

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE
MOTHER/PRACTITIONER RELATIONSHIP
THROUGH DIGITAL DOCUMENTATION IN
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE
(ECEC).**

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Abstract

This thesis explores partnership working in an English Preschool in the North of England and examines, using digital documentation, the perceptions of mothers and practitioners when they share stories about 'their child'. Partnership is a term used interchangeably, especially in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), and a positive relationship is regarded as fundamental when considering how best to support young children. Relationships are complex nevertheless, and there are often underlying tensions and power dynamics that influence the way practitioners and parents develop their working relationship and communicate their values and beliefs; additionally, there are questions about the contribution and way the child's everyday experiences are interpreted. A qualitative study design was adopted to explore the perspectives of seven mothers and their respective child's key person, using the child's unique digital story as the focus they discussed their relationship, their hopes and worries for their children. Phenomenographic interviews were conducted, the method chosen for its collaborative and conversational style, yet potential to reveal nuanced meanings. The data was analysed using sociocultural theory and aligned to Reflexive Thematic Analysis. I propose that the participant mothers and practitioners had developed their own unique pedagogical practice, influenced by their relational and cultural experiences. The digital documentation provided a perspective to explore how each child was framed by the adults as they discussed, negotiated, and celebrated what they saw. Nevertheless, the discussions about the child, their care, learning and development, whilst seemingly informative and collaborative was entirely from an adult perspective. The study highlights a number of key findings that advance an understanding of partnership working and also the contribution documentation can play in ECEC practice. Familiarity and a shared history when working in partnership became evident and of significance was the importance placed on the way the mothers and practitioners engaged in a dialogue about their children's needs. However, they freely discussed assessment practices and a desire for their children to be ready, and the mantra of children being ready for school came through strongly, reinforcing the presence of professional and political power in early years practice. Children were not physically present in the interviews but their voices, feelings, wants, and needs were interpreted by the adults. I propose they had a presence, captured in the observations, photographs and videos of the digital documentation. The research findings challenge practitioners and parents to consider the way children become subjects of documentation and how this can lead to the normalisation of monitoring and assessment practices. Partnership as a concept is complex and the research findings concur that establishing a collaborative relationship in ECEC is not without challenge, however, the findings suggest the need for practitioners to acknowledge and explore how children's experiences are interpreted by adult carers and used to inform relationships and partnership working.

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Glossary

BERA	British Educational research Association
DfE	Department for Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
DfEE	Department for Education & Employment
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYFSP	Early Years Foundation Stage Profile
LA	Local Authority
OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education
NNEB	National Nursery Examination Board
RBA	Reception Baseline Assessment
TACYC	Association for Professional Development in Early Years
SSLP	Sure Start Local Programme
UNCRC	United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child

List of publications arising from this thesis

Conference presentations

Crow, A. (2017, February 21st). *Collaborative Pedagogy in the Early Years: Valuing the relationship between parents, children and practitioners*. Presentation presented at the BECERA 'Play Based Pedagogy: New and Re-developed Strategies for Supporting Children's Learning', Birmingham.

Crow, A. (2018, August 28th - 31st). *Collaborative pedagogy between parents, children and practitioners in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Presentation presented at the EECERA 'Early Childhood Education, Families and Communities', Budapest, Hungary.

Crow, A. (2019, June 18th-19th). *But where is the child? Investigating the pedagogical relationships between parents and practitioners*. Presentation presented at the AVP Ocular becomings in dangerous times: The politics of 'seeing', Melbourne, Australia.

Book chapter

This book chapter was published prior to submission of the thesis. The focus of the chapter differs from the thesis in that it elaborates the potential of using phenomenography as a methodology for exploring pedagogical practice. It has informed my thinking rather than been fully incorporated into any particular chapter.

Crow, A. (2020). But Where Is the Child? Using Digital Documentation in Pedagogical Practice with Parents and Practitioners. In E. J. White (Ed.), *Seeing the World through Children's Eyes: Visual Methodologies and Approaches to Research in the Early Years* (pp. 125-140). Brill Sense.

Chapter 1. Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the concept of partnership, with a particular focus on the relationships that are fostered between the adults – practitioners and parents/carers, when children attend early childhood/early years settings in England. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is the statutory framework all preschool settings are required to follow, and partnership with parents is clearly stated as being an important factor in ensuring children and their families receive a quality service (Department for Education, 2021b). There is an existing body of research that highlights the link between the home environment, working with parents and children’s early experiences (Allen, 2011; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Field, 2010; Sammons et al., 2015; Sylva et al., 2004; Tizard & Hughes, 2002), and I have followed with interest throughout my career how such research reports have been translated into early years practice by policy makers and practitioners alike.

In 1981, I qualified as an NNEB (National Nursery Examination Board) nursery practitioner and have continued to enjoy a varied and fulfilling career in a variety of early years and family support settings; I have experienced first-hand what is involved in building a collaborative relationship, with parents, carers and children. Currently I am employed in the higher education sector and have continued to be curious both personally and professionally about how partnerships are initiated and integrated into practice, especially as there is an assumption inherent in the EYFS that practitioners will form a “strong partnership with parents/and or carers” (DfE, 2021b, p. 6). Nevertheless, working in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) over the last 25 years has not been without challenges, and successive governments have introduced policies that have sought to change the face of the early childhood landscape. Initiatives aimed at reducing child poverty and encouraging parents into employment have been pitched alongside the requirement for settings to be of the highest quality so that they could influence parenting practices (Ofsted, 2014, p. 4). This political focus has placed practitioners under pressure to improve the quality of their provision in order to raise children’s achievement and reduce inequalities for the most disadvantaged children (Kay, 2021), alongside maintaining positive relationships with parents (DfE, 2021b).

Undoubtedly then for practitioners and parents there is a balance to be struck, and even though a number of high profile research reports have made claims that there is a correlation between the wellbeing of children, their preschool attendance, and partnership with parents, (Allen, 2011; Ball, 1994; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Field, 2010; Ofsted, 2014; Pugh, 2010; Sylva et al., 2004), local and personal factors will have also had an impact on their relationships. The statutory EYFS, which all early years providers are mandated to follow, has parent partnership at its core (DfE, 2021b). Nonetheless, defining parent partnership is complex, and there are different and even opposing views about what constitutes a positive or collaborative working partnership (Janssen & Vandebroek, 2018; Kambouri et al., 2022).

This introductory chapter sets the scene and structure for the thesis; initially I explain how my interest in working with parents and children evolved. In order to do this I include a short account of the way my career developed, influenced by the different early years' roles and responsibilities. It feels important at this early stage in the thesis to acknowledge and recognise that the personal and professional nature of the study, means also being transparent about the way my own values, beliefs and assumptions will have shaped the research process. A research study that involves a personal and practice focus, according to Mannay (2016, p. 31), must also acknowledge that analysing one's own profession is not without challenge. It is necessary, therefore, to take a reflective and reflexive stance as this offers the ability to recognise the presence of power dynamics as they will have unavoidably impacted on the research design and analysis. Additionally, research that seeks to understand multi-professional practice with families and children should be open to scrutiny, and, I have endeavoured to do this by taking a reflexive perspective by making visible the way theory and practice are embedded in the research process (Pascal & Bertram, 2012 p.479).

The chapter concludes with a summary and explanation of the structure of the thesis.

1.1. Partnership with parents – the historical and personal policy context

Childcare, the term used to describe the provision of nursery or day nursery care in the 1980s and early 1990s, was not high on the political agenda, and there was no specific duty for local authorities (LA) to provide nursery education (Ball, 1994).

Consequently ECEC across the United Kingdom was sporadic, with little provision especially for children 0-3 (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 2000), and what was available differed in each LA. Where provision was funded by the LA, often in larger cities, provision consisted of private day care, childminders, charity run preschool playgroups or locally funded day nursery settings aimed at working with families considered to be in need of social care support. My early practitioner roles were in such day care and family support settings that primarily cared for children who were deemed to be at risk of harm or where safeguarding concerns meant that family intervention was necessary. Although working with parents was regarded as an essential part of the work, collaboration was often strained and limited, as parents were instructed to take up the day nursery place rather than attend voluntarily. This meant, that parental involvement was directed and usually part of a care plan, so rather than a collaborative partnership, the relationship between practitioner and parent was often reduced to one of monitoring and completing routine care tasks.

I was fortunate to work in a LA that saw early years and childcare as a priority, especially for families who due to their socioeconomic circumstances were regarded as needing support to access services for their children. Working with parents in an enabling way was encouraged, especially in the most disadvantaged areas of the city, and during the late 1980s and early 1990s the LA embarked on an ambitious expansion of its early years provision by creating family centres. These centres worked with the whole family and there was a strong connection with community, voluntary and statutory services. The family centres offered what would later be regarded as integrated ECEC services, and there were opportunities to work in a less authoritative way with parents, as the remit changed from prescribing childcare to one that was more enabling and collaborative. Family support, advice and community engagement were key aspects of the family centre provision. It was this experience of working more holistically with families that enabled me to gain new competences in early years practice, as I gained experience of working with the child, their parents, the wider family and community.

