific tasks to introduce knowledge of literacy skills. Children could use their surroundings to develop their interests and account would be made of diversity where the children are perceived as individuals. Activities children engage in would not be specifically designed to address predetermined goals for the group. Full use would be made of other professionals to support individuals when required for their holistic development.

To enable individuals to cope with future challenges skills such as self-reliance and creative thinking will be necessary. This inner resourcefulness would enable individuals to access new technologies and innovations, whilst having the social skills to disseminate them and work with others. Lifelong learning would be part of this process.

These are laudable aims. However, there are different interpretations as to how a holistic approach can be achieved. Vadeboncoeur states that ‘throughout the twentieth century, two competing views of child development’ have been prevalent (quoted in Richardson 1997:15). One considers it important to ‘educate the individual child in a manner which supports the child’s interests and needs,’ while a second concerns a ‘social transformation and the reconstruction of society aligned with democratic ideals.’ These differences influence how a holistic approach could be implemented.

Waller (2005:59) contests ‘There are multiple and diverse childhoods and in order to study childhood one has to consider a range of perspectives.’ Nativism stems from the belief that a child has innate capabilities while children learn from an appropriate environment. Empiricism incorporates the notion of a child being rather passive in their learning with a professional delivering the appropriately devised learning environment. This includes an instructivist approach with an emphasis ‘on preparing for school and focusing on literacy...aiming for equality of educational opportunity and the means to improve later education.’ This approach is taken ‘where early childhood services for children 3-6 are seen as the initial stage of schooling’ (McQuail et al 2003:14). Instructivism argues that children should be instructed in predetermined facts to enable them to progress in their learning. In a constructivist approach early childhood is seen as a stage in its own right, with children viewed as competent learners and co-constructors of their learning.

Constructivism ‘acknowledges that children are born with cognitive capabilities and potential, and sees each child constructing knowledge and developing through cognitive activity in interaction with his/her environment. Children create their own meaning and

understanding, combining what they already know and believe to be true with new experiences' (Woods 2005:5). Social constructivist views emphasise the need for children to use social interactions with their peers and adults to formulate constructions of their world and develop their concepts. The inclusion and pursuit of one of these learning theories in early years settings has major implications for the learning and development of the child. Through a devised strategy a child gains an understanding of the world in which he /she is located. Brannen et al (2003:37) state 'Young children are viewed as active subjects with rights and voice, members of a social group and located both in the family and the wider society.' Therefore the strategy used in the setting is crucial for the way in which children respond to the world around them.

Early years literacy national policies reflect the drivers from macro organisations to provide literacy development in a broad framework within a wide range of services. Inter-professional working combines the notion of professionals from a range of backgrounds, such as education, health and social services working together to promote the development and well-being of the child. It 'requires all groups to have a shared vision and to work towards well-articulated and agreed aims and goals' (Woods 2005: xi, x). She notes a holistic viewpoint and inter-professional working 'are now prominent or influential in the early years policies and priorities of the UN, UNICEF and OECD.' The inter-professional approach is deemed to be implemented in many European countries. Baldock et al (2005:59) suggest the UK is influenced by developments in Europe 'including a move towards universal early years services and integrated planning and service delivery.'

The structured literacy skills teaching within a holistic approach has implications for the training of the professionals involved who would need an awareness of new methods of training or changes to existing courses to accommodate changing practice.

2.3.3 The Quality Dimension

Specific recommendations have been given from macro organisations for national and local provision, while global forces affect how they are implemented into settings. The European Commission's Ten Year Action Plan for early childhood (1996: A5) stated 'Good quality services are a necessary part of the economic and social infrastructure. It is a goal to be espoused at all levels-local, regional, national and European-and a goal for which all levels can and should work together.' Paper 1 states 'Achieving quality will be a major undertaking.' It is 'an issue that applies not only to individual childcare services, but also to the overall childcare system' (A5). Member states 'should initiate a process of developing a definition of good quality and a strategy for promoting quality in services' (ibid: A14).The report sets out key areas to ascertain criteria for quality. These include accessibility and usage, environment, learning activities, relationships, parents' views, cost benefits and ethos (Paper 2: 11-16). Quality indicators for services at local and national levels are also included (ibid, 18-23). These notions of quality provide one perspective. However, Owen (1771-1858) claimed human character was 'the product of the environments and social systems in which people grow up' (cited in Cole 2008: 20) and suggested different views might be apparent. Musgrove (1965: 240) states 'Those in power are ensuring through the system that they maintain or have set up that pupils become persons of a certain type and this keeps society going as it is now.' The challenge for the empirical study is to explore how differing notions of quality between the two

countries fare when international structures are foisted on them. Consideration has been given to the effects of globalisation on early years provision, to identify economic, political and cultural forces and specific targets for early years literacy. Yet countries which implement recommendations within existing pedagogy will have different notions of what is being sought. Mooney et al (2003:6) note 'definitions of quality and what should be measured will depend on interests, cultural values and understandings of childhood.' Therefore different cultures will have different understandings of what quality entails for early childhood education and care. Yet the European Commission sought to 'deliver a policy which crosses traditional boundaries and deals with issues which may have been neglected or simply never addressed, or which, for the first time, are being coordinated' (1996:12). Brannen et al (2003:77) stated 'All pedagogies have in mind, as an end product, a certain type of individual and a certain type of society.' This could be a desire to maintain local or national structures based on local philosophies or be linked to a wider network of countries reaching common agreements about what quality entails.

Rhedding-Jones (2004) suggests 'the 'quality' discourse matters very much' in early childhood education as 'institutions and professionals are being made accountable in ways that might not be desirable.' She continues 'what happens with children in pedagogical and caring institutions could change for the worse' (2004:1). In such an environment difficulties that practitioners face in their practice are pertinent as they provide an insight into changes in aspects of practice that matter to them. Economic, political and cultural perspectives impact on understandings of quality in the two countries in different ways. However, the dynamic nature of understandings of quality

means that perceptions could be influenced by factors, for example in Norway ‘there is an inescapable hierarchical bureaucracy informing its practices’ (ibid:13). The extent to which the informing of quality in practices is evident could be considered as a form of power.

Dahlberg et al suggest ‘power in modern societies’ has become ‘diverse and pervasive. It is exercised not only by the sovereign but by many others, for a wide variety of purposes’ (2004: 29). Foucault, a French philosopher, stated exploration of resistance in institutionalised forms of power consisted of ‘a way which is more empirical, more directly related to the present situation’ (1982: 780). This approach would gain a deeper understanding of practitioners’ perceptions of quality in the empirical study. Foucault (1977: 177) claimed ‘it is the specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and instruments of its exercise.’ He emphasised the importance of knowledge as power and how discourses are an important aspect. The language within the discourse shapes ideas and thoughts, forming dominant discourses. ‘But power can be opposed because despite its apparently pervasive and hegemonic nature, it is in fact neither monolithic nor total, but fragile and open to challenge’ (Dahlberg et al. 2004: 33). Children can participate in their own development through constructions of their world. Dahlberg et al. (2004: 37) claimed that ‘decontextualizing the child, we lose sight of children and their lives: their concrete experiences, their actual experiences, their theories, feelings and hopes’ in a regime of normalised capabilities. Within this normalisation power is wielded as practitioners are accountable for the children to achieve the required stages and children are categorised within the stages set. These

notions of quality and power will be further considered using reflections from the analysis of findings.

2.3.4 The Local as a Product of the Global and Vice Versa

Research into micro practice would indicate how policies have been received and implemented. 'Issues and problems may well be increasingly constructed in international and global terms, but decision making and implementation still remain domains which must be analysed within the context of nation states' (Parsons, 1995: 243). In a 'Europeification' of national policy making, different challenges are likely to be faced as new structures are imposed on differing existing frameworks. There may be global forces demanding the expansion of preschools, and international organisations offering suggestions of ways to achieve this, but how such changes are finally implemented remains the responsibility of individual countries. Soler and Miller (2003) compare differing approaches found in England, New Zealand and Reggio Emilia, Italy and discuss the different perspectives of quality provision in each country. Such research studies grew from earlier work for example by Moss, Pence, Penn, Petrie (1994), Penn (1997), David and Penn (1998) and Broadhead (2001). The studies considered how quality provision could be interpreted in different ways and how these perceptions influenced understandings of appropriate practice in different countries, for example Spain or Norway. The present study seeks to develop this kind of work, exploring explanations concerning why differing understandings and approaches to literacy have developed in Norway and England. It extends previous studies by scrutinising whether macro recommendations have influenced recent practice through practitioners possible changing perceptions of what is deemed desirable and the challenges this has posed.

Perhaps international recommendations might be easier to implement in some countries, where certain aspects of practice already exist. However, in others new structures could be challenging for the professionals who are required to implement them.

Certainly, it is apparent that further research is needed to observe the extent to which macro policies are implemented into national systems, how they have been received and put into practice locally and what differences have occurred in the incorporation of them into existing practices. Neuman (2005: 138) believes 'there is a need for further research on the consequences of different governance arrangements for policy outcomes that affect children's early learning and development, quality, access and coherence' to 'inform ongoing cross-national policy debates.' Ho et al (2011: 243) state 'The quest for quality improvement is high on the agenda of educational reform on many countries. In an age of globalisation, policy-makers tend to look abroad for promising solutions to local problems.' Thus, for example, Blaiklock (2010:8) in a comparative study between New Zealand and England concludes 'given the example of a greater emphasis on literacy in the Early Years Foundation Stage, it is time for the New Zealand early childhood profession to reconsider whether Te Wha-riki' (the New Zealand early years framework) 'is really providing effective guidance.' He suggests a combination of the two approaches. Research considering the challenges this would pose could correspond with the study in this thesis as possible challenges arise when strategies for practice are implemented into different structures and strategies.

In like manner, Tayler (2011:211) claims the review of the Australian system undergoing change raises questions about 'the capacity of national reform enterprise within complex systems to change local practice'. The present study explores whether international and

national reforms are changing local practice in Norway and England. The study seeks to examine early years experiences and processes in a similar manner to that of Limlingan (2011:38) who suggests that observing process elements such as ‘learning opportunities’ and ‘the kinds of activities available ...provide a better picture of what is happening’ and what is ‘most influential and meaningful to the child’. Early years provision in Lincolnshire, England and Hedmark, Norway have been chosen for:

‘There are some strong commonalities among English-language countries and among Nordic countries: in relation to early years and childcare provision, these two groups of countries occupy two extremes’

Mooney et al (2003: 9).

Economically, politically and culturally the countries might be posed with similar challenges but early years provision has developed from different perspectives.

In the next chapter discussion is focused on early years provision in Norway to explore the policies regarding approaches to early years literacy. In particular it gives a brief overview of the historical background to the policies, followed by discussion of recent developments and resolutions to meet the challenges posed by globalisation and the need to respond to international recommendations and policies.

Chapter 3 Challenges for Approaches to Early Years Literacy in Norway

This chapter examines the context of provision for approaches to early years literacy in Norway, opening with a discussion of the context in three forms, economic, political and cultural. It addresses research question 2, focusing on the Norwegian context;

(RQ2) How does a study of national context contribute to our understanding of challenges in early years literacy approaches?

An overview of approaches to early years literacy in Norway is considered, including the theories underpinning the practice. Global challenges for early years literacy in Norway are analysed, followed by a discussion of early years literacy using a holistic approach. The setting in Norway used for the empirical study is described.

Munton (2002) argues ‘There can be no general formula for...universal best practice. There can only be particular choices situated within particular contexts’ (Moss, ed, 2003: 7). This suggests macro recommendations and targets identified in the previous chapter need to be disseminated and implemented according to the contexts of the early years provision. Rui argues ‘There is a dialect at work by which these global processes interact with national and local actors and contexts to be modified and transformed’ (Bray, ed, 2007: 253). He recognises the ‘significance of global forces in educational research’ yet emphasises ‘the dilemmas associated with the transfer of educational policy and practice from one cultural practice to another’ (ibid: 252).

Therefore, recommendations from macro organisations cannot be transferred from one culture to another and be expected to thrive in similar conditions. Values and beliefs of the local communities will impact on the recommendations which will evolve according

to the requirements of the locality. The relevance of a discussion of the context of the study is emphasised by Rui, who claims 'Context is of great importance to comparative research in educational policy' (Bray, ed, 2007: 252).

The term policy 'derives from political science' (Almond, 1990) but there are different perceptions of the meaning of 'policy, policy-making and implementation' (Fowler, 2000, in Bray 2007:243). Rui discusses rational and conflict perspectives of viewing policy. He considers the rational perspective which includes research by Bowe et al. (1992) showing that 'policy is different in different contexts.' This includes the context of influence, such as intentions, ideas and purposes, context of policy text production for example written texts and documents, and the context of practice, including actions and activities. The conflict perspective consists of a view of society 'as consisting of competing groups with different values and access to power' (ibid: 248, 249). Through this perspective legislators of the policy may not have authority in the practice of the policy. The intention of the policy might not be what is happening in practice.

It is therefore essential to analyse the context in which the policies and practice are placed. Moss argues:

'There is a central problem with cross-national work. Services are the way they are in each country for specific and deeply embedded economic, cultural, social and political reasons' (2003: 5).

In order to gain an understanding of the challenges for implementation of early years literacy approaches the following section provides an overview of how they are embedded in the formative economic, cultural and political contexts.

3.1 The Context of the Study in Norway

The final report of the 2001 OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) highlighted policies and provisions which are ‘embedded in cultural and social beliefs about young children. Key elements of successful policy need to be discussed in light of social constructions of childhood’ (Moss 2003: 7). The development of these ‘social constructions’ will be considered in three forms, economic, political and cultural, followed by an overview of key elements of the provision.

3.1.1 Economic Form and Early Years Provision

According to the OECD review (2004: 11) ‘Norway was ruled for four hundred years by Denmark and then at the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars, it became part of a joint kingdom with Sweden. The country was established as an independent constitutional monarchy in 1905.’

The population of the country is about 4.5 million, of whom about 500,000 live in the capital Oslo. 74% of the total population live in towns or built up areas. The remainder live in areas of scattered populations. (OECD 2004: 11). In the largely rural area chosen for the study, children would need strategies and an understanding of the environment to survive in a challenging climate. The Stortien symposium in Sweden in 1977 argued that the environment enabled children to have an ‘understanding of, and feeling for, the natural world of mountains, valleys, forests, rivers and fields’ (Woodhead 2004: 73) and recommended its use as an appropriate medium to support children’s learning and development through exploration and investigation.

By 1949 Galenson could report ‘Within the life span of Norwegians and Swedes now living, their countries have been transformed from terribly poor, backward, agricultural

economies into advanced, industrial societies that offer their citizens among the highest standards of living in the world' (Einhorn 1989: 4). 'The main industries, in which the labour force of 2.35 million work, are agriculture, fishing and farming (about 4%); industry (about 22%); and services (about 74%)' (OECD 2004: 11).

Isolated communities needed to co-operate to survive, to share and collaborate using skills to support the communities in which they live. Relatively small co-operative communities are reflected in school provision and children attend their local school. 'The effect of offering local schools to local people in a mainly rural country is that many schools are small (in 2004, 36% of primary and lower secondary schools ...had less than 100 pupils)' (OECD 2004: 20). This would strengthen pastoral care between the age groups as older children could support younger ones. However, Woodhead (2001: 71-73) suggests possible disadvantages for children living in sparsely populated areas in Norway such as parental over-protection, children ill-prepared to cope with group experiences and professionals who 'feel isolated and unable to participate in in-service training'. This enhances the perceived need for the development of social communication and co-operation for young children, with networks of practitioners within the municipalities and in the wider domain who can provide mutual support.

The sea proved an asset for transport and networks to markets and fishing. Ready access to the sea promotes the availability of macro markets, fostering wider global perspectives. Norwegian policy makers need to be aware of macro forces to compete in European and global markets. In 1960 Norway joined the European Free Trade Association but, following referenda in 1972 and 1994, it remains outside the European Union, possibly because of fishing rights and a desire to retain its independence after years of rule by

Denmark and Sweden as well as occupation by Germany during World War 2. Norway does participate in European alliances when beneficial for the country, for example inclusion in the Agreement of the European Economic Area (EEA) in 2004. This agreement included provision for;

- participation in the internal European market, with free movement of goods, services, persons and capital in the other 17 countries
- Harmonisation of rules and regulations for goods and services
- Common rules regulating competition, state aid and public procurement
- Extensive co-operation in other areas of society, including research, education, cultural affairs and social policy

(www.norway.org.uk/policy/europe/eea)

The EU's common fisheries policy is not part of the EEA agreement. Responding to this agreement could have implications for early years provision where reference is made to European standards of early years quality identified in the targets 1996-2006. Conversely reluctance to join the EU could herald a desire to retain a national Norwegian 'identity' as it relatively recently gained independence in 1905. In such a climate immigrant workers could be required to adapt to 'traditional' cultural demands perceived in Norway. According to Equity in Education (2004) 'Norway is a rich country with one of the highest gross domestic products per capita in the world. The unemployment rate in 2004 was only 4.7%' (OECD: 11). However, in the early 1990's neo-liberal deregulation of the credit market resulted in the Norwegian socialist government having to take over or support three of the largest banks in Norway. Broadhead (2001: 21) argues 'In communities increasingly fearful for their own economic viability, the construct of

educational freedom becomes aligned with the need to be economically self-sufficient, rather than with the right to contribute to the design of one's own learning experiences.' Children need to be able to deal with the economic demands of the future in a challenging environment. In 1997 children were required to start school at six instead of seven due to the introduction of ten year compulsory schooling, a move to provide a future workforce who will be equipped to deal with a knowledge or creative economy. The OECD review for Norway in 2004 highlighted the Norwegian government's assertion that 'everyone in the country should have the opportunity to participate in –and influence the development of a knowledge economy' (ibid. 12). The framework for learning in early years settings moves to a design to ensure children have the skills needed for such work.

Policy makers would, therefore, need to consider challenges within Norway, while responding to macro forces.

3.1.2 Political Form and Early Years Provision

This section considers the political micro challenges, macro factors and their influence on early years provision. Martinussen in 1977 called Norway a 'distant democracy' as the 'modern political history of Norway is characterised by peaceful coexistence and revolution in slow motion' (Olsen, 1982: 19). In 1989: 277 Einhorn claimed 'The small nations that comprise the Scandinavian area constitute a social laboratory for the western world.' This developed as ideas of social assistance took hold and by the end of World War 1 social welfare was in place.

Norway's parliament, the Storting, resulted in the Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party having a majority after the election in 2005. The social democratic government does not have a clear majority, and therefore has had to respond to the

importance of local agendas and initiatives. In 1984, a new system was introduced for the transfer of income to the municipalities from the central government. Municipalities could spend the money according to their plans rather than formulated agreements from the government. The 1987 Monsterplannen for early years settings (Barnehager) and schools, took into consideration the needs of the local areas in the format of a curriculum with broad centralised guidelines. Despite an invitation by the Norwegian government in 1988 for OECD to review provision in schools, the recommended accountability scheme was not accepted by practitioners and diagnostic tests were introduced. This stressed the importance of local opinions incorporating parental and community involvement where communities 'drew their strength from the cohesion of small groups of neighbours or workmates. That cohesion permitted collective action that advanced common interests' (Einhorn 1989: 142). Newcomers could have difficulty becoming part of this 'cohesion' in challenging financial and employment circumstances. In 1992 the government decided that management by objectives was to be the main principle of government for all public activity. Providers could state what was intended as their objective to secure funding. Policies were disseminated through governmental, county, municipal and local provision. Norway has forged alliances with macro organisations. Four layers can be observed in the alliances; Nordic, European, OECD and global. The Nordic Council was established in 1952. The Nordic area forms a geographical concept of five nation states, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Denmark. Petersson claimed they formed a 'community of culture and common values' (Harper, 1993: 210) The Nordic Council comprised 'Co-operation ...concentrated on a number of priority areas: culture, education and research' (ibid: 216). The Nordic countries are not a homogenous unit. There are major economic,

defence, linguistic and cultural differences between the Nordic countries. ‘A renewal of the political institutions of the Nordic model may be the one factor that will give new life to the Nordic community’ (ibid: 222). However, meetings and alliances strengthen individual Nations’ power through economic negotiations and bargaining. Common policies enhance the networking of the ideas of professionals within the countries, sharing educational initiatives, research and forming a pedagogical understanding between practitioners.

Norway interacts with OECD, providing significant recommendations for Norwegian educational phases with the requirements of a future workforce frequently mentioned. A Report to the Storting ‘Culture for Learning’ 2004, ‘laid out a plan to ensure that future generations of Norwegian children are adequately prepared for the challenges they are likely to encounter in their lives’ (OECD Review 2004: 15). This incorporated a comprehensive account of all stages of learning from birth to the end of tertiary education. It provided recommendations and areas of concern for educational progress in the country.

The review did not mention any particular strengths from early years provision but it did recommend;

- Priority should be given to support early childhood education and care taken over the costs of tertiary education
- Research should be undertaken into ways of supporting the early learning of disadvantaged pupils in danger of underachieving.

Norway would have to make crucial decisions regarding welfare costs, for example whether tertiary education might be more beneficial to learners rather than early years

provision, as the means to the country to provide a future workforce while students personally develop and progress. However, it is important for younger children to access provision as it concerns their well being, is the source of a future workforce and provides a means to help parents maintain employment. Questions could be raised to ascertain who are the disadvantaged young children in danger of underachieving and the circumstances that have brought this about.

The Norwegian government has supported UN recommendations, (for example the Norwegian white paper in February 2009 which backed the UN Global Compact to promote sustainability by companies), by maintaining ecosystems or supporting indigenous peoples. Through such economic considerations it remains a player in global discussions. A workforce which is prepared to emigrate to secure employment has significance for Norwegian policies. 'In recent years, Norway has permitted the entry of a growing number of immigrants (300,000 by 2002). Immigrants make up 7.6% of the population of 0-9 year olds. (OCED 2004: 11). 72% of all children were in Barnehager in 2004, with 58% of children from ethnic minority backgrounds attending. A cash benefit scheme was in place which 'may discourage a number of poorer and immigrant families from taking advantage of this phase of the education and care system' (OECD 2004: 20). It was felt there were 'insufficient concrete strategies to resolve equity problems' (ibid: 45). These findings could have arisen as a result of Norway's early years development, through funding issues and a desire to establish a national 'traditional identity' which could exclude values and beliefs from another country. It raises an assumption that immigrants should assimilate to a perceived 'superior' culture, in which those who do not assimilate or are perceived not to, are excluded.

3.1.3 Cultural Form and Early Years Provision

National policy makers influence the curriculum which helps to strengthen a perceived national identity and in turn, their own stability in the existing national structure. However, the effect of a minority government has implications for the governance of the municipalities. Power is delegated to local and regional authorities where ‘In practice and tradition local governments have substantial autonomy’ (Einhorn 1989: 34). This is substantiated in early years provision. Woodhead (1979: 98) noted that provision ‘requires sufficient flexibility to enable individual regions and localities to design a pre-school system in accordance with local characteristics.’ This organisation of provision through local needs, strengthens communities. It ‘involves a sense of belonging to and identifying with others’ and encourages an ethos where individuals ‘share a sense of group identity ...that overrides individual interest’ (ibid: 142). This also implies an expectation of reciprocity, that others feel the same obligations.

The political organisation, where local communities had power in the areas, along with economic and geographical factors, fostered notions of co-operation and ‘reciprocal obligation’ in Norway, where individuals were expected to care for others but would expect others to care for them. In this cultural environment the child is viewed as a member of the community and an equal part in it, with childhood perceived as a stage in its own right. Use is made of the local resources in the community for learning. The natural environment and children’s own interests are paramount in the structure for learning. Expertise within the community can be drawn upon as part of the learning process. It could result in an insular perspective where new ideas and wider horizons are

neglected. Gaps in the provision might be missed with unequal emphasis on existing resources and skills.

The establishment of the provision responded to local requirements. Woodhead (1979) observed ‘When rural pre-schools are built, they must find their own form. What they offer must be determined by local culture and the local environment (Pre-school Law; 1974-75: 74). The terms local culture, local environment and home environment appear frequently in all the reports. By 2003 48% of children attended Barnehauger full time and a further 21% attended on a part-time basis.

However, the costs of the provision, although shared 40/30/30 between government, the locality and parental contributions, cause problems in a challenging economic climate. Increasing costs for an ageing population, further demands on the health service, heightened competition in macro markets, changing patterns of work and possibilities of unemployment pressurise existing systems. This could foster a society where unregistered child provision relieves the pressure for families with small children. The quality of the provision for these young children would be difficult to ascertain.

The following section discusses key aspects of approaches to early years, including consideration of care and education and the underpinning theoretical stance of the provision.

3.2 Early Years Care and Education in Norway

Rui highlighted the research by Bowe et al. (1992) which revealed:

‘Practitioners interpret policy with their own histories, values, and purposes’
(Bray, ed, 2007: 250).

It is therefore necessary to gain an understanding of the rationale of the early years settings in Norway. This section will discuss care and education in the Barnehager (early years settings), a social constructive development model and how this influences the delivery of frameworks for learning, and key aspects of early years provision.

There are many interpretations of the term care, including care as a business or as an approach. Kamerman (2000) suggests 'Historically 'child care' and 'pre-school' have evolved as separate systems' (cited in Neuman 2005: 132). Nordic early years settings developed from a basis of care, while English settings had a strong educational element where education was seen as serving intellectual needs, and care as serving physical and emotional needs. Recently, this has appeared an unnatural divide and both elements are incorporated into settings. According to Mooney and Munton (1997) 'it is now widely acknowledged that education begins at birth and separating education and care is no longer sensible' (McQuail,ed, 2003: 14).

However, this distinction remains the basis of provision. Theories of child development underpin the rationale of practice. The accepted importance of care plays a crucial part in the formulation of early years provision in Norway. Dahlberg et al suggest 'care, as an ethic, has an important influence on how the project of education is conceptualised and practised' (1999: 39). It is reflected in the broad, developmental approach used in Norway, where care for the child as a holistic strategy is accepted. Clarke et al (2007: 7) identify key features of the provision including;

- A holistic approach to caring, upbringing and learning
- A resistance to sequential discipline-based learning, cognitive skills and school readiness

- A disapproval of testing and assessments that rank young children
- The primacy of play

Moser (2006) stresses ‘the fear common amongst Early Years practitioners in the Nordic countries that the pedagogical curricula currently being introduced might change the focus from social learning and play...with children as the active creators of their culture and as actors of their own development and learning’ (ibid: 7). A more formal approach could be promoted by legislators, away from a social construct theoretical basis.

Key features of Nordic provision in a Report for OECD lists aspects including;

- The child as a subject of rights: autonomy, well-being. The child is a member of a caring community. An outdoors child of pleasure and freedom. A time for childhood that can never be repeated.
- Community and parental interests with no pressure placed on children
- A broad national guideline
- Focus on working with the whole child
- Confidence is placed in the child’s own learning strategies and centres of interest
- Growing confidence in the national language
- Broad orientations rather than prescribed outcomes
- The environment and its protection is an important theme
- Formal assessment not required
- Quality control based on educator and team responsibility.

Starting Strong II (2006: 141).

These aspects of provision were also reflected in strategies in school, evident in the ethos of the schools. For elementary (6-9 years) children ‘The learning process must put

emphasis on strengthening pupils to cooperate and work together in both formal and informal contexts...By expressing their ideas and opinions, discussing them and listening to the views of others, pupils learn to communicate. Through cooperation they learn to plan and allocate tasks, find solutions to problems and evaluate results of their efforts. Cooperation between pupils must therefore have a prominent place in school activities (Royal Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs 1999: 69).

However, OECD (2004: 52), when considering Norwegian practice, strongly asserted:

'We believe that one of the reasons for underachievement at age 15 may be the predominance of a culture in which children are under-challenged. We have been impressed by the quality of care provided for children, the emphasis on social development and the priority given for outdoor play but worry that expectations about intellectual development are too low.'

Measures for structures to promote intellectual achievement could meet with resistance. The features described above emphasise the rationale for the provision and reflect an ethos of child development and ways of working that might cause tension when formal, prescribed curricula are implemented into the practice. It could lead to difficulties with behaviour management strategies, where children are unused to demonstrating respect for the teachers. Recommendations from OECD (2004) stated that local provision should include rules for agreed acceptable behaviour.

The broad aims based on co-operation and local values were apparent in pre-school provision. Moss (2003:6) argued 'The Nordic countries ...have decentralised much responsibility for services to local authorities. In practice this means no national standards for services, few 'earmarked' funds and broad curricular frameworks which leave much scope for interpretation to individual local authorities, schools and other institutions.' It will be interesting to observe whether these elements of provision have

changed since that date to reflect new understandings of appropriate care and education for young children.

Norwegian early years provision is based on a social constructivist approach where early childhood is a stage in its own right. Children are seen as competent and agents of their own learning, co-constructing knowledge through dialogue with practitioners. This goes alongside an approach integrating age groups of children from birth to six with groupings across ages for at least part of the time. Well trained adults scaffold children's learning, while 'appropriate interventions are various and require discrimination and professional discretion' (McQuail 2003: 15). Practitioners use their professional judgement to organise and manage the facility, to work as part of a team to devise access to an appropriate environment to promote children's development and construction of learning. The practice is underpinned by developmentalist theories such as those of Vygotsky who claimed that the learner is a social constructor of knowledge through their own experiences. This knowledge is scaffolded and developed through appropriate interactions with others. The scaffolding builds on what the learner can do and was described by Vygotsky as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Jordan (2004) discusses a significant difference between expert –child interaction and that of an equal partnership where the child is the significant partner in the dialogue (cited in Waller 2005: 93). The emphasis in Norway appears to favour the latter approach where the child is, at least, an equal partner, driving interactions. The approach draws on children's interests and development through interaction with others, yet it could disadvantage children if Norwegian is not their first language or there are difficulties with verbalising thoughts, because of speech and language problems or lack of confidence. James et al

(1997: 1) suggest 'The ideology of the child-centred society gives the child and the interests of the child a prominent place in the policy and practices of legal, welfare, medical and educational institutions'. The importance of the child is located in the care of the community. Roggoff (1997) argues 'developmental processes are not just within individuals but also within group and community processes. Learning and development are therefore inseparable from the concerns of interpersonal and community processes' (ibid: 91, 93). The child as a member of the community is stressed. Moss (2003: 7) states 'these understandings or social constructions of childhood ...have not been widely applied as an analytical tool in cross-national work.' Language barriers might cause problems in an empirical study, although case study analysis and interviews could probe such understandings of childhood.

Mooney et al. (2003: 9) provide an overview of the provision stating, 'Nordic countries have: generous leave entitlements; no school-based early years services...; extensive non-school and age-integrated services; entitlement to service; supply subsidy funding mechanisms; and a well trained workforce. This is consistent with welfare regimes, which emphasise generous benefits and universal entitlements and a strong public sector role in provision and/or funding.' However, the cost of the provision is associated with relatively high levels of taxation and needs to be justified alongside other pressing demands on finances.

Woodhead (1979) emphasises the importance of 'Context Appropriate Practice' and 'Practice Appropriate to the Context of Early Development' (PACED). Yet there are multiple interpretations of what constitutes early development. The interpretation would

be specific to the values and beliefs of those working in the settings in the context of the setting.

However, James et al. argue:

'it would be a mistake to overestimate these trends towards context sensitivity. They are a ripple against the tidal wave of globalisation' (1997: 79).

The following section will therefore analyse the challenges posed by the impact of globalisation on approaches to early years literacy in Norway and consider the resolutions formulated through the inclusion of aspects of the macro driver literacy targets from an holistic approach within inter-professional working, into national policies.

3.3 Globalisation and Challenges for Approaches to Early Years Literacy in Norway

'We live in a period of great change, some would even say of paradigmatic transition or movement from one epoch to another'

(Dahlberg et al 2005: 176).

Why would Dahlberg describe the 'movement from one epoch to another'? Globalisation is not new, as discussed in the previous chapter yet the overwhelming change could be viewed as one of uncertainty, even fear. Communication networks and links provide immediate news information. The Guardian (2001) stressed, following the aftermath of the 2001 disaster in New York, 'one illusion has been shattered on September ; that we can have the good life in the west, irrespective of the state of the world' (cited in Cole 2008: 87). Issues happening on a global scale impact on the lives of individuals throughout the world. Environmental destruction and global warming heighten concerns for the future. These anxieties have been exacerbated by the recent credit crisis.

The changes taking place are considered, noting the effects perceived on early years provision, acknowledging the uncertainty the changes will bring. Rui claims 'An increasing duality has become evident. On the one hand, the way the policy is made is highly contextualised and its implementation even more context-dependent; and on the other hand, policy travels globally and has profound impact in locations far removed from its origins' (Bray, ed, 2007: 241). This section discusses effects of globalisation on approaches to early years literacy in Norway, driving the 'great change', for as early as 1989: 147 Einhorn stated 'almost every aspect of domestic policy has become porous – that is substantially affected by regional and global events'. This interaction between local and global, Rui suggests, emphasises global forces for 'Global policy agendas are steering education research as a means of shaping socioeconomic development within countries' (Bray, 2007: 251). This indicates that education is viewed as a preparation for the perceived needs of the society in the future. Yet, the possibility of determining such a society could be questioned. Woodhead concurs, stating 'the international economic situation, the domestic political party constellation, and the cultural context within which the institutions operate are anything but static' (2004: 279). This uncertainty could be reflected in macro dynamics.

Rather than Norwegian policies being astutely allied with other nations to suit the nation's own purposes, as well as those they join, Hall et al claim Scandinavian countries are 'less actors than the acted upon in international politics. They must respond to political and economic changes around them, regardless of their preferences' (2008: 1). Europe is possibly entering an era of post-industrialisation where new forms of employment are gained, with existing industries increasingly under pressure as 'Markets

are opened up and competition intensifies' (Dahlberg 2005: 177). Events produce pragmatic policies in response to issues that arise. Woodhead (2004: 293) uses the term 'Functional democracy' as the country struggles to support the expense of the welfare state. Global markets become vital, not only for the wealth and employment they create, but for the subsidiary benefits of a prosperous economy.

The cost of the welfare state is scrutinised for savings in such a climate. Early years provision is part of that remit. Changes in family structures also cause differing needs. The OECD (2004:18) report notes that 'when municipalities are seeking to balance their budgets they sometimes have to choose between competing priorities – such as education or care of the elderly. The credit crisis focuses attention on financial affairs. Where there is competition for employment workers must be flexible, adapting to changes and being prepared to maintain lifelong learning to keep in work and accept lower wages. Parents move to gain employment or work longer hours; early years provision would need to be affordable and flexible to meet workers needs. Poorly paid practitioners could be expected to supervise larger numbers of young children over longer hours. Rising unemployment would be a precursor to a growing number of children in families living below the poverty line. The government also accounts for national spending. Costs for buildings, maintenance, wages, training or resources are all under scrutiny. Settings could be requested to amalgamate to save costs. Families would need to find the nearest setting available. However, 'Norway is the only OECD country where child poverty can be described as very low and continuing to fall' (UNICEF Report No 6 2005: 4). Children who live in families below the poverty line account for 3.4% in 2005, the third lowest rate in OECD countries, behind Denmark and Finland. During the Norwegian recession

in the 1990's there was a rise in government support for families, while overall Norway decreased their share of social spending' (ibid: 22). Those children whose learning does not sufficiently progress would have serious difficulties in gaining employment in the competitive market in later life. The country could not afford to lose the competition for macro markets and needs a skilled workforce, able to cope flexibly with the required demands of lifelong learning to adapt to changes in employment and to meet the requirements of capitalist leaders.

As workers migrate to follow employment, Norway has tight controls on immigration numbers allowed into the country. The largest groups of non-Western minorities are from Pakistan, Iraq, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Vietnam, Iran and Somalia (figures from OECD 2004: 11). Appropriate curricula frameworks for diverse learning are needed for those immigrants who settle in the country. Hall et al (1999) confirm that 'official documentation in Norway is replete with references to societal diversity, minority groups, community and equality', suggesting these values underpin legislation (Broadhead 2001: 21). However, access to early years provision is more difficult for children from immigrant families. Concerns over the gap between achievers and low achievers in European tests identify that those who are disadvantaged struggle. 'Some pupils are not fluent in Norwegian when they enter school, and 5.9% of all pupils receive additional training in Norwegian. However, a research study by Lodding (2003) has shown that over a ten year period 20% of the pupils with immigrant backgrounds never graduated from the language course. 'We believe that the city of Oslo is considering abolishing the course on the grounds that rather than supporting access to the full curriculum it actually serves as a barrier to it' (OECD 2004: 24). Provision for immigrant children does not

seem to be fully addressing their needs. OECD states 'given the ethnic balance of Norwegian society, we...question whether enough time is being devoted to teaching multiracial issues' (ibid: 56). This could foster a sense of alienation amongst immigrant children who perceive they are not accepted.

International tests drive discussions of standards for early years provision, with the Norwegian government setting prescribed early years literacy guidelines for practitioners. They provide a common basis of work throughout the country, overriding local variations and possible differences in approaches by practitioners. Hall et al. claim 'all countries seek to adapt their curricula to fit their changing social, economic and political circumstances' (2008: 1). In 2001 'mapping tests' were introduced into schools, providing an assessment of children's abilities in reading, mathematics and writing. 'The radical shift to testing in Norway stems from the country's concern about its standing in international assessments' (ibid: 15). Results forwarded to government agencies were fed back to individual schools and parents but the results were not published or reported at school level. 'Individual pupil results are fed back to individual schools and parents; assessment in Norway is not high stakes' (ibid. p.15). The development of these guidelines could be the formulation of Government assessment strategies which compare provision, leading to accountability for practitioners. Broadhead (2001) observes 'Increased political intervention in educational processes has brought tensions, such as the placing of economic self-sufficiency and the retention of a national identity alongside the right of the individual learner to participate in the design of their own learning process' (2001: 34). At present, national curricular frameworks have been introduced in 2006 in early years settings, with assessments tentatively approached in schools. OECD

(2004: 52) emphasise the importance of ‘benchmarks of expected standards’. The absence of the benchmarks leaves difficulties for teachers to know ‘whether a pupil’s progress is adequate’. In such an environment those having difficulties could not be diagnosed, receive the support they need or progress. It notes the need to ‘establish strategies in how to deal with pupils with learning difficulties and pupils at risk of falling behind’ (ibid: 55).

Shared macro dialogue and international assessments result in consideration of aspects of practice which are recommended by global and European organisations. James et al. state ‘the possibility of a universal agenda for childhood remains tantalisingly attractive’ (1997: 79). Parker (1999) agrees and advocates the development of a ‘global civic culture’, where a multinational school curriculum would identify human characteristics needed to deal with complex global crises’ (cited in Broadhead 2001: 21). This would have major implications for the curriculum devised as a global requirement. Hendrick supports the views suggesting there is ‘the political and cultural struggle to extend the developing constructions (and reconstructions) of childhood through all the social classes, to universalize it’ (James et al. 1997: 34). This standardisation would lead to changes in provision, yet others would prefer to have perceived ‘traditional’ aspects within the prescribed guidelines. A Minister for Education (2001) stressed ‘A tiny fraction of the world’s population lives here and if we don’t take care of what is our legacy...no one else is going to do it’, with an emphasis on national heritage and traditions (Broadhead 2001: 10). Tension could arise between a desire to provide national standardised provision and local ‘traditional’ care, with a loss of professional status for practitioners, less power for local authorities, and lack of provision for diversity.

Strategies could strengthen national control of the system, with reference to national frameworks and possible assessments. Professional networks within the country and in a wider European framework, particularly with other Nordic countries, could be enhanced to share and discuss common issues in the implementation of the national agenda in early years settings.

Concern for children's abilities to thrive in the future leads to a continued emphasis on a broad framework for learning where young children can investigate and explore their surroundings. The recent prescribed literacy framework could pose tensions for practitioners who are required to implement it. Financial constraints could bite into the provision, again disadvantaging those who cannot pay, for Norway 'has not matched the provision of early childhood education and care in some other OECD countries, where provision for those aged 3-6 is free and near universal' (OECD 2004: 50). Disadvantaged families and their children could experience feelings of exclusion, lack of support and understanding of their circumstances.

The following section now considers the effects of globalisation and international policies on two aspects of early years practice identified from macro recommendations and targets, namely literacy as a crucial skill and an holistic approach.

3.3.1 A Framework for Literacy in Norway

According to the UN Education for All Report in 2006:

'Literacy is a human right. Literacy skills are essential in today's societies, conferring benefits on individuals, communities and nations'

(www.unesco.org/education).

The importance of literacy as a crucial skill is demonstrated in a change of emphasis which is evident when Barnehager were moved in 2004 from the Ministry of Child and

Family Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Research. Education has been firmly placed in the early years remit and could be dominated by ideas from the educational system. Awareness is apparent of Norway's European standing, including literacy rates of progress. European 'league tables' identify successful areas of literacy provision and promote shared discussions between countries regarding possible best practice and standards of quality. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000 focuses on Literacy and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) a comparative study of reading achievement of 10 year olds takes place every five years. In 2003 OECD found that 'by international standards, young Norwegian adults had good literacy skills, with few poor performers' (2004 Review: 57). The OECD review found of 22 countries Norway ranked second in the Adult Literacy survey, while the UK came . However, the gap between underachievers and their average counterparts was 'considerably bigger than the other Nordic countries and slightly better than the OECD average' (ibid: 28). Possibly questions of equity for children from families who have difficulties accessing early years provision, could be responsible for the differing results for the attainment, as the results of children from unknown educational backgrounds are not included in the scores. The report claims 'it is clear that Norwegian pupils are underachieving in comparison with international peers at the age of 15. Paradoxically, it is also clear that the Norwegian adult population has excellent skills of literacy in comparison with other countries. (ibid: 34). Possible reasons for this paradox include the low response rate for the tests, which did not contain persons with unknown educational levels and could exclude those with negative results. These figures, arrived at a national level, could reflect practice at a local level, where practitioners strive to justify activities

and provide perceived 'acceptable' responses. The report does highlight the evidence of 'some scattered evidence for a decline in school standards in literacy' with PISA 2000 and 2003 giving 'some evidence that Norwegian 15 year-olds are relatively unmotivated, in both reading and mathematics domains, by international standards' (ibid: 35). Perhaps early years provision did not succeed in establishing motivational foundations for children. Such speculation clearly needs more research, however.

There has been a 'change in orientation of public debate about the education system from one to do with *inputs* ...to one more concerned with *outcomes* (what have pupils actually learned?)' It states 'what is expected of each pupil in terms of speaking, reading, writing, arithmetic and information and communication technology skills' (OECD 2004: 16). This change in orientation is demonstrated in the guidelines introduced for early years settings. In 2006 Norway introduced guidelines for early years literacy from the central government. They were in response to a desire for a capable workforce in a 'knowledge economy' that could meet 'the challenges of the future' yet it could also have been in response to the widening gap between underachievers and those of average ability. This could be a result of policies regarding disadvantaged children. While those children with special educational needs are actively encouraged to attend Barnehaager, universal EC services have 'not led equal access to services for immigrant children. Norway, where immigrant groups constitute 3% of population, less than 40% of these children attend Barnehaager' (McQuail et al 2003: 5). Jensen raises a concern stating 'The Nordic model's emphasis on student participation, democracy, autonomy and freedom requires a lot of children, because they are seen as agents in their own learning processes, and as competent persons who are assumed to engage actively in the surrounding world' (2009:

17). Young children who do not speak Norwegian, lacked confidence in a new country or were unsure of themselves, could fall behind in their learning in such a system, without support and structure from an adult. They would need familiar features in the provision to feel safe, secure and able to learn, which could be difficult in an environment where learning is based on 'traditional' Norwegian stories and 'identity'.

Funding to support the provision disadvantages those on low wages. Frameworks which emphasise activities based on 'traditional' stories could exclude children where there is a concern to assimilate rather than integrate them. Provision for ethnic Sami children has been promoted, although a Barnehave in Oslo was set up by Sami parents after difficulties in accessing local provision. According to a Report to the UN 2006 Norway 'defends the rights of indigenous peoples' (www.norway.org.uk/policy/organizations/un). Tensions could arise for practitioners in response to the introduction of the literacy guidelines as previously they have been able to devise their own frameworks, with reference to local requirements. Jensen argues 'The absence of planned structured programmes and learning standards may obstruct the implementation of a curriculum adjusted to pre-school children's right to and need for learning possibilities' (2009: 18). Practitioners could find implementing a structured programme within a child-centred approach, challenging. Accountability could also be considered as a national strategy to assess standards. As early as 1997: 5 Granheim, a Senior Advisor for the government claimed 'The schools in Norway are traditionally sceptical towards external evaluations, and very few such evaluations have been undertaken.' He continues 'There is a broad consensus in Norway among school politicians, teachers and researchers, that the school system of marks as practised today provides insufficient information in a National

evaluation system on conditions in schools.’ Sensitivity would be needed to ensure a revised curriculum would be appropriate for all children who attend, including those from other countries. A holistic approach aims to address the needs of all children as individuals.

3.3.2 A Holistic Approach to Early Years Literacy in Norway

There are different interpretations of what a holistic approach entails. For some it is a cross-curricular approach to learning, while for others it includes the whole range of aspects for the child including social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. In Norway a holistic approach concerns the whole child in the broadest sense, perhaps to reflect and compensate for family life. Literacy as a ‘holistic skill’ involves supporting children’s development through informal opportunities, for example when communicating with parents or carers and the child, listening to children’s play, responding, interacting with and questioning them. Children’s ideas are valued and adult interactions occur on equal terms to encourage the child’s personal explorations. Individual’s learning can evolve in an open manner with no testing or targets containing predetermined goals. The natural environment is highlighted as the children’s learning space to enable the children to develop their interests. It reflects the social, community based structures in the Norwegian municipalities.

However, as early as 1982: 136 Van der Eyken observed family structures were changing in Norway where ‘the child must prepare itself for being able to master a future with great challenges and changes in family life, economic life and societal conditions.’ The empirical study sought to ascertain whether these structures remained or changes

were experienced where planned, formal literacy skills were considered by practitioners, responding to ‘challenges and changes’ to economic and ‘societal conditions’.

A holistic approach as perceived in Norway is evident through the policies to promote such provision. ‘ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) in Norway has long been regarded as part of the general family policy, and establishing ECEC institutions was seen as an important tool in order to enable women to participate in the work force’ (Eknes, 2000: 9). The provision was based on a notion of care for the child. Esping-Andersen (1999) cite the development of defamilialisation welfare regimes where policies were developed, especially childcare, that enabled women to reduce their family responsibilities particularly for caring. ‘So far the Nordic welfare regimes stand apart for the extent to which they have pursued and achieved this aim’ (Moss et al 2003: 6). In a study of fifteen European countries women’s employment was found to be ‘highest in the Nordic countries’ (Mooney 2003: 4). However, Qvortrup questions the rationale for the provision for ‘The demand for more kindergartens... is unequivocally understood as a positive children family policy by parents who both want to work. Can we be so sure it is also a positive children’s policy? (James et al 1997: 102). Solberg considers the quality of the care provided in the fast growth of the ECEC institutions claiming the situation constitutes an important background for political claims for better day-care facilities’ (ibid: 129).

Guidelines from the national government were broad and open to local interpretation. The 1997 guidelines included five areas of child development to be encouraged in early years’ settings;

- Community, religion and ethnic dimension
- Culture, music and practical activities

- Language and communication
- The environment and nature
- Physical techniques and health

It emphasised the importance of local geographical resources as a crucial learning environment. Assessment is by observation and used to inform the school of achievements made by the children. There was no external reporting of children's progress in the wider community.

Children experience a coherent provision where services have an integrated structure, for example a setting which provides access from birth to six, including flexible hours and timings to suit working parents. This approach should be readily interpreted within settings as it forms part of the existing practice. Neuman states 'Municipalities in parts of Norway have integrated kindergartens, leisure-time activities, schools and children's welfare services into a Department for Growing Up, with a responsibility for a child's total environment (2005: 136). Young children were perceived to have no problems moving from the Barnehager to primary school, although those who did not attend the provision had difficulties adapting, particularly those who were unable to communicate in Norwegian.

Inter-professional working can be viewed as a reflection of the holistic approach, where professionals work together to address individual children's needs. Barnehager operate on a flexible basis with times to accommodate working parents. A three year training programme is becoming common in Nordic countries, where practitioners can further develop their training to progress into other areas of care. A holistic approach with inter-professional working appear to be fundamental to practice in Norway. A prescribed national literacy framework is a new initiative. Challenges for implementation could

occur when individual literacy learning programmes are placed within a community play based environment. A child-centred philosophy is required to implement prescribed strategies to prepare the child for readiness for the future. Alexander (1992) argues 'imposing new practices on teachers without a parallel exploration and assimilation of underpinning rationales leads to changed but not necessarily improved practice' (Broadhead 2001: 32). Jensen substantiates this claiming 'The pre-school teachers are...met with very demanding requirements; they are expected to create an inclusive educational environment and at the same time support each child in his/her free choice and interests, aiming at competence, development and learning. (2009: 17). Observing and questioning the practitioners' complex role would serve to give an understanding of the pressures faced in the role, as a leader and manager of early years literacy, in such a setting.

Reflection in this study is made of local attempts to devise ways to help young children who are constructing, subconsciously or consciously, their own strategies, strengths and views of their surroundings which will help or hinder their survival in a challenging globalised world.

The vulnerable young members of society are buffeted by the effects of globalisation, over which they have no control, but are living with its effects which, through their construction of the world, will remain with them for the rest of their lives. Jensen asserts 'the pre-school teachers' key responsibility is to create these learning environments in order for the children's curiosity, imagination and creativity to be stimulated, and at the same time these learning environments should enable children to acquire experiences with meeting the surrounding society's demands, culture and challenges' (2009: 17).

This chapter has contained an analysis of the context where a child-centred, holistic approach has developed concerning early years literacy. It identified inherent weaknesses, such as a lack of support for disadvantaged young children, the need for wider curricular perspectives and support to promote intellectual challenge. Consideration was given to the effects of globalisation which are having major repercussions for the provision in Norway, through financial demands, employment requirements and diversity, while highlighting the fragile nature of the provision in an increasingly pressured and competitive environment. The empirical research element of the study seeks to explore the changes and challenges practitioners have perceived when implementing international policies and recommendations through national frameworks, which will impact on the children in their care. The following section will therefore describe the local setting in Norway for the empirical study.

3.4 The Setting for the Empirical Study in Hedmark, Norway

Hedmark is the third largest county in Norway and makes up the northeastern part of Ostlandet, the southeastern part of Norway. It is only one of two Norwegian counties with no coastline. In the county are the towns Hamar, Kongsvinger, Elverum and Tynset. Hamar is approximately 100 miles from Oslo. Hedmark is one of the less urbanized areas in Norway, where about half of the inhabitants live on rural land, with mountainous areas in the north and extensive stretches of forest which supply much of Norway's timber.

Hedmark represents an example of Norwegian practice as:

- The distance from Oslo means it is influenced by local decision making
- It is a rural area and demonstrates a strong cultural background

- Provision in the locality uses a social construct approach
- Use is made of the environment
- The national early years framework has been introduced in the area
- Training practitioners is addressed by the local University

The pilot study occurred in Flekkenga Kindergarten, Hamar while the resulting case study research took place at Vestenga Kindergarten, Hamar, Hedmark.

The structure of the next chapter reflects chapter 3, to aid comparison of approaches to early years literacy in Norway and England. It considers economic, political and cultural perspectives followed by a discussion of international drivers of literacy as a crucial skill and as a holistic approach.

Chapter 4 Challenges for Approaches to Early Years Literacy in England

This chapter explores the context of approaches to early years literacy in England. It addresses the second research question based on the English context;

(RQ2) How does a study of national context contribute to our understanding of challenges in early years literacy approaches?

It begins with a discussion of the context in economic, political and cultural forms, followed by an overview of early years education and care in England. Challenges arising from the impact of globalisation are discussed with specific recommendations from macro targets and the resolutions as the incorporation into policies in England, namely early years literacy, and a holistic approach. The setting for the empirical study is described and possible challenges for practitioners when implementing the recommendations, identified.

4.1 The Context of the Study in England

‘International evidence introduces the idea of cross-national sharing of experience and practice in areas of common interest, and in a rigorous way that enables account to be taken of national similarities and differences’ (McQuail et al 2003: 3). The implementation and resolutions of macro recommendations for early years literacy will be different according to the context in which they are placed. The previous chapter considered the approaches to early years literacy in Norway where the ‘children are understood as co-constructors of knowledge who have worthwhile and insightful understandings of the world around them’ (Janzen, 2008: 292). However, Jensen argues

‘the Nordic model is very different from the structured programmes’ in England (2009: 18). He suggests:

‘there are huge differences between the Nordic and the Anglo-Saxon models for ECE (Early Childhood Education) in terms of learning, standards and assessments’
(ibid: 13).

How have the differences in context affected the resolutions for implementation of the macro recommendations? Solberg highlighted the differences stating ‘the two countries differ, for example, in the degree of urbanization: compared to central parts of Britain, Norway can be seen as a collection of villages’ (James et al 1997: 130). The following section will discuss the context of approaches to early years literacy provision in England from economic, political and cultural forms, with consideration of factors which have promoted the manner of the development of the provision in the country.

4.1.1 Economic Form and Early Years Provision

England is a relatively densely populated area. Moss noted the 1999 census which stated the UK population was 59,501,000 while Norway’s population was 4,462,000 (2003: 11). Historically, England was the first country to experience the industrial revolution. Large numbers of workers, including young children, were employed in harsh conditions until reforms were introduced. The notion of gaining skills and knowledge for the preparation of future employment and to provide a compliant workforce, were powerful pressures for educational systems. Petrie argues ‘provision and systems are a means of social control and should be analysed as such’ (Brannen et al 2003: 77). This affected young children who were, or preparing to become, part of the workforce. When the government debated the school starting age in 1870 the importance of earning a living was considered, with beginning and ending statutory schooling early seen as a solution for children to begin

employment early. In 1876 children from three years old could be taken into school 'babies' rooms which offered training in alphabet recitation, picture recognition and marching to music (Anning 1991: 3). Therefore early years provision developed from a need for childcare to support working parents and to give disadvantaged children the opportunity to 'catch up' with their progress in readiness for school and employment.

The cost of the provision was also a factor. While governments were willing to oversee provision, through guidelines for practice and external regulators, it was up to parents to access the provision they required for their children.

4.1.2 Political Form and Early Years Provision

Callaghan's Ruskin speech in 1976 emphasised the financial implications of government policy, demanding 'value for money' and stressing the need for a monitoring system in order to 'maintain a proper national standard of performance.' He argued there was a strong case for the so called 'core curriculum of basic knowledge' (ibid: 7). The National Commission for Education in 1995 promoted the belief that investment of taxpayers' money in increased support for children aged 3-8 years would ensure that all children achieve a good grasp of early years literacy and basic skills early, to provide a foundation for future learning. This strengthens government control over the provision through directives for frameworks taught, with regulations and accountability to ensure funding can be accessed.

While maintaining and strengthening this control through regulation, a neo-liberal perspective was apparent where parents could access the provision of their choice. The DfEE in 1998 stated 'It is up to parents to decide what kind of childcare they want for their children. This is not a matter for the government' (Brannen et al 2003: 29). Private

providers played a central role in delivering services in the childcare market. The growth in numbers of working mothers created a growing childcare market which needed to follow external regulators requirements to compete in the burgeoning range of provision. The findings of the external regulars had a profound impact on the viability of the provision, with adults readily able to transfer their children to other childcare arrangements if the subsequent report was not favourable. By the end of the twentieth century childcare was not just for children in need but a desirable commodity for working families. National standards and regulations existed for all providers.

This legislation had links with those of other countries. Alliances forged between nations had an impact on the policies devised and implemented. The American /UK alliance during the Iraq war highlighted the close links between the two countries. This liaison between the nations was apparent when early years policies were devised. The background to the government's New Labour approach drew heavily upon the USA Headstart programme. The purpose of Headstart was to give children from low income families a 'head start', to support their transition to formal schooling with an emphasis on school 'readiness' and an outcomes based approach. Consideration was also given to European guidelines and targets when England referred to the EU agenda regarding early years provision and took account of proposals, such as the European Commission's ten year strategy 1996-2006.

Government policies fostered a range of provision, statutory frameworks and external regulators which meant reference had to be made by practitioners to national guidelines, as they were accountable to the regulators. This impacted on the provision through control over what was provided and awareness that evidence would need to be produced

to support the assessment of good practice. Changing patterns of delivery could result, with practitioners eager to satisfy the demands of the regulators and in turn gain acceptable publicity to encourage parents to send their children to provision deemed successful by the national regulator, Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills). Financial considerations and viability of the provision would be connected to these findings, therefore promoting a strong desire to obtain a satisfactory result. An outcomes based approach developed from an historical cultural context.

4.1.3 Cultural Form and Early Years Provision

The emphasis on a preparation for industrial work fostered the encouragement of strategies to promote a compliant workforce. Any successes were developed on an individual basis, with strategies implemented such as the 11+ testing for the school system in the 1944 Butler Education Act, which determined the next steps for children's education.

Yet changing family structures and employment goals encouraged new perspectives on appropriate arrangements for young children. In 1967 the Central Advisory Council for Education claimed, 'mothers with young children who also worked were to be deplored' (Brannen et al 2003: 33). However, while in 1951 12% of the workforce in England were women, by 1998 the number had risen to 30%. Although childcare was the subject of public policy, the responsibility and practice was firmly placed in the private domain. This encouraged a view of the provision as a market commodity where parents were the consumers. It led to a diversity of provision, with local authority departments organising nursery classes and schools, while social services departments encouraged playgroups,

family centres and the private sector. Government intervention led to a 'regulation of the market while rectifying 'market failures' (ibid: 35). Children in this market scenario were objects of their parents' purchasing decisions to access provision they deemed most appropriate.

However, according to the DfES by 2002 99% of 4 year olds were attending some form of educational provision, with 59% of 4 year olds in infant classes. The rise in the number of women working and the changing view of early years provision as a beneficial requirement for young children occurred. This developed when there was anxiety by some school leaders over concerns of the management of school budgets. Increased financial support could be claimed with the attendance of young children in school, as funding was given on the numbers of children attending. Pressures of accountability and ensuring children progress through their individual targets, further influenced the organisation and management of learning to support the compilation of evidence to satisfy external regulators. Callaghan's Ruskin speech 1976, claimed children and education were perceived as 'capital' for the future sustainability of the country. Early years provision was viewed as an important foundation for this capital, to enhance school performance through the children's later enhanced achievements.

The importance of ensuring a suitable workforce is apparent where support is needed in other areas of society. The ageing of populations has financial implications for social welfare provision but also heightens the importance of a workforce able to sustain the older members of society, through gaining employment and having sufficient extra resources to support them. Moss argues 'The ageing of the European population is of

profound consequence for any study of services for children and indeed for European societies as a whole' (2003: 11).

Therefore early years provision was viewed as a significant factor in preparing children to be successful in school, providing a workforce for the future which could in turn strengthen the economic position of the country. This view was reflected in the national alliances forged. 'The English-language world, including the UK, mostly limits itself to the study of English-language documentation. For many native speakers, this closes off work on other languages and limits understanding of other countries to what can be gleaned through the medium of the English language. Conversely, it means that the English-language world is exposed mainly to research from the United States' (Moss 2003: 8). While English speaking countries share their understanding of policies, less collaboration could be achieved through those who are not. This would strengthen the importance of findings of comparative studies, including those between Scandinavian and English speaking countries.

The following section gives an overview of the rationale for approaches to early years literacy in the context in which they developed.

4.2 Early Years Education and Care in England

According to Janzen (2008: 290) in Norway the child is viewed 'as co-constructor of knowledge, identity and culture'. Children are active constructors of their own learning and lead the interactions with adults. They can interpret the culture in which they engage in their own ways. However, in England 'the traditional sociological position of the child as cultural reproducer constructs the child as a relatively passive recipient of socialisation in order to transform the child into an adult...and reproduce what society has deemed

important.’ In England ‘the child is viewed as a reproducer of knowledge, identity and culture’ (ibid: 290). Children are perceived as ‘not there yet’, with universal goals of development to form the progression for learning, with a consideration of those who do not conform possibly at risk from failing to achieve prescribed goals.

Activities were devised based on enabling the child as an individual to progress through developmental stages. Rather than waiting for the child to accumulate enough experience to move on to the next stage, the adult or more experienced child supported the learner’s progression. Progression was devised through such theories as those of Piaget (1950), Vygotsky (1962) and Bruner (1966). Settings were therefore highly ‘organised and planned and there is less emphasis on children’s self-initiative’ (McQuail 2003: 14).

The emphasis was on teacher initiated and directed tasks with basic academic skills within a structured framework comprising core knowledge for the children to learn. Links were sought with schools for ‘in the UK...there is a strong emphasis on school ‘readiness’ with parents being encouraged to ‘educate’ their children in the skills and knowledge which will allow them to succeed in school’ (Smidt 2006: 85). According to Brannen et al (2003: 25) ‘England has a National Childcare Strategy’ in 1998, although ‘for those settings linked to schools the focus could have been on education for early years rather than an emphasis on care.’

A basic curriculum was sought for all children to succeed as part of the future workforce. David Blunkett, the Secretary of State for Education, in the foreword to a key government green paper, the Learning Age (1998), described the purpose of learning as ‘the key to prosperity –for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based

economy of the twenty-first century. This is why the Government has put learning at the heart of its ambition' (Bottery 2001: 206). The curriculum was linked to the perceived requirements for the future economic wealth of the country. The introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998 gave rise to pressure for some practitioners who were encouraged to implement the strategy in Foundation Stage settings for three and four year olds. In 1999 the Chief Inspector of Schools argued that the inclusion of reading, writing and numeracy in the early years curriculum would help to overcome educational disadvantage experienced by children from poorer backgrounds. The desire to ensure all children had the necessary skills needed for the workforce led to further guidelines for early years practice. The introduction in 2000 of the Curriculum Guidelines for the Foundation Stage aimed to give parity of provision to all three and four year old children. The OECD publication *Starting Strong* (2006: 141), noting key features of the English early years system, included the following curricula traditions:

- The child is a person to be formed.
- An early years centre is a place of development, learning and instruction. Children are expected to reach pre-determined goals.
- There is a prescribed ministerial curriculum, with goals and outcomes.
- There is a focus on learning and skills, especially in areas of school readiness.
- The national curriculum must be 'delivered' correctly.
- It incorporates a growing focus on individual competence in the national language. There is an emphasis on emergent literacy practices.
- Prescribed targets are set at a national level.
- Indoors is the primary learning space, with resources focused here.
- Learning outcomes and assessment are required.
- Quality control is evident with inspection undertaken by external regulators.