In the year 2000 I was offered a secondment within the LA to develop and train a childcare/crèche team in a Local Sure Start (SSLP) programme, one of the many initiatives launched after the Labour government was elected in 1997 - please see

chapter 3 for more details about the political origins of Sure Start. It was the opportunity to work in this initiative and further develop and focus on an inclusive approach to working with children and their families, that nurtured my interest in parent partnership and where my practice took a new turn. The philosophy promoted in SSLP's was aspirational, and as a practitioner, my pedagogical practice was influenced by the new and, in my view, exciting ways the programme sought to create opportunities for children and their families. I became involved in listening to families and engaging them in shaping early years services in different and less conventional, ways whilst supporting them to access preschool provision. After five years in 2005, I was seconded back to develop Children's Centres for the LA and then in 2007 moved to a neighbouring LA to deliver their Children's Centre programme; both roles were influenced by my earlier Sure Start experiences. It was this opportunity to engage with parents, to share knowledge and work alongside them with their children in the SSLP that enabled me to see the importance of collaboration with parents rather imposing a professional ideal.

1.2. Rationale for the Study

As explained in the previous section, working in the SSLP and then subsequently developing Children Centre provision instigated a change in my professional practice, and this is where the motivation for this thesis began. Since moving in 2014 to work in the higher education sector, I have continued to research and explore parent partnership using my practice knowledge to inform my teaching. It was at this point in my career that my doctoral journey began and the driver for this study was shaped by my interest in working with parents, together with exploring pedagogical practice with young children. Pedagogy, for the purpose of this study is defined as a holistic practice; one that recognises not only the importance of relationships but also the complexities that exist when practitioners work with children and their families. Thus pedagogical practice is a set of values, beliefs, and skills that embraces, teaching, learning, play and is informed by theory of child development (Arnott, 2021).

In the initial planning stages, the broad aim of the research was to focus on partnership working; the interplay between the key adults who have the responsibility of caring for very young children in the home and early childhood setting. Building on

the premise that for children, the relationships that form around and with them are significant. Of interest was how parents and practitioners share and negotiate information as they develop cooperative working practices and this underpins not only my own experience of quality practice but is also expected and directed by the EYFS (DfE, 2021a, 2021b). The term parents in ECEC practice is often used as a catch all, to include mothers, fathers and those with parental responsibility; similarly, when early childhood policy refers to partnership with parents the same gender-neutral terminology is often applied (Ciblis, 2017, p. 56). The EYFS suggests that collaboration between practitioners and parents/carers is key to enabling children to be strong independent learners (DfE, 2021b, p. 5), but it is important to acknowledge that partnership relationships are complex, multifaceted and not every partnership will be challenge free as tensions exist around which parent/carer is involved most, what constitutes a good partnership, and where the child is positioned in such a relationship.

The data collection for this thesis was conducted in one early childhood preschool setting in the North of England, given the pseudonym Kinderclass, and used the setting's digital documentation tool, Tapestry, to explore the perspectives of a group of mothers and practitioners. Tapestry is a digital platform purchased by Kinderclass, marketed as an "online learning journal" on its website it is described as a tool to "promote the sharing of photos, videos and diary entries" (The Foundation Stage Forum Ltd, 2022). The use of digital tools, such as Tapestry, is becoming more widespread in ECEC practice, as the information stored on them can be accessed by parents/carers on smartphones and tablets (Cowan & Flewitt, 2021, p. 2).

Nevertheless, digital documentation, of which Tapestry is just one model, include features where celebrating children's learning and development is pitched alongside monitoring and assessment. It was important, therefore, to be sensitive when using digital documentation in the data collection process and being mindful of the potential for conflicting agendas around assessment practices (Albin-Clark, 2020, p. 142). Tapestry did offer a way to facilitate a conversation with the participants; I was curious to know what the mothers and practitioners felt was important to them when they worked together. For this reason digital documentation and the way Kinderclass used Tapestry was integrated into the research plan.

Kinderclass, provides early education and childcare for children aged 2 - 4 years (or when children move to full time education). Following an initial meeting with the setting manager and staff team to introduce the study's aims, seven mothers of children, aged between 2 and 3 years old (all were in or had been in receipt of 15 hours of funded early education), and their child's respective 'key person' - totalling four early years practitioners' volunteered to take part in the research. The EYFS requires ECEC settings to allocate a named key person to each child (DfE, 2021b), therefore, the mother and practitioner participants were already familiar with each other. They had a previously established relationship, where they regularly shared information about the children verbally and through the generation of digital documentation consisting of artefacts - photographs, videos and observations; recognised practice in the EYFS. Consequently, of interest and equal importance was to what extent the documentation -Tapestry - provided a route for the mothers and practitioners to share, co-construct and evaluate their understanding of child development and learning, when working together in partnership. An additional curiosity was the representation of the children in the artefacts. Often this is regarded as a way to see and even hear them as they are positioned in the documentation, by the adults who choose what and how to represent their experiences. The research presented in this thesis aims to inform ECEC theory and practice by:

- Exploring the perspectives of a group of mothers and practitioners about what constitutes partnership working in Early Childhood Education and Care.
- Examining the way digital documentation informs how the mothers and practitioners share, co-construct and evaluate their understanding of child development and learning, when working together in partnership.

The following research questions were designed to inform and shape the study:

1. How do the key adults, involved in the care of the child, work together in ECEC, and what factors influence their working relationship?
2. How is digital documentation used by the participants and what contribution does this make to how ECEC practitioners understand the child's learning and development?

3. To what extent does digital documentation contribute to and influence the way the mothers and practitioners see the 'child'?

1.3. Structure of the thesis

The thesis is composed of a further six chapters, and is organised as follows:

Chapter 2. Theory informed practice, a web of theoretical perspectives

This chapter initially situates the research theoretically by introducing the different perspectives that have been influential when considering partnership working.

Sociocultural theory is introduced as an underpinning concept for understanding the way partnership is constructed but also influenced by different social and cultural factors. In addition, the chapter considers the way political influences have shaped early childhood practice, challenging practitioners to negotiate a delicate balance between their responsibilities to the children, their parents and policy makers. Finally partnership is explored through relationships; and individual and cultural perspectives are considered alongside the practice of documentation, due to the opportunities it offers for providing the window into the social and cultural world of the child.

Chapter 3. Partnership is multi-layered, a review of the literature.

The literature review chapter begins by defining what is meant by partnership in Early Childhood Education and Care, and in order to do this partnership is explained in relation to the wider educational landscape. The review then explores the historical origins of working with parents and considers the way educational policy has influenced the pedagogical practice of practitioners and parents alike. The chapter moves on to explore documentation as a pedagogical tool recognising how international ECEC practice has influenced the development of documenting children's early childhood experiences in England. However, as documentation in digital format is on the increase, concerns have been raised about what this means for children once their visual biography is shared and interpreted.

Chapter 4. The Methodology, methods and data collection

In this chapter the methodological approach and subsequent methods chosen for this study are explained. A qualitative research design was adopted as this offered

an effective way to understand and interpret the perspectives of the seven participant mothers and four practitioners. The chapter introduces phenomenography as an under used research approach in the ECEC field and includes details about how the phenomenographic interview method used pedagogical documentation to gather data from the mothers and early childhood practitioners. The chapter concludes with a detailed explanation of how the findings were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2018).

Chapter 5. Presentation and analysis of the findings

The findings generated from the seven phenomenographic interviews are presented in this chapter. Due to the interpretative nature of the research, the chapter begins with a reflexive analysis of my own role as researcher as I considered this to be important due to my professional heritage. I have an emotional and professional connection with ECEC practice, and this meant it was essential to reflect critically on my own assumptions about partnership working when analysing the interview data. The findings are organised in the following three themes which are illustrated with excerpts from the interviews, these themes are utilised to foreground the analysis:

1. The affective dimension of partnership.
2. Digital documentation as a tool for partnership.
3. How digital documentation 'frames the child' .

Chapter 6. Partnership is complex, a discussion.

The discussion chapter draws together the findings of this research study, supported by the previously reviewed literature to argue for a greater transparency in ECEC practice, particularly in relation to the partnership between parents, practitioners and especially the children. The chapter uses the three research questions to consider the different factors perceived to have an impact on partnership working as discussed by the mothers and practitioners during the interviews. The way the mothers and practitioners shared the digital documentation is discussed, as is the way they make assumptions about what they believed they saw the children doing in the photographs and videos. Children's experiences, their learning and development was readily discussed in the interviews as they were captured in the documentation, nevertheless, their actions were only ever interpreted by the adults.