This approach to learning strives to enable children to progress in their learning yet Gammage argues that the best care and education possible is 'not about 'hot-housing' children, or about forcing them into early academic endeavour' (2006: 241). He cites evidence from neuroscience research which states 'early childhood is the period when the

human organism responds to the environment with such malleability that the very architecture of the brain is affected' (ibid: 236). This reflects the Norwegian approach to learning, although it could be appropriate in an organised environment where consideration is given to the need to stimulate the child. John Dewey (1897), an American philosopher and educator described his 'educational creed' stating, 'I believe that the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of social situations in which he finds himself' (ibid: 236). However, this could be part of the remit of the facilities provided in the English system, where children are encouraged to discuss their learning.

This stance is taken further by McQuail (2003: 14) who claims that in the instructivist approach:

'there is an emphasis on preparing for school and focusing on literacy and numeracy, aiming for equality of educational opportunity and the means to improve later education. This approach is taken where early childhood services for children 3-6 are seen as the initial stage of schooling. Here grouping tends to be according to age, the pedagogical approach more formal, with higher staff/pupil ratios and specialist teachers. The setting is more organised and planned and there is less emphasis on children's self-initiative.'

The system suggests an outcomes based approach where 'the overriding principle of implementation becomes coverage rather than understanding, more especially so perhaps when associated with a punitive inspection system as in England' (Broadhead 2001: 22).

Practitioners are held accountable by inspection systems and therefore required to maintain evidence of their success to ensure viability in a competitive environment between providers. The emphasis on academic progress of the child could have implications for other areas of children's development which could be given scant attention. A 2007 UNICEF report on the well-being of children in twenty-one of the world's richest countries ranked the UK bottom of the table (Lester et al 2008: 3). This

suggests a need for further focus on a holistic approach where children's needs in other areas, as well as those concerning academic achievement, are addressed. Broadhead (2001: 34) claims there are 'concerns about teachers serving the state in the implementation of the curriculum rather than serving learner's needs and interests through the curriculum.' This could influence the delivery of early literacy strategies where practitioners seek to use aspects which readily provide evidence, such as mark making, to the detriment of speaking and listening skills. It also heightens the importance of demonstrating an environment for learning about literacy. This is reflected in the displays devised, where expectations are apparent to provide a learning environment which demonstrates the learning taking place within it. A 'print-rich' learning environment is encouraged, with stimulating displays created to celebrate children's work, while enhancing the learning taking place. Andreae and Matthews highlight the importance of good quality provision which includes 'instructive learning environments (Pugh et al 2008: 52). Guidelines for excellence were developed to assure practitioners of appropriate ways to deliver early years approaches. This included the growth of Early Excellence Centres started in 1998.

Issues of policy and quality were influenced by the alliances and networks forged between England and other countries. Mooney (2003: 9) notes commonalities between English speaking countries. He states 'English-language countries tend to: offer least paid maternity and parental leave; have limited school-based early years services (mostly one or two years and part time only); have mostly age segregated services; have an approach to providing childcare services which emphasises markets, high private sector participation (including for-profit providers) and demand subsidy funding mechanisms;

and have relatively low trained and poorly paid childcare workers.’ If this is the case early years practitioners would need to maintain their commitment and dedication to the learning and development of the young children in their care, while being faced with difficult decisions concerning the sustainability of the setting.

Within the challenging circumstances change is inherent in the system. A strong American influence has not only affected early years provision but the children who frequent them. Lash and Urry (1994) believe ‘As societies have changed and cultures become globalised and increasingly commercialised, a whole children’s culture has developed’ (cited in Smidt 2006: 89). Smidt agrees, contesting ‘Societies are less and less able to secure their cultural and defining boundaries’. The following section considers the effects globalisation and the resolutions formulated to address the challenges has had on the approaches to early years literacy in England, with particular regard to an holistic approach working, highlighted in the macro recommendations.

4.3 Globalisation and Challenges for Approaches to Early Years Literacy in England

According to Abbott et al (2001: 133/4) discussions in England speak:

‘of a world in which there is no longer disagreement about purpose and value, only about the most efficient systems of management for delivering universally agreed objectives.’

These ‘universally agreed objectives’ would need to be implemented by practitioners who may hold different values. Urban (2008: 140) claims ‘There is a powerful top down stream of knowledge presented as relevant for practice. Practitioners at the bottom are required to implement the policies.’ This was emphasised in the Children’s Plan which stated ‘The single most important factor in delivering our aspirations for children is a

world class workforce able to provide highly personalised support, so we will continue to drive up quality and capacity of those working in the children's workforce' (Balls 2007: 11). Practitioners could find the aspect of implementing the many policies and new initiatives to 'drive up quality' challenging for 'Policy articulated at the top is rooted in defence mechanisms developed to cope with the job, while the policy that emerges from practice is rooted in survival' (Lipsky 1980: 187). What are the challenging issues, affected by globalisation, that early years practitioners are required to consider?

A creative approach is needed where children can respond to changing factors, such as employment and new, developing industries. Lauder et al (2008: 7) state 'improving early childhood education and childcare is linked to lifelong learning and a number of international policies where the rationales are those of economic development.' Eyre (1978: 169) stressed the need to be literate and have an holistic, creative, knowledge base to survive. Those who were not able to achieve this would have difficulties for 'a situation exists in which the population continues to increase but where human labour is increasingly dispensable'. Emphasis is placed on transferable skills where children are 'learning to learn' rather than receive formal prescriptive teaching. This change in emphasis was reflected in the name change for the department responsible for the provision from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in 2007.

The welfare state includes an ageing population who are not working but need to be provided for. In the global credit crisis the cost of early years provision is a concern. Clark et al (2007: 27) question 'Might there be a dichotomy...between the ideology of improving childhood but without the financial investment to make it a reality?' Training

needs could be incorporated into work based learning, for example as demonstrated in the growth of the Early Years Professional Status qualification. Nursery schools could be deemed expensive to maintain, with costs cut through closure and children moved to nursery classes linked to existing schools. The Rose review of admission policies recommended young children should be admitted to early admission classes in schools. Birth – three provision could then be accessed through private facilities on site. This supports parental employment when the ‘new discourse of policy now tells parents that childcare is not just acceptable but positively to be desired’ (Brannen et al 2003: 33). The rationale is that children achieve more when given access to early years provision. However, to further achieve the aim to meet the needs of working parents flexible hours are required, which is facilitated through such means as extended schools and Children’s Centres.

However, in a competitive environment there could be a perceived need to strive for evidence of attainment. Barber (1999) states ‘The treasury is increasingly demanding hard evidence that the investment they are making in education is delivering outcomes’ (Aubrey et al 2000: 197). One of the means of judging achievements is through results from the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) profiles. Pressure from colleagues teaching classes of older children could also be apparent, through the importance of results and a satisfactory report from Ofsted. The new Ofsted (Office for Standards for Education, Children’s Services and Skills) came into being in 2007. It brings together four formally separate inspectorates. It inspects provision for children and young people and education and training for learners of all ages. This strengthens the remit of the inspectorate and in turn, accentuates the importance of the findings. Early years

practitioners could be pressured to provide evidence that the children in their care were progressing along the prescribed frameworks.

A framework for literacy in England is part of the process of learning and development described. The next section discusses the resolutions devised in the form of recent policies introduced to promote early years literacy.

4.3.1 A Framework for Literacy in England

Evidence (DfEE/QCA 2000; English et al 2002; Locke and Ginsborg 2002) suggests ‘There is some evidence ...from England, that concentration on outcomes and the impact of the literacy strategy is pushing out spoken communication. Less qualified practitioners tend to concentrate on the literacy and numeracy goals, which are more prescriptively defined and specified than the others’ (McQuail 2003: 15). The Early Years Foundation Stage framework, which became statutory in 2008, provides six areas of learning guiding practitioners through children’s developmental stages from birth -five. It is underpinned by a broad remit of four strands including, a unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments and learning and development. These broad aims encourage a play-based early years learning environment. Children’s progress is assessed during the year the children are five years old through the EYFS profiles. These assessments are specific targets which the teacher and the age phase team decide the child has reached. Dahlberg et al (1999: 2) query the use of assessments where ‘They aspire to methods that can reduce the world to a set of objective statements of fact, independent of statements of value and the need to make judgements.’ Whitehead (2002: 80) agrees stating:

‘Goals underestimate young children’s social, cognitive and linguistic abilities and are full of low-level expectations and narrow objectives for early literacy: using phonic knowledge to write simple regular words, or just naming and sounding letters and writing in upper and lower case forms. These examples cut across the evidence that

simple regular words are not the easiest to read and write, and rarely connect with young children's passions and interests.'

Evidence is needed to support the assessments which could lead to practice where documentation can be readily accumulated. When the profiles were initially introduced John Bangs, head of education at the NUT, was concerned the profiles attempted to 'ride two horses, to provide information for value-added scores and to be diagnostic' (Rodger 1999: 43).

The introduction of Letters and Sounds (2007), following the Rose Review, provides a developmental approach in a pack of information and activities to use while children are in the early years leading through primary school. However, practitioners should be aware of what children need to understand before they can learn to read and write, what they have to do before they become literate and what type of adult support and environment best supports literacy learning. In order to implement the strategies effectively the approach the practitioner uses is personal to them in their daily interactions with children. Lynch (2009: 192) argues, 'In understanding literacy as a social practice, the focus has shifted from viewing language and literacy as a set of rules to using literacy in authentic events. Reading and writing are considered elements of larger practices that are socially patterned and cognition in literacy learning is seen as guided by social participation and relationships.' The following section considers how an holistic approach to literacy could be considered for, as Sylva (1994) stated:

'The most lasting contribution of early education to a child's development is the way it shapes motivations, self-concept and social commitment- not formal 'school' skills'
(Abbott et al 1999: 165).

4.3.2 A Holistic Approach to Early Years Literacy in England

In 1994 SureStart used the term 'educare' to describe the way education and care could be combined in early years settings. This was reflected in the development of Children's Centres where early education was integrated with health and family support services. Flexible timings of the sessions, usually open from 8am to 6pm, supported parents working patterns. If places are unfilled the centre could close through lack of funding. Decisions regarding appropriate provision for young children could be influenced by the ramifications of closing existing settings to provide access for children in a setting which incorporates flexible timing and multidisciplinary working. The cost of changing provision could be a factor where an existing add-on to school could be the cheaper option. Early years practitioners involved with the existing provision could voice their concerns about changes, although the closure of nursery schools to place young children in early years settings in schools appears to be continuing. Yet Lumsden believes working in partnership with health and social care has led to inter-professional issues 'being integrated into traditional education courses' (Waller 2005: 52).

Competition between schools could also be an issue as access to the early years provision could encourage parents to keep their children at the school, therefore boosting the numbers and viability of the school where most children attend the early years provision. Practitioners would be aware that they need to 'sell' the provision to parents to encourage them to send their children to their setting. This could impact on networking arrangements between early years colleagues who perceive they are competing for children to maintain the viability of their own setting.

While competition between providers continues, provision is underpinned by a holistic approach which is promoted throughout schools. The Every Child Matters agenda, introduced in 2003, promotes a holistic approach to learning through specific outcomes identified for children aged birth -19, that is; be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being but is being reviewed by the coalition government.

These requirements mean a major overhaul of provision for children both in the classroom and through organisations incorporating a range of services to enable disciplines to work together. Practitioners devise plans to include the agenda, checking that all children access early years literacy activities within the remit. The Government's Children's Plan (2007: 2,18), claimed a 'new role for schools... regardless of traditional institutional and professional structures' with schools 'at the heart of the community'. Practitioners will be required to implement these changes to ensure 'quality and capacity'. The agenda stressed the importance of professionals working in a collaborative manner to support the progress and well-being of the children to 'make effective links' and 'tackle all the barriers to learning' (ibid: 2).

Legislation in 1989 from UNCRC highlighted the need for professionals from a range of disciplines to work together to promote the well-being of children. Inter-professional working brings together professionals from differing disciplinary backgrounds to collaborate and co-operate to promote the well-being of the children they are responsible for. In schools teachers liaise with colleagues in other professional agencies as required, for example gaining access to specialist support for speech and therapy. Children could be at risk if the agencies are not working together to support children, as individuals

could be referred to various members of the team without a coordinated or shared response, as happened in the Victoria Climbié (2000) and Baby P (2008) cases where lack of liaison had tragic consequences.

In a competitive environment where evidence is needed of outcomes in the setting, the focus could remain on children's attainment of specific goals, to the detriment of a broader view of individual progress. In such an atmosphere concerns could still be missed in the endeavour to achieve goals which can be readily assessed. Urban (2008: 139) states that 'Early childhood practitioners' have a 'contradictory professional context' where 'they are expected not only to give children a 'good start' but to achieve predetermined, assessable outcomes'. Practice could be challenging where 'practitioners are increasingly being told what to do, what works and what counts' (ibid). The empirical research will determine whether this is the case in the settings used, or whether practitioners have incorporated the new frameworks into their existing practice with ease. The empirical study will attempt to ascertain the extent to which practitioners in England are using a holistic approach incorporating liaison with parents /carers to develop children's literacy learning from the home environment, building on what children already know, providing opportunities for children to interact with each other through the use of their experiences in the learning environment around them, devising activities from their own interests with adults supporting this informal stance through responding to children's ideas and interacting with them on an equal basis. It will explore whether children are using their environment to formulate activities and follow their interests as individuals within the group, from the resources around them.

4.4 Settings for the Empirical Study in Lincolnshire, England

Early years practitioners in Lincolnshire follow the national statutory framework for early years settings as interpreted by the Local Authority and their own understanding of appropriate practice. However, this prescribed pathway of learning could hinder new insights into relevant strategies for the children as individuals, for example a ‘chaotic’ approach to children’s learning where it appears random and haphazard but children are able to make links between experiences. Difficulties could arise in the implementation of a holistic approach when there is a focus on a small band of learning skills with a further narrowing of the areas of learning due to concerns over accountability and the desire to provide evidence.

These contemporary issues will be explored in the empirical studies undertaken in Hedmark and Lincolnshire. The following section will discuss the rationale for the placing of the study in Lincolnshire.

Lincolnshire is a mainly rural county in the midlands area of eastern England. It stretches from the Wash in the south to the river Humber in the north. The North Sea spans the east side. Grains, sugar beet and vegetable crops are the main farm products. Industries include food processing, oil refining, chemicals and steel production. There are northern ports of Grimsby and Immingham.

Lincolnshire has been chosen for the study as;

- It is approximately the same distance as Hedmark from the capital
- Provision is influenced by local authority recommendations
- It follows the approaches used in Lincolnshire
- It uses the Early Years Foundation Stage framework

- It is recommended as a partnership setting for the University College
- It participates in the recognised accountability measures

Hibaldstow County Primary School Foundation Stage was used for the pilot study to ascertain the quality of the questions posed in the semi-structured interviews. Barton St Peter's Church of England Primary School early years setting was used for the case study in Lincolnshire.

The previous chapters have concerned global, international and national perspectives, leading to an exploration of local contexts. The next chapter examines the methodology used to do this.

Chapter 5 The Research Methodology

The research study explores how recommendations from global organisations and the resulting influence on national policies, have changed early years literacy approaches in selected settings in Norway and England. The specific focus considers the complex challenges and resolutions to early years teachers when implementing the recommended changes in the respective countries.

The major research question is;

What are the challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches in two selected sites in Norway and England?

The research sub-questions evolved as a response to answering the major research question. It was divided into sub-questions which were discussed in turn in chapters throughout the thesis, in order to provide findings for the major research question. The questions moved from consideration of global contexts, to national contexts and finally to specific localities. Analysis, on the other hand, arose from findings from the empirical research which enabled insights into philosophies and practice in the settings which could be used as useful indicators for issues raised in the previous chapters and sub-questions. Through this structure, findings from the interview questions, observations and documentary evidence provide a window which could be used to give a deeper, focused understanding when considering issues on a wider scale when answering the major research question.

The literature review in chapter 1 discussed the first sub-question:

(RQ1) What challenges are suggested by an investigation of the global context for early years literacy approaches?

Chapters 3 and 4 considered the second sub-question:

(RQ2) How does a study of national context contribute to our understanding of challenges in early years literacy approaches?

This chapter focuses on the local context and responds to the third sub-question:

(RQ3) What are the most appropriate research instruments to investigate an understanding of these challenges in the local context?

The chapter discusses the research methodology used for the study. It consists of two sections, beginning with a justification for the approaches taken and the research methods used. It incorporates consideration of the research rationale, key questions, epistemological approaches, choice of methods and a discussion of the samples chosen. The section is followed by a description of how the research methods were organised and implemented. This includes consideration of documentary evidence, interviews, observations, validity, reliability, triangulation and ethics, leading into methods of data analysis and means of dissemination of the findings.

5.1 Justification for the Approaches used.

This section includes a rationale for the research methodology used, key questions, epistemological approaches, choice of methods and the sample chosen.

5.1.1 The Research Rationale

The main reason for the research design was a desire to explore the complex challenges and resolutions faced by early years teachers when devising approaches to early years literacy from global organisations, particularly the desire for a standardised European framework. A visit to Norway in 2004 identified practice which compared sharply with that experienced in my setting in England (see Appendix 1). This influenced the selection of settings used for the empirical study. A setting in Norway and another in England were chosen as they represented philosophies in practice from opposite ends of child-initiated and adult-led approaches. Rui (2007: 261) claims ‘By the time policies reach local

educational institutions, they have been transformed many times' (Bray et al, eds.). Therefore, in order to ascertain the challenges policies created in the different underlying philosophies it was necessary to scrutinise practice in the local context, in this case an early years setting. MacNaughton et al (2001: 3) state 'research is simply a tool that helps us answer important questions about early childhood.' Through reflexivity the researcher sought to reflect on practice and underpinning philosophies while gaining a deeper understanding of how they had evolved with possible drivers. It also sought to ascertain whether these drivers produced initiatives in practice which were converging or not between the different countries.

Archer (2007: 5) described reflexivity as 'the means by which we make our way through the world.' It suggests that people have an internal conversation with themselves to reflect upon events and happenings around them. This internal dialogue interacts with the social world through communication with trusted others who support the deliberations. In the study relevant literature and participants views provided insights into new perspectives and understandings of challenges posed by trends in early years philosophies and how they are responding to wider demands in through globalisation. Reflexivity concerns others views about happenings in the dynamic social early years settings. Archer (ibid: 4) suggests 'reflexivity is the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa.' This was achieved through a scrutiny of personal concerns and how to deal with them, speculation about the action needed to be taken to gain the findings to resolve the questions and who would be involved in this. Reflexivity is 'socially embedded, as embodied dispositions, shaped by one's location within social fields' (Kenway et al, 2004: 528). An interaction occurred between myself and the action decided upon, to move the situation forward and deal with new practices which may be unfamiliar from my existing dispositions. The thesis sought to identify new understandings of the situation through an exploration of economic, cultural and political backgrounds regarding early years literacy approaches in Norway and England in earlier chapters. Scrutiny of personal views and concerns is bound up with cultural values and the beliefs of those around the person which have subsequently impacted on the person's perspectives of issues and practices. It is also influenced by subjective aspects such as

personal interests. This supported my understanding through the acquisition of a knowledge of participants perspectives and philosophies. The internal conversation is 'responsible for the delineation of our concerns, the definition of our projects and, ultimately, the determination of our practices in society' (Archer, 2007: 16). This internal conversation is therefore dynamic and the researcher responded to happenings in different ways to enable them to accommodate the new perspectives. The research became a learning journey through reflexivity from a perspective at the start of the study to a deepening understanding of views, ideas, perspectives, drivers, trends and analysis of possible happenings and suggestions of future developments concerning universalised norms of practice.

Reflexivity is used to adjust thinking about existing views while accommodating new thinking about approaches. This reflexive inner dialogue provides an ability to 'speculate about ourselves, any aspect of our environment and, above all, about the relationship between them' (ibid: 63). Therefore, there was a requirement to think about the new perspectives and consider the extent to which they influenced existing personal views of the situation.

Archer (2007: 319) argues 'The practice of autonomous reflexivity is certainly expected to rise considerably as globalisation intensifies.' The need for reflexivity appeared crucial for the focus of this study due to the rapidly changing nature of issues from globalisation and drivers affecting change.

As early as 1998 Gray noted 'If, as seems likely, pre-five education is likely to become one of the most important areas of growth, then development needs to be based upon major programmes of research which include studies of the nature of early learning' (Ruddick and McIntyre, eds: 57). Research into learning approaches for young children is described as 'vital' by those informing policies in England (Moyle et al. 2002: 137). In 2010 early years policies were being reviewed in Norway and England. Findings from my research were specific to two settings and do not purport to have generalisations to the wider population. However, analysis of findings should inform policy and practice,

providing through reflexivity an insight into issues raised by practitioners working in early years settings and resolutions implemented to accommodate similar global and European recommendations in differing existing approaches, while discovering indicators for further policy developments. Research informs professional dialogue, with a comparative study raising awareness of different approaches to learning. 'Educational research is a critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational action' (Bassey, 2008: 39). It would hold interest for early years professionals working in settings in the UK and further afield, including policy makers, advisers and academics who are concerned with early years issues.

The key questions for the empirical research evolved from discussions in the literature review where areas of macro recommendations were identified, namely literacy as a crucial skill and an holistic approach. The questions sought to provide a deep understanding of the complexity of the situation in the contexts using different approaches and therefore needing to accommodate differing aspects to comply with global and European recommendations. Findings would help to inform the major research question.

5.1.2 Key Questions

Questions 1, 2, 3 and 8 concern the challenges experienced by early years teachers when implementing early years literacy activities.

Questions 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 explore the holistic approach to literacy.

1. What initiatives concerning early years literacy have been introduced in the last three years?

This question opens the perspective of challenges to the early years teacher and how he/she might have resolved them.

2. How has this influenced the approaches used in the settings?

This develops question 1 and begins to open discussion of a range of initiatives the teacher might have been faced with.

3. What challenges has this caused in implementation?

Practitioners consider personal views of the challenges and resolutions experienced.

4. What role in the settings does the adult take regarding early years literacy?

This question was incorporated following the pilot study and a suggestion to gain an understanding of the different roles in the respective countries and the impact this has on learning.

5. How do assessments influence practice?

The question considers the remit of the early years approaches, how broad the curricular framework for the children was and the possible constraints on it.

6. How are children with Norwegian/ English as a second language supported?

Links with other professional disciplines could be discussed in the response to this question.

7. How are parents involved in the practice?

The collaboration with parents could be raised, to determine whether parents and practitioners share understandings and what aspects this entails, whether an holistic or skills based approach.

8. Are there any initiatives or aspects of practice that practitioners are particularly pleased and concerned about?

This provides the opportunity to raise issues that might be deemed important which the interviewer may be unaware of. It highlights the practitioners perspective and viewpoint.

5.1.3 Epistemological Approaches

According to Bryman (2001: 11) ‘An epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline.’ This knowledge could be gained from a quantitative or qualitative approach. This study is based on interpretivism, used in qualitative methods, which is the term given when the subjective meaning of social actions are highlighted. ‘Interpretivists...employ qualitative methods in order to address the meaningful character of human group life’ (Travers, 2001: 9). The study considers differing views of those in the context, drawing on perceptions of participants relevant to the research focus and responding flexibly to themes as they emerge. The research study uses a qualitative stance, following a previous Masters level study in 2001, based on the perceptions of early years teachers of approaches to early years literacy but using quantitative methods. While providing relevant data, it did not fully explore the constructs and meaning behind the responses, or enable the researcher to delve further in depth into the responses given. Only a superficial understanding was gained rather than a knowledge of underlying issues. Quantitative research follows the position that the social world reflects the natural world and can be studied along similar lines. This positivism contains an objective bias. Knowledge confirmed by the senses or phenomenalism is advocated, gained through the gathering of facts and measured. This would generate too narrow a perspective for this study as it was intended that a complex variety of issues identifying challenges, should be discovered. A qualitative design can

produce data that illuminates the interviewees perceptions of changes and the challenges they foster.

A qualitative approach can provide some understanding of the context in which the study takes place which is highly relevant for the study of settings in different countries. It links to findings in the literature review for the 'primary purpose' according to Adamson and Morris, of an interpretative perspective is 'to provide a better understanding of pedagogical approaches and how they reflect those societies' cultures' (Bray et al eds, 2007: 272). A quantitative approach has an ontological position known as objectivism, whereby social orders have an existence that are independent in their functioning of the people involved. This study uses a qualitative approach and is based on a constructivist view, where people can shape the social orders they are involved in, which would support a comparison of the settings through gaining different perceptions built on the context in which they are placed. The framework for the design is socially constructed as the data was accrued from the settings in England and Norway and there was a desire to 'seek understanding of the world in which they live and work' (Creswell, 2008: 8). A qualitative approach is embedded in the social context in which it occurs as the strategy covers an awareness of the environment and the group within it, to obtain a rich understanding of what is taking place in the selected settings in Norway and England. It provides data to enable similarities and differences of ways macro recommendations have been accommodated to be compared and contrasted, with recommendations of good practice identified.

Themes drawn from the literature review and identified in global and national policies can be scrutinised to ascertain the extent to which they have been implemented and the

manner in which it has been achieved. Differences and similarities between the approaches implemented can be explored in depth, with new perspectives identified and information gained about them, for example differences in perceptions of the role of the adult, the specific approach to learning and what that entails, activities and resources provided for the children or the use of the learning environment. A greater understanding can be gained of the approaches, with possible strengths and weaknesses identified and recommendations of resolutions and good practice disseminated.

Qualitative methods were used to gain an understanding of different perspectives of adults involved in the setting, enabling a wide spectrum of views to emerge, for the study was exploratory and ‘the researcher seeks to listen to participants and build an understanding based on their ideas’ (Creswell, 2008: 30). Themes can be uncovered through the participants’ perspective from their various roles within the organisations. These roles are noted in Appendix 7. Interpretations of the participants actions are seen from their own perspective. A quantitative study, while providing a broad understanding from a large number, would not have given the deeper understanding and perceptions of issues pertinent to this study of those involved.

Qualitative research was appropriate for research with young children as observations of their routines and activities could be viewed. Observations could form part of the data collection through daily observations of literacy input or child tracking. Edwards (2001:117) states ‘Whatever version of qualitative design and analysis we select, we find ourselves getting to grips with the complexities of the social world of early childhood’ (MacNaughton et al, eds,). This was evidenced in an action research project of the early years unit where the researcher previously worked, forming part of a national scheme

named Effective Early Learning (2002). It was demonstrated that findings can provide a rich source of evidence as ‘qualitative research is concerned with the quality of data it produces, rather than just its quantity’ (ibid:53). Bassey (2008:48) agrees noting ‘Teaching is such a complex activity that ... simple statements just do not exist.’ This method allows the researcher to gain a glimpse of the child’s world.

Another advantage to a qualitative method is that themes can be flexibly constructed as they develop. Findings from the data provide sufficient information to gain an holistic view, with complex issues addressed. The approach is inductive, where data is collected and themes drawn out of the findings. This may occur in a cyclical process as data and theory develop. In comparison a quantitative approach is deductive. A theory is identified at the beginning of the process and data is collected to correspond with this. The data is subsequently analysed and the findings given. Fairbrother argues ‘The qualitative studies... tend to be based more fully on the views of the subjects of research, including the meanings they attach to literacy and the reasons and explanations they themselves provide’(Bray et al, eds, 2007:60). This is particularly relevant in a study which aims to discover interviewees’ perceptions of challenges and resolutions. The findings are unknown and cannot be predicted, providing new ideas, themes and theories.

5.1.4 Choice of Methods

The research aimed to explore challenges for early years teachers in two differing approaches when implementing early years literacy international and national recommendations and how they addressed them. It featured the perceptions of those who worked in the early years settings, or those who were involved with it. An understanding of the contexts, discussed in chapters 3 and 4, supported appreciation of differences in the

approaches and why they could have occurred. The empirical research study sought to build on this understanding and ‘catch the complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity’ (Stake, 1995:xi). It was decided to use case studies as according to Yin (2009:4) they ‘retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events’. They provide a rich description of activities and happenings which can give an outsider’s perspective of the context, while participants could be unaware of familiar practices in their organisation. In a case study ‘a revelatory investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyse a phenomenon previously inaccessible to social science enquiry’ (ibid:48). These can provide new understandings of others roles and inform early years policy and practice. Bassey (2008:xi) claims case studies are a ‘prime strategy for developing theory which illuminates educational policy and enhances educational practice.’ Although case study designs have various forms, for example a descriptive case study which seeks to give an account of the setting, a comparative case study design, where each setting was studied and the findings compared, was deemed to be the most appropriate. While encouraging reflections of approaches to early years literacy, comparative research can ‘inform professional discourse’ (ibid:51) by developing discussions regarding different approaches and opening insights into new ways of working. The case studies were embedded in their cultural contexts but they remain pertinent to discourse between those interested in early years provision.

Three methods were used in order to study the perceptions of challenges and resolutions of early years professionals and the context in which they work, in depth. Policies used in the setting were scrutinised, followed by interviews with teachers and those involved with the literacy provision to gain an understanding of various viewpoints and lastly

observations of routines and procedures were used to ascertain what was happening in practice. This choice of methods included documentary sources, interviews and observations which enabled triangulation of the findings.

However, these rich and deep insights into the case study settings required sufficient data to enable a thorough understanding to be achieved. This process demanded a rigour in the procedures to ensure credible data collection occurred which could be used to tease out pertinent aspects of early years literacy provision and identify the challenges and resolutions faced by early years teachers in the settings. Validity refers to the problem of whether the data collected is a true picture of what is being studied, (McNeill, 1990:15). Reference was made to the scrutiny of procedures to enable this to occur for Bryman (2001:30) notes the importance of the 'integrity of the conclusions...generated from a piece of research'. This implies the concern of the researcher to collect data that is an accurate representation of the focus of the study. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose 'trustworthiness' as a term for assessing qualitative research as 'they are critical of the view...that there are absolute truths about the social world that it is the job of the social scientist to reveal' (Bryman, 2001: 272). Care was taken to ensure comparable samples and settings were used to provide meaningful findings for data analysis and an accurate record of happenings maintained.

Questions of reliability were considered when designing the research study. 'Reliability is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable' (Bryman, 2001:29). Oppenheim (1992:144) concurs stating 'reliability refers to the purity and consistency of a measure, to repeatability.'

The research methods encompassed documentary evidence, interviews and observations for a case study is ‘an enquiry which uses multiple sources of evidence. It ‘investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context’ (Johnson, 1994:5). The study did not claim to have generalisation factors as the settings were peculiar to themselves. However, the findings could be of interest to colleagues concerned with early years issues.

5.1.5 Documentary Evidence

Adamson and Morris (Bray et al, 2007:274) suggest there are a number of ways of gaining an understanding of issues. These would be relevant for an empirical study of early years literacy approaches to gain a depth of understanding through different forms of data. They consider four forms;

1. Ideology –books, academic papers, policy documents
2. Planned –policy documents, teaching materials, intended assessment materials
3. Enacted –teacher and child actions, classroom interaction
4. Experienced-change in the student, teacher attitude and behaviour, students cognitive processes

These forms were addressed in the study. Ideology covered the background reading in the literature review while documentary evidence was provided through handbooks and policies in the settings. Enacted data was sought through observations. An experienced form was gained through interview findings.

5.1.6 Interviews

‘Interviews have a particular focus and purpose. They are initiated by the interviewer to gain information’ (Johnson, 1994: 43). In order to gain this information carefully

organised schedules and procedures were devised to provide valid, reliable data which could be used for analysis. According to Powney et al (1987: 1) interviews consist of 'planning, organisation, recording, transcribing, analysis and reporting.' Therefore rigorous procedures were needed rather than casual discussions. Yin (2009: 68) views the interviewer's role as one of an investigator, where there is 'continuous interaction between the theoretical issues being studied and the data being collected.' The researcher's background was considered to ensure minimal bias in the interview procedures and a flow of communication occurred.

'The presence of the interviewer and observer may bring disturbance to the working arrangements, the lifestyle or the relationships of the people we involve' (Johnson 1994: 5). It may prompt the interviewee to reflect on the content of the interview and influence future behaviour. In order to understand the interviewee's situation it was necessary to have an empathy for them in their own role. There were different understandings of issues and these were viewed through awareness of the interviewee's individual situation and practice.

The interview was the interviewer's schedule, yet ultimately the interviewee had control as he /she could end the interview earlier if chosen. Therefore, a shared understanding and appreciation of the value of the study was required. Powney et al (1987: 18) suggest the purpose of informant interviews is to 'gain some insight into the perceptions of a particular person (or persons) within the situation. The interviewer attempts to help 'the interviewee express his or her concerns and interests.' The interviewer could gain some understanding of the rationale for the activities, policies and routines in the setting by listening and sharing information about it. It was intended to attempt to minimise

disruption in the setting and not influence the interviewee in the responses given. It was endeavoured to achieve a rapport where it could be, according to Kvale (1996:36) a ‘rare and enriching’ experience for the interviewee ‘who may gain new insights into his or her life situation.’ The research design used semi-structured interviews, enabling participants ‘to discuss their interpretations of the world’ (ibid. 266). Semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewer to respond to key issues raised and develop arguments.

However, constraints such as time, appropriate space and relevant procedures had to be addressed prior to the start of the interviews taking place. Interviewees needed reassurance of confidentiality, an understanding of the expectations of the study and knowledge of the ethical guidelines followed. Language differences were considered to ensure misconceptions in translations were addressed.

5.1.7 Observations

Whole setting observations facilitated the exploration of relationships and happenings in the setting, in order to fully understand the whole (see Appendices 5 and 6). According to Croll (1989:86) the observer ‘attempts to arrive at an understanding of the meaning of social relations and social processes in the classrooms.’ Adamson and Morris (Bray et al. eds, 2007: 265) agree stating, experienced learning ‘encompasses all the experiences – both planned and unplanned, desirable and undesirable –that a learner has within the context of an educational institution.’ Observations provided an immediate recount of happenings within the setting, although it was acknowledged some recordings might have been missed, or recorded according to the observer’s bias. Every endeavour was made to ensure an accurate record was maintained. This was supported by similar observation formats and interview questions used. Croll (1986: 90) notes ‘It is important that

researchers make it clear that they want teachers to carry on as normal and not to set up a teaching situation that they feel the observer would be interested to see.’

Considerations for the observer included arriving early to become familiar with the surroundings and where an appropriate place to observe unobtrusively would be. Care was taken not to influence happenings in the setting or the children and adults working there. Relationships were important to maintain a sound working atmosphere and foster cooperative and collaborative management of the study proceedings.

5.1.8 The Samples Chosen

The two sites were chosen to enable a consideration of how different contexts can influence teachers’ choices, despite responding to similar global recommendations. They were carefully selected to ensure they were comparable yet demonstrated practice which provided opposite sides of the spectrum for adult-led or child-initiated approaches. They could provide information-rich data to raise awareness of practice in another country and therefore reflect upon personal practice. Levinson in Shacklock et al (1998: 102) agrees stating comparative study or study in another country provides ‘a glimpse of the universal, and therefore of the self, in the particularities of the other’. This understanding through case study research could promote self-reflection and deeper awareness of strategies used in personal practice.

The visits and initial awareness of the specific contexts of the settings formed part of my academic role at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, establishing liaison with professional collaborative links for academics and trainees at the respective Universities. The two sites were chosen to provide comparative situations and promoted the differing approaches. They were situated in the outskirts of towns, had similar rural/industrial

surroundings and socio/economic backgrounds. Interviewees were chosen to represent corresponding roles at the two sites.

Observations of practice provided evidence to compare with interview responses, triangulated with documentary source material from the settings. Individual child tracking observations were used with random selection providing a representative selection of children. In this way each child within the attainment groupings in the settings had an equal chance of being selected.

To ensure reliability time sampling involved making a code at precisely regulated times. Boehm et al (1997:87) suggest 'Time sampling is an appropriate procedure to sample behaviours that occur in rapid succession, such as children's interactions or teacher verbalisations.' The following section considers the research methodology and how it was organised and implemented. This includes discussion of the pilot study, methods used for the study, validity, reliability, triangulation, ethics, consideration of data collection and analysis and concluding with a description of the dissemination of findings.

5.2 How the Research Methodology was Organised and Implemented

The focus of the research developed from my work as an early years coordinator at a large unit attached to a primary school. The research had direct implications for personal practice. Stake (1995: 49) argues 'There is no particular moment when data gathering begins. It begins before there is commitment to do the study: backgrounding, acquaintance with other cases, first impressions.' A visit to Norway, observing practice in kindergartens in Hedmark, confirmed the view of a different approach to learning for

young children compared with that promoted in our own setting. The initial visits to settings in England and kindergartens in Norway were made in 2004 to gain an overview of the rationale for the settings and the feasibility of undertaking the proposed study (Appendix 1). Issues considered covered language differences, travel and work arrangements and the possibility of forging links with providers in the respective countries to gain permission to undertake the research. This was further developed in 2006 when aspects such as meeting those responsible for the provision, organisation of the interviews, addressing possible language differences, ascertaining settings that would provide a valid comparison and gaining consent for the study in the localities.

A pilot study was arranged in summer 2009 at Hibaldstow Primary School, Lincolnshire, England and Flekkenga Barnecharge, Hedmark, Norway. The interview questions and observation proformas were considered and used for the pilot study (see Appendices 2, 3 and 4). Adaptations to the procedures were undertaken and the study began in Autumn 2009 and continued in Spring 2010 at Barton St. Peter's Primary School, Lincolnshire, England and Vestenga Kindergarten, Hamar, Norway.

5.2.1 The Pilot Study

Consent for the pilot study to start was agreed by Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln and Hibaldstow Primary School, as part of their partnership agreement. Consent was sought from the Headteacher, staff of the school and parents /carers of the children observed and tracked. Consent for the study at Flekkenga, Norway was sought via my colleague at Hedmark University College, Hamar who contacted the manager of the kindergarten to ensure permission to carry out the research. The manager made contact personally via email and welcomed the participation of his Barnecharge into the study.

The interviews covered a wide range of items but were worded slightly differently between the interviewees to account for their various roles. An example is given in Appendix 2.

The key questions were those numbered but possible inclusion in discussions was to be raised in the sub-points. The pilot interviews taken with staff at Hibaldstow Primary School identified that the questions were too long and general in nature. Interviewees lost interest through the questioning and key points were not raised as the questions were too structured to allow for personal thoughts and impressions of what was happening in the sessions, which were given insufficient time to be pursued. Further care needed to be taken to ensure the location for the interviews remained quiet, without interruptions, so that interviewees were not distracted by other issues while they were responding to the interview questions. 'Running a few pilot interviews focuses the mind wonderfully on potential data collection problems and gives the interviewer a chance to modify practices, before the investigation proper begins' (Powney et al, 1987: 125). This proved correct and many changes to the original structure of the interviews and modifications to the observation formats were undertaken. Shorter, more specific questions were trialled at Flekkenga Kindergarten and demonstrated the successful strategy of allowing time to suggest issues relevant to the provision, for example the role of the adult as an observer who allows children to attempt tasks and activities of the child's choosing but does not take an active role in giving children activities to do. It was an interactive role between adult and child where the child took the lead in the exploration of learning, with the adult supporting and guiding. Following the pilot study the questions were changed to fewer semi-structured questions pertaining to particular key issues, allowing the interviewee

scope to develop points raised where he /she felt appropriate. The specific role of each interviewee was identified to avoid confusion, for example between an early years teacher and assistant.

Observation proformas took two formats, one for the observation of the whole group, while the other tracked one child to gain an understanding of activities accessed during the day. They provided space to note routines and events happening during the day while giving data for specific items relating to early years literacy approaches.

These observation formats were adapted to a more efficient use following the pilot study, where both proformas were given the same aspects to identify during the observations to allow greater use of comparison between data collected. Timings in the whole session observation were added to identify the length of sessions, while specific aspects of literacy and the approaches used were noted. The original two minute snapshots arranged for the child tracking proformas were changed to ten minutes to give sufficient time to gain a worthwhile picture of happenings.

5.2.2 Documentary Evidence

A range of documentary sources were used to support the development of analysis of the comparative settings. National policies gave perspectives of what was to be achieved and how this was to be delivered in each country, specifically in England the Early Years Foundation Stage framework (DCSF: 2008) and in Norway the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (MfER: 2006). Booklets in the settings provided an overview of provision, supporting knowledge of the backgrounds and communities they served. Relevant policies gave further understanding of appropriate organisation for the provision. Samples of children's mark making were taken to analyse the emphasis placed

on aspects of early years literacy provision in the settings. Photographic evidence provided clear data for the organisation of the learning environment and what was deemed important within the settings to aid children's literacy development.

5.2.3 Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured to allow interviewees to develop their ideas and explain their thoughts and impressions of issues. They lasted approximately an hour each. All interviews took place in a suitably quiet room away from colleagues and children. At Barton St. Peter's classrooms at the end of the day were used for early years assistants and teachers interviews and the Headteacher was interviewed in her office. The nursery managers were interviewed in their office in turn. The Early Years Adviser was interviewed at her office in Brigg Council Offices, North Lincolnshire.

At Hamar the early years assistants and first years practitioners were interviewed in an office in the kindergarten. The Headteacher was interviewed in her office. The teachers interviews took place in a study at Prestrud Skole. The Early Childhood Adviser was interviewed in her office at Hamar Council Offices, Norway.

The interview questions followed the procedure outlined. The interviewee was welcomed and the purpose of the interview explained. Permission for taping the interview was requested and assurance that the transcripts would be agreed prior to inclusion in the study was acknowledged. In providing an overview of the purpose of the research study it was explained that the setting had been highlighted as one offering high quality provision by the University Colleges partnership departments in the respective countries. It was hoped to disseminate good practice and raise awareness of the complex role taken by an early years teacher. The interviewee's name, role and brief profile were requested.

Care was taken to provide a persona as researcher of someone who would listen and be empathetic to the interviewees' situation. Stake (1995: 102) notes 'Research is, in some senses 'neutral ground' a non-threatening context for respondents since researchers are not likely to be able to exercise any direct impact on those lives.' It was hoped interviewees would be sufficiently able to trust and be confident in the situation that they would be able to give responses which reflected their thoughts about issues. It was emphasised that transcripts would be sent to them and their agreement sought prior to inclusion in the study.

5.2.4 Interviewees

The interviewees were chosen to correspond with the comparative settings (Appendix 7). The early years teachers in the respective countries were central to the study. Two early years assistants supporting their role were chosen to give a different perspective of the work undertaken in the setting. The Headteachers (Styrer) of each setting were interviewed to gain an overall picture of what was hoped would be achieved and whether this was different to what was happening in the classroom or kindergarten room. This was also considered when interviewing the person from each country who was responsible for overseeing early childhood provision in the locality. Two teachers from the schools serving the settings were interviewed, to gain another view of what it was hoped would be achieved in the early years provision regarding literacy and how this impacted on their work. Lastly, two first years managers from each country were interviewed to gain another view of children's achievements in their care as they moved towards the early years setting under scrutiny. Stake (1995:102) highlighted the need for

the researcher to ‘consider all views, all interpretations, of equal value.’ This was particularly important when collecting data from professionals with differing roles.

Therefore, the early years teachers formed the hub with those working around them, citing their perspective of what was to be achieved in the setting. Interviewee responses sought to unravel the complex challenges and resolutions the early years teacher would need to make to accommodate the variety of views surrounding the provision planned for.

5.2.5 Observations

Observations were undertaken in two forms. A holistic approach focusing on a general overview of activities was used to gain information regarding routines, staff deployment and children’s activities and interactions in the setting. The second type of observational style used took the format of child tracking procedures, where individual children were closely tracked to discover specifically the activities each child accessed. The final arrangement of formats for data collection consisted of those in Appendices 5 and 6.

Both formats covered the same items to discuss the importance of language based interactions, how the activities were organised and delivered and what use was made of the whole learning environment, indoors and outdoors. The whole session observation included the setting, date and number of staff and children present. This was to aid reliability procedures to ensure observations were replicated between the settings and to support data analysis by giving an indication of the organisation and management of the group. Observations were carefully timed to enhance reliability and replication. The section to the left of the format enabled observations of activities, interactions and incidental happenings occurring during the day to be tracked, to gain an overview of procedures and routines. The sub-sections to the right of the format were included to

maintain a record of key issues regarding approaches to literacy. The first three items covered interactions and assessed the level of speaking, listening and language opportunities present. This could indicate socially constructed cognitive development. Items three, four and five reviewed the dynamics of the groupings of children and could be cross-referenced with other points in the observations to ascertain the extent the approach is instructive or constructive. Items six, seven and eight develop the approaches further by assessing how the activities were devised, whether from the child's interests or adult-led or initiated. Note of the use of the indoor and outdoor environment could indicate differences in the approach to literacy experiences, for example whether adults were preoccupied with adult-led or child-centred activities and if so which area of the learning environment was used. This was kept as a checklist to identify the time each aspect was used.

The child tracking formats followed the same initial structure, including the name of the setting, the date and the number of children and staff present. The children in the rising five year old group were organised into boys and girls. The formats facilitated records in depth of the experiences of the child throughout the day, both planned and unplanned, and tracked early years literacy approaches accessed. The timings were replicated in each setting to ensure consistent procedures were followed.

5.2.6 Validity

Construct validity was considered, with care taken in the choice of settings in the respective countries, interviewees within the settings and individual children tracked during observations to gain representative samples, with each aspect of the research planned and deliberate. 'The objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of

an everyday or commonplace situation' (Yin, 2009: 40). Data was triangulated as 'this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study' (Creswell, 2003: 191). Documentary source material from the settings, policies, observational data and rich responses from interviews provided findings which were used for triangulation. It was necessary to determine any bias prior to the research, with inclusion of data which might show discrepancies. Internal validity encompassed keeping a record of events and findings and sending transcripts of the interviews and observations to the interviewees where they could respond to any changes required. This ensured data was checked and had respondent validation. Observations and interviews taking place in the participants setting, children and adults who are familiar with receiving visitors and the appropriate role of the researcher, supported the maintenance of the integrity of the proceedings and credibility of findings.

External validity included peer review of the work as part of Bishop Grosseteste University College's action research group schedule and wider scrutiny through meetings and workshops with colleagues from other Higher Education establishments as part of the national organisation TACTYC (Training, Advancement and Cooperation in Teaching Young Children) schedule, where the researcher was an executive member.

5.2.7 Reliability

According to Yin (2003) 'qualitative researchers should document the procedures of the case studies and document as many of the steps of the procedures as possible' (Creswell, 2003: 190). This advice was adhered to as interview questions and responses, observation formats, findings and documents from the settings were collected and stored. According to Oppenheim (1992: 159) 'The notion of reliability includes both the characteristics of

the instruments and the conditions under which it is administered.’ It was proposed to replicate the data collection conditions in each setting. An appropriate venue for interviews was secured with consistent timings and questions administered. Consistent use of observational formats, for example in the weekdays and timings data was collected, aided the reliability of the procedures.

5.2.8 Triangulation

Stubbs et al (1979: 3) claim ‘no single technique or theory can capture the complexity of classroom life’. Therefore triangulation of findings sought to gain ‘a purchase on the field of study by looking at it from a number of vantage points’ (Edwards in MacNaughton et al, eds, 2001: 124). Documentary evidence provided information regarding the background of the setting, its ethos, policies, strategies used, staff working there, how the learning environment was organised and perspectives of the learning styles designed by the management of the setting to promote learning for the children. This supported the desire to scrutinise documentary evidence to triangulate findings with interview and observational findings.

Information was gained through interviews concerning differing views about how changes in approaches to learning had been implemented in the early years literacy provision. Observations during child tracking procedures and overviews of the routines of the setting provided data concerning what was happening in the setting, the organisation used to facilitate learning, the style of learning promoted, interactions between children and the activities they participated in, the range of tasks accessed and the role of the adult to facilitate this. This data was triangulated as it ‘helps to counteract threats to validity’

(Johnson, 1994: 8) by confirming or otherwise, documentary evidence with observations and interview findings.

5.2.9 Ethics

The work adhered to Bishop Grosseteste University College's ethical guidelines, with ethics permission gained for the study. Permission was sought from the Headteachers of the settings to undertake the research in their organisations (see Appendix 8). Consent was gained from parents / carers of children in the settings and informed consent forms were signed by interviewees prior to the interviews, with permission sought to gain agreement of taped interviews. Transcripts of the interviews were checked by interviewees and observation formats were sent to Headteachers to gain approval of content before being included in the findings. Care was taken to ensure no participant was coerced into being observed or interviewed, for example if a Headteacher was eager to participate, while others were not sure but did not want to offend their line manager. The researcher sought each person's approval to commence the interviews and parents /carers and children involved were informed of the procedures and did not have to participate if they wished not to.

Ethical issues followed procedures at Bishop Grosseteste University College's partner University at Hamar, Hedmark. The LA Adviser in Hamar and Headteachers of the settings were contacted to gain permission for the research. The Headteachers of the pilot setting and the empirical study informed parents /carers of the proposed research. The focus of the empirical study was on the approaches used and could be observed as means of incorporating literacy. Hence key elements of the findings included interview responses and observations of ways in which literacy was delivered in the settings. This was observed through formats for data collection of different approaches used to address this, for example using whole class adult-led delivery or child-initiated activities.

All the interviewees spoke English well. The pilot study identified that the interviewees spoke English well. They suggested they preferred not to have an interpreter as they could speak freely to the interviewer and develop arguments with their knowledge of English. Possible differences in meaning between Norwegian and English were scrutinised during the interviews to ensure interviewee and interviewer had agreed

understanding of the responses. Transcripts of the recorded interviews were sent to the individuals concerned to confirm the accuracy of the scripts.

5.2.9.1 Data Analysis

Data collection was planned and deliberate, with procedures to gather data for analysis. Themes were drawn from documentary evidence and cross-referenced with interview responses and observational data. Glaser and Strauss (1967: 76) suggest a substantive theory – grounded in research on one particular substantive area ‘may have important general implications and relevance’. They continue, these aspects teased from the data could ‘become a stepping stone to the development of a formal grounded theory’. Transcripts of findings were scrutinised to discover what the challenges and resolutions were perceived to be. This was achieved by open coding procedures where underlying themes within documentary evidence were linked with findings from interview responses and observational data. The codified procedure for analysing data ‘allows readers to understand how the analyst obtained his theory from the data (ibid. 229). It involves sorting findings by code and finding similarities and difference between the groups of codes which can be compared. The codes were grouped into three main areas drawn from the literature review that is, literacy as a crucial skill, an holistic approach and inter-professional working. Further issues from the sources were noted where appropriate and formed sub groups, linked by commonalities, under the main headings. These were compared between the respective countries and possible rationale for the underlying ethos and approaches used to implement early years literacy was considered, supported by literature from previous chapters.

The items from the observations were graphed to highlight the importance placed on aspects of practice (see Appendix 9). These were used in the analysis along with themed findings from documentary evidence, interviews and observations.

5.2.9.2 Example of emerging themes.

Fig. 1.1 Example of Emerging Themes of Approaches Used.

Documentary evidence	Transcripts	Observational findings	Themes
<p>Weekly planning sheet included activities;</p> <p>Designed my own Super Hero costume.</p> <p>Practised forming numbers correctly.</p> <p>Looked at writing letters i and j.</p>	<p>EY assistant (TA)</p> <p>Q2 In some ways things were more structured. Now it is child-initiated learning. Before we had topics and we would run a cycle. Now it's more from the children's interests. We found the new structure hard at first. It is difficult to plan in advance.</p> <p>Headteacher</p> <p>The team are working towards getting a balance between free play and academic activities.</p>	<p>Adult-led activity with TA support.</p> <p>A. overwriting patterns ilililil with plastic card and felt pens. Writes oooo for own name and has difficulties with letter shapes.</p> <p>Child-initiated activity</p> <p>C. uses mobilo to make 3D shapes. Makes car shapes then long cars. 3 friends compare size, shape. No adult present.</p>	<p>Staff have difficulties planning work from the children's interests.</p> <p>Academic/formal activities deemed more important.</p>

The findings were organised for analysis by relating them to the literature review, examining the challenges and resolutions for early years teachers in the two settings under the headings; literacy as a crucial skill and as an holistic approach.

The findings discussed in chapter 6, concerned Research Question 4;

(RQ4) How does a study of local contexts contribute to our understanding of challenges to early years literacy approaches?

Chapter 6 Findings of the Empirical Research

This chapter reports the findings from the empirical case studies in two selected sites in Norway and England. It considers the challenges arising from the findings concerning elements of literacy, that is language, reading and writing, the learning environment in which they take place, adult-led and child-initiated approaches, the adult role, and how parental influence, accountability, resources, transition, competition between providers and diversity issues impact on the approaches to literacy.

It explores sub-research question 4:

(RQ4) How does a study of local contexts contribute to our understanding of challenges to early years literacy approaches?

In order to explore the challenges the chapter opens with a discussion of the learning environments in the settings which reflect the approaches to early years literacy. Themes emerging from the empirical findings are discussed based on the key questions identified in the previous chapter. Finally, data from the observations is analysed.

6.1 The Learning Environment of the Two Sites

Vestenga, Norway

The setting in Norway demonstrated an emphasis on provision for outdoor activities, with appropriate clothing and resources prepared for outdoor play. Approaches to literacy therefore occurred in this natural, outdoor environment. The Norwegian kindergarten consisted of a wooden building surrounded by a large area of grassland with a path leading upwards to the rear of the building where there was a large natural area

containing trees and shrubs, backed by woodland. The outdoor environment provided a learning resource, readily available, including a large, natural area containing trees and shrubs, backed by woodland.

The emphasis on outdoor learning was reflected in the indoor provision. Rooms were small and contained sparse resources. The care aspect was evident in the layout of the room which was informal, almost homely, consisting of an area with a large table and benches, a home corner with books, the teacher's desk at the side of the room and a kitchen at the back. Display was ongoing with five children's pictures placed on the walls, an alphabet and numbers to twenty. There was a computer for children to use in another room, along with a box of construction equipment. The small number of bought resources highlighted the need for children's sharing and social interactions to access them and requirement for creative thinking to devise activities from the natural resources around them. Learning through ongoing routines linked to the caring role included incorporation of facilities for snacks and lunch and the length of time children accessed the kindergarten. This reflected parental requests for the timings of the provision, including opening at 7.15am. Routines included indoor child initiated activities as children arrived, a snack at 8.30am, lunch at 11.30-12.30pm either indoors or outdoors, then outdoors for the afternoon, returning indoors for a snack and story before parents/carers came to collect them at 4.30pm. The same adults supervised the children throughout the day, taking breaks on a rota basis which influenced the input of the sessions, incorporating communication activities within daily tasks.

Care was also evident in the close liaison with colleagues responsible for younger children, with close proximity of indoor rooms and the shared outdoor area. The youngest

children did not go outside to play with the older children in the kindergarten if it was below -15 degrees C, otherwise the children played outdoors. The area for children aged three-five had a child: adult ratio of eighteen children with one teacher and two assistants. This low child: adult ratio facilitated ease of interactions between them, used in the outdoor learning environment.

Barton, St. Peter's, England

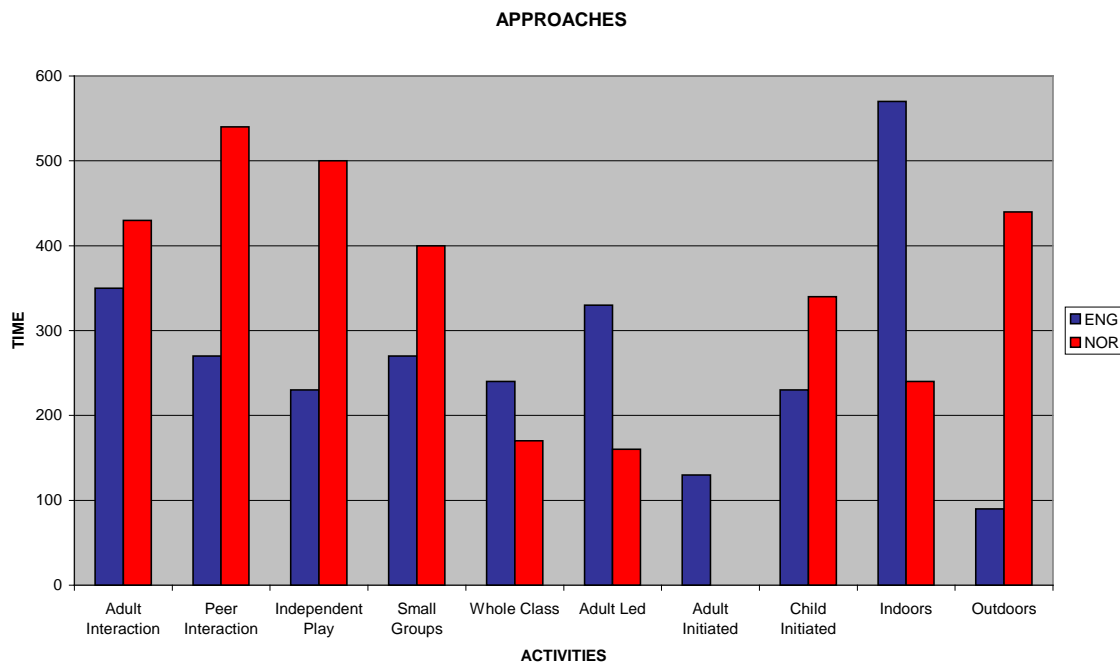
The setting in England emphasised the indoor learning environment. Routines were focused around lessons with times, such as lunchtime, supported by adults who came into school specifically for that purpose.

Collaboration with colleagues taking older children was evident. The setting comprised a classroom as part of the wider school and shared timings for school routines. It had a small courtyard outdoor area to share with Key Stage 1 and access to the playground shared with the whole school. Resources brought to the classroom were plentiful in the large area where the walls were covered with bright, informative displays incorporating children's work and aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, such as a poster showing the principles of practice. Emphasis on learning was apparent in the structure of the day, resources and daily liaison with parents. The day started at 9am when children left their parents /carers in the playground and entered the class. The room included three large tables with chairs around them, an IT Smartboard, two computers, a role play area, a home corner, construction equipment, graphics, craft, sand, reading areas and a carpeted area.

Registers were taken with children sitting on the carpeted area and at 9.15am they lined up to go into the school assembly. When the children arrived back in the classroom the

teacher organised them into groups for activities. Playtimes outdoors and lunchtimes were organised around lessons and not part of the planned learning provision for the early years teacher. At 3pm parents / carers waited in the playground to collect their children as they left the classroom. The class consisted of a teacher and an assistant with twenty-eight children. The high child: adult ratio, focused on literacy lessons and liaison with colleagues taking older children had implications for the organisation of literacy activities planned.

Fig. 1.2 Key Elements of the Approaches Used in Norway and England



The table of key elements of the approaches used in Norway and England is taken from data collected in each of the two settings over three days. This provides a clear indication of differences and similarities between the settings. Timings were synchronised to ensure both settings approaches were collected during the same time span. It supported further data gained over the remaining two days focusing on tracking individual children. The

findings were used to develop reflections from interview and literature findings. Observations of practice indicated two styles of approaches to early years literacy. The learning environment in England was primarily indoors with the English setting observed using this facility for 570 minutes during the observation times compared with 240 minutes of Norwegian time. This supported the predominance of adult-led formal activities in England. Whole class, adult led and adult initiated activities demonstrated an instructional approach to learning. The Norwegian setting accessed outdoors for 440 minutes while the English setting used the facility for 90 minutes supporting the predominance of child initiated activities in Norway. Use was made of child-initiated activities in Norway with Norway observations of 340 compared with 230 minutes in England while adult-led were used in England for 330 minutes compared with 160 minutes in Norway. The higher level of adult interactions, child interactions and independent play indicate a preference for a socially constructed approach to learning. Higher levels of an adult-led, whole class approach compared with the small group or independent play approach in Norway. It supported the observation of a predominance of an instructivist approach in England and constructivist emphasis in Norway. The observations show the main learning approaches yet also reflect the incorporation of new initiatives in the two settings. Child-initiated activities are significant in the English setting, while adult-led sessions are an increasing factor in the Norwegian setting.

The following sections discuss the findings in the key questions identified in the previous chapter. Themes emerging from documentary evidence were noted and cross referenced with interview responses and observational findings.

6.2 Interview Q1. What initiatives concerning early years literacy have been introduced in the last three years?

Vestenga, Norway

Documentation

In the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (Ministry of Education and Research: 2006) literacy aspects were highlighted. Learning areas of the curriculum were increased from five to seven, which included communication, language and text. Children were required to become knowledgeable about text in written form. Familiar aspects were noted such as, 'Listen, observe and respond to mutual interaction with children and adults.' However, there were also requirements to become familiar with written text such as, 'Become familiar with symbols such as letters.'

The framework emphasised the kindergarten as a 'learning arena' for children. This change in emphasis towards aspects of knowledge of literacy skills was reflected in some of the challenges perceived in the interview responses.

Interviews

The kindergarten framework had influenced all respondents. Government guidelines formed a growing consideration. The early years assistant felt 'there always seem to be changes. We have government guidelines about the things children should be learning.' She continued 'we have been told to do more reading and writing with the children'. This had been introduced alongside existing practice. The teacher said 'We have introduced a 'Skole Club' for those in the term before they start school. They do not write but learn how to recognise their names and later write their names.' This emphasis on recognition of letters was corroborated by the teacher responsible for the youngest children who stated 'Each child has their own place. We have started to put their name on their place

and from this we hope they will recognise their name. Before that we just had a picture such as a bear or a flower.’ Accountability measures were being discussed where standards would be scrutinised and awareness of children’s progress fed into later schooling. The Adviser for Early Years stated ‘we have begun to measure things more. In 2009 there was a government report about the quality of kindergartens. Now there are discussions about measuring early years provision in Norway. There were also reports about transition from kindergarten to school.’

Observation

A girl made an envelope and letter home to her mother with pappa, mamma letters written on it. The materials had been made available for letter writing and mark making. Tasks were evident outdoors, with ‘stations’ around the outdoor area. Children accessed activities including singing a song, talking about Norwegian history, describing shapes, discussing occupations, naming animals, action rhymes and naming fruit.

Commentary

The early years teacher had designed resolutions to meet the challenge of incorporating structured literacy skills within existing constructivist practice. Skills, such as letter writing and recognition of own names and familiar words had begun to be incorporated into ongoing routines, alongside existing independent child activities, in a meaningful way (see Appendix 10). Writing skills were being celebrated in an informal manner, for example through discussion of a child’s letter to her parents. Literacy skills were also promoted in activities outdoors, such as the ability to describe types of fruit and say the first letter of a fruit. A change in the indoor area was observed, with the use of children’s pictures and an alphabet displayed.