Chapter 7. Conclusion and recommendations for practice

The final concluding chapter details how the findings contribute new knowledge to ECEC practices in England and beyond. I reflect on the methodological limitations of the thesis and implications for practice when developing and sustaining partnership with parents. In summarising the recommendations for practice, I include a section on the Covid-19 Pandemic that affected the world from late 2019, and subsequently England in 2020-2021. The ramifications brought about by Covid-19 had a profound impact on society, businesses and education, including ECEC. Partnership practices as described in this thesis had to change instantly as ECEC settings were forced to restrict physical access for parents, they either closed or offered a limited service due to country wide lockdowns. Documentation in digital format would have undoubtedly been a valuable communication tool in this case, but only for the parents who were able to access it. In 2022, when this thesis was completed, ECEC settings in England are still recovering, and anecdotally, there are instances where parental involvement has shifted to less in-person contact. This means that there could be opportunities for using documentation in creative ways to enhance rather than take the place of collaborative partnership working.

1.4. Chapter summary

This introductory chapter has set the scene for the thesis by exploring the motivation for investigating parent partnership. The chapter has introduced the rationale for the study and explained my motivation for focusing on the interplay between the participating mothers and the key person responsible for caring for their child in an ECEC setting. Adults form their own interpretations of each child's experiences and documentation is a tool regularly used in practice for this purpose as it contributes to the way adults see the child. In the following chapter I explore a number of influential theories that have contributed to understandings of partnership working in early childhood practice. Presented as a web of theoretical perspectives, these theories offer a way to consider the relationships that form between the adults who care for children when they attend ECEC settings.

Chapter 2. Theory informed practice, a web of theoretical perspectives.

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced the rationale and aims of this thesis and provided a brief historical look at the way early childhood services have been shaped in recent years. There are two main threads to this research study; to investigate the significance of partnership relationships and to explore how digital documentation influences partnership working in ECEC. Building on the research aims and questions, this chapter will now focus on several interlinking theoretical concepts that contribute to the dialogue about relationships and the practice of parent partnership in ECEC.

In the introduction to this thesis, I discussed how the term parent in ECEC practice is often used interchangeably as a catch all (see page 15). Additionally, I explained my own motivation for focusing on partnership with parents, as it is borne out of practice. Yet, early years practice is intrinsically informed by theory, and the terms theory to practice and practice to theory are often used interchangeably. Whalley defines this interplay as reflective and reflexive practice (Whalley & the Pen Green Team, 2017, p. 17), this resonates with my understanding and experience as a practitioner and researcher, as it accounts for the way knowledge and experience continually evolve. Moreover, in relation to my own experiences, reflecting on my practice and being reflexive, so challenging my own values and beliefs, has enabled me throughout this research to think deeply about my personal assumptions about parent partnership and the relationships that form between adults in ECEC practice. I naturally wanted to see the positives in partnership, and needed to remind myself that when studying one's own profession, it is important to take a self-critical stance (Pascal & Bertram, 2012). Being self-critical involves challenging personal and professional principles, meaning I considered it necessary to be aware of the potential for such principles to influence my judgements while doing research in the real world.

2.2. A web of theoretical perspectives

When conducting research into partnership working, recognising the way relationships are constructed by the individuals involved is vital, as is acknowledging the way social and cultural influences have shaped their personal behaviours. Furthermore, as ECEC services in England are regulated by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (Ofsted, 2011), there are also agendas driven by political policies that need to be considered. It appears that there is no one definition for partnership in ECEC practice (Kambouri et al., 2022, p. 640), however, practitioners in each setting will have developed their own ethos, guided by their professional practice and their interpretation of the EYFS. Pascal and Bertram (2012, p. 489) recommend applying the paradigm of praxeology when conducting research in ECEC; they define this as the “theory and study of praxis,” meaning research conducted in this way is centred around reflective and reflexive practice. This endorses the approach taken by Whalley (2017) as detailed previously, where theory and practice are inextricably linked. Correspondingly, Formosinho and Formosinho (2012, p. 597) explain that in order to understand praxeology, a researcher must primarily understand the meaning of praxis, as it is an approach to research that recognises the way theory informs practice. Alongside theory, praxiological research also acknowledges the significance of beliefs, values and power and this is important when working with individuals in any environment. Translated into ECEC practice, there are inevitable power imbalances at play, as each individual will bring different experiences to the relationship, resulting in power differentials forming between the triangular association of the parent – child- practitioner (Brooker, 2010) (see Figure 1).

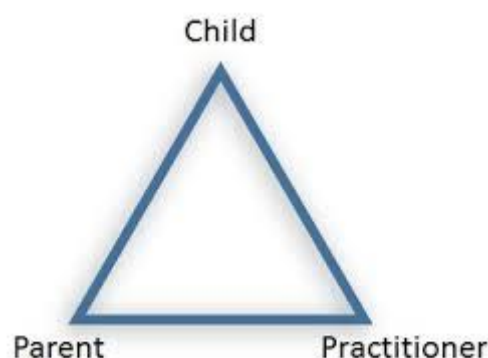


Figure 1 - triangular association of the parent – child- practitioner.

To better understand the role of power in ECEC, Moss (2018a) considers the work of Michael Foucault, proposing his work offers an understanding of the way power can influence the forming of relationships as it cannot be separated from an individual's interactions. MacNaughton (2005) also applies Foucault's work to early childhood practice, particularly in relation to normalising child development, and, as this concept relates to the way parents and practitioners assess and monitor children's achievements, this point is noteworthy when considering factors that may impact on their relationships. Relationships in ECEC are about negotiation, and the key adults deciding what they believe is in the best interests of the child (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000); this can result in tension – especially if there are disagreements around care and parenting practices. Foucault would not necessarily have regarded the presence of tension as a negative, moreover, according to Moss (2018a, p. 90) the application of his theory to early childhood practice could also lead to positive change and development. Even so, drawing on Foucault's work offers an insight into the way power can affect the behaviours of individuals, and emphasise inequalities, and as early childhood settings are closely regulated establishments, this adds a further layer of political power that could in turn influence the practice of partnership.

Praxeological research can be interpreted as a theoretical and epistemological lens through which to understand the layers present in early childhood practice and research. In chapter 4, I explore further the relationship between theory and my epistemological stance. However, the rationale for introducing the concept here is due to the way praxeology can be used in pedagogical research, to justify the inclusion of theory to investigate and understand ECEC practice with children and their families. Agee (2002) proposes that qualitative research draws on different theoretical perspectives as a means to understand different social and cultural environments. As this thesis is concerned with how a group of mothers and practitioners engaged in a working relationship, using documentation as a conduit for collaboration, it is acknowledged that in doing so they will have constructed situations where children's learning and development is not only recognised and celebrated but also scrutinised.

When taking into consideration the aims of this thesis and how different theoretical perspectives could be used to understand partnership with parents in ECEC,

traditional theories of child development were considered alongside those that related to relationships and documentation practices. The Oxford Dictionary defines partnership as an “association between two people” (Stevenson, 2015), yet this is a simplistic definition. Partnership is not necessarily about binary relationships; there are many layers to contemplate and in ECEC practice the associations between the practitioners, the parents, the child and their wider family are equally significant. Nevertheless, relationships have a subjective element (Degotardi & Pearson, 2009), as they can be motivated by personal and professional agendas. Hence, understanding what the association or relationship means to each person, is a crucial aspect of any developing partnership.

2.3. Partnership: a sociocultural perspective

Child development theories within the discipline of developmental psychology have, over time, guided policies and pedagogical practices in ECEC (Chesworth, 2016; Hedges, 2021). As every ECEC setting is legislated to work collaboratively with each child’s parent/s/carer, it should also be acknowledged that the term partnership is influenced by the individual partners. Indeed, the current non-statutory guidance document *Development Matters* is a working example of this concept, as it guides practitioners to use “broad ages and stages” for planning and assessment purposes (DfE, 2021a, p. 4). Nevertheless, as Hedges (2021, p. 2) posits, the focus on children’s linear development contributes to the discourse that development leads learning, as in the work of Piaget, whereby children’s cognitive development can be observed as developing at critical periods (Tizard & Hughes, 2002; Wood, 2000). Chesworth (2016, p. 295) offers an interesting critique, suggesting a focus purely on child developmental psychology can miss the way children learn from their environment and others around them. This perspective has implications for the way parents and practitioners work in practice, as it raises questions about the way children are perceived if they are regarded to only develop through typical milestones. Practitioners are expected to use child development theory to inform the way they use the EYFS to record and monitor children’s progress (DfE, 2021b, p.7) and, although parents will have similar goals for their children, it cannot be assumed that they are mutually agreed. Additionally this point of view may inadvertently lead to a particular construction of the child and childhood in ECEC, where measuring

children against expected norms may limit the social and cultural experiences offered to them.

Sociocultural theory offers an alternative theoretical view for ECEC practice as it challenges the narrow linear view of child development and places an emphasis on the significance of the environment alongside interpersonal connections for all partners – parents/carers/practitioners (Hedges & Cooper, 2018). In contrast to developmental psychology, sociocultural theory is a philosophical approach that has built on the work of Lev Vygotsky (Rogoff, 2003, p. 50), “whereby children’s individual development is theorised as, and entwined with their social and cultural experiences, both past and present.” And, as Hedegaard (2012) implies, Vygotsky’s theory can also offer a view on how children learn from and with others, further reinforcing how children are often the focus and at the centre of any partnership relationship. Nevertheless, partnership has different interpretations (Kambouri et al., 2022 p. 641) and although sociocultural theory provides a valuable lens for understanding the complex interrelationships and entanglements of partnership working, relationships between parents and practitioners are not without challenges (Rogoff, 2003). The expectation that ECEC settings will work collaboratively with parents is clearly defined in policy, yet the suggestion that this will ensure a child is “ready to benefit fully from the opportunities ahead of them” (DfE, 2021b p. 7), is potentially idealistic. Parenting practices differ and are shaped by social and cultural processes, additionally each practitioner will also be influenced by their personal and professional knowledge, therefore, each partner will bring differing sociocultural perspectives to their relationship.

2.4. Partnership is individual and relational.

Partnership, the term used in ECEC practice to describe the relationship between the key adults, parents and practitioners, usually begins when children start attending an early childhood setting. In many instances (but not all) the first partnership is formed between the mother and designated practitioner or key person. Preschools are, after all, institutional establishments, and there are expectations for parents to be involved in their child’s educational journey (DfE, 2021b). According to Ciblis (2017, p. 56) the term parents is often used as a general term, but it is mothers who tend to be targeted as the main carer for young children and, therefore, by

default they are seen as the key contact in early childhood settings. This point is reinforced by societal beliefs around motherhood and what it means to be a good mother and political ideologies that have influenced parenting practices. As Simpson et al., (2015, p. 97) argue this view is based on the premise that parents fall into one of two categories, dictated by their socioeconomic status and whether children achieve “success or failure”; resulting in them being assessed as “good or bad parents”. Acknowledging, that the parent most often associated with forming a partnership in ECEC is the mother it is reasonable to suggest that they are the individual who are increasingly likely to engage in a relationship with the child’s key person. Ultimately it is the key person who has the responsibility to maintain a collaborative working partnership with the child’s parents and share information about the child’s day (DfE, 2021b).

All practitioners who work in the early childhood sector are expected to follow the principles of the EYFS and this places an expectation on ECEC providers to “ensure children have the best start in life” (DfE, 2021b, p. 5). Combined with the responsibility to ensure they provide high quality care and learning (DfE, 2021a, p. 9); practitioners, when fulfilling their key person role, have a professional duty to ensure they foster a positive relationship with the child and their family. Given that relationships and the individuals who engage in them may have different motivations when engaging in shared pedagogical practices, the anticipation that both parties will and can cooperate in partnership working is implied in policy but not guaranteed. As Cottle and Alexander (2014) suggest, there are many different factors that can affect individual relationships, and these are complicated by political and personal pressures. Consequently, relationships are not value free, there is always an element of power present, swayed by the dominant discourses that exist at the macro and micro level (Moss, 2018a p. 92).

Parents are equally under pressure to “form a strong partnership” as the EYFS places an emphasis on good parenting as an essential quality for children to achieve positive outcomes (DfE, 2021b, p. 6). This reinforces the view that parenting, and in ECEC practice motherhood, is under political scrutiny (Simpson et al., 2015). Furthermore, as early childhood practice is affected by government policy and national and local political expectations, tensions around parenting practices mean ethical dilemmas can develop for both parties (Pascal & Bertram, 2012). There

appears to be an assumption that forming a partnership is a natural process and one that parents, and practitioners will readily engage in, but even though legislation such as the EYFS makes partnership a requirement, including it in policy documents does not guarantee collaboration.

2.5. Partnership is cultural.

Hedegaard (2012, p. 129) explored the way children's traditions and routines differed between the home and preschool setting and suggested that different social situations shape children's social skills. This notion resonates with sociocultural theory and contributes to the discourse that child development takes place through participation and interaction with others, including children, adults and the wider community (Rogoff, 2003). When translated to ECEC practice, the notion that relationships with children and their families grow through a shared culture, shaped by traditions found in the home, the early childhood setting and wider community, is worthy of consideration. Children's historical and cultural information is usually the first source of pedagogical information shared and documented when they are enrolled into a preschool setting. It provides the key person with knowledge about the child and their family helping them to know how best to support and attend to their individual needs. Documentation at this early stage may be mostly administrative or routine based, however, it is also multifaceted and according to (Birbilli, 2022, p. 310) serves multiple purposes for multiple audiences. Moreover, for early childhood practitioners it is also a vehicle to help them understand how best to care for the child and how their lives are constructed (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

Documenting children's experiences can, provide practitioners with an insight into the child the family and their different social networks, which can help the setting build a relationship with the parent/s and the child. The practice of documentation, capturing children's learning and development in narrative observations and visual artifacts is a familiar practice in ECEC. It has a "long and rich heritage" (Cowan & Flewitt, 2021, p. 1), and it is widely regarded as a tool to gather evidence that children are gaining skills for the future (DfE, 2021b). Nevertheless, documenting children's experiences can take many forms, and as Alcock (2000, p. 2) explains, it can range from being a system to record achievement and outcomes, or alternatively offer the potential to "make children's thinking visible." This has become even more

possible through the introduction of digital formats where videos, alongside narrative observations are able to capture and be used to share children's experiences "in the moment" (Cowan & Flewitt, 2021, p. 2). This interpretation reinforces the view that documentation is a tool with many possibilities and, according to Birbilli (2022), supports the development of pedagogical practice within a sociocultural framework. This perspective also acknowledges the opportunities that documentation offers to partnership working, in that it provides a shared language for parents and practitioners. However, documentation is a socially constructed activity, and although it encourages dialogue on many levels, it is also fraught with tensions about what is documented, or not, and how children are represented, which can mean the potential for developing a shared pedagogy may be misinterpreted (Dahlberg et al., 2007). So, although documentation has the capacity to enable parents and practitioners to make children's learning visible, in pedagogical terms there are ethical questions to address about how and why they are photographed/videoed, and the choices adults make when documenting children's lives (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010).

Documentation as a pedagogical tool will be explained in more detail in the review of the literature presented in chapter 3. In principle though, it could be argued that there is a consensus that documentation can be used collaboratively to help parents and practitioners understand and expand their pedagogical activity with children (Dahlberg et al., 2007), thus, informing the way they work together in partnership . The same notion can be applied to documentation being a tool to utilise the prospective of seeing how children's experiences in the home and early childhood setting can contribute to their learning. Within this sociocultural context, documentation has the potential to realise the contribution of children, as they also bring their own unique knowledge to any relationship, informed by their social and cultural experiences. This concept resonates with the notion that documentation can inform and shape partnership practices in ECEC, especially when used to recognise how children gain and use different skills, knowledge and strategies in their everyday lives.

Documenting children's everyday experiences, in the home and preschool setting, typically extends into a visual biography (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010, p. 248). As these stories develop and children are visually captured in the documentation, their actions are interpreted by parents and practitioners. According to González et

al.(2005) the funds of knowledge can be helpful when making sense of and evaluating how and what children are learning (p. 5). In practice, children go about their everyday lives playing with others, they imitate and use language and gestures to demonstrate their understanding of their world and these actions are informed by their experiences with their families and wider communities. It is the capturing and sharing of this knowledge so, children's funds, that create possibilities for partnership, not only with the adults but also from the perspective of involving children. Therefore, as Hedges et al. (2011) propose, adopting a funds of knowledge approach, when evaluating the meaning of documentation, can be influential as it offers a way to enrich the pedagogical relationships between the adults and children. Additionally, it also highlights the potential for documentation to recognise the role of children in co-creating their own visual biography, respecting their right to not only be visually present but to also have an audible voice (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010, p. 255).

The position of the child in the different visual and narrative documentation entries is though only ever interpreted by the adults. De Sousa (2019, p. 381) discusses how documentation can provide a means for "making visible [children's] plural identities", nevertheless, as Alcock (2000) states this can only happen if there is a mutual understanding of the purpose and possibilities documentation can offer.

Documentation, whilst placing children at the centre of pedagogical practice, also situates them as subjects to be analysed and assessed (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010). Meaning documentation as a practice should be conducted in moral and ethical ways that recognises and questions why their data is being collected. The construction of the child as a competent social actor with agency is as Lomax (2012) indicates, often engineered by adults, and this point is significant when considering how children are represented by, and understood in documentation, particularly by the parents and practitioners who are the documenters. Furthermore, practitioners are governed by a political agenda, whereby they are expected through the requirements of the EYFS, to measure and assess children's abilities (Albin-Clark, 2020). Consequently, it cannot be assumed that parents and practitioners have a shared and mutually agreed agenda for documenting children's experiences.