St. Peter's, England

Documentation

The Early Years Foundation Stage framework (EYFS, DCSF: 2008) emphasised the whole child. The importance of starting with the child was highlighted, building on the achievements attained. 'The overarching aim of the EYFS is to help young children achieve the five Every Child Matters outcomes of staying safe, being healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being' (EYFS, 2008: 7).

Interviews

The Headteacher commented that 'It is now very much play based provision with planned activities taken from the child and their experiences.' Four interviewees commented that practice was different after the EYFS framework with 'massive changes' where the 'whole ethos' had changed. Two noted the change to personalised learning, while others noticed a reorganisation of furniture, children sitting at tables less and more play based learning. The Key Stage 1 teacher claimed the early years teacher had 'done well to promote these changes' with literacy as 'the hinge carrying other subjects' in role play and the bright and stimulating environment.' A teaching assistant noted the child initiated aspects of provision stating 'children self select a lot more. They used to sit down and get on with their work. We introduced outdoor learning in the last year. The EYFS was different from what we had been doing.' She continued, 'things were more structured. We found the new structure hard at first. It is difficult to plan in advance but the children are more motivated.' Another early years assistant stated, 'before we focused planning in themes. Now we work from the children's interests.' Adults working in

provision for younger children stated 'Now it is child-led. The child is leading the exploration and play. It is a more relaxed environment and we have dropped the worksheets. We provide all the things they need for learning but they are no longer forced to do it.' This approach was agreed by the early years teacher who felt 'we are a lot more open now. We have adapted each area to allow for independent activities to go on. The concern for children's interests has formed better bonds with them.' The changes were supported by the local authority as the Adviser claimed 'It has put early years on the map' with national initiatives such as Every Child a Talker. She continued, 'we have a consultant who is...looking at practice in terms of language and communication, particularly from birth through to five.'

Observation

Children were observed choosing their own activities from the variety of resources provided. These included role play of the three little pigs, word mats with letters and making pig puppets. Alongside these activities children devised their own tasks through the resources, for example large construction models, playing with 'eggmen', using wheeled toys and the climbing frame outdoors. Two observations noted outdoor play was taking place.

Commentary

The early years teacher had worked hard to convince colleagues of the desirability of play based approaches in the early years. Planning had changed to accommodate children's interests, while remaining mainly in the indoor environment using bought resources. The organisation for the learning environment was changing with informal areas designed and

some use made of the designated outdoor area. The Local Authority highlighted the importance of children's language and communication development.

Both settings were striving to incorporate children's interests into the provision for literacy. In Norway planning for writing skills was being included into play based language activities with consideration of children's developmental progress. In England play based activities from children's interests had begun to be incorporated with adult-led literacy skills tasks. The Norwegian setting indoors was becoming proactive in displaying literacy aspects, while in England the print-rich indoor learning environment remained.

6.3 Interview Q2 How has this influenced the approaches used in the settings?

Vestenga, Norway

Documentation

The overarching basis of the provision remained focused on an holistic approach. The framework plan claimed 'the development of children is seen as dynamic and closely interwoven interaction between their physical and mental circumstances and the environment in which they grow up' (Framework, 2006: 7).

This continued in the national document Quality in Kindergarten 2008 which set out a framework underpinned by an emphasis on an holistic approach incorporating care, play and learning. Kindergartens were encouraged to use natural areas and be active in the community. Point 9.2 states 'This approach to learning, particular characteristics of Nordic day care, is emphasised as a positive approach by the OECD.' Concern to provide

more skills based activities were tempered by values of allowing the child to discover the natural world and 'day care'.

Interviews

This was reflected in interview responses. The teacher taking younger children preferred to talk about what was achieved rather than collect evidence. 'I think with small children it is most important to talk about what we do.' The teacher taking an older age phase in school agreed stating they 'should not do writing and things like that at kindergarten. They should climb the trees, make bonfires and be in the forest.' An assistant noted, 'We let the children have more play experiences outside the kindergarten.'

Observations

The child-initiated activities began indoors as children came to the setting. Climbing equipment was attached to the wall of the indoor area. Later outdoors, children explored the large natural area at the rear of the building. Lunch was also outdoors. The children were observed being given the option of outdoor play for the day, thirteen times. This included making ice 'pies' to put in the 'oven' to bake, making dens, skiing, football, riding a toboggan, using large spades to dig, sliding and skating. Children were observed in the 'natural area' outdoors in the setting, participating in activities such as collecting 'natural' pieces or making dens. Children and staff had walked to the frozen lake the week prior to the observation week, to catch fish.

Commentary

Challenges occurred when attempting to incorporate formal literacy skills within informal child-initiated activities, outdoors. The authority for early years named the provision as 'day care'. This included use of the natural area as a learning resource and emphasis on

children's physical development. Literacy was viewed as language interactions in the activities the children accessed and songs and stories discussed, particularly those with Norwegian links. While writing skills were encouraged in documentation, language and communication were at the forefront in interview responses and observed practice.

St. Peter's, England

Documentation

In documentation an holistic approach was required to work alongside carefully prescribed structured plans. The EYFS framework covered six areas of learning, language for communication, language for thinking, linking sounds and letters, reading, writing and handwriting. These were described in detail, as a progressive awareness of aspects of the area of learning in sections called Developmental Matters. They culminated in the Early Learning Goals which children were expected to reach at the end of the year in which they are five years old. The child's development was assessed, tracked and used to inform the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, the statutory early years assessment. Specific skills should be taught, for example 'Use a pencil and hold it effectively to form recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed' (Early Learning Goal, EYFS, 2008: 60).

Interviews

The introduction of Letters and Sounds, noted five times by interviewees, 'is made more formal in the way we teach phonics.' Three respondents mentioned books being banded for the children to use. A teacher responsible for older children focused on formal aspects of practice, 'We have just re-banded the books. I've worked with (the teacher) to ensure lower levels of the books are correct for children coming in. She is familiar with how the

reading scheme is set up and how it offsets what she does.’ This focus was repeated by the early years teacher who noted ‘organising letters and sounds’ had changed practice. A teaching assistant stated, ‘in terms of planning (the teacher) pretty well gets on with it. (The teacher) has worked hard on resourcing and implementing the letters and sounds and organising the room so that children can be grouped in their different phases. The furniture has been reorganised to allow for that. When I did an observation they were doing a numeracy lesson as part of a carousel system. Mathematics is a stand alone item. They have phonics every day.’ The teacher observed, ‘We do not really use school policies but national ones, such as the EYFS and Letters and Sounds.’

Observation

Handwriting practise was observed eight times and mark making or story writing thirteen. Children’s phonics groups were observed nine times. High attaining children went to the year 1 class, the average attainers joined the early years teacher’s group, while those deemed to be struggling with their phonological awareness worked on practical activities with the early years practitioner.

Commentary

Child-centred activities were taking place but rather as an additional factor despite endeavours to fully include child-initiated tasks. Observations and interview responses identified that the focus remained on children’s learning and development which was through indoor, adult-led tasks (see Appendix 11).

Evidence from the study suggests the extent to which child-initiated activities occurred differed between the countries. In Norway literacy formed part of the ongoing daily routines and interactions, with children devising their own activities. On the other hand in

England there was a greater emphasis on planning focused on adult-led or adult-initiated tasks which supported assessments of children's progress in literacy.

6.4 Interview Q3 What challenges has this caused in implementation?

Vestenga, Norway

Documentation

'As pedagogical institutions within society, kindergartens must change and develop. Improving the quality of kindergartens involves constantly developing staff skills and competencies' (framework, 2006: 11). The notion of change was apparent with the requirement of adults in the setting to respond positively to them, for example through further qualifications, the approaches used, what children were taught, children's assessment and practitioner's accountability. Adults were encouraged to continue to work from children's interests while incorporating activities based on literacy skills, such as writing and recording progress. 'By taking the interests of children as a starting point, staff can, together with the children, investigate, ask questions and together find answers that will satisfy the children' (ibid. 17).

Interviews

The dilemma of approaches was apparent through transition issues from the kindergarten to skole. The skole teacher gave a graphic account of the challenges posed by the changes. She stated 'in Norway until 1997, 6 year old children went to the kindergarten. In 1997 we were told not to teach them too much and not to teach them to read in the first year. We were told to let the children play most of the time. Now it has changed quite a lot and we have been told to do more reading and writing with the children. The

kindergarten has also changed for the five year olds and the children have to be ready for school when they are six.’ The local authority Adviser was aware of the difficulties. ‘Mostly people are not positive about the changes. I would say people are sceptical about it. We feel we might be measuring too much. We are proud of our existing practice, with the emphasis on play.’

Observation

Boys played outdoors during the sessions and four did not seek adult support. Two boys did not interact with adults during the times observed, while playing outdoors for the whole period.

Commentary

Challenges for implementing literacy skills within a constructivist approach included the use of the learning environment. Using the outdoor environment could pose challenges when including literacy tasks such as writing skills, with children becoming cold outdoors or insufficient space indoors for more formal tasks. Transition issues, with a different approach used between the kindergarten and skole, were also a challenge. While strong links existed between the birth–five provision, colleagues responsible for older children had little knowledge of the children’s progress in the kindergarten and began their records when the children started to attend the skole. Resources might need to be provided for new strategies requiring formal teaching, records kept and some staff might need to gain further qualifications.

St. Peter’s, England

Documentation

The EYFS resources are designed to ‘help practitioners meet their legal requirements’ (EYFS, 2008: 11). The Childcare Act 2006 comprised three elements;

- The early learning goals
- The educational programmes
- The assessment arrangements

While practitioners were concerned with providing an holistic approach for the children in their care they also needed to be mindful of their legal obligations, giving evidence to support the premise that they are doing so through assessments of children’s progress and results gained in the profile judgements. Ofsted (2007) reported of the setting, ‘Close attention to the needs of the individual underpins the school’s work’ which included tracking of children’s progress. They also reported ‘The needs of pupils in respect of outdoor provision is not met.’

Interviews

The Adviser claimed, ‘It has been a political football. Key team members are involved with CLLD (Communication, Language and Literacy Development). The CLLD programme really focuses on looking at practice...it has a lot of influence in terms of collecting data.’

Transition issues concerned many respondents due to the differing approaches. The early years assistant was clear about the changes. ‘It has changed a lot in the last 6 years I’ve been here. It has changed into more personalised learning and an independent learning environment. There are a lot less children sitting at tables. For some who are used to teaching in Key Stage 2 that is quite an unusual setting. The teacher has pushed for more independent learning rather than more formal teaching. She has ‘gone out on a limb’ in a

few cases and spoken to senior management. We are isolated. There are difficulties of transference.’ The teacher taking older children helped to clarify the challenges. ‘There are always pressures about standards and children’s achievements. I am part of the Senior Management Team and so am aware that my class feeds into year 2’ (where the children are tested).

The practitioner taking younger children was also concerned about differing approaches. ‘The sudden change from one regime to another is difficult for many children. Teachers at school have many more children to deal with and they cannot give them the individual support. They have introduced a ‘Link Diary’ which is good. The school regime is much more regimented and the transition is difficult for children.’

The early years teacher was concerned about transition to Key Stage 1. Awareness was raised of the formal aspects of the provision. ‘Phonics and letter formation prepares them. Without these they would struggle in year 1. There is a formal environment, sitting and working in year 1 so they must have these skills. It is also dictated by the seating arrangements. There are some concerns about the amount of phonics work needed in the Foundation Stage and learning words. There are expectations from management and we work within the constraints of a primary school.’

Observation

Four of the boys observed chose to play outdoors when they were given the option to do so, without an adult in the close area. Only girls were given the opportunity to work with older children on formal tasks.

Commentary

Care was taken to ensure all children made progress with the emphasis on formal aspects of learning and tracking clearly recorded. Challenges arose where the early years teacher needed to provide transition from the child-initiated learning with younger children to formal learning in year 1. The formulation of a Link Diary had supported the ease of transition between different providers.

Providers in both countries experienced challenges for transition. In Norway transition from the younger setting did not pose a difficulty, although greater liaison between the kindergarten and skole was suggested. In England the setting was in the midst of informal approaches with younger children and formal tasks with older ones. While early years teachers strove to incorporate children's interests as the basis of provision, in both countries new initiatives posed challenges in implementation. In Norway tasks based on literacy skills were being introduced into existing provision, while in England child-initiated activities were being incorporated into a more formal approach.

6.5 Interview Q4 What role in the settings does the adult take regarding early years literacy?

Vestenga, Norway

Documentation

The framework affirmed the importance of children's views of their learning. 'Children shall regularly be given the opportunity to take an active part in planning and assessing the activities of the kindergarten' (2006: 8).

Interviews

This basis of the children's interests involved staffing arrangements, planning and the role the adult took in the interactions with children. Parental requirements had implications for staffing issues which included the length of time in the kindergarten. The Headteacher was aware of this stating 'The problem is having enough staff to cover the hours we are open. They stagger the times they are here.' The Adviser discussed the qualifications of the staff; 'We have not many qualified staff working in the kindergartens.'

The early years teacher noticed a change of approach, 'practitioners in the kindergarten have begun to make notes about what children are doing. It is time consuming and difficult to fit in.'

Observation

Adults observed and guided children, they did not insist the children accessed activities. In an observed session a child attempted to skate around obstacles. She spoke to other children. An adult approached, praising the child and discussing the task devised by the child, suggesting further extensions to the game.

Commentary

The adults appeared to have a complex task. They were required to work long hours to accommodate parental wishes for times and support learning through exploration and learning about helping the children to become independent, for example by making sandwiches for their lunch. Adults observed and guided children through interactions when they felt it beneficial for the child's development. This approach could be difficult when accommodating an instructivist style for formally teaching structured literacy skills.

St. Peter's, England

Documentation

The EYFS (2008: 20) stated 'Providers must maintain records, policies and procedures required for the safe and efficient management of the settings and to meet the needs of the children.' They must 'plan and organise their systems to ensure that every child receives a challenging learning and development experience' (ibid). The adult needs to be proactive in devising strategies to support children's learning and ensure adequate records are kept to provide evidence for regulators to acknowledge this.

Interviews

Four interviewees felt the role of the early years teacher had changed. The emphasis on different approaches to early years literacy demonstrated the value placed on aspects of practice, particularly focused skills based tasks. The teacher in Key Stage 1 stated that in the early years 'the teacher does more formal elements while the practitioner does the play planning.' This was agreed with the early years practitioner who claimed 'the teacher manages the area herself and plans the more formal elements of the curriculum. The practitioner does the play planning. Early years teaching is more prominent than it was.' An early years assistant felt 'the role of the adult has definitely changed. When I first started working here I did a lot of displays and heard readers. Now I'm more involved with paperwork, assessments and planning.' The Adviser stated, 'the document 'Communicating Matters' came out three years ago. 'Many of our practitioners found it challenging' with difficulties of incorporating language interactions within the time constraints of delivering activities to inform profile judgements.

Observation

An observed session included supporting a small group of children to practise their manipulative skills by drawing around letters. Although a child-initiated, play-based approach was part of the planning the adult focus was on skills based learning, preparing evidence for the profiles through the tasks planned. Children sitting together on the carpet, with the teacher leading discussions of work, happened thirty-two times during observations.

Commentary

The focus remained on adult-led tasks which supported EYFS profile judgements. Large numbers in the class could prove difficult when ensuring all children made progress on an individual basis, while not in formal groupings. The practitioners would need confidence to give children the freedom to develop independence in child-initiated learning.

The settings differed in the role adults took in the settings. In Norway adults allowed children to take risks in their learning, finding out for themselves the progress they could make with adults supporting and guiding children's endeavours. In England a proactive approach was used where adult-led or adult-initiated activities were planned to enable children to progress within a pre-determined structure. The interactions in Norway led to greater emphasis on language and social communication whereas the activities in England led to prescribed tasks which could provide outcomes as evidence for records.

6.6 Interview Q5 How do assessments influence practice?

Vestenga, Norway

Documentation

‘All children must have a rich and varied language environment at their kindergarten. Some children develop their language skills late, or have other language problems. They must receive help at an early age (framework, 2006: 19). It continues, ‘Alternation between the use of body language, movement and words helps to support the development of speech. During play, children often use varied and complex speech’ (ibid. 19). ‘Kindergartens shall not normally assess the achievement of goals by individual children in relation to specific criteria (ibid: 31).

Interviews

Parents received children’s record of achievements when they left the kindergarten to move to skole. They played a leading role in the happenings of kindergarten life. Accountability was largely to parents, with the local authority overseeing the practice. A practitioner working with the youngest children mentioned a book that was kept to collect some of the pictures for the children to take to the next group but this did not go to school. The early years teacher agreed stating we ‘do not keep records of children’s activities but put together some of the things they have made to give to parents when their child leaves the kindergarten.’ She also noted changes that might be taking place concerning assessments. ‘It will be different soon. It is proposed that there will be more written evidence and details about each child before they go to school. It is not definite when this will start.’ The skole teacher highlighted the lack of assessment material. ‘The kindergarten doesn’t send anything. We talk to the kindergartens to find out a little more about the children.’ The Adviser was aware of this stating ‘Not much of our practice is written down and we need to make better recording. We need to improve this to show

parents what we are doing. We have been clever with planning but not so good with being able to assess our practice.'

The Headteacher was aware of the proposals and the desire for greater written liaison between the kindergarten and skole. 'The government has not said we need to change yet. But they are preparing something at the moment. They have said they want a test for the children who are going up to school to see what level they are on. That test will follow the child from the kindergarten to the school. They will show the teacher how the child is prepared for school. We have some tests to show the language development of the children. We are using this material which is quite new for us. Then we suddenly had 13 minorities (children) and we had to decide how to deal with this. So we are using these tests for these children to see how we can help them to prepare better for school.'

Observations

Records for the older children were built up during the time the children spent in the kindergarten. Herman's included a photograph while he was playing a table top game, two paintings, crayon, felt tip, pencil and graphic drawings, a photograph with his family and a picture he had drawn from the story of the Three Bears. They would be given to his parents when he left the kindergarten.

Commentary

These records of achievements formed part of assessments along with observations of individuals. The early years teacher felt the children were too young to be assessed meaningfully. High attainers could be insufficiently challenged in their learning if not assessed and extended. Some children might find social interactions difficult and require specific adult input to enable them to participate fully. Records were not shared with

colleagues in the skole, although there were informal discussions about the children and any needs they might have. Language development was felt important for assessment, with support for minority ethnic children identified. The forthcoming changes to a national assessment strategy could impact on practice, with teachers needing to meet the challenge of fulfilling the requirements to observe prescribed aspects to inform later schooling.

St. Peter's, England

Documentation

The EYFS profiles (introduced in 2003 by DfES) mirror the sections for Communication, Language and Literacy from the EYFS framework. These include the Early Learning Goals to be reached approximately towards the end of the Foundation Stage, for example;

- Attempts to read more complex words using phonic knowledge.
- Begins to form captions and simple sentences, sometimes using punctuation.

Local authorities 'have a duty to monitor and moderate the EYFS Profile judgements' (EYFS, 2008: 17). Local authorities were under a duty to return the data from settings to the DCSF. Records were kept for scrutiny by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) who provided a regulation of standards for early years provision and whose findings were published and widely available. Ofsted (2007) reported 'Many (children) have weaknesses in communication, language and literacy. Standards at the end of Year 2 are above average. Children enter school with skills and knowledge below those which are typical for children of their age.' Records and tracking progress mean individuals 'get off to a flying start.'

Interviews

The importance of assessments and adults accountability to provide evidence of children's progress, was argued throughout the interviews. A Key Stage 1 teacher noted 'observations of activities are used for the EYFS profile. These are recorded in booklets with goals, points.' An early years assistant agreed claiming 'The early years teacher does most of the assessments but we can look at them to have some input. The assessments help us to gauge where the children are when they get to us. We do an on-entry assessment. In some years the children might be good at phonics already.' The private nursery practitioner noted 'We do assessments here and follow the EYFS procedures but they are not followed up at school. They start their own booklets and format.' The early years teacher stated 'We have to gather evidence for the profile. There was an expectation from management of an overview when planning for the whole team in the school. There is an 'early years bubble' but really we are working within the constraints of the whole school with tracking and assessing pupils all the time, picking up dips and rectifying them.' Children were assessed and grouped according to ability, with those who needed extra support identified.

An early years practitioner highlighted the desire for ease of transition between key stages. (The head) 'monitors it from a Key Stage 1 perspective. The observations for the EYFS profile are recorded in a booklet with all the goals listed.' The Headteacher emphasised the importance of assessments which were 'done from day 1. Observations, where they come from, where they go, what they do, how they talk, how they speak, how they interact and what they do while they are learning. It is moving the children on from what we see them doing.' The year 1 teacher stated, 'When they come to me I look at

their profile. The CLL area helps me to set the children when they come into my class – we are looking for particular groupings for literacy.’

The Adviser highlighted issues surrounding the use of data. ‘We do use the data. The assessments are made at the end of the Foundation Stage, as children go into year 1. We use the data to identify schools that have the widest number of children under-achieving. The data is strictly moderated. The areas for support are Linking Sounds and Letters, the phonics and writing. This links to some of the gender issues.’ Assessments could be used to identify an under-achieving school as well as assess children’s progress.

Observations

Assessments were used as an ongoing process with specific goals identified in planning. Children’s work was assessed as achieved or not achieved and dated. Children had their records to provide evidence for the profile judgements. Examples of work obtained included emergent writing, children’s work achieved and not achieved and letter formation. A sample of books needed for scrutiny by the Headteacher was compiled during the observations, including six writing books as a sample of work.

Commentary

Practitioners found assessments and the compilation of evidence challenging. It impacted on planned activities as a means to provide the information required, to aid planning for subsequent classes, to identify individual children’s attainment and to satisfy colleagues, parents and the local authority to achieve acceptable results.

Assessment practice between the two settings differed considerably. In Norway children were encouraged to develop at their own pace, exploring the world around them and

interacting with others. In England targets were established and ability groups within the class set, to enable children to follow prescribed steps of standardised progression.

6.7 Interview Q6 How are children with Norwegian/English as a second language or with special educational needs supported?

Vestenga, Norway

Documentation

The framework for Kindergartens (2006: 5) states, ‘On account of geographic mobility and increasing internationalisation, Norwegian society is far more diverse than it was in the past. There are now many ways of being Norwegian. This cultural diversity shall be reflected in kindergartens.’ It continues, ‘In a global perspective, it is very important that children develop attitudes of charity and solidarity.’

Interviews

Responses focused on the challenges posed by how best to support minority ethnic children, without causing misunderstandings between staff and parents /carers. The Adviser gave an overview of the situation. ‘Now in Hamar 10% of the children in kindergartens are from other countries. The immigration started about 5 years ago, but in the last 2-3years the rate has increased rapidly. There has been an explosion. People from Somalia, Burma. There are twenty-seven languages spoken in the kindergartens in Hamar. We have five kindergartens which are working closely to help these children. Vestenga is one of these.’ The Headteacher described what had happened. ‘People are glad that we are easy for them to get to. I think that is why a lot of children (from other countries) come here.’ The teacher commented, ‘We suddenly had fifteen languages and

we had to decide how to deal with this'. The early years practitioners noted challenges of communication with children and parents. 'Children from other countries started coming in the last few years. They are Vietnamese, Serbia, India, Sri Lanka, Iran, Burma, Finland and Iraq. We are multi-cultural.' Another said 'a lot of children have come in the last two years. It is a challenge. The parents do not speak Norwegian very well. We have information leaflets explaining in pictures what we do. Sometimes people in the community help with translation.' The early years teacher highlighted practicalities in the situation. 'The main problem is one of communication with the parents. It can be difficult to get parents to bring things that the children need for activities such as warm outdoor clothes.'

However, the skole teachers did not perceive any difficulties. 'They may be from different cultures but it is not a big problem. It may be difficult to talk to the parents, but not the children. If they have been to kindergarten it is easy to take them. The parents language skills may not be good but there are few problems with the children.'

All children were admitted to the kindergarten if the parents / carers wished them to come. When discussing children with special educational needs the response was, 'We have a lady who comes to help the children with their speech and language. It will make things more systematic about language training and this is also about the immigration which is happening. This is new for us.' Responding to immigration concerned the Headteacher, 'We have some difficulties communicating with parents. We need some staff who could speak other languages as well as Norwegian. Sometimes we struggle to understand each other. Things would be much easier if we could talk easily to each other. It is a big challenge to us' (that the families are anxious).

Observation

Children were allocated to a specific adult to help them participate in sessions. An adult who spoke four languages was employed by the kindergarten to support children where possible.

Commentary

The kindergarten had designed resolutions to meet diversity needs. Staff were proactive in encouraging minority ethnic children to come and had strategies in place to welcome them. In the home corner area books were available for children to read, including bilingual books such as Norwegian /Somali and Norwegian /Bengali, which were borrowed from the library. Adults working in the setting attempted to promote inclusion although established friendships between children occasionally made it challenging. In a busy schedule it could be difficult to gain access to relevant language support. Funding for the extra support may not be forthcoming. However, the success of the strategies was highlighted in the skole teacher's positive response to inclusion. In an ethos where the child takes the lead with interactions possibly children's preconceptions might not be challenged.

St. Peter's, England

Documentation

Practitioners should 'provide equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice and ensure that every child is included and not disadvantaged because of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, learning difficulties or disabilities, gender or ability' (EYFS, 2008: 7). Ofsted (2007) reported, 'Almost all pupils speak English as their first language.' It continued 'The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and

/or disabilities is average, but the proportion with a statement for special educational needs is above average.’

Interviews

The foci in the responses from the setting were largely concerned with children with special educational needs. The Adviser gave an overview of the situation stating ‘We have children from Bangladesh, Poland and Eastern Europe. We have been working with key schools and the English as an Additional Language (EAL) service looking at different strategies to give focused support.’ The private nursery confirmed they ‘have children who speak different languages, for example Polish, who come here. We had to enquire about getting books in different languages. You have to hunt and find out information.’

However, in the school this was not apparent and there were no minority ethnic children in the early years setting. The teacher stated, ‘We don’t have a massively diverse community. Provision is mainly for learning abilities.’ The assistant agreed claiming ‘We cater for different learning abilities. If questions of diversity arose we would deal with it. There are no ethnic minorities in the class. We have extra input for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) from the Local Authority, such as programmes for individual children and SEN.’ Another assistant developed the descriptions of the provision for children with SEN. ‘We have a child with speech problems and another with behaviour problems. We have a home behaviour programme. Some come from the Educational Behaviour Unit and we are given programmes to follow.’ This was supported by practitioners in the private nursery where they have ‘some professionals for example

health workers.’ In school they have had speech therapy, occupational therapy and play therapy professionals supporting work.

The Headteacher confirmed the focused provision for individual children. ‘Everybody is assessed through formal and informal observations. It is using this information with profiling and through base line assessments going through the EYFS profile. Then we look at those who are above average and those below, looking very closely at those who are borderline and those thought to need extra support.’

Observation

The speech and language therapist supported a boy’s progress on a regular basis. The boy eagerly participated in the activities. Focused observations by the practitioners for children with special needs or who were perceived to be gifted and talented were seen. Children from older classes cared for the younger ones, looking after them at playtimes, walking with them on a visit to the local Church and comforting them if they fell.

Commentary

Children were catered for on an individual basis when they arrived at the setting and made very good progress. It was not proactive in encouraging children from diverse backgrounds to attend.

Settings differed in their approach to supporting minority ethnic children. In Norway the Headteacher was proactive in encouraging children to attend the kindergarten and devise ways to welcome them and their parents. When they started the setting each child was allocated to an adult for support. However, the philosophy of the adult role meant that structured provision did not occur and children could have experienced difficulties

participating in the activities which were heavily dependent on social interaction. In England the setting was not proactive in welcoming minority ethnic children and missed opportunities for children to access their provision.

Both countries accessed inter-professional support for children with special educational needs and were able to use this to structure appropriate support. This consisted mainly of speech and language support but in England included behaviour management. This probably reflects a more formal regime in England.

6.8 Interview Q7 How are parents involved in the practice?

Vestenga, Norway

Documentation

The framework for kindergartens (2006: 6) states ‘International conventions and Norwegian law emphasise both the right of parents to bring up children in accordance with their religion or ideology and the right of children to learn about the society in which they are growing up. Kindergartens must ensure that children do not experience a conflict of loyalty between their home and their kindergarten. Kindergartens shall assist homes with the care and upbringing of their children’ (ibid: 9) The importance of a partnership with parents was highlighted. ‘The collaboration of parents in the overall activities of kindergartens is ensured through their participation in parents’ councils and coordinating committees’ (ibid. 10). Parents are given the opportunity to actively participate in the planning of the kindergarten programme.

Interviews

Provision was highly responsive to the needs of parents. The Headteacher described the support given to parents to help their working life style. 'The kindergarten opens at 7.15am to support parents. It's competition from other kindergartens in Hamar to have enough children. There are many kindergartens in Hamar. You need to have the children to get the funding. We have to think about what is special about Vestenga and let the parents know. The early opening hours is one thing that the parents asked for. Some work in Oslo and have to get there.' The Adviser commented on the effects of this provision. 'We have had younger children coming into the kindergartens. In Hamar 80% of all children go to the kindergartens. We were the first town in Norway to have so many children going to kindergarten. Kindergarten is popular with all parents in Hamar. We demonstrate to parents that we are all working together to provide them and their families the best possible service.' Social aspects were also emphasised in the responses. An early years practitioner mentioned 'At the kindergarten we like to build up good relationships with the children and most of the staff have been here a long time so we know the local community.'

Observation

Parental needs were important in their involvement with the setting. Practitioners accommodated their requests and flexibly responded to their work requirements. Thus, for example, although the setting opened at 7.30am on 15.2.10 a child arrived at 9.40am. She joined two other girls, used to arriving after other children had arrived. During the time of the case study data collection children arrived between 7.15am and 9.55am.

Commentary

Parental choice was a key factor in the provision, described as ‘the best possible service.’ Timings responded to parental wishes. Parental views were sought to consider questions such as the type of activities children accessed during the day. Staff organised their routines around these timings and the language interactions and development within them.

St. Peter’s, England

Documentation

The EYFS (2008: 7) states practitioners should create ‘the framework for partnership working between parents and professionals.’

Interviews

Staff involved parents to support children’s progress and literacy learning development. According to an early years practitioner ‘parents come into the classroom when children first start. We could involve them more though. We have parents evenings and Open Days. Last year I set up a Link Diary after seeing something in the EYFS document. It encourages links with parents, home, school, grandparents, nursery. Anybody can write in the diary which is kept in the children’s book bag. It is a good way of communicating. On Fridays we let parents know what children are doing the following week.’ The emphasis on sharing skills towards reading was apparent. An assistant described the routines for liaison. ‘Before the children start school they will come with their parents for an introduction to school. They do literacy sessions in preparation for school such as swapping over reading books and flash cards.’ The early years teacher listed the many ways the focused liaison on literacy was achieved. ‘Parents share reading books, phonic

sounds, home /school diary, storysacks.’ The Headteacher confirmed the links with parents /carers. ‘Book bags are taken home and we have a home /school diary. Practitioners write in them and we encourage parents to write in them as well. Home visits are made before they start. Practitioners can get a background picture of the child. We also encourage parents to come in and help in school.’

The Adviser reflected on the strategies. ‘We are looking at sustaining the development with parents involvement, modelling and providing resources, having sessions that are seen as fun for parents and children, not challenging them or making them feel uncomfortable about their own skills. The aim is to help parents help their children. We are trying to engage carers /parents in the early literacy of their children and offer training to them to assist in this. There is a pack that goes out when the children start school. This is an area capable of further development.’

Observation

Practitioners were viewed as the experts in the school with parents supporting their children at home with tasks placed in children’s book bags, linked to work achieved in school. Children, parents and carers were aware of the routines at the start of the school day. Parents /carers said goodbye to their children in the playground. One child entered the classroom tearfully but quickly joined his friends and followed the procedures for the day.

Commentary

Adults in the setting were viewed as the experts and provided activities for parents/ carers to access, to continue to promote the literacy learning development from the school to the home.

In Norway parental requirements were accommodated and staff strove to share children's development with them, through flexible timings, sharing children's achievements and daily discussions at the start of the day. In England parents supported work achieved in school, for example helping children to read words, share reading books and help with homework given.

6.9 Interview Q8 Are there any initiatives or aspects of practice that practitioners are particularly pleased and concerned about?

Vestenga, Norway

Documentation

The statement of the fundamental values of kindergartens claims 'Care, upbringing and learning shall promote human dignity, equality, intellectual freedom, tolerance, health and an appreciation of sustainable development' (framework for kindergartens, 2006: 6).

Interviews

The emphasis in the documentation remained with 'care' and 'upbringing' alongside 'learning.' The care and upbringing aspects were supported by an assistant who suggested, 'The children stay in the kindergarten for a long time. At the start they were here from 10am until 2pm, but now it's from 7.30am until 4.30 pm. We have to be more strict with them than we were before. We have to set rules and limits more so than before. I think it is because now both parents are working full time and spend less time with the children. I think they are developing earlier and this happens with their writing too. We have a skole club. In this club they do things that will help them when they start skole.'

Competition for children to fill places in kindergartens in the area was fierce due to the number of places available. There were twenty public, twelve private and eight small kindergartens in Hamar. In the previous two years the government had given funding for private providers to open settings. The Headteacher described the ethos stating, 'We try to play with the children and do the things that they like to do. We read them a lot of books and sing with them. We let the children have more play experiences outside the kindergarten.' The early years teacher could decide how she was going to address the framework although she wished for 'more time to get everything done.'

Language activities were foremost in the provision. A practitioner taking the youngest children mentioned 'We do a lot of singing. While the children are playing we have the opportunity to speak to individual children.' Another stated 'The children really like it when we read to them and they also really like it when we play together with them. They like us to sing together. I really like to take them into the woods and look at nature.' The Adviser felt 'I think physical training and outdoor learning has benefits for mental development.'

Observations

Children chose activities on their own or with a small group of friends, usually accessing outdoor learning. For example, on one occasion a group of children played in the trees climbing and building a den. The play turned into the three bears story with other children hiding in the den while the 'bears' went for a picnic. Stories were read to the whole group at the end of sessions. A strong emphasis on social development and independence was apparent, with children laughing and playing together usually in groups of two-four. For example, a child tracking observation noted a boy with a friend

watching an adult take the wire from an outdoor barbeque. The boys watched the still smouldering logs. They took a stick and put small amounts of snow onto the burning logs, watching them cool. When the logs were nearly cooled completely they covered them with snow.

Commentary

Adults working in the setting had noticed a shift towards more formal aspects of provision, such as recognition of letters, yet interview responses and observations demonstrated the strong focus on outdoor constructivist learning. Language activities, arising from the child-initiated play, dominated the literacy area of learning. This was accommodated well within a flexible approach to timings in the setting. There was awareness of a shift to incorporate more formal aspects providing such tasks earlier in a child's development. However, adults needed to respond to parental wishes and be proactive in encouraging children to their kindergarten to gain sufficient numbers accessing it, in a competitive local market by focusing on 'care and upbringing'.

St. Peter's, England

Documentation

The purpose and aims of the EYFS state 'Every child deserves the best possible start of life and support to fulfil their potential. A child's experience in the early years has a major impact on their future life chances' (2008: 7). The focus on the provision as a means for the child's future academic success was evident.

Interviews

The Adviser claimed 'in recent years the changes have never stopped. Data is useful for asking questions. It can be thought provoking. We are trying to encourage engagement

with the use of the outdoor play environment and mark making. A lot of work remains to be done on child development.’

Competition was also a factor in the English setting and highlighted the ethos of learning and development. Concerns regarding numbers of children starting school were expressed. The teacher stated ‘We are undersubscribed by ten or so places in the Foundation Stage. It is massively competitive.’ This view was supported by the early years practitioner who said ‘We have 28 children with a 40 intake. We have 30 per year group. Some children can go to a mixed year 1 class but that has not happened this year.’

The early years teacher felt ‘We should be forming the basis of a child’s learning and not just pushing them further ahead.’ She did express satisfaction that her expertise was valued. Awareness was made of the teacher’s professional autonomy within the constraints of the school system and the demands of the EYFS framework.

The practitioners gave examples of the literacy focus. ‘We provide a good phonic base for them which provides the basis of reading and writing. We give them the ability to form letters correctly with their handwriting and an enjoyment of stories.’ We ‘recently started the phonics sessions. I think they have made a really big difference. We do them every day and they are really helping the children. We start from scratch. I have made some games for them to take home to play with, such as Alphabet Lotto. Sometimes I think a lot is expected of the children in the first year. It is surprising what they do in a year.’

This focused literacy work was not felt to be shared with practice in the private setting. ‘It would be useful for key workers to meet and share information about children.’ However, there was developing collaboration with the year 1 teacher. ‘We have started to

integrate the children and this has been really helpful. We have also looked at targeting children in specific groups. They are grouped by ability.'

The complex challenges faced by the early years teacher when addressing different approaches to literacy was cited by the Headteacher. 'It's getting the balance between formal literacy lessons (children still need to be taught how to read, how to hold a pencil, phonics, how to speak and listen) and play provision.'

Observations

This balance of approaches was attempted in daily routines which incorporated assessment opportunities, for example Tuesday started with the children sounding the letter ttttt and handwriting used as part of the activities, for example overwriting lilili. Planning reflected themes of general interest, for example the Chinese New Year, skills to be consolidated or introduced and children's interests, such as writing about and taking photographs of their 'superhero' poses.

Commentary

Competition for children to fill places was also a challenging factor in the English setting. Adults sought to promote children's progress, sharing this with parents and gaining pleasing reports from Ofsted. Concern from documentation centred on the preparation for children's 'future life chances' and 'potential.'

Discussion

Approaches to aspects of literacy appeared to be shifting towards similar provision in the respective settings, for example the introduction of Skole work for older kindergarten children in Norway and 'a balance' devised between play and formal tasks in England. Documentation demonstrated similar literacy elements were proposed. However, the

guidelines incorporated philosophy which gave an emphasis on ‘care and upbringing’ in Norway while in England preparation for ‘future life chances’ was sought. For some children in Norway virtually all their waking time during the week was spent in the kindergarten, therefore having a significant impact on their welfare. The amount of time spent on different literacy elements also differed. In Norway the emphasis was on language activities, with discussions of the surroundings, songs and stories. Language was used to discuss learning taking place, for example sequencing a story in role play or investigating the effects of snow on burning wood. In England activities focused on planned tasks such as phonics or handwriting sessions. Competition, and therefore the views of the parents who would be sending their children to the settings had to be considered in both countries. However, in England parental views could be influenced by external regulators, pressurizing providers to gain pleasing results to maintain capacity.

Summary

This section provided an overview of the findings concerning challenges for the implementation of early years literacy approaches. Both settings responded to recent changes in national policies and incorporated language, reading and writing elements of literacy into their provision. However, the emphasis in the settings differed. In Norway social interactions through language were prominent while in England use was made of tasks which could provide evidence of children’s progress to show external regulators when needed. Challenges occurred in the implementation of formal aspects of literacy incorporated into Norwegian practice and learning from child-initiated activities in English practice.

The adult's role played a significant part in these differences. In England adult practitioners planned structured play activities while in Norway adults observed and guided children in their play. This was reflected in the assessment strategies where Norwegian practice incorporated ongoing storing of items relevant to the child, such as a family photograph, while in England evidence gathered supported profile judgements. Minority ethnic children attended the Norwegian setting while in England no children from minority ethnic backgrounds were present. Parental views and requirements formed an integral part of kindergarten planning while in England parents supported the practitioners literacy planning. Implications for literacy approaches through funding, liaison with inter-professional teams and competition with other providers were issues shared by both settings.

The following chapter analyses the findings and responds to sub-research question 5;

(RQ5) How does a comparison of the two sites improve our understanding of the challenges and resolutions?

This question examines the issues raised from the findings which are considered in two areas, literacy as a crucial skill and as an holistic approach, reflecting discussions in earlier chapters based on a review of relevant literature of macro recommendations on national policies and local practice.

Chapter 7 Analysis of the Empirical Findings

The analysis of the empirical findings covers two aspects identified from international and European recommendations and policies, namely;

- a) literacy as a crucial skill
- b) literacy within a holistic approach

The empirical study focused on the challenges and resolutions posed for early years teachers taking children who were five in the 2008-2009 academic year. For the purpose of this analysis the terms Norway and England will be used when referring to the specific sites. The two elements of early years literacy approaches form the basis of the analysis, with findings from the empirical study used to inform the fifth sub research question;

(RQ5) How does a comparison of the two sites improve our understanding of the challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches?

Findings from chapter 6 indicated that while literacy in national documentation reflecting international recommendations were similar in the two countries, the implementation of the policies was embedded differently in their national contexts. Siraj-Blatchford et al (2002: 28) suggest, 'Different early years practices are informed by different educational philosophies and values and by the different assumptions that are held about learning, child development, appropriate styles of instruction and curricula.' The literature review highlighted the different philosophies in the two countries. Clarke et al (2007:7) and OECD in Starting Strong 11 (2006:141) identified in England an emphasis on pre-determined goals to be met, while they claimed features of the Norwegian provision were based on a holistic approach. The chapter discusses the different challenges and

resolutions posed in the two countries when implementing the international recommendations into existing philosophies.

7.1 Literacy as a Crucial Skill

Challenges

The challenges when implementing literacy as a crucial skill concern the implementation of ‘universalised norms’ on existing philosophy. Different challenges between the settings were apparent in language and writing aspects, with reading incorporating structured programmes in England. Transition issues are discussed.

7.1.1 Universalised norms

The challenge in Norway was to implement the recommendations of the 2006 national policy. This was because new initiatives, such as the consideration of written text and reading with settings viewed as a ‘learning arena’, posed difficulties when incorporated into existing practice. Teachers in the skole did not require evidence of writing ability and it did not form an aspect of assessment of the children’s development. The newly formed Skole Club for the oldest children in kindergarten did not include writing tasks. The setting in Norway was beginning to introduce such experiences for the children due to the forthcoming perceived shift in emphasis to the integration of recognition of letter formation. This built on existing practice which supported children’s understanding of phonological awareness as a precursor for distinguishing sounds and their meaning in print, yet posed a challenge to incorporate into child-initiated activities. Action songs and rhymes to enable children to actively participate in the formation of sounds and

corresponding movements were used but children were not specifically encouraged to write about them.

Challenges in Norway could occur if specific textual reading strategies, as had informally begun through reading key words, were encouraged through forthcoming assessment measures and incorporated in the provision for younger children to ensure they could continue their learning when they moved to the skole situation. National documentation indicated that specific skills were required rather than relying on language acquisition hoping that literacy would follow. Sweller states ‘Simply being immersed in a reading/writing society will not guarantee that someone will learn to read or write. We need to be explicitly taught’ (Tobias and Duffy eds, 2009: 129).

The challenge in England when incorporating the EYFS documentation was the recommendation for language development and child-initiated activities. Language activities were part of the adult-led interactions for whole class or small group teaching, or an aspect of provision that occurred in children’s play while adults were busy with formal activities. Interactions focused on questions relating to tasks set by the adult. The ‘concentration on outcomes’ was ‘pushing out spoken communication’ with a focus on literacy goals which were ‘prescriptively defined’ (McQuail, 2003: 15). The local authority Adviser highlighted the challenge for practitioners to incorporate communication and language activities within existing practice.

Interactions between adult-child and child-child reflected the culture of the settings. The English setting had a large number of adult-child whole class sessions where talk was largely from the adult’s lead, with children seeking to respond to questions, often with a definite answer, for example the day of the week. Wood claims ‘interactions between

adults and children in 'spontaneous' and 'contrived' encounters are different in nature' (Woodhead ed, 1998: 158). She continues 'children often appear to display varying levels of intellectual or linguistic competence in different situations' (ibid: 159).

Another challenge in England was the requirement to foster a love of reading while encouraging the development of specific reading skills. The process incorporated the structured phonetics programme Letters and Sounds (2007) and inclusion in a graded reading scheme system, linked to parental participation, which developed children's ability to read texts. The reading scheme ensured children reached certain levels within the programme and satisfied the expectations from the subsequent class and wider school. Organisational issues had to be considered by the practitioners, for example the phonics sessions consisted of small groups with each adult involved in phonics teaching. This included the assistant who took the less able group with the more able children joining year 1.

7.1.2 Existing Philosophies

These elements of literacy to be incorporated into practice posed challenges because they were difficult to fit into existing philosophy and practice.

In Norway it was found hard to incorporate writing and structured adult-led reading activities in practice as the emphasis was on language. Social interactions were frequent, particularly amongst peers, and language development featured in literacy learning. Interactions were observed to be of high importance and were accommodated well in the organisation used. The long hours for the children in the setting fitted well with the language rich approach. Care perspectives for the children, such as staggered timings for the kindergarten and the incorporation of meals as learning experiences, also supported

the language-based approach. This developed from non-verbal communication with the youngest children in the shared setting. Language formed the basis of children's learning in literacy and promoted the assimilation of social mores and culture. The language-based provision was deemed beneficial by teachers in the skole who felt they could use children's knowledge of language to begin their reading and writing activities (see appendix 10). Interactions were on equal terms, or with the child taking the lead. Peer interactions observed demonstrated the value placed on these interactions for children's constructions of meaning and reflections of understanding. Children constructed their own meanings while accessing materials in their natural surroundings and devising socially constructed activities with their peers. Shared communication with their peers and learning about the outdoor environment helped the children assimilate survival skills and independence in the climatic conditions in Norway.

The love for reading material was foremost, with stories read and action songs learned and a particular emphasis on traditional tales strengthening the community bond and Norwegian awareness. It was difficult to incorporate structured tasks within this system.

In England challenges were posed by initiatives for language, with difficulties incorporating them into existing practice because the focus was on written tasks and reading, providing evidence of children's progress in their learning. In England skills needed to participate in a literate world and educationally progress were specifically taught at an early age, despite the awareness as noted by a practitioner, of children being more motivated with child-initiated tasks. Children's writing formed a requirement for implementation as an aspect of the profile assessments. Evidence was therefore needed to ensure children had met profile standards. The frequent observations of writing practise

and examples of evidence for the profiles confirmed this view (see appendix 11). Children were given instructivist tasks to confirm whether they could or could not achieve Early Learning Goals set. These literacy aspects were useful to provide evidence to parents of the achievements of their children, which could satisfy them in a competitive market for places. The indoor environment provided a learning space for children to practise their formal writing skills.

7.1.3 Transition

Challenging transition issues were evident in both countries. In Norway this was because all practitioners supported the existing philosophy based on language development in the kindergarten, with formal elements of literacy begun in skole. However, the government's desire for evidence of literacy attainment, framework inclusion of aspects such as children's knowledge of letters and text and awareness of a process of change for the year 2011-2012 when children's achievements and attainment were to be recorded and shared in a written format, was found 'difficult'. The Skole teacher preferred children to 'climb trees and make bonfires' while in the kindergarten, while those taking younger children felt activities should be based on 'talking with children'. New assessments could strengthen national control away from the locality. A practitioner voiced the views of others in the setting as she felt children 'should not be writing in kindergarten'.

In England transition issues posed challenges for practitioners because they were felt to be in an 'early years bubble'. They were required to organise progression from the private provision where activities were child-initiated, to the formal tasks set in Key Stage 1 in order to provide the mixture of literacy approaches for children. These

strategies were set within the national EYFS framework while working within a school context.

This caused different challenges in implementation as similar macro recommendations were implemented through differing Norwegian and English local values and philosophies. These changes were seeping into approaches to literacy in Norwegian kindergartens in preparation for children's later schooling, while use of literacy from child-initiated activities was emerging in English settings.

7.2 Resolutions

The resolutions included pragmatic changes to practice and the learning environment in the settings to implement the recommendations.

7.2.1 Pragmatic Changes

In Norway, despite a reluctance to change, practitioners had implemented strategies to accommodate more formal literacy teaching. An assistant stated 'it has changed quite a lot and we have been told to do more reading and writing. The teacher had introduced a 'Skole Club' the previous summer for children who were about to go to skole. This preparation for skole included learning to recognise and later write their names but formal writing practise remained outside the desired provision. It was asserted that 'mostly people are not positive about the changes'. The adult focus remained on what they perceived as appropriate practice.

In England there were 'massive changes' according to an early years practitioner, which consisted of the incorporation of child-led activities where 'children self-select a lot more'. The play based activities were taken from the child's experiences to promote

language development. There was an attempt to provide a balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities, despite it being, according to a practitioner, ‘hard at first’.

Resolutions devised were set within existing practice and the learning environment available. The Norwegian Adviser noted practitioners were ‘sceptical’ about the changes while in England the early years teacher worked within ‘the constraints of a primary school’ when making changes. The Norwegian setting had outdoor play as the main learning environment. This posed difficulties for the implementation of formal activities as routines needed to be changed to enable children to attempt the activities indoors. Formal literacy practices could be attempted outdoors but would need to be appropriately devised. The use of the indoor or outdoor environment does not preclude either constructivist or instructivist approaches. Children could be engaged in meaningful constructivist activities indoors while experiencing instructivist tasks outdoors. However, the indoor area in both countries was coming to be perceived as the ‘working area’ where formal skills were practised.

7.2.2 Learning Environments

Practitioners sought to change the learning environments in the settings to reflect the new initiatives they needed to include. In Norway names and written instructions were displayed and in England furniture had been reorganised to enable children to play in areas in the classroom. In Norway literacy skills were being further included in the provision and in England planning for children to actively co-construct concepts through language was being developed in designated play areas.

New ways of working could be beneficial for children. Rivalland states, ‘Helping children to learn how to shift from one literacy context to another is critical if we are

serious about providing equal opportunities for children to access literacy and power in the world outside of their own homes and communities' (Barratt-Pugh, ed, 2000:29). Perhaps providing children with a growing range of learning styles and experiences supports their ability to be able to respond to different situations and encounters and become 'global citizens'.

The second section considers how international recommendations of an holistic approach have been incorporated into literacy practice for Barratt-Pugh, (2000:25) claims 'Literacy learning is a complex and multifaceted process which is continually evolving.'

7.3 Literacy within a Holistic Approach

The literature review suggested a holistic approach was already a significant part of practice in Norway, while it was being further incorporated into the educational structure in England through such policies as Every Child Matters (2003). Mooney et al (2003:6) note 'definitions of quality and what should be measured will depend on interests, cultural values and understandings of childhood.' Countries which implement recommendations within existing pedagogy will have different notions of what is being sought for provision, hence differing challenges were experienced by practitioners working in the two sites. The next section discusses what challenges and resolutions for a holistic approach to literacy this had for practitioners working in their settings.

Challenges

Challenges are considered concerning different perceptions in the two countries of a holistic approach concerning the child and those around them who support individual

literacy learning. This includes discussions of children's learning, the adult's role, professional liaison, diversity, parental influence, accountability, resources and competition.

7.3.1 Children's Learning

Challenges regarding children's learning resulted from existing philosophies which posed difficulties when incorporating new ways of working with children. In Norway children socially constructed their concepts and ideas as part of an holistic approach to learning. Structured literacy skills specifically taught to children were difficult to accommodate in these circumstances. It was apparent in the interviews that practitioners felt it was difficult to manage written records of children's work in the existing organisation with concerns they might be 'measuring too much', deflecting attention away from interactions with children. Practitioners were rejecting a move which veered from what they deemed a holistic approach.

In England an instructivist approach with the focus on educational progress held challenges when children's interests were incorporated into planning within school and national demands for evidence of educational progress, for example a letter writing task set for the whole class. Ofsted noted the previous year that 'children make rapid progress from day one' in this environment. In school, judgements were used to inform subsequent practice and gauge 'where the children are at when they get to us'. Such judgements strengthened the commitment to maintain the existing instructivist system. Motivation and self-esteem, as observed by a child who attempted handwriting and naming sounds, could be harmed in this approach. In both countries the challenge was to provide learning and teaching styles which supported boys and girls learning. The outcomes based

approach could result in some children having little memory of the tasks set as an educational, rather than holistic approach.

7.3.2 The Adult's Role

The challenge in England was to incorporate a holistic approach within the demands of structured programmes of work. The high adult:child ratio had implications for the organisation of learning and knowledge of the child through interactions with them. These were mainly through whole class and small groups while communication with individuals was used within these perimeters.

In the new initiatives English practitioners were required to change from instructors to facilitators for children's learning. Prior to the introduction of EYFS David (2003:14) noted 'key studies in both preschool and statutory school settings have identified significant gaps between the rhetoric and practice.' She continued, 'although accepting that children learn and develop through play and that play is a motivating force for children's learning, many teachers are pressurized by the very full first school curriculum and large classes to neglect play as a means of teaching.' It was observed during the study that the focus of tasks was on adult-led or adult-initiated activities where children had a passive role but the teacher had made difficult choices in changing the provision to incorporate child-initiated learning. Observations indicated Norwegian children used child-initiated activities for 340 minutes while English children used this approach for 230 minutes. However, observations and children's records demonstrated that the adult focus in England was on adult-led activities with children accessing their own tasks when they were waiting for adult support for the focused task or had completed it.

In Norway the challenge was to continue the holistic approach while incorporating structured literacy skills. The adult facilitated children's holistic learning, guiding children's learning through the child's interests and interactions with them. A development of this role would include the delivery of structured tasks to support systematic learning of letters and writing skills. The low adult:child ratio supported individual guidance, interactions and knowledge of the whole child. The kindergarten had to respond to parental needs to gain employment, working longer hours and being prepared to accept the changes through necessity to maintain the viability of the setting, although the adult:child ratio had not changed. This promoted the strong links between the children and the practitioners working there as the child was in the kindergarten for long periods.

Both settings used children's interests as the starting point for activities, within the physical learning environment available, supporting a holistic view of the children. Differences occurred in the approaches adopted to promote this way of learning and develop children's potential. In Norway the national framework was implemented within the existing philosophy where children took the lead in their activities, devising their own tasks while interacting with their friends. Children made their own judgements regarding whether they were able to achieve an activity, exploring their own strengths and limitations enabling development from concrete to abstract thought. In England practitioners used children's interests as the starting point along with guidance for phonetic and handwriting guidance. These were transformed into structured learning opportunities where specific teaching points were taught to aid children's progression through the developmental stages in the EYFS framework and provide evidence for

profile judgements. In England changes to the layout of the classroom included displays which incorporated interactive, informative displays providing ongoing 'working walls', attempting to promote an holistic view of children's interests. Although care and education are inseparable in an early years setting the emphasis on the perspectives and their impact on a holistic approach was apparent.

Staff gender issues were a challenge as during the times of observation there was only one male member of staff in Norway, who was a trainee teacher, while the rest were female. This could influence the dynamics of the setting and at times interactions and responses from boys, particularly if there was not a male member present in the child's family.

The challenge in both settings was to maintain professional expertise to meet the demands of knowledge of literacy skills and an holistic viewpoint. The adult's role in both countries was adapting to recommended changes in policies and practice. This was mentioned by Advisers in the localities who identified the need for practitioners to maintain their professional development or have newly qualified staff who have had changes incorporated into their training. This however, could devalue existing practise where practitioners do not have specific qualifications but a deep understanding of the locality of the setting and the people who live there.

In Norway children holistically devised their own activities in the natural environment, while in England children's interests were transformed into formal educational activities. In Norway holistic values such as 'human dignity' and 'equality' were sought. Children were encouraged to develop their interests, accessing the outdoor environment with their friends for the whole session if desired. In England children were given support to fulfil

their ‘future life chances’ with educational strategies for learning focused on preparation for later schooling.

7.3.3 Professional liaison

Practitioners in both settings found accessing other professionals to support individual children challenging due to time constraints and lack of funding. For example in England support for specific behaviour needs from professionals with expertise in this area was sought but rejected as a priority, while practitioners in the Norwegian setting would have liked further provision for speech and language to help minority ethnic children with Norwegian as a second language.

All practitioners, bar one, had had some educational training for working with young children. In the settings studied a variety of professional backgrounds of practitioners was not evident. One practitioner in England felt there was a difficulty of communication with professionals from other disciplines when discussing individual children, as contacting them was problematic due to time, funding and pressure of workload.

7.3.4 Diversity

In Norway the fears expressed in the literature regarding minority ethnic children’s inability to access provision was not realised in the study. Much work had been undertaken to ensure minority ethnic children were supported, through language activities and care. However, the close knit community they entered and possible difficulties of acceptance by their peers was observed. By the time children had reached skole this had also been resolved through the perceptive interventions of practitioners in the kindergarten. Recorded assessments of children’s progress was not kept but consisted of informal discussions of children’s welfare and social wellbeing. The language rich

environment through interactions with peers and adults supported children's literacy development and understanding.

In Norway those children who might have been reluctant to participate and did not actively pursue social constructs of their learning as they lacked confidence and spoke little Norwegian, were given further support by identified practitioners. However, misconceptions were noted. There could be a misunderstanding of the purpose of the setting if cultural values in the home differed from those in the kindergarten. Parents might expect children to sit and study resulting in children who were reluctant to participate in learning through active participation.

The proactive approach welcoming minority ethnic children in the setting used as a basis of research contrasted with the English setting where no children attended. However, the setting did support individuals with special educational needs, which had been recognised by Ofsted the previous year.

7.3.5 Parental Influence

Working with parents was a challenge as they were knowledgeable of their child's development and shared vital holistic information with practitioners. Also, in both settings they held power over the practitioners through their ability to move their children if they felt it appropriate. It was therefore necessary for practitioners to listen to the type of framework parents wished for, while working in close liaison with them.

In England parents were encouraged to share their child's progress with practitioners, gaining access to aspects of practice to further promote the literacy development of their children. This was particularly noticeable in reading where support was secured from parents to help their children learn key words or read books to support phonetical

awareness. This could lessen the perception of the parents as the expert concerning their child, with professionals delivering structured literacy skills. Parents could perceive that children come to school to ‘work’ not access child-initiated play. It could however, reinforce the awareness of a literate society and encourage children to participate in the written form of communication through shared dialogue between practitioners and parents. Maintaining the dialogue between staff and parents appeared challenging in the busy early years classroom environment, such as the beginning of the day.

In Norway, practitioners were accountable to parents who could share in the requirements of the learning and influence timings of the opening of the kindergarten and activities accessed by their children. The provision responded to parental needs, some of whom needed to travel daily to Oslo to gain employment due to the population rise in the area. Staggered daily entry meant parents could discuss concerns or share experiences, when arriving at the setting. Both settings shared dialogue with parents of children’s activities and responded to parental perceptions of quality by producing required evidence to demonstrate that they were fulfilling their obligations. This evidence reflected the ethos of the setting with social aspects in Norway, such as family photographs or using a table top game with friends and educational aspects in England, such as reading progression, planning, writing or made objects. Parents had significant impact on the welfare of the children, providing information for a holistic approach and influencing what was undertaken by the settings.

7.3.6 Accountability

This aspect was challenging for practitioners as there were multiple sites of accountability. They were required to respond to parental wishes, the contexts of the

settings, that is the views of others in the kindergarten or school, the local authority and national external regulators. This shaped approaches used in the settings as these views could have significant impact on the viability of the setting or the job prospects of the practitioner.

Practitioners responded to the needs and requirements of parents in the localities as they could readily move their children if they wished. They were required to work within the constraints of the settings they worked in. Both settings used a whole team approach to planning for provision and individual practitioners views were listened to in this remit. Views of those working around the age phase studied had a strong impact on the ways of working for the five year olds. Practitioners were accountable to provide a smooth transition for the children and work alongside their colleagues, taking into consideration the approaches they used. This highlighted the contrast between the two settings with the Norwegian setting based with younger children, while the English setting worked within a school ethos.

In Norway the care aspect of the provision was emphasised, with timings to suit parents and language and communication providing the basis for learning and promoting a holistic approach. Local authority Advisers oversaw provision but responded to parental views of quality. This included records, for example of family photographs or tickets from a family outing, which were given to parents when children left the setting. The records highlighted the desire to appreciate the child at each stage in life, rather than as a purpose to promote formal literacy skills. Proposed national changes to assessments however, could introduce accountability to a wider authority, on local or national scales, changing practice to include new directives.

Practitioners in Norway were reluctantly agreeing to the need for further measures of accountability to ensure children made progress in literacy elements, both in the kindergarten and as a process to be continued in skole. Measures introduced could strengthen control by local and national authorities as requirements to assess the extent of children's progress and quality of provision is overseen by the local authority and checked for standards on a national basis. Decisions would need to be made as to what constitutes appropriate assessments for on-entry profiles from kindergarten to skole which could depend on the values held by the communities for the need for an holistic approach.

In England practitioners were also challenged by accountability to the local and national authorities. Ward (TES, March, 2010) claimed 'The pressure on reception comes from it being both the final year of the Foundation Stage –which means teachers must complete a statutory end-of-stage profile assessing children's achievements-and the first year a child is in school, with expectations to prepare children for the more formal teaching ahead.' They adhered to the statutory frameworks, assessing children through the national profiles system. This was regulated by Ofsted to ensure the requirements were carried out, which could have significant implications for the sustainability of the provision. Ward (ibid.) continued, 'Local authorities have to identify schools where scores aren't high enough, then SIPS (School Improvement Partners) come in and ask them to work in ways that they know are not right for the children.' This meant practitioners had to provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that activities had been attempted by all children. Alexander (2010: 117) states government policy highlights 'the conflicting paradigms at its heart-high quality education and care for individual children on one

hand, with the demands of accountability and standards on the other'. The pressure on children to succeed could lead to them losing motivation on meaningless tasks or ones which they cannot achieve to provide evidence for external regulators and assessment scales, with resulting harm to their self-esteem. It also focuses practitioners' attention on specific tasks to satisfy regulators, rather than the holistic needs of the child.

7.3.7 Resources

These were a challenge to practitioners as existing resources influenced activities that were undertaken. The resources favoured the holistic development of children who responded well to the learning style used in the different settings. The Norwegian setting had few purchased resources compared with the wealth of resources evident in the English setting. Use could be made of the large natural resource around the kindergarten in Norway, as more land was available. This was not possible in England where high density living means land is at a premium. The learning environment was focused indoors where different areas were well resourced, enabling aspects of literacy to be developed through bought items, combined with the use of materials for child-initiated play, for example computers and Smartboard with relevant software accessible. The use of resources strengthened existing approaches to children's learning as they promoted these ways of working. It would be challenging, and possibly expensive, to incorporate different approaches within existing ones. Sustainability was a factor in both countries, to enable the maintenance of resources for individual holistic needs, while keeping within financial constrictions.

7.3.8 Competition

Competition between providers proved challenging for both settings because time spent promoting the provision and focusing attention on required aspects to secure full capacity was taken from time spent with the children. It also meant practitioners were reluctant to change elements of practice in case parents were not happy about the changes.