2.6. Chapter summary

In sum, partnership is complicated. In ECEC practice each partner, be they mother, father, carer or practitioner will contribute to the partnership in different ways. The basis of their relationships will be influenced by their diverse social and cultural experiences, overlaid by power, both personal and political. The experience of partnership will not be the same for every partner. Incorporate into the mix the inclusion of the child, be that in person or represented through documentation, then arguably there is a need to acknowledge the complex nature of relationships and how this will impact on practice in early childhood.

This chapter has explored a number of different theoretical perspectives that were considered to have value when investigating partnership with parents in ECEC. Praxeology and the work of Pascal and Bertram (2012) was introduced as it offered an approach that recognised the importance of reflection and reflexivity in the research process, through the connection of theory to practice. Sociocultural theory in the broadest sense, further builds on this concept, as it recognises the possibility for exploring the interrelationships and entanglements of partnership working. Rogoff (2003, p. 58) stressed the need to respect that relationships are founded through participation in personal, interpersonal and cultural experiences. Therefore when applied to ECEC practice, particularly working in partnership, these aspects can help parents and practitioners develop an understanding based on their social, cultural and historical experiences. Added to this concept, the funds of knowledge as an approach offers a lens through which to attempt to understand each child's individual story, documented and influenced by their social and cultural experiences.

The next chapter reviews the literature considered relevant when investigating partnership with parents in ECEC. The chapter begins with a brief definition of partnership followed by the historical origins of working with parents as partners in early childhood education. Documentation is introduced as it is a recognised tool used in ECEC for documenting children's learning, but its potential as a pedagogical tool is not always realised; the chapter discusses this issue together with the way children are represented and interpreted through the visual images and narratives contained in the documentation.

Chapter 3. Partnership is multi-layered: a review of the literature.

3.1 Introduction

Chapter one of this thesis, the introduction, established, the purpose and aim of the study, which was to explore partnership with parents in early childhood practice. 'Partnership with parents' as explained in chapter 1, is a "gender neutral term" used to encompass the work in ECEC with mother/father/carer (Ciblis, 2017, p. 56). The research conducted in this study focused on the perspectives of a group of mothers, and practitioners, however, there is a recognition that the literature presented in this chapter will refer to partnership with parents as a practice that encompasses the relationships that develop between the adults who have the role of caring for and parenting young children.

This chapter has six parts and starts by highlighting literature that explores parent partnership and the different definitions of what partnership means in preschool educational settings. In order to develop an understanding of partnership in ECEC, the chapter briefly explores how practice has developed over time, with the Plowden Report published in 1967 highlighted as a key document for influencing government policy and research. Consideration is also given to how ECEC in England and the United Kingdom developed rapidly during the tenure of the Labour government from 1997 to 2010, as this era is significant due to the plethora of policies that were introduced to develop the quality and integration of children and family services. Current ECEC policy is then explored together with the discourse that exists around preparing children to be ready for school. The literature review moves on to concentrate on ECEC practice, critically evaluating relationships and the tools used to develop partnership. Documentation is introduced at this point as it illustrates how children's lives at home and in preschool settings are routinely captured and monitored by parents and practitioners as they share and negotiate information about children. The chapter concludes by drawing together the themes and debates raised in the literature review by identifying their significance to the research focus of partnership with parents in ECEC.

3.2. Partnership in ECEC practice is multi-layered.

The term partnership has many different meanings; the Oxford reference guide defines partnership in simple terms as the “association between two or more people” (Stevenson, 2015). When translated to educational settings, partnership is less easy to define as it often involves more than two people and is influenced by external, internal and personal circumstances. Nevertheless, partnership with parents/carers in educational settings has long been regarded as necessary for children to reach their potential to lead a fulfilling life. Additionally, connections between parents and the home learning environment have been reported as key factors when considering how to ensure young children are ready to gain from their education experiences at school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Sammons et al., 2015). The report “Schools and Parents” produced by Ofsted in 2011 highlighted parental engagement and involvement as important components of partnership working (Ofsted, 2011, p. 6), and whilst the findings did not give a definitive definition of partnership, there was a clear steer that communication, involvement and engagement are factors schools should consider when working with parents. Even so, the report highlighted a correlation between involving parents in their child’s learning and achievement. ECEC settings are increasingly being framed in a similar light, and according to (Janssen & Vandenbroeck, 2018) the narrative around preparing children for compulsory schooling has become more evident in early childhood practice. This point is further reinforced by Georgeson et al. (2022); and Kay (2021) as they concur that the correlation between parental involvement and educational achievement has become a dominant theme in early childhood educational research and policy.

According to Hughes and MacNaughton (2000, p 241) the discourse around involving parents in their children’s early education has been driven by three main factors: 1. national, 2. business and 3. individual interest. As a result the belief is that there are long term benefits for the future economy when parents support their children through their educational journey. Family life and parenting practices have undergone many changes in recent years as a result, presently in the 21st century there is no longer a typical family model or structure (Wilson, 2016), similarly, parenting practices have also been influenced by changes in society. Dominant

discourses including those around child poverty and parental unemployment have also played their part in adding to the complexity of partnership with parents in ECEC. And, when combined with neoliberalist policies aimed at increasing the quality of preschool provision, meeting assessment targets and measuring children's outcomes, there is an increased pressure on practitioners to be accountable to policy makers and parents alike (Jarvis & Georgeson, 2017; Sims, 2017). Yet, partnership is about so much more, and at its centre are the relationships that develop between the caring adults who have responsibility for children and how in turn, they are triangulated with the child (Cottle & Alexander, 2014; Hohmann, 2007).

The EYFS statutory framework in England, contains details about supporting children to learn and develop through positive relationships, and in order to accomplish this, partnership with their parent/s is regarded as a necessary aspect (DfE, 2021b). Introduced in 2008 by the Labour government, the aim of the framework was to improve the quality of preschool experience for children. Following a review in 2011, conducted by the then Minister of State for Children and Families, the emphasis for early childhood settings to work closely with parents and carers was reinforced. Conversely, the review also concluded that children's outcomes could be adversely affected if they did not have a stable home life and consistent parenting. ECEC settings were tasked with identifying and supporting children, especially those identified as most in need (Tickell, 2011). These findings echoed earlier reports by Sylva et al., (2004) and agreed with the recommendations of Allen (2011) and Field (2010) and called for an increased focus on early years practice and family support. Significant in all of the research was the emphasis on the role of parents in their children's early development and learning opportunities, from the moment they are born.

From the literature reviewed above, it can be concluded that partnership between parents and practitioners is multifaceted. ECEC practice is a legislated process; nonetheless, when engaging and being involved in partnerships, parents and practitioners bring their own influences and interpretations to each relationship. As Kambouri et al. (2022) suggest, this diversity can lead to confusion in practice for all involved. The following section seeks to draw out the factors that contribute and potentially hinder partnership working, starting with historical literature relating to policy and practice in ECEC.

3.3. ECEC provision and parent partnership: a potted history

Publicly funded nursery education has been existent in some areas of England from as early as the 1900s. Primarily it was aimed at supporting children who were living in inner city disadvantaged areas and who were deemed to have poor health outcomes. Nursery schools were, consequently, founded in order to improve children's health (Nutbrown et al., 2014) and also to enable women to work in industry (DfEE, 2000). However, provision was patchy and inconsistent across the country, becoming more established only when need arose, for example, during the First and Second World War. In post war Britain, once women were no longer needed to bolster the workforce, nurseries started to close and the role of women as homemaker became the leading ideology (DfEE, 2000, Melhuish 2016). A change in policy for children and families was prompted with the publication of the 1967 Plowden report, regarded as an influential document of its time, as it highlighted the value of relationships between the home and school (Central Advisory Council for Education (England), 1967). Commissioned by the Minister for Education, Sir Edward Boyle, and led by Lady Plowden, the report considered all aspects of education, including school organisation, deployment of staff, the provision of infant and nursery schools and the transition processes for children from primary to secondary school. The Plowden report was regarded as a comprehensive review of how education had developed in post war Britain and highlighted evidence that the education of young children was taking place in the home "long before [they] reached school age" (Central Advisory Council for Education (England), 1967, p.118).