In Norway the government had pursued a policy of kindergarten for every child, supporting parents return to work. This led to an explosion of providers in the Hamar region. Practitioners had to satisfy parents to gain their children's attendance at the setting and in turn receive funding for them. The Headteacher remarked that each kindergarten needed to have an aspect which would encourage children to attend. She had worked hard to secure appropriate provision for minority ethnic children in the area. Therefore, parental views were of great importance, affecting what happened in the provision and promoting a holistic approach.

In the English setting practitioners also had to satisfy parents to ensure their children attended the school. The structured learning environment in England could reassure parents that learning was taking place. In addition, practitioners were required to satisfy the demands of the regulators Ofsted through evidence provided, where provision was assessed and outcomes published, further influencing parental views and the strength of the uptake of children coming to the school. Increased mobility of parents heightened the desire to please them and sustain the settings, keeping the viability to remain open and ensure the children remain in the settings. Therefore parental focus on educational progress became a major guiding factor for practitioners.

7.4 Resolutions

Resolutions resulted in changes to practitioners' expertise, strengthened collaboration, increased workload, developed support for individuals, particularly those with Norwegian as a second language in Norway and encouraged the implementation of new strategies.

7.4.1 Professional expertise

The adult's role in both countries was adapting to changes in policies to meet possible global requirements for children. This was mentioned by Advisers in the localities who identified the need for practitioners to maintain their professional development. In Norway adults helping children to draw on literary experiences would need expertise while in England the Adviser felt 'a lot of work remains to be done on child development'. This was a concern for a practitioner in Norway who had been appointed as a member of the local community rather than having specific professional qualifications. In England an early years assistant sought to develop her professional expertise through gaining Early Years Professional Status.

7.4.2 Staff Collaboration and Workload

Staff collaborated to accommodate changes in circumstances. In Norway staff worked flexibly to share the demands posed by longer hours with the children. They claimed 'everybody does everything' including sharing shifts.

In England tasks were shared to enable adults to work with smaller groups and get to know the children as individuals more, for example the early years assistant took a group teaching children letter recognition.

A move towards having staff who taught formal literacy skills in Norway, while English practitioners combined care with education through early years professional status,

incorporating birth-five provision, was resolved through demands on practitioners time and workload. Changes to requirements for professionals to work in the settings increased their workload and, with unemployment and a workforce willing to accept new regulations, encouraged existing staff to accept conditions to keep their posts and be increasingly mindful of accountability measures which could jeopardise their employment. A tension was occurring between 'care' and 'education' approaches with practitioners becoming exhausted when trying to accommodate both aspects of provision within increasingly demanding daily routines. This resulted when more formal tasks were deemed educational, such as keeping written records of children's progress in Norway or observing child-initiated play while completing evidence based records in the form of work in school books in England.

7.4.3 Support for Individuals

The setting in Norway had been proactive about a suitable environment for minority ethnic children. The Headteacher was a leading professional to support minority ethnic children and colleagues who had similar concerns. She was one of a small number of professionals who were involved in an International Child Development Programme (ICDP). This ensured minority ethnic children were given expert support and tested for their language ability to inform the next steps. The material 'was quite new for us'. Assessments used as a diagnostic tool rather than part of accountability measures could be deemed useful by practitioners. A language specialist was employed to help children with Norwegian as a second language. Targeted support was given to help children participate in the language activities offered. Practical strategies were devised, for example warm clothes available for children to access the outdoor environment.

In both settings children identified as those with special educational needs were given individual support, either by a named adult or from another agency involved in their well-being. Speech therapists visited both sites to support individual children. In England children were given further support by the local authority if it was considered necessary to meet their individual needs.

7.4.4 Strategies

Specific strategies had been devised to promote a holistic approach in both countries. In Norway the shared Records of Achievement between staff and parents encouraged dialogue and communication. In England a 'Link Diary' had been devised to record children's experiences with different providers during the day, which was a 'good way of communicating' and enhanced a holistic view of the child's literacy activities. The early years teacher noted 'Parents share reading books, phonic sounds, home/school diary and storysacks.' This dialogue, incorporating literacy learning for the child, promoted interactions and communication between practitioners and parents. She continued, changes to the organisation of learning incorporating 'more personalised learning and an independent learning environment' supported the growing knowledge of children as individuals through interactions with them. The English Adviser emphasised the development of collaboration between parents and practitioners 'sustaining the development' of partnership and 'not making them feel uncomfortable about their own skills'. Therefore pro-active measures to promote a holistic approach to literacy had been fostered.

7.5 Challenges and Resolutions from the Local Contexts

This chapter analysed how a comparison of the two sites improved our understanding of the challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches. Similar macro recommendations were implemented into differing philosophies of learning, resulting in differing demands in the two sites to accommodate the new initiatives. Given the different contexts, any international policy will require different adjustments, different changes and may never be similar. This was due to the different philosophies at the settings and indicated that, while practitioners sought to implement similar international recommendations, their perceptions and practice influenced how they were incorporated into practice and the value placed on them. Practitioners pragmatically implemented the recommendations to suit their philosophy. They resolved the many demands placed on them by incorporating aspects of international and national recommendations and frameworks into their practice. This was achieved by fulfilling aspects, such as names on children's pegs for children's awareness of written text, or reorganising furniture, while maintaining a system which continued to follow the practitioners' philosophical beliefs about young children's learning.

The following chapter reflects on the findings of responses to the sub-questions discussed throughout the thesis to answer the major research question;

What are the challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches in two selected sites in Norway and England?

Chapter 8

Challenges and Resolutions to Early Years Literacy Approaches

This chapter considers the findings of the six sub-questions discussed throughout the thesis, to answer the major research question which concerns the question;

What are the challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches in two selected sites in Norway and England?

The literature review in chapter 1 discussed the first sub-question:

(RQ1) What challenges are suggested by an investigation of the global context for early years literacy approaches?

Chapters 3 and 4 considered the second sub-question:

(RQ2) How does a study of national context contribute to our understanding of challenges in early years literacy approaches?

Chapter 5 focused on the local context and responded to the third sub-question:

(RQ3) What are the most appropriate research instruments to investigate an understanding of these challenges in the local context?

Chapter 6 explored findings from the empirical study to answer the fourth sub-question:

(RQ4) How does a study of local contexts contribute to our understanding of challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches?

Chapter 7 analysed the empirical findings to consider sub-question 5:

(RQ5) How does a comparison improve our understanding of the challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches?

Chapter 8 incorporates the final sub-question, discusses the sub-questions and answers the major research question:

(RQ6) What are the resolutions for practice in the two sites?

The first sub-question explored challenges for early years provision suggested by the global context. Key macro organisations were identified in the literature review and their recommendations for early years literacy approaches considered. The chapter begins with a discussion of the findings of the first research sub-question;

8.1 (RQ1) What challenges are suggested by an investigation of the global context for early years literacy approaches?

Challenges suggested by an investigation of the global context for early years literacy approaches were contemporary forces and international organisations which drove the formulation of policies, creating recommendations for perceived ‘universalised norms and best practices’ (Kennedy, 2006:299).

8.1.1 Contemporary Forces

Challenges in the global context featured interconnected factors in a shrinking world, such as migration for those seeking jobs, need for child-care, importance of literacy, financial constraints and diversity, which impacted on early years provision. Cultural changes in an increasingly multicultural world influenced provision, with continually evolving exchanges of views and values. Ease of communication, for example use of the internet, and travel increased global transference of ideas and shared understandings of

common contemporary challenges such as global industries, resources, food or human rights issues, heightening this process.

National alliances between countries, forged to support economic and political strengths, further impacted on early years approaches through shared dialogue and collaboration concerning which aspects constituted appropriate standards of provision, for example the European Commission's Targets for Quality 1996-2006.

8.1.2 Universalised Norms and Best Practices

The challenge for international organisations was to address the contemporary forces and transform issues arising from them into elements of international policy as recommendations to national governments to incorporate into their policies. Contemporary forces and macro networks influenced the compilation of these international recommendations regarding early years provision, including literacy. These recommendations or directives took the form of 'targets' in some instances for incorporation into national early years policies and practice. This fostered the notion of 'universalised norms' where a common approach to early years provision was applauded, such as in the European Commission's policy paper in 2008, 'Young Children and their Services: Developing a European Approach'.

Key international and European organisations such as UNICEF, OECD, the World Bank and the European Commission, considered the contemporary forces and formulated specific recommendations to address them. From these deliberations they sought to define, from their perspective, what aspects were required in an appropriate standard for early years care and education. They provided recommendations which concerned;

a) Literacy as a crucial skill

b) Literacy as a holistic approach

It was recommended that literacy as a crucial skill was taught through two aspects, formal literacy skills and a child-centred approach which promoted skills relating to a child's ability to draw on their own resourcefulness. The structured approach was deemed necessary for children to gain the skills to enable them to become literate and participate in a literate world. This incorporated an approach where children developed independent thinking skills to enable them to survive and respond flexibly in an increasingly challenging world.

A holistic approach covered factors such as the whole child, how the child learns and the team around the child to support children as individuals and cope with the diverse nature of those accessing the provision as global citizens. This included the philosophy of how children learn, and how they are supported by practitioners, parents and other professionals concerned with the child's welfare.

Aspects of the two key literacy elements were featured in international policies for incorporation into national policies and practice. The international perspective of these policies could be discerned as a desire to promote standardised provision for young children to help them become 'global citizens or workers'.

These international recommendations and policies cascaded into national policies. They influenced national policies where there was a desire to remain or participate on the world stage, for example to maintain economic stability. National governments therefore sought to provide resolutions to the recommendations and policies through incorporation

into national policies and frameworks for early years. This incorporation into national policies led to the challenge posed as the second sub-question;

8.2 (RQ2) How does a study of national context contribute to our understanding of challenges in early years literacy approaches?

Reference in the literature review to international drivers and how national frameworks for early years provision had evolved, enabled the identification of possible challenges which might occur when new initiatives were implemented onto national agendas. It was possible to identify similarities and differences that might occur in practice, through the scrutiny of literature and reflections of existing practice.

8.2.1 National Policies

Study of the national contexts contributed to our understanding of challenges to early years literacy approaches through discovering how the approaches had evolved and why they had been formulated in that way. National policies indicated similar elements of practice to be implemented in the localities. Challenge in the national context therefore including the implementation of international recommendations within existing provision. The study provided an understanding of why the national frameworks had been formulated. It was necessary to implement aspects of strategies which were not apparent in existing practice and establish practice which moved towards ‘universalised norms’ from the macro recommendations.

Therefore, international recommendations for literacy as a crucial skill and as a holistic approach were resolved by the incorporation into national frameworks. In Norway,

national policies and frameworks were introduced for early years literacy by the government in 2006, including concerns for recording children's achievements and providing structured strategies. Assessments are due to be introduced in 2011. Guidelines also drew on the existing holistic approach.

In England structured approaches in policies such as Letters and Sounds (2007) were disseminated. This fitted into existing practice discussed in the literature review. Other agendas such as Every Child Matters (2003) drew on a holistic approach to the whole child, while the revised Early Years Foundation Stage framework (2009) incorporated structured areas of learning and development with a play-based approach aimed to start from the child's interests and needs. However, these standardised elements were introduced within existing philosophies and therefore were different in their implementation.

8.2.2 Existing Philosophies

The study of the national contexts in Norway and England identified the rationale for practice, why systems evolved in certain ways and the philosophical approaches used. It provided an understanding of the different philosophical approaches in the respective countries and why they occurred. This understanding led to an awareness of different challenges posed in the two countries.

In Norway it was discerned that the country had forged alliances with other countries, sharing ideas, while maintaining responses to climatic and geographical demands. The low population, high employment and economic links with countries, such as inclusion in the Agreement of the European Economic Area in 2004, provided an understanding of

how early years provision had evolved. The issues were discussed alongside political and cultural factors where Norway was found to be a relatively new country after being governed by others and alliances had been forged with Scandinavian countries to ensure Norway remained independent yet had sufficient strength in global terms. The social communities in the localities worked as strong networks to support each other and survive the long winter months. Care for the children supported those who wanted to work in the communities. This background to the evolving provision, fostered an understanding why a holistic approach to literacy was deemed desirable. This approach reflected society, where social interactions and a communal spirit of working were vital for survival.

In England the study of the national context contributed to an understanding of the provision through discussions of the historical background and how international recommendations might impact on the existing frameworks. The outcomes based approach was found to have evolved from an individualistic stance from the industrial revolution where school and early years provision revolved around employment schedules. Emphasis was on 'value for money' (Callaghan, 1976) where children's education was 'investment in human capital' (Blunkett, 1998) with control by governments through assessments and accountability measures. This was reflected in the frameworks for the provision where Early Years Foundation Stage profile points assessed individual children's progress, recording the success of the programme in the provision and those who worked there. Younger children were involved in school programmes through early admission, nursery or reception classes.

The study of literature based on the national contexts therefore enabled similar national frameworks to be noted but exploration of differences in ways of implementing the policies due to the different ways in which the practices had evolved. It was further possible to consider what those differences might be, and speculate about the challenges for practitioners who were to implement them within existing systems.

In order to discover the impact of the international recommendations and national policies it was necessary to scrutinise the delivery of the policies on practice in settings in Norway and England and ascertain the effect they had had on subsequent practice. Consideration needed to be given to the methods used for this empirical study. Therefore the third research sub-question sought to consider what were the most appropriate methods of gaining a knowledge and understanding of the challenges faced by practitioners, when implementing recommendations from international organisations within national policies into their practice.

8.3 (RQ3) What are the most appropriate research instruments to investigate an understanding of these challenges?

A desire to gain an appreciation of the international recommendations on different national philosophies was needed and an understanding of whether the recommendations were being implemented into the systems and to what degree. In order to achieve this consideration needed to be given to the sites chosen, the methodologies to gain relevant data, who should be incorporated into the sample of interviewees chosen and how the observations should be conducted.

8.3.1 The two sites

The two sites were chosen as they represented differing approaches to early years literacy which promoted an understanding of different challenges experienced in the provision. This developed from an understanding of the global context and international and European recommendations and guidelines, through relevant literature case studies in two selected sites in Norway and England. This provided data to consider how practitioners had addressed different challenges. The specific sites were chosen to represent typical settings in the areas. The English setting had received a ‘good’ recommendation by Ofsted during the year prior to the empirical research and was used as a partnership school by Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln. The Norwegian setting was a partnership school for teacher training at Hedmark University, Norway.

8.3.2 Methodology

The methodology of two case studies to gain information was chosen as it provided a deep insight into the challenges through the perceptions of those who worked there. A previous study of an English setting by the researcher, based on the perceptions of challenges posed by the literacy hour on early years teachers practice, used questionnaires to gain data regarding the practitioners views of approaches to early years literacy. Three interviews were subsequently developed from the questionnaires to gather further data concerning the perceptions of the teachers involved. It was found in the study that the depth of findings from the interviews was much richer and gave a better depth of understanding of issues. It was therefore decided to concentrate on qualitative methodology to gain data to use to inform the research questions and use two case study sites to gain this information. The questions revolved around the two main international

recommendations identified, namely literacy as a crucial skill and as a holistic approach. Interview questions posed developed the understanding of issues concerning specific aspects of literacy and the literacy development concerning the whole child and those around them.

8.3.3 Interviewees

Interviews enabled rich insights into the philosophy and rationale for the interviewees' decisions regarding practice and the resulting challenges. The sample of interviewees was chosen to gain an understanding of the philosophy of learning held by the practitioners and whether it differed from that proposed in the national documentation. It also revealed the challenges faced by the practitioner as the person responsible for that age group, in implementing new initiatives. It considered whether there were different expectations for the age group from those supporting younger or older children, posing another challenge for the practitioner when attempting to satisfy different requirements by various practitioners around them. A comparison of the perceptions of the practitioners in the two sites enabled consideration of the extent of standardisation between the settings and the views held by those who worked there.

8.3.4 Observations

Observations indicate how challenges had been addressed in practice. They enabled understanding of routines of the settings and the activities individual children accessed during the day, while seeking to gain a further picture of approaches to literacy and whether they corresponded to the perceptions proposed by the practitioners who worked there.

National documentation, interviews and observations were used to triangulate findings and discover whether the proposed agendas in the documentation were being implemented in the manner promoted in the frameworks, how far the interviewees agreed with them and whether what was said to be attempted was happening in practice. They enabled a comparison of findings between the sites.

When the study sites and methods of research had been decided, it was necessary to discover what challenges had been posed by the implementation of national frameworks and guidelines and how and why they were similar or different in the two countries. This led to the focus of the empirical research and the forth sub-question;

8.4 (RQ4) How does a study of local contexts contribute to our understanding of challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches?

A study of the local contexts supported the understanding of the underlying philosophical differences reflected in the literacy approaches used and the challenges arising from the international drivers on existing local practice.

8.4.1 Implementation of Recommendations in Practice

A study of the local contexts contributed to our understanding of the challenges by enabling a reflection of the national documentation and the extent to which it was being implemented within the settings. The interviews provided views of the frameworks by the practitioners using them and the challenges they had experienced in following them. They were able to develop themes they wished to discuss, for example the challenges of competition or accountability which significantly influenced their practice.

The study gave a reliable and valid reflection of happenings within the setting. It provided findings which reflected the routines of the children and the staff who work in the settings and views of what was desirable practice of the wider society in the contexts of the settings.

8.4.2 Indications of the Wider Picture

The case studies gave a depth of understanding of issues and enabled a rounder picture of the children and all those who were involved in their learning to be discovered. It enabled findings to emerge which supported or ran against views regarding the philosophies of the settings and the manner in which they were changing. They provided findings which gave data for consideration of similarities and differences between the settings to emerge. This could lead to reflections of standardisation of provision between the settings as they implement similar recommendations.

The case studies in the two sites were chosen to provide an in-depth knowledge and understanding of issues concerning the challenge of implementing international recommendations into existing practice. Key themes from documentation, interview responses and observations were noted in turn then discussed pertaining to their relevance to the main concerns of literacy as a skill and as a holistic approach. This led to the fifth sub-question which concerned an analysis of the empirical findings.

8.5 (RQ5) How does a comparison improve our understanding of the challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches?

A comparison of the findings from the two sites highlighted the differences faced by differing philosophical approaches to early years literacy when attempting to implement similar strategies from international recommendations.

8.5.1 Different Contexts, Different Resolutions

A comparison of the challenges and resolutions to early years literacy in the two settings highlighted differences in their implementation and the underlying philosophies. The comparison considered whether the new initiatives were incorporated into the practice, to what extent this occurred, the philosophy of those working there, and the dilemmas and tensions experienced by the practitioners when implementing early years literacy approaches in the specific sites. It was possible to scrutinise each aspect of literacy as a crucial skill to compare the extent to which it was placed in importance and the initiatives which needed to be introduced to fulfil the macro recommendations. It enabled the discovery of perspectives of elements of an holistic approach from different viewpoints to be discovered which were deemed to be important by the practitioners, the rationale for using existing approaches and how they reflected the context of the society of the settings.

It was found that resolutions were used to incorporate the new initiatives within existing philosophies. The study provided opportunities for practitioners to express their perceptions of the challenges and the wide range of issues that concerned them when delivering literacy sessions. They were able to give accounts of the strategies they had used to resolve the challenge of the new initiatives on their practice with considerations of the impact this had on others working there or involved with the children's learning.

Findings demonstrated that policies were implemented in practitioners' understandings of children's learning and development.

The resolutions to the challenges posed in the study were considered in the final sub-question;

8.6 (RQ6) What are the resolutions for practice in the two sites?

The resolutions for practice led practitioners to implement elements of national policies within the constraints of the localities and the settings. They reflected the values and beliefs of the communities they served.

8.6.1 Pragmatic Solutions to National Policies

The resolutions for practice identified the pragmatic strategies used to respond to issues in a changing world. The international resolutions to contemporary factors through recommendations and guidelines were observed to have been implemented into national policies and frameworks as resolutions to meet the requirements. Practitioners were required to meet the new initiatives as strategies within their daily work in the local context. Resolutions to these national initiatives were devised which incorporated existing practice, with attempts to incorporate aspects of the new strategies. Practitioners were observed to identify specific strategies, which they had recently introduced, to support the learning of the children at the settings.

To meet the challenges brought about by the tensions between existing practice and new recommendations, it was discovered that early years teachers and their colleagues had devised resolutions to implement initiatives within their existing philosophy and practice.

8.6.2 Resolutions

The specific resolutions from the two sites included;

Literacy as a crucial skill –structured programmes

- Incorporation of literacy skills, such as recognition of letter symbols and introduction of a ‘Skole Club’, within existing practice in Norway

Literacy as a crucial skill –encouraging independent thinking skills

- Planning from children’s interests within existing instructivist structures in England

Literacy as a holistic approach

- Addressing transition issues through the introduction of a Link Diary in England and discussions of written records in Norway
- Changing the layout of furniture to accommodate the child-centred frameworks in England
- Further consideration of the learning environment, i.e. indoors in Norway and outdoors in England
- The formation of local networks to support children with Norwegian as a second language

Within broad frameworks teachers used their personal, professional expertise and judgement to respond to the needs of the children in the settings and sought professional advice from other agencies when appropriate.

8.6.3 Wider Understandings

The specific resolutions cited, for ease of implementation of the new initiatives, led to further consideration of wider recommendations for early years practice. In the introduction of the thesis mention was made of the study not having claims of generalisation as findings were particular to the settings involved in the case study. Cross-national studies are deeply embedded in the culture of origin. However, according to Adamson and Morris comparisons of curricula ‘permit useful transfers of good practice, allow informed decision-making, and deeper understandings of the interactions between education and its social, economic and political contexts’ (Bray, eds, 2007: 282). These reflections of practice can lead to practitioners to consider their own practice, for example the importance of language in children’s literacy development, the role of assessments and what constitutes a learning environment and why does it.

Consideration can now be given to the major research question;

8.7 What are the challenges and resolutions to early years literacy approaches in two selected sites in Norway and England?

The challenges concerned contemporary forces impacting on the locality of the settings and international recommendations driving ‘universalised norms’. national policies and guidelines, the contexts of the settings and practitioners values, beliefs and philosophies about supporting young children’s literacy learning. Resolutions incorporated international and national solutions and practitioners pragmatic strategies to devised to meet the complex challenges.

Challenges

8.7.1 International Recommendations

The international challenges discussed concerned the identification of contemporary economic, political and cultural forces on early years literacy provision. These were identified by international organisations who provided recommendations, directives and targets for early years literacy approaches which included the need for individuals to be literate to enable them to gain employment, respond flexibly to future challenges and function as part of a global society. They formed standardised aspects of provision as guidelines to promote common practice to develop literacy learning. This promotes a vision of society, reflected in early years provision, which is standardised and has common values, strengthening uniformity for a global workforce.

8.7.2 National Frameworks

These recommendations impacted on national policies as requirements for literacy as a crucial skill and as a holistic approach. Both countries were included in international league tables, for example PIRLS 2006, and could respond to such findings through incorporating international recommendations into their policies. There may also have been a desire to reflect societies they were collaborating with, for example in Scandinavian countries.

8.7.3 Local Contexts

The challenges for implementation into local settings was that practitioners did not agree with aspects of the new initiatives, and implemented them within their existing philosophy. They used their judgement when implementing the recommendations,

although in England they were under external regulator, parental and school context constraints, while in Norway they worked within the kindergarten ethos and parental wishes. This led to implementation of the initiatives as a means to satisfy regulators while for the most part continuing with their existing practice. The challenge in Norway was to accommodate writing skills and written assessments within the child-initiated play which occurred mainly outdoors. In England the challenge was to incorporate child-initiated play while providing written records for evidence of children's structured progress. Challenges also occurred in the changing role of the adults from either a facilitator or an instructor to accommodate the change in ethos. In England support for children with diverse needs was planned on an individual basis when the children came to the school while in Norway pro-active measures were used. Parental involvement, accountability, competition and transition issues increased the challenges faced by practitioners in both countries when implementing literacy approaches. They listened to parental voice, adjusting practice accordingly, celebrated aspects of the provision that others in the locality did not have, such as provision for minority ethnic children in Norway and recorded educational progress from the early years in England. Practitioners resolved the many demands placed on them by incorporating aspects of international and national recommendations and frameworks into their practice. Aspects of new practice were being introduced gradually and possibly sceptically, changing practice slowly as practitioners assessed the value of the new elements.

8.8 Resolutions

8.8.1 International and National Policies

The contemporary challenges of a global society were identified by macro organisations as specific recommendations for early years practice. In turn, national governments responded by incorporating the recommendations into policies and frameworks for early years. Practitioners in the localities responded to global challenges by devising activities and planning which supported individuals, for example those with Norwegian as a second language or as identified in both settings, those children with special educational needs.

8.8.2 Local Values and Beliefs

In the settings practitioners responsible for the young children's literacy learning negotiated a complex task of using their personal, professional philosophical beliefs as a basis to incorporate national directives and frameworks. Pragmatic strategies were used to liaise with practitioners taking younger and older children, link with parents to collaborate for the benefit of the children as individuals and access other professionals to support individual children when appropriate. Practitioners satisfied national requirements using pragmatic strategies, while basing their work on their existing philosophies. Therefore, the contention that practitioners used 'universalised norms and best practice' while apparent in documentation, it was demonstrated in the empirical study that practitioners based their work on their personal values, beliefs and philosophies, reflecting the views of the society in which they were situated.

The final chapter considers limitations of the study, recommendations for early years practice, further research and conclusions.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

The study highlighted the complex tasks early years teachers in two different countries were posed and the resolutions they devised to implement international recommendations and national initiatives into their practice. Practitioners provided the link between the national frameworks and the developmental needs of the children, having a crucial impact on what was taught in the settings and the approaches used. Moyles et al (2002:60) state ‘Early years pedagogy is extremely complex and difficult to define precisely. It is more than ‘practice’ alone, for it is what the practitioners think about as well as do, and the principles, theories, knowledge and qualities that inform and shape their practice.’ The cultural contexts of the practitioners shaped the manner in which they implemented the international recommendations. The implementation of the new initiatives reflected ‘personal thinking and beliefs concerning the way learning is fostered’ (David et al, 2003:7). This final chapter considers limitations of the study, recommendations for early years practice, further research and conclusions.

9.1 Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study concerned generalisations, the sites of the case studies and researcher bias. The first limitation concerned how far generalisations could occur from the two sites.

9.1.1 Generalisations

According to Bryman (2001:282) it is claimed that ‘when research is conducted with a small number of individuals in a certain organisation or locality ...it is impossible to

know how the findings can be generalised to other settings.’ However, he argues ‘it is the quality of the theoretical inferences that are made out of qualitative data that is crucial to the assessment of generalisations.’ The case studies concerned were too few to come to definite conclusions regarding a wider population. Bassey (1999:52) suggests the term ‘fuzzy generalisations’ which have ‘built-in uncertainty’ and the concept suggests the limits of generalisations. The use of the term ‘fuzzy’ allows recognition of the likelihood of there being exceptions ...and this seems an appropriate concept for research in areas like education where human complexity is paramount.’ Fuzzy generalisations were considered in terms of the study.

The case studies provided findings which could be analysed, specific to the sites. They can also lead to deliberations about those findings to provide an insight into possible theoretical underpinnings of the data collected. In this study the empirical data was used to consider whether there were universalised norms in documentation and in practice in the settings. The settings allowed theoretical generalisations to be made of universalised norms in documentation from international recommendations and national policies but differences in practice in the contexts. Humphreys et al (2005:16) suggest ‘Europeanisation’ refers to ‘both the development of a regulatory framework at the European level and its impact on domestic structures and policies.’ This study explored the extent of convergence of policies and practice. Convergence consists of ‘the degree to which there is an ‘institutional ‘fit’ between the European model and the domestic one’ (ibid, 16). Knill (2006: 4) believes this is achieved through a process of ‘spreading policies across countries’ through such means as policy measures and secondly through policy convergence by voluntary methods where aspects of practice are felt to be

beneficial. Modern uncertainties, cross-national policy convergence caused by transnational communication such as the OECD and pressure from international league tables encouraged policy convergence. The changes fostered through convergence brought challenges to those implementing the changes. The study identified a convergence of policy documentation where the Norwegian kindergarten was a 'learning arena' and writing aspects were being introduced. In England speaking and listening activities were incorporated into sessions with children accessing outdoor play. Elements of literacy and the learning environment in which it was delivered were converging. Both settings started from the children's interests, they liaised with parents, carers and other professionals to support children's learning.

However, Humphreys et al (2005: 8) claims 'change (and consequently convergence) is most difficult on ideas, given their deep embeddedness in dominant beliefs on domestic actors.' The focus for practitioners remained on outcomes in England and the process of learning in Norway. These aspects were emphasised in interactions with parents. In a competitive market practitioners responded to parental notions of quality to maintain the viability of the settings and ensure parents wished their children to attend the settings and not go elsewhere. Accountability measures impacted on how literacy was approached, with profile targets identifying children's progress in England and practitioners' informal observations of children in Norway. Adult interactions with children were on equal terms in Norway, while in England children were given tasks to complete. The power of the learning environment was on equal terms in Norway but the adult held the power in England and children followed what was requested. However, practitioners in both countries were required to respond to the implementation of converging national policies

with local authorities ensuring that they did so. Cost and time when resourcing different strategies, for example preparing a natural outdoor learning environment in England or purchasing writing materials, literacy games and IT equipment in Norway, prolonged the implementation and diffusion into practice. Practitioners were not demonstrating similar philosophies, but responding to their personal values and beliefs in the local contexts which shaped the provision. Therefore it cannot be argued with certainty that universalised norms, transformed according to the values of the practitioners and communities they serve, appear throughout the whole of the population of settings but it can be deduced that this transformation of the norms and recommendations is happening in practice.

9.1.2 The sites chosen

The two sites could have been unrepresentative of early years settings. The countries were chosen as the literature review revealed interesting comparisons between the development of literacy approaches in the two countries. Care was taken to have comparable sites in the two countries and specific sites which were deemed by external bodies, such as the local authorities and partnership universities, to have systems in place which were largely typical of others in the areas.

9.1.3 Researcher bias

It was recognised that the researcher had been an early years teacher previously, and had worked in England. Care was therefore taken to be objective when collecting data, in England and in Norway, where a possible ‘rosy’ picture of provision could have occurred as it was different to previous experiences. It was advantageous to be able to empathise with interviewees through an understanding of their situation. Consideration of

documentation and observations as well as interviewee responses enabled triangulation of evidence. Interviewee responses through an interpretivist paradigm (qualitative) rather than a positivist paradigm (quantitative) enabled issues to be explored in depth following practitioners' perceptions. The perceptions of staff working around the age phase chosen further enabled an insight into different viewpoints.

The findings obtained in this thesis raised a number of recommendations for consideration.

9.2 Recommendations

Recommendations arose from international challenges, national concerns, elements of literacy and the pragmatic strategies used by practitioners in practice.

9.2.1 International Challenges

- Networks could be developed to support colleagues at a local level, with organisations such as ICPD (International Child Development Programme) in Norway, to aid the movement of children of migrant families.

In Norway experiences of supporting children was shared in networks with proactive measures devised, for example encouraging children to come to the setting, having key workers to support individual children and language specialists for liaison with families and to help the children in interactions with those around them. These networks supported practitioners' understanding of how best to prepare for the challenges to foster inclusion and celebrate the increasingly diverse community of which they were a part. This network could be extended to incorporate all settings in Norway, England and further afield to ease movement for the children concerned.

9.2.2 National concerns

- The views of practitioners should be sought to inform national policy making.