One key proposal in the Plowden report was for schools and nurseries to recognise the value of play and how this benefitted children, leading to questions about what they needed from early education. The report also described societal differences experienced by some families (DfEE, 2000). This point is significant as it was recognised that some children had limited opportunities due to their living conditions but it also coincided with a negative emphasis on parenting, and an assumption that early education could solve societal problems (Nutbrown et al., 2014; Wilson, 2016). At a similar time, the 1960s saw a rise in community preschools in some areas of the country, run by local parents and voluntary groups, created due to the lack of

organised nursery provision and the acknowledgement that children could benefit from some form of preschool experience (DfEE, 2000). As a result the Pre-School Playgroup Association (PPA) (now known as the Early Years Alliance) became established and the movement was regarded as a major player in the early years landscape, particularly as settings expanded during the 1970s and 1980s (DfEE, 2000, p. 9; Nutbrown et al., 2014, p. 19). This provision, although regarded as being instrumental in foregrounding nursery education (Bertram & Pascal, 1999) was not universally accessible to all children; funding was dependant on voluntary and charity groups and or government grants, meaning there were cost implications for families. This is notable and corresponded with Plowden's findings about the inequalities between the different socioeconomic groups in society and was based on the belief that some families were able to provide opportunities and a stable home background for their children. Whereas other children who lived in crowded housing or lacked of parental stimulation had limited opportunities and choices (Central Advisory Council for Education (England), 1967, p. 29). Nonetheless, the PPA model of offering part time/sessional places must have had some influence, as following Plowden's report, part-time nursery provision was proposed but only for children deemed to need help and support as this was in line with her comments about the unequal availability of provision. This narrow focus meant further divisions between children living in different socioeconomic groups, as nursery places were only offered to the most disadvantaged children. The promotion of a part-time/sessional model also received criticism for limiting the opportunity for women to enter the workforce, reinforcing the rhetoric that mothers should stay at home rather than work (Bertram & Pascal, 1999).

Education and care for the under-fives continued to be divided throughout the next two decades, with education seen primarily the responsibility of the education - school sector and care provided through voluntary preschools or at the request of social services departments (Bertram & Pascal, 1999, p. 7). This meant that early childhood provision for young children served two distinct sections in society; as a means to support affluent parents who could afford to fund their own childcare or as a "safety net" for children in need (Brooker, 2010, p. 181). Reinforcing the tension alluded to by Plowden about discrepancies between social groups. Coincidentally in the 1970s preschool provision was again being talked about at government levels,

with the Conservative Secretary of State for Education, Margaret Thatcher, reportedly recognising “that all children would benefit from nursery education” (Ball, 1994, p. 13). She was later elected as Prime Minister in 1979, and even though she had an interest, funding for all nursery aged children was still not forthcoming and what was available was limited.

There was, however, a growing interest in the 1970s as to what children were learning more generally from their early experiences, and as most children were not attending some form of consistent preschool provision, it was the home environment that became the focus of the research by Barbara Tizard and Martin Hughes. They were driven to find out what children were learning from their mothers and especially sought to challenge societal preconceptions about “working class parents” and their provision of “limited interactive opportunities for their children” (Wilson, 2016, p. 95). Whilst their research was performed on a small sample of four-year-old girls, the study questioned several assumptions about the unequal balance of power relating to parenting and championed the benefits of the home learning environment. Concluding that children, irrespective of social class had much to gain from shared experiences including their social world, and the people within it (Tizard & Hughes, 2002). These findings offer an interesting contribution to the discussion around parent partnership as parents were regarded in a positive rather than negative light regardless of their socioeconomic circumstances, as the extract below demonstrates:

Indeed in our opinion , it is time to shift the emphasis away from what parents should learn from professionals, and towards what professionals can learn from studying parents and children at home (Tizard & Hughes, 2002, p. 225).

Towards the end of Thatcher’s government the promise of nursery education raised its head once again when in 1994, a report by Christopher Ball, “Start Right: The Importance of early Learning”, was commissioned to review the availability of preschool provision (Ball, 1994). In the report parents, the wider family and community were singled out for their ability to have an impact on children’s early learning. Additionally, it highlighted the role of parents as their child’s first educator and acknowledged the benefits for children if there was an association between parental involvement and preschool education (Ball, 1994). In doing so Ball coined the term the “triangle of care” to describe the relationship between the educator,

parent and community identifying it as a “new kind of partnership between parents and professionals” (Ball, 1994, p. 9; Whalley & the Pen Green Team, 2017, p. 11). When the Labour government were elected to power in 1997, the vision for ECEC as an integrated service was born; families were at the centre of an array of politically driven initiatives aimed at improving early childhood services alongside support for parents (Broadhead et al., 2003). However, as the expansion of early years and preschool services became the focus of government decisions, the negative discourse around parenting and disadvantage once more became prominent and parents were felt to be the “source of and, solution to, a number of social problems” (Simpson et al., 2015, p. 97).

The publication of the White Paper *Excellence in Schools* in 1997, introduced a range of proposals that were intended to change the landscape of education; they included providing part time education for all four year olds, and a target to offer nursery places for three year olds (DfEE, 1997). ECEC provision was finally on the agenda and at the heart of the paper was the plan to give every child and their family access to integrated early childhood services (Bertram & Pascal, 1999, p. 53). Early Excellence Centres (EECs) were introduced as a starting point for joining up services for children and families (Pascal et al., 2001), their remit being to reduce social “exclusion and increase the health of the nation” (Bertram & Pascal, 1999, p.59). There was also an appreciation that parents played an important role in their children’s early years, and a recognition that they should be respected as their child’s first and enduring teacher, echoing the premise put forward earlier by Ball (Ball, 1994, p. 44). The integration of ECEC also signified the joining together of education and health services for children and families and included a focus on the way poor health determinants could impact on the future life chances of children. As such, the recommendations from the White Paper together with a report by Donald Acheson into health inequalities (Acheson, 1998), informed the political narrative and led to the instigation of a range of government funded initiatives which aimed to support families and children living in the most disadvantaged areas of the country. One such initiative and cross departmental strategy was Sure Start (SSLP) (Glass, 1999, p. 257). Developed as local programmes, they were designed to address social disadvantage and improve opportunities for children 0-4 and their families by

giving them access to good quality early years education and childcare, health services and family support (DfEE, 2000).

Nonetheless, SSLP's were targeted at specific families and communities as nationally the programme was seen as a key initiative for tackling child poverty and raising family aspirations and children's achievements, alongside the remit to enable parents to re-join the workforce if they were unemployed (Ball, 2002). Locally programmes recruited multi-agency teams of professionals from statutory and voluntary services who, together with the programme managers, were expected to work closely with their communities; their remit being to evaluate and reshape local services for families (Glass, 1999, p. 257). Despite it being a strategic initiative and politically motivated, SSLP delivery was felt to be innovative and radical (Pugh, 2010), promoting community consultation and joining up services for children (Glass, 1999). Thus potentially changing experiences for children and parental perceptions of traditional services. One of the inconsistencies, however, was that funding was only targeted at specific areas (Ball, 2002), meaning families could be excluded from accessing services based on their postcode.

Alongside SSLP's and the complimentary initiative, the National Childcare Strategy (NCS) opportunities were opening up for working parents, with employment for mothers seen as a way to enable families to increase their household income (Cameron & Moss, 2020). ECEC had become part of the strategy for affordable good quality childcare and registered childcare places increased dramatically especially as the introduction of the 2006 Childcare Act placed a duty on each LA to ensure there was sufficient childcare available for parents to work. Building on the apparent success of SSLP's, the government introduced Sure Start Children's Centres in the 2002 Interdepartmental Review, the idea being that there would be a transition where the learning from SSLP would be combined with an integrated offer of ECEC and family support services (Ashton et al., 2002). Nevertheless, alongside the expansion of services for families there was also a requirement to improve outcomes for children by narrowing the achievement gap, as there was a recognition that a disadvantaged lifestyle experienced by some children meant they had poor health and underachieved educationally (Pugh, 2010, p. 6). This placed ECEC in a unique but also challenging position, as the emphasis on educational achievement also coincided with political focus on parenting, and so the practitioner role in early

childhood became an influential part of the strategy to tackle child poverty with a remit to offer a quality service to children and also give parenting advice (Simpson et al., 2015, p. 98).

This focus on narrowing or closing the achievement gap between children in different socioeconomic groups, continued to feature in national policy after the Labour government was replaced in 2010 by the Coalition government - formed by the Conservative and Liberal Democrats. Again this was the also the case when the subsequent Conservative government was elected in 2015. Reducing child poverty, improving children's outcomes and the role of parents persisted as a feature in research and policy, but austerity measures meant a cut to the funding for public services. The impact on services for children resulted in the closure or the remodelling of certain early childhood services, and some Children's Centres closed (Cameron & Moss, 2020; Sutton Trust, 2018), whilst others were required to offer interventions targeted at families perceived to be a problem to society (Simpson et al., 2015, p. 3). This shift for families was profound, especially as Children's Centres had been initially introduced as a hub for childcare and integrated support for parents as described by Ashton et al. (2002). According to Cameron and Moss (2020, p. 9) the impact of such changes stirred underlying tensions in ECEC, integration either stalled or halted and the language used in policy documents became focused on providing childcare and children being ready for school.

The split between education and care once again became prominent, and even though organisations such as the Sutton Trust called for the government to review early childhood services, particularly the Children's Centre Closures, ECEC provision became less coordinated (Sutton Trust, 2018). The Conservative government did however retain the funding for 15 hours of nursery education children aged 3–4-years and backed new legislation for an increase to 30 hours where both parents were working (Cameron & Moss, 2020). There was also an emphasis on the childcare places for children living in disadvantaged households with the introduction of a 2-year entitlement (Albakri et al., 2018). The take up of the offer was inconsistent, perhaps due it being a targeted intervention, as suggested previously by (Simpson et al., 2015). Both Cameron and Moss (2020) and Simpson et al. (2015) discuss how neoliberal ideologies have steadily crept into ECEC practice, resulting in settings being under increased pressure to be accountable through the

various often contradictory government policies. Additionally, as Wood (2017, p. 109) corroborates, the emphasis on standardisation through assessment practices has also intensified, which in turn, has fed into the school readiness agenda. ECEC services have evolved over time and continue to do so, nevertheless, they are positioned and required to fulfil many needs where opposing demands include the emphasis on being a solution to societies problems whilst also reinforcing the political ideal that parents are consumers of affordable and available childcare (Simpson et al., 2015).

Despite the tensions in ECEC policy and practice, competing discourses and seemingly negative end proposed in this section of the chapter, the early years of a child's life continues to be regarded as an important period where the foundations for future learning are laid down. Early childhood services are part of an infrastructure that can support the differing needs of families and as this section has highlighted, partnership working is an integral factor. The next section of the literature review focuses on partnership, relationships and how they feature in pedagogical practices, and whilst policy is recognised as being influential, so are the benefits for children when their key adults work with them in a reciprocal way.

3.4. Partnership as a pedagogy

This section of the literature review considers partnership as an element of pedagogical practice, reflecting on what children may need and are entitled to in order to gain socially, emotionally and cognitively from their environment, in the home and ECEC setting. Parents and early childhood practitioners are in a unique position; they are resources in human form and as such, can create advantages for children to develop and learn through socially and collaboratively constructed interpersonal interactions (Degotardi, 2015, p. 1). Furthermore, these advantages can result in a shared pedagogy where parents and practitioners exchange values, skills and knowledge of child development to inform their understanding of play, teaching and learning (Arnott, 2021). In order to develop pedagogical practice that is understood and negotiated between partners, it is important to explore what may or may not be working in practice, and how the child is perceived and situated within the relationships that form between the adults who care for them.

There are many different interpretations of parental involvement in the education sector and likewise this is also the case for ECEC. The term used to describe partnership with parents, therefore, has many different connotations which can lead to confusion for practitioners (Crow & Froggett, 2018). Even so, practitioners are expected to develop meaningful relationships with parents/carers (Kambouri et al., 2022), which will range from exchanging information about children to engaging in the assessment process and co-construction of their learning. The current version of the EYFS makes clear reference to partnership working as this is seen as key to providing the foundations children need to be ready for school (DfE, 2021b). Research would seem to support this principle as children's social and cognitive outcomes are claimed to improve when their parents engage in activities, such as reading, singing and talking through everyday experiences with them (Sammons et al., 2015; Sylva et al., 2004). It would seem pertinent then, that parents and practitioners have a responsibility to ensure they form a relationship where they have a shared understanding of the child, their needs and abilities. Nevertheless, as Kay (2021, p.173) points out the emphasis on being ready for school, as articulated in policy documents, such as the EYFS and OFSTED, contributes to a dominant discourse about what readiness actually means, creating tensions in practice. Hence, if the focus of ECEC partnership working in the main, is dominated by an agenda for school readiness, the benefits children can gain from multi-sensory and holistic experiences may be overshadowed (Bingham & Whitebread, 2011).

Establishing a reciprocal relationship with a child's parent may be regarded as the ideal goal for early childhood practitioners, and, as Hedges and Cooper (2018, p. 5) suggest this involves developing a pedagogical practice that involves, parents, families and the wider community. Each child when they start attending an ECEC setting in England is assigned a key person (DfE, 2021b, p. 27); therefore, it should follow that this named practitioner will become attached to and hopefully develop a relational bond with the child and their family (Page, 2018, p. 129).

The relationships that form between the parents, the key person and other practitioners in the setting are shaped by their shared and negotiated experiences, that in turn affect the child. Hohmann (2007); Brooker (2010) and Page (2018) use the concept of a triangle to illustrate the connection between the parent, child and practitioner, sharing similarities with the triangle of care proposed by Ball (1994).

Their interpretation places the child firmly within the relationship, so whilst this analogy still recognises that partnerships strive to reach a common purpose (Ball, 1994, p. 9), the interrelationship between each partner becomes the focus. However, this analogy according to Cottle & Alexander (2014) also highlights the challenges that can arise when working in partnership, especially when structural and individual pressures are present. So whilst the triangle offers a way to understand how parents and practitioners keep children's well-being, learning and development at the centre of their relationship (Brooker, 2010, p. 182), it is also influenced by political and parental expectations. Translated into ECEC practice the triangular relationship between the child and their caring adults may offer significant opportunities to consider the development of positive pedagogical relationships that support the child to develop holistically, provided there is an openness between the adults that relationships are never value free (Moss, 2018a, p. 92) as working in partnership will always retain an imbalance of power (Brooker, 2010, p. 184).

The term pedagogy in ECEC has many different interpretations; research reports such as the Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (EPEY) study defined pedagogy in relation to practitioner experiences, suggesting it comprises of an "interactive process between teacher and learner" (Siraj-blatchford et al., 2002, p. 10). This definition although simplistic, highlights the importance of interaction and interpersonal relationships between the adults who care for children. Furthermore, Oliveira-Formosinho (2009, p. 234) describes the more intricate processes involved in pedagogical relationships explaining the need to recognise the involvement of parents and the development of spaces for children where learning, diversity and play are valued. Both descriptions, when combined with theory informed reflective practice would seem to offer an enhanced definition of pedagogy, reframing it as the holistic practice, described by Arnott (2021). Nevertheless, pedagogy is also regarded as a social construction, and according to Dahlberg et al. (2007) this construction is informed by the way society views the child, their family circumstances and the adults that care for them in ECEC. In practice this can lead to a tension for practitioners and parents, especially as their different life experiences will have shaped their views on pedagogy and what constitutes a partnership.

In England early childhood pedagogical practices have been influenced and constructed through the different political initiatives, such as the Sure Start and

Children's Centre initiatives, as detailed in the first section of this literature review. Also of importance is the way children and childhood are understood and how they are perceived, or not, as equals in the pedagogical relationships that form between caring adults. Arnott and Wall (2022, p. 59) discuss the way adults are regarded as authoritative figures in children's lives and as such, by default they are perceived to be the more powerful partner. This concept relates to the construction of the child and child-centred practice that has become dominant in pedagogical research (Lomax, 2012), where childhood is a "social construction, constructed both for and by children" (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 49). This means that practitioners and parents may not realise how their views inform and shape children's experiences, or how the imbalance of power can impact positively or negatively on any partnership relationship.

It would seem pertinent then, when developing their relationships that parents and practitioners recognise they will each be influenced by their own personal and professional values and additionally that these values will inform the way they interpret children's everyday experiences (Arnott & Wall, 2022). This is an important concept to be aware of when considering the aforementioned triangular relationship and within this context, Palaiologou (2014) discusses the way research has influenced and aimed to challenge what were regarded as traditional views in the construction of early childhood practices. The change in perspective arises from children being regarded as vulnerable, dependent, and young adults in the making, to children being accepted as active citizens in society (Palaiologou, 2014). This concept is further supported by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) where the importance of recognising that children have rights to be listened to and involved in matters that affect them is emphasised (United Nations, 1992). Translating this philosophy to pedagogy and how this informs partnership, it is necessary to acknowledge that the parent and practitioner have a responsibility to make decisions about the care children need (Arnott & Wall, 2022) There is also a strong argument for recognising and finding ways to facilitate the contribution of the children (Merewether & Fleet, 2014).

Pedagogical practices can, consequently, be enriched by generating knowledge with children, so, it is necessary to adopt methods of knowledge production that are inclusive and participatory (Clark, 2011). Yet, even though there has been a surge of

interest in recent years to include the contributions of children in research and practice (Clark, 2011; Merewether & Fleet, 2014), there is a tension between what is expected of children in relation to their learning and development and how their rights are influenced by political policy. These influences on children's everyday lives have become more prevalent as children spend large amounts of their time in ECEC settings. The EYFS, for example, describes the four principles that should shape ECEC practice, referring to the unique child as a confident, capable and resilient learner (DfE, 2021a). However, practitioners are also accountable for making assessments, which can potentially constrain practice suggests Roberts-Holmes (2015), especially as there is an expectation placed on them to measure children against certain milestones. Nevertheless, when seeking to understand how these tensions can be understood and challenged in practice, it is helpful to look to international literature suggest Merewether and Fleet (2014) as it offers the potential to explore sociocultural theory which positions children as active participants constructing meaning alongside others.

One such approach considered influential is the Reggio Emilia philosophy attributed to the practice inspired by the work of Loris Malaguzzi in the municipal infant and toddler centres/ preschools in Northern Italy (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Reggio practice supposes that children learn with the help of others, as in the Vygotskian notion that social situations and everyday experiences enhance development (Hedegaard, 2012). The approach is known for advocating the development of collaborative practices that promote children's learning as a constructive process, and where relationships are incorporated into pedagogical practice with children. Children in Reggio settings are seen as "rich and capable" (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 146) which could bear some similarity to the description of the unique child in the EYFS (DfE, 2021b). Nevertheless, one of the inconsistencies in this perspective is that the Reggio approach is not something that can easily be emulated and Chicken (2022, p. 5), clarifies this point by explaining that there are different contextual and political issues that relate to the way pedagogy is constructed in different countries. These differences mean Reggio practice is interpreted and shaped by local policies, but research and practice in the United Kingdom has been influenced and taken aspects of the Reggio approach on board (Kinney & Wharton, 2015) particularly by promoting participatory tools, such as pedagogical documentation, that enables practitioners to

engage in reflection, and the development of listening practices with children and their families (Clark, 2011).

To summarise this section, pedagogy in ECEC is informed and shaped by the relationships between, parents, practitioners and children, so consequently how these relationships develop and are sustained will have an impact on partnership working. But as has been discussed, relationships are not neutral and there will always be challenges and pressures, personal and professional, that will influence the contribution of each partner. This particularly relates to the position of the child within the partnership as their inclusion is often well intended but regularly overlooked according to McDowall Clark (2013). Listening practices, as advocated in the UNCRC, may offer an opportunity to include children more readily in partnership work, even so, listening is about more than just hearing, it is multi-layered (Kinney & Wharton, 2015) and dynamic (Arnott & Wall, 2022) and misunderstandings can lead to varied and contradictory practices. Equally as Brooker (2011, p.140) argues this can lead to tokenistic listening activities which may be mistaken and interpreted by adults rather than genuine participation. With this in mind, this next section explores the way documentation has developed as a facilitative pedagogical tool in ECEC, especially from the stance that it has many possibilities for illuminating children's everyday lives and making their learning visible.

3.5. Documentation, as information for partnership

Children attending early childhood settings both in the United Kingdom and internationally have their everyday lives documented as this is the process used in practice to evidence their learning and development. With the rise in digital technology, documenting children's early experiences has gained an increased versatility and accessibility, and this has resulted in each child having a "visual biography" (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010, p. 248). The practice of recording aspects of children's lives has historical roots, as since the late 19th century written observations have been used to understand children's behaviour and measure their development (Alcock, 2000, p. 5). Suggested to be affiliated with the discipline of developmental psychology (Dahlberg et al., 2007), observation also developed overtime, as an educational improvement method, creating a tension between

whether documentation was a tool to benefit children or inform the practice of teaching (Emilson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2014. p. 176).

Capturing and documenting children's images, and accompanying them with narrative observations is also not a new concept, and its origins can be traced, according to Dahlberg et al. (2007) to the 20th century Italian preschools in Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy. Many settings in the UK and internationally have sought to adopt or adapt the Reggio approach (Chicken, 2022, p. 4), it is regarded as an enviable pedagogy due to the way children are considered to be active participants in their own learning; with documentation an integral aspect. Whist arguably the Reggio approach originates from a particular philosophical stance, the practice of documenting with children and valuing their contributions according to Merewether (2018, p. 260) contributes to a particular discourse where documentation is also a pedagogical tool, whereby children/parents and teachers co-construct learning together. Even so, there are many interpretations of documentation in ECEC practice, and examples range from it being used pedagogically, to where documentation is essentially a method of recording information, linked to the curriculum and informed by the requirements of assessment (Alcock, 2000; Fleet, et. al., 2017).

Fleet (2017 p. 11) suggests that finding a definition of what documentation is or isn't, is challenging and any interpretation must take account of different geographical and socio-political contexts. The process of documenting children's experiences in ECEC both nationally and internationally today, will have been informed by different cultural traditions and influenced by individual and national politics. Common to all, though, as Alasuutari (2014, p. 242) justifies, is the ethos promoted through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1992) and the sociology of childhood, where the child has the right to be taken seriously and have their views heard.

According to Lenz Taguchi (2010, p. 8) one way to counterbalance any confusion about the pedagogical nature of documentation is to develop it as a tool that can be used to create ways to enhance rather than normalise children's learning.

Practitioners can then incorporate into their documentation the significance of the environment and the different resources, including familiar adults, as this resonates with the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 10). Yet, as Chicken

(2022) argues there are too many variables at stake and, whilst there may be a desire to emulate the pedagogical aspect, documentation is also heavily shaped by policy. Practitioners, have the responsibility, consequently, to balance the needs of the children and their families together with the demands of EYFS and Ofsted. It can be concluded then, that the practice of documentation has and continues to serve many different purposes and in English preschools this there appears to be a contrast between the holistic approach promoted in Reggio Emilia and the requirement to measure children's progress. Nevertheless, according to Flewitt and Cowan (2018), it is this assessment approach that has become dominant with practitioners. This interpretation could be attributed to the requirement to assess children at critical stages as found in the EYFS (DfE, 2021b).

Alcock (2000, p. 2) implies that some of the confusion around what to document has originated as the terms documentation and pedagogical documentation are often used interchangeably. Therefore, it is important to recognise that documentation is not merely a means to record children's routine administrative procedures, or simply a tool to record child observations (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 143) but it has reflective and holistic processes as associated with pedagogical practice (Alcock, 2000). Moreover, narrative observations, photographs and videos when used to enhance pedagogy, present new scope and a more dynamic approach for working with children, which resonates with the proposal to be creative by Lenz Taguchi (2010). As Dahlberg et al. (2007) propose, using documentation to enhance pedagogical practice, offers practitioners the opportunity for reflection, which in principle means they can develop their skills of analysis and interpretation, offering the potential for parents and practitioners to see the child's learning in action.

Documentation is though about choice, and as Dahlberg et al. (2007) suggest practitioners make decisions about what to capture and document, meaning that when making such choices they apply their own subjective lens to the process. In agreement Birbilli (2022) expands this concept further, indicating that there are opportunities for training if the choices made by practitioners are regularly scrutinised. Nevertheless, returning to Alcock's point as detailed above, whether the term pedagogical documentation or documentation is applied, documenting children's learning is a social construction, and what is documented represents an interpretation of the child and their relationship, constructed by the adults who care

for them (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 144). So, whilst it is acknowledged that using different mediums to document and make children's learning visible has a place in ECEC, and documentation as a pedagogical tool can encourage working with children and their families in a holistic and collaborative way, it is also necessary to critically explore its limitations and potential challenges.

As previously acknowledged, social media, and the accessibility of technology has seen a rise in the digitalisation of documentation (Cowan & Flewitt, 2021; Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010). Over the last 20 years this change has contributed to an increase in the use of digital tools where children feature in their own digital story, and this often begins prebirth with the sharing of ultrasound scans. White (2020, p. 1) suggests a practice known as "sharenting" means these stories are readily shared, between parents, family members and others. Technology, has similarly found its way into ECEC practice and digital documentation, as Cowan and Flewitt (2021) report, is becoming the tool of choice for preschool settings, due to its potential as a platform for encouraging collaborative practice. Furthermore, the combination of visual images and narrative observations can be used pedagogically, to portray a holistic journey of the child's preschool experiences making digital documentation an engaging sharenting tool. Yet, caution should be applied (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010) as digitalisation can contribute to existing tensions around what documentation is or isn't, due to the expectation placed upon practitioners and parents in the EYFS to record development and learning (DfE, 2021b). It can be concluded, therefore that as this form of sharing has become the norm in today's society, it could also be said to have become normalised in early childhood practice.

Given that the EYFS in England expects practitioners to promote children's learning and development through observation and reflection, and use these to inform assessment of children (DfE, 2021b), documentation could be regarded as one of the foundations of pedagogical practice (Paananen & Lipponen, 2018 p.78). But, as the practice of documenting children's lives has become more commonplace, it also places them in a position of being looked at and their actions observed and interpreted by others (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010, p. 259) and this raises questions about the purpose of documentation. Similarly, the focus on progress, assessment and preparing children for their next steps as required in the EYFS (DfE, 2021 p. 18), means there is a potential for missed opportunities if documentation is used merely

as a formal measurement tool. ECEC practice in the English context is governed by political regulations, which include a number of formal assessments, initially at age two years, then on entry to full time school, via the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) and latterly when the, Early Years Foundation Stage Profile EYFSP) takes place at the end of their reception year (DfE, 2021b, p. 19). Therefore, pedagogy and documentation are structures