It was found in the study that national policies were implemented into practice according to practitioners' values. National policies can reflect international recommendations but local philosophies are used for their implementation. This was found to be the case in both settings studied. Further awareness should be made of the complex work experienced by early years practitioners and their views and professionalism valued.

- Early years practitioners workload should be carefully monitored

It was identified in the study that expectations of practitioners were increasing. They were required to provide a care and educational role, for example in Norway they were given longer hours with the children while requests were made to incorporate formal educational sessions within limited financial budgets for resources. In England educational demands were coupled with considerations of supporting children's interactions and play, within large classes.

9.2.3 Elements of Literacy

- Further support should be given to practitioners to incorporate child-initiated learning and formal literacy tasks within indoor and outdoor play

The incorporation of child-initiated learning in England, and formal tasks in Norway were found challenging by practitioners. The practitioners in the settings studied had difficulties in using the whole environment for literacy learning, both indoors and outdoors as a matter of routine. Practitioners were aware of the policies but had implemented them according to their understanding of what quality learning in literacy

should be. Some practitioners in each country sought further qualifications to keep up-to-date with differing learning strategies and the new demands they might pose on their practice. However, there was resistance in embracing some aspects of new ways of working. For example, writing skills in Norway took the form of labels in the indoor room, while in England the outdoor area was accessed but adults did not participate outdoors during the observations. Practitioners sought ways to incorporate different strategies into their existing philosophies and beliefs of quality practice, to stabilise or normalise the combination of existing activities and new ones. The new activities would be sufficient to address national policies while taking into consideration personal beliefs and values of quality provision.

- Assessments of children's literacy development should not be linked to the accountability of the practitioners or settings

It was identified in the study that accountability measures, particularly in England, led practitioners to focus on providing evidence of children's literacy development to satisfy external regulators. This could lead to activities where children lose self-esteem and motivation. It would be beneficial to maintain assessments as a device for tracking children's development, rather than incorporating a dual purpose.

9.2.4 Pragmatic Strategies

- Practitioners' pragmatic strategies should be shared and used to support work in early years sessions

Pragmatic strategies practitioners had devised were observed in the study, for example the use of link diaries in England and flexi timings for children's start of the

day to support parental collaboration and interactions and knowledge of individual children in Norway.

- Transition should be viewed as a continuity of learning experiences for the child.

Both settings were challenged to provide a continuity of experiences for children from birth to six. Further collaboration can be sought to ensure children have a seamless learning experience between different providers. In Norway transition for younger children to skole followed a desired pathway by practitioners who believed children in the kindergarten should use language activities then begin tasks such as writing, in skole. National guidelines which differed in this practice, in that knowledge of writing was a requirement while children were in the kindergarten, with written records kept of their progress, were attempted to be accommodated within the existing practice. In England the early years practitioner needed to negotiate practice between what was desired for younger children and that of older pupils, which followed different practice, while working within school constraints and national guidelines.

9.3 Further Research

The research identified challenges and resolutions for early years literacy approaches and consequently early years teachers and could form a basis on which to develop further research. This section discusses the kind of research the study is leading to and why this is the case. Research questions arose as the study progressed and conclusions were reached, leading to consideration of issues for future research. This includes;

9.3.1 International Research

- Cross-national research by academics in Higher Education could consider whether similar challenges are faced by global forces on aspects of practice in different countries, for example the role of teacher training or multicultural education, and how contemporary needs are being met.

This question follows deliberations of global forces and whether similar challenges result in different outcomes in countries and why this should be the case. Rather than early years literacy approaches the research would consider the impact on aspects of Higher Education practice to meet changing national needs and the resulting outcomes of the changes.

- An international study collaborating with colleagues interested in early years in Higher Education, to further explore how international recommendations for early years literacy approaches are being implemented in other countries.

This cross-national study would expand the remit of the research undertaken for this project and include colleagues who could consider agreed aspects in their countries. Recommendations could be identified from practice in many countries.

9.3.2 National studies

- A national survey of early years teachers perceptions of changes and the challenges in implementation of national policies, for example the EYFS Review in England and assessments in Norway.

This arose from an understanding of the complex nature of the work of early years practitioners and the desire to use their professional judgement to implement national strategies within their personal values and philosophies.

- A national study of the experiences young children are receiving in early years settings, in the light of the changes.

This question developed from a concern regarding the activities children access, for example the amount of time spent in child-initiated tasks or passive listening.

9.4 Conclusions

According to Gardner (2007:17) ‘We acknowledge the factors of globalisation...but we have not figured out how to prepare youngsters so that they can survive and thrive in a world different from one known or imagined before.’ This study has attempted to raise awareness of issues concerning early years literacy approaches and the challenges posed to teachers when endeavouring to implement macro recommendations and national policies into practice situated in their locality, while responding to the needs of the children.

Gredler (2005:3) states ‘Society...cannot risk leaving the acquisition of knowledge to chance.’ This understanding provides a basis for work with early years colleagues involved in the implementation of policies. The crucial nature of the task is apparent for Woods (2005:xi) emphasised the belief that ‘in early childhood and care lay the foundation for children becoming effective members of society.’ Awareness of the challenges for practitioners in this research should aim to ‘inform professional discourse, and to be informed by it’ (Bassey, 1999:51). David et al (2003:20) agree stating ‘there is

a growing recognition of the need for researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners to work together as partners to define problems and forms of enquiry which are helpful to all groups.’ Debate continues regarding appropriate provision for young children and consideration of contemporary issues but the continuing development of international networks of those concerned with early years should further the consideration of underlying values and aims to enable teachers to meet the many demands placed upon them. We cannot predict with certainty what will happen in the future but the understandings explored in the study could raise awareness of the contemporary drivers influencing early years provision, the challenges resulting from it and the perceptions of those attempting to foster positive change for young children in practice.

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Appendix 1

Report for the Early Years Visit to Forset Skole Kindergarten, Norway - March 2004

Participants

Early Years Coordinator –Pat Beckley
Foundation Stage Governor
Nursery Nurse
Teaching Assistant

This report focuses on the findings of the Foundation Stage team visit as part of the

Teachers' International Professional Development School Determined Programme: SD491

To compare provision for children in the Foundation Stage age group between their own nursery and one in Norway, namely Forset Skole Kindergarten.

The range of provision offered

The kindergarten is open from 7am to 4.30pm. The provision is available for 1-6 year old children. 3 staff care for 9 children in the 1-3 age group, while 6 staff care for children in the 3-6 age group. Children can attend from 2-5 days during the week depending on the requirements of the parents /carers. This has developed to meet changing needs. In the 1980s children attended 2 sessions, which evolved into 1 longer session from 8am -1pm. Children did not have to attend every day but could choose to attend 3-5 days. In 1997 a new policy was introduced which was more subject orientated for children in school. It also had implications for younger children as they could attend kindergarten 2-5 days a week any days. Approximately 10 children stay all week with most children attending 4 days. Children come at staggered times during the day, also according to parental choice.

How information is disseminated to the local community

Teachers from the Gausdal district where the nursery is based, meet once a term to discuss educational matters that may have arisen in the area, such as links with parents and new educational initiatives. Open days are used when parents and carers can join their children in the kindergarten. Day trips and picnics are also organised.

A national speaker visited the district recently to discuss ways of improving parental involvement. Staff at the kindergarten would like to involve parents more but are not sure how to do this. However, there are two parents evenings a year. Parents meetings are also held on a regular basis. Matters arising from these meetings are dealt with by parental representatives. Two parents from each pastoral group are elected to form a parental organisation in the kindergarten. These parents feed back to other parents in the group. Parents are given a handbook of what is expected to be covered in the kindergarten.

Parental questionnaires were sent to ascertain whether they were satisfied with the provision. Questions covered such aspects as;

- How satisfied are you with the staff taking care of our children?
- How satisfied are you with the activities in the classroom?
- How are you able to influence life in the kindergarten?
- Are staff treating you with respect?
- Are you satisfied with the times of the sessions?
- Are you satisfied with the building?
- Are you satisfied with the kindergarten?

There was a 50% response from parents. Pastoral groups were allocated work to respond to issues as a result of the feedback. These results were also sent to the local education authority. A meeting will be held in the autumn to review the work. Planning is available in the kindergarten for parents to see. The government and parents pay jointly for the provision. It is not inspected at a national level.

The daily routines offered by the provision and the philosophy which underpins it

Children are assigned to pastoral groups giving them a base where they can feel secure and settled throughout the day. The younger children were housed in a separate building which was specifically equipped for their requirements. The two other groups have a larger area, with two large spaces and four small areas. They have access to the outdoor area.

All snacks and meals are prepared and eaten in the same areas. Breakfast is at 8am-9am, lunch at 11am-11.30am followed by outdoor play. The older groups come together for activities such as circle time and singing.

The guidelines from the government regarding the curriculum are 'wide and open' according to the teacher. There is an emphasis on enabling the children to be excited and motivated to learn while co-operating with others. Assessment is by observation. The curriculum covers the following areas;

- Community, religion and ethnic dimension
- Culture, music and practical activities
- Language and communication
- The environment and nature
- Physical techniques and health

The impact this is having on the long term success of the pupils

The ethos of the kindergarten appears to promote self-esteem, confidence and the independence of the children. There is an emphasis on motivation and willingness to learn which encourages children to become intrinsically involved with their own learning. Children are very familiar with working in small groups and respond readily to this approach. Children learn in school through subjects based on 'real life' situations and many join different year groups to complete tasks.

A comparison of elements of good practice in both countries

- In Norway the emphasis on children's motivation and co-operation with others proved a useful insight for practitioners from England and showed how this could be developed in school.
- The whole-child approach was apparent with much emphasis on independence and an awareness of physical development. The outdoor area was well used.
- There is a concern in Norway of children's achievements in more formal areas in comparison to other European countries and staff were interested in our approach to activities which promoted emergent writing
- Staff in Norway appeared to have close links with parents and responded to their requests, particularly over the times of sessions
- The high ratio of adults / children meant that more time could be spent discussing activities the children were doing and eased the role of the adult facilitator

Appendix 2

Interview questions for the pilot study.

The main foci evolved from the findings of the literature review.

Questions 1,2, 3, 8 relate to literacy as a crucial skill..

Questions 4,5, 6, 7 relate to an holistic approach.

Welcome and appreciation of support for the research.

1. What do you feel is an appropriate learning environment for young children to support their literacy development?

What sort of resources do you find useful?

This question provides an indication of the approach, and the resources used to implement the approach.

Would you like to make changes in any way?

This gave a clear indication of a move towards a more open ended, less formal approach in the pilot study, gauging the action plan for next steps.

How is the setting organised for the provision?

This helps the teacher to describe the thinking behind the organisation of the provision and how literacy is delivered.

Has this changed in the last three years?

Again, this provides an indication of the changes in approach and strategies currently in place to make changes in the setting.

How has it changed?

This enables specific issues to be raised. In the pilot study 'massive changes' were deemed to have occurred due to the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. This was displayed prominently.

What factors have influenced the need for change?

This should indicate possible reasons for the changes, e.g. networking, who with etc.

2. What role does the adult have?

Again, this reaffirms the approach used.

What policies do you use for planning your literacy activities?

This should identify who is providing the driving force for the planning, whether it is within the setting, in the Local Authority or through National documentation.

How is the setting funded?

Funding has implications for accountability for professionals in the setting.

Who devises the literacy planning for the setting?

This identifies who plans the implementation.

What other areas of learning are covered?

This gives an overview of the framework for learning and the place of literacy within this, whether it has a narrow or broad remit.

How do the children learn aspects of literacy?

This identifies the approach used by the teacher

In what ways do you share your ideas with colleagues?

This has professional connotations and is largely perhaps relevant for the teacher's role.

How is the learning managed and organised?

This gives information regarding the implementation of the planning and supports observations used to discover what is meant by certain learning and teaching styles, for example the use of the term play.

3. Do you have assessments in the setting?

This could indicate pressures of accountability.

If so, are they recorded and who are they shared with?

This could provide further information to accountability concerns.

Are there links with other age groups?

This could develop the rationale for the approach used to literacy, for example whether there are strong links with birth –four or Key Stage 1.

What are they?

This would provide specific ways the links are part of the provision.

Has the training of staff changed? What route did you take into early years provision?

This would include consideration of the effects of a change of approach to a change in training for early years professionals. It would also cover reflection on the balance of 'education' or 'care' in the training of existing staff.

4. How is diversity catered for?

This could indicate whether there a response to a diverse society.

Who decides who is admitted to the setting?

Who decides admission, how it is decided and what it includes could be addressed in the question.

How are individual needs of children catered for?

Does the setting emphasise a view of the child as unique or as a member of the community as the focus.

Do you work with other agencies?

Is multi agency working in place and how does it work? Is there a common language, collaboration and cooperation?

5. What links are there between parents / carers /community and the setting?

This would provide an opportunity to gain further information about the approach used, e.g. whether the child is viewed as a member of the community or the community supports the learning of the child while the child is educated in a school setting.

In what ways are parents involved in their children's learning?

This takes account of an holistic approach and the emphasis placed on the ways of forging the partnerships with parents, e.g. is it a formal arrangement or informal one?

Has the timing of the opening of the setting changed?

Does the timing of the provision incorporate an holistic view of the child, using such facilities as extended schools.

If it has changed what factors were considered?

This would provide the rationale for the changes.

6. Do you feel policies in the last three years have changed your practice?

This should help to encourage discussion of the teacher's rationale for implementing changes.

If so, what aspects have changed?

This would provide example of changes. They could be supported by other evidence such as photographs.

Has your approach to learning and pedagogy changed?

Again, this would further encourage the teacher to discuss any changes in thinking about the nature of early years learning and literacy in particular.

How do you feel your professional role is developing regarding early years literacy?

This answer to this question could indicate how the teacher feels the professional role is developing, if at all.

7. Do you feel any pressures of expectations from outside the early years setting?

This could identify and conflicts of pedagogy the teacher might have to deal with.

Do the children do any special work to prepare them for the next class?

This question could help to further gain an understanding of the approaches used, e.g. whether there is a strong emphasis on preparation for the next stage or the age phase is viewed as a stage of development in its own right.

If you could prioritise three things you hope the children learn from your setting regarding literacy what would they be?

This would support observations of practice and the learning environment to ascertain what the teacher feels is important in an early years literacy framework.

8. Are there aspects of literacy practice that you are particularly pleased with or have concerns about?

This question could further develop concerns from the previous question, while also celebrating the teacher's achievements in implementing valued practice

Appendix 3

Observation formats

Key

- 1 Mark Making
- 2 Speaking and Listening
- 3 Story sharing
- 4 Child reading to adult
- 5 Phonetic input
- 6 Adult led activities
- 7 Child initiated activities

Observation whole setting

Setting:								
Date:								
Number of staff present								
Number of children present								
Time		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Scrutiny of the observation forms will reveal aspects such as the activities pursued by the children and how they are organised and managed, the space occupied, the style of learning and teaching demonstrated, the routine of the day, the interactions taking place and how diversity is managed.							
Observer								

Discussion with teacher following observation

Thank the teacher for supporting the research.

- 1 Did the teacher feel the observed session was typical?
- 2 If not, in what ways was it different?
- 3 What role /roles did the teacher feel he /she was using during the session?
- 4 What made the session effective?
- 5 On reflection would anything have been changed?

Appendix 4

Child Tracking Observation format

Setting:
Date:
Number of staff present:
Number of children present:

2 minute each observation 5 observations per child (3 am, 2 pm) 12 children per setting

Time:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Time:										
Time:										
Observer										

Key

- 1 Interaction with adult
- 2 Interaction with peer
- 3 Independent play
- 4 Small group
- 5 Whole class
- 6 Adult led activities
- 7 Adult initiated activities
- 8 Child initiated activities
- 9 Indoor play
- 10 Outdoor play

Appendix 5

Observation proformas for Vestenga, Norway and Barton St. Peter's, Lincolnshire

The observations took place in the setting where the children who were 5 years of age in the academic year from August 2009 to August 2010.

Key

- 1 Interaction with adult
- 2 Interaction with peer
- 3 Independent play
- 4 Small group
- 5 Whole class
- 6 Adult led activities
- 7 Adult initiated activities
- 8 Child initiated activities
- 9 Indoor play
- 10 Outdoor play

Observation whole setting

Setting:											
Date:											
Number of staff present											
Number of children present											
Time		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Scrutiny of the observation forms will reveal aspects such as the activities pursued by the children and how they are organised and managed, the space occupied, the style of learning and teaching demonstrated, the routine of the day, the interactions taking place and how diversity is managed.										
Observer											

Discussion with teacher following observation

Thank the teacher for supporting the research.

1. Did the teacher feel the observed session was typical?
2. If not, in what ways was it different?
3. What role /roles did the teacher feel he /she was using during the session?
4. What made the session effective?
5. On reflection would anything have been changed?

Appendix 6

Child Tracking Observation format

Setting:
Date:
Number of staff present:
Number of children present:

10 minute each observation 5 observations per child (3 am, 2 pm) 12 children per setting

Time:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Time:										
Time:										
Observer										

Key

- 1 Interaction with adult
- 2 Interaction with peer
- 3 Independent play
- 4 Small group
- 5 Whole class
- 6 Adult led activities
- 7 Adult initiated activities
- 8 Child initiated activities
- 9 Indoor play
- 10 Outdoor play

Appendix 7

Interviewee participants

Barton St. Peter's Church of England Primary School, Lincolnshire, England

Michelle Ashton	Early Years Teacher The Early Years Co-ordinator gained a B.Ed with Hons training for 3-11 age phase. She taught for two years before coming to St. Peter's where she had taught for nine years.
Yvonne Hewitt	Early Years Practitioner Yvonne obtained a Foundation Degree in Early Years. She started work at the school seven years ago as a Teaching Assistant but qualified as an EY practitioner in November 2009. She worked as an Early Years Practitioner on Mondays and Tuesdays and as a TA the rest of the week.
Stacie Holtby	Early Years Practitioner Stacie started at the school ten years ago. She trained as a Nursery Nurse and worked full time until 2006 when she became part-time following the birth of her daughter.
Sandra Simmons	Early Years Adviser Sandra was a former Headteacher and subsequently responsible for Lifelong Learning, including Early Childhood in North Lincolnshire.
Janet Steward	Headteacher Janet had taught for approximately twenty years, ten years of those at St. Peter's.
Rachel White	Manager Rachel was a manager at Fieldview Nursery. She opened the private nursery fifteen years earlier with her mother, mainly as a nursery for 0-3 provision. This was extended to 0-5 provision and the nursery moved to facilities specially designed for the purpose six years prior to the research study.

Louise Montgomery	<p>Manager</p> <p>Louise was also a manager at Fieldview Nursery, which fed into St. Peter's schools early years department. She trained as a Nursery Nurse.</p>
Pamela Carr	<p>Year 1 Teacher</p> <p>Pamela had been teaching approximately twenty years. It was her seventh year at the school after moving from New Holland Primary School.</p>
Adeline Brack	<p>Teacher</p> <p>Adeline worked at St. Peter's for ten years and was appointed Acting Deputy Headteacher two weeks prior to the data collection.</p>

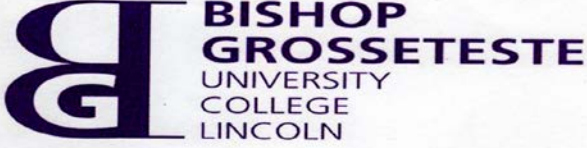
Vestenga Barnharge, Hedmark, Norway

Randi Barkald Kulstad	<p>Early Years Teacher</p> <p>Randi worked for approximately twenty years in early years institutions, five of those at Vestenga Kindergarten.</p>
Aud Juliussen	<p>Early Years Assistant</p> <p>Aud completed her education in 2005 and had worked at Vestenga Barnharge for two years.</p>
Kari Dobloug	<p>Early Years Assistant</p> <p>Kari had worked at the kindergarten for twenty years. She did not have any formal qualifications but lived in the community and her grandchildren attended the kindergarten and neighbouring skole.</p>
Anne Dorothea Barge	<p>Barnehagusjef Early Years Adviser</p> <p>Anne began her career setting up provision for children's learning in a hospital. In 1984 she became the administrator for early years barneharge. In 2001 she became the Early Years Adviser for the region, overseeing private and maintained settings.</p>

Sissel Nyang	<p>Styrer (Headteacher/manager)</p> <p>Sissel had been the Styrer for seventeen years at Vestenga Barnharge, Hamar, Norway. She had become an Adviser in the area for the International Child Development Programme.</p>
Siv Tove Larsen	<p>Leader in the first years</p> <p>Siv completed her education in 1991. Her role at Vestenga Kindergarten, where she had been for eleven years, was Pedagogical Leader of the First Years.</p>
Hege Nyang Anderson	<p>First Years Assistant</p> <p>Hege worked in provision for children's first years and had been at the kindergarten for six years.</p>
Asa Brynildsrud	<p>Teacher</p> <p>Asa was a teacher at the neighbouring Presrud Skole in Hamar. She worked with a team of three teachers, who had responsibility for three classes and sixty-two children. She had taught at the skole for approximately twenty years.</p>
Kari Kirkeby	<p>Teacher</p> <p>Kari also worked in the team of three teachers. They had responsibility for the first classes in the skole, following the children's attendance at the kindergarten.</p>

Appendix 8

Examples of copies of the signed ethical agreement




**BISHOP
GROSSETESTE**
UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE
LINCOLN

**The interview adheres to the Bishop Grosseteste University College
Lincoln Ethical Code of Practice.**

The interviewer, Pat Beckley, agrees to follow the guidelines.

The interviewee Randi B. Kiehlstad

**has agreed to participate in the interview and will receive and check the
transcript of the interview before it is incorporated into the study as
part of a Doctoral thesis.**



**BISHOP
GROSSETESTE**
UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE
LINCOLN

**The interview adheres to the Bishop Grosseteste University College
Lincoln Ethical Code of Practice.**

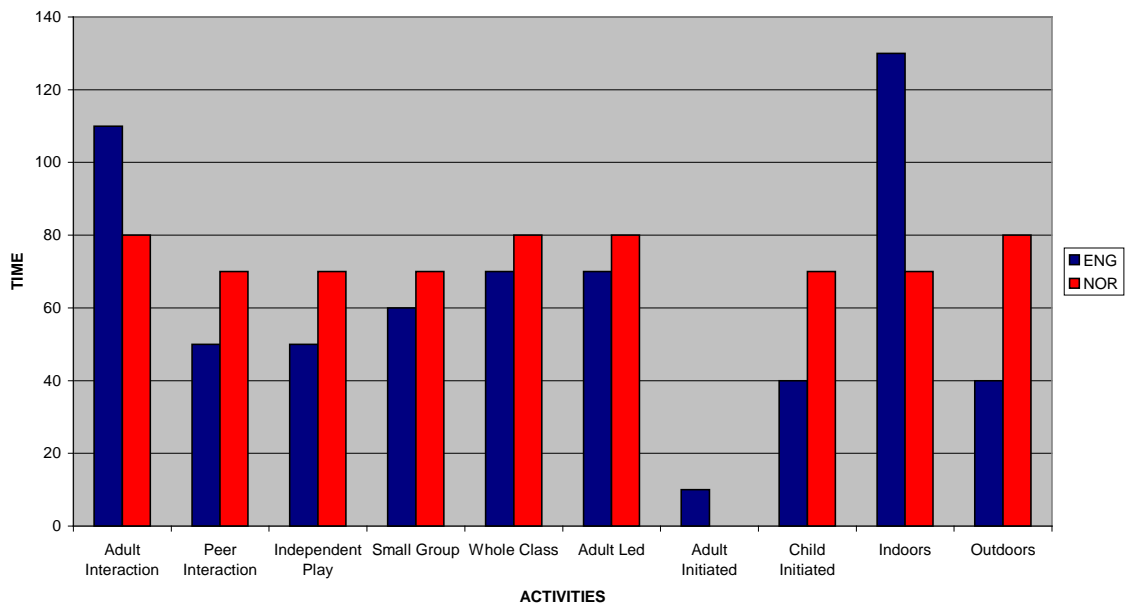
The interviewer, Pat Beckley, agrees to follow the guidelines.

The interviewee M. Ashton

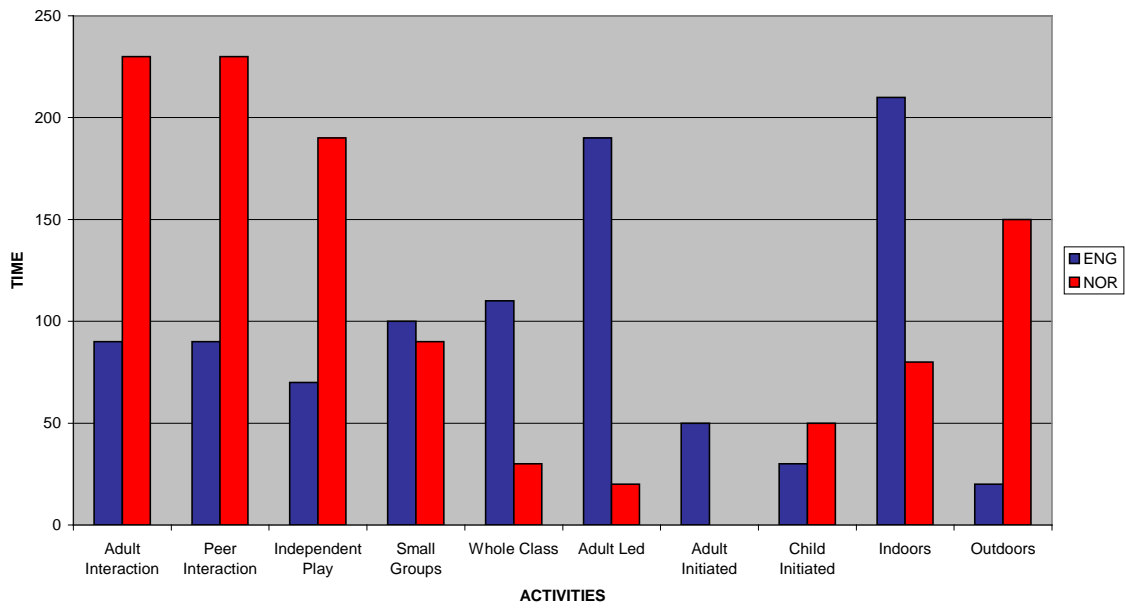
**has agreed to participate in the interview and will receive and check the
transcript of the interview before it is incorporated into the study as
part of a Doctoral thesis.**

Appendix 9 Approaches to Literacy days 1-3

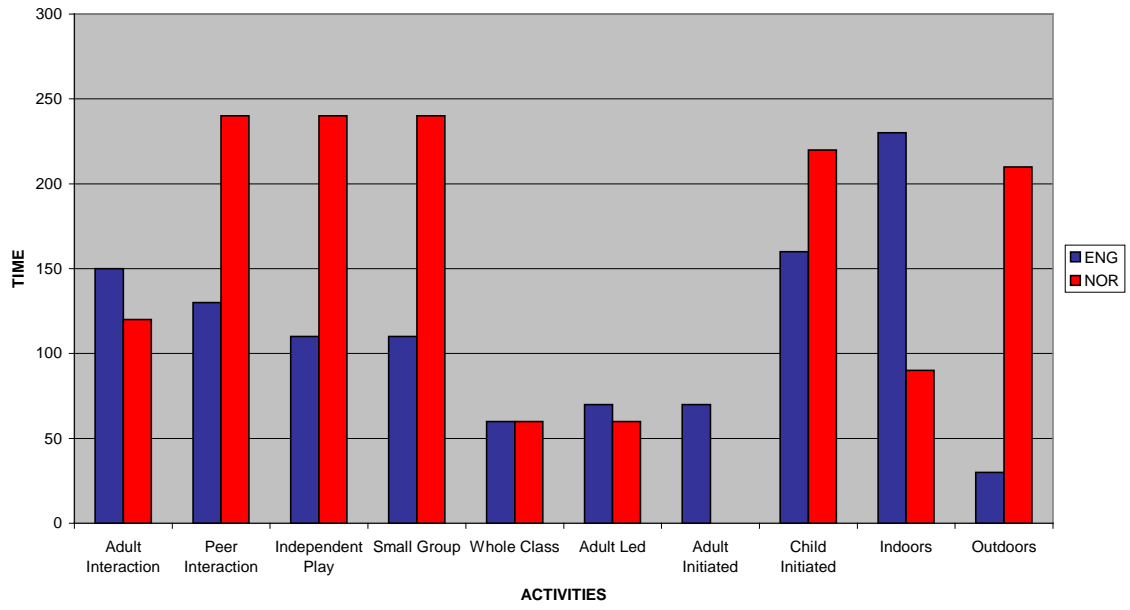
APPROACHES DAY 1



APPROACHES DAY 2



APPROACHES DAY 3



Appendix 10 Examples of children's writing Vestenga, Norway



A self-portrait with name. Thea was beginning to recognise letters in her name.

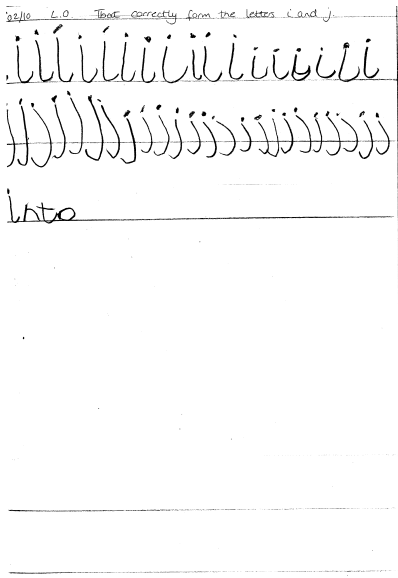


A drawing of the local Fire Station after a visit. Herman could write his name correctly and drew the equipment that was meaningful for him.

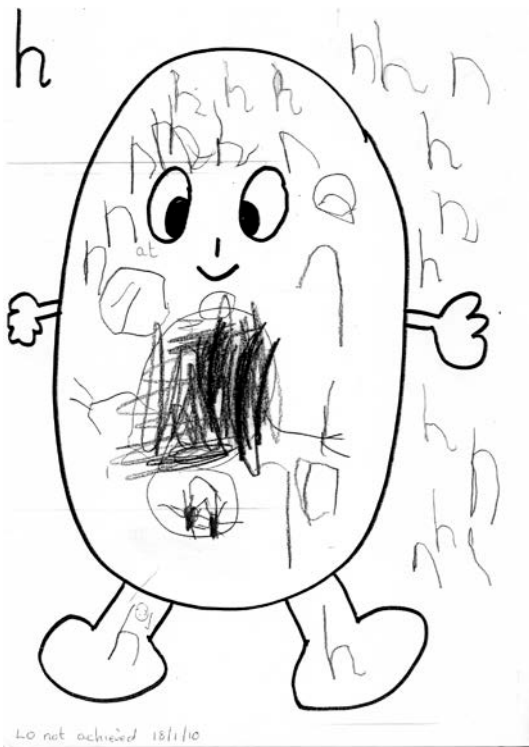
Appendix 11 Examples of children's writing Barton St. Peter's, England



Overwriting used to support children's ideas of writing to Santa. The child was unable to write his name but recognised the first letter. He used an adult's help to overwrite his writing to express his ideas.



Formation of letters i and j as part of an adult-led handwriting practise session.



Handwriting practise and sound recognition not achieved above and achieved below, to use as profile evidence.



The lion was too scary.

↳ F o h o r c o p B m n p e s o

The dog was perfect.

F h o M T i o B.

LOA 25/11/09.

Example of emergent writing following a story read to the class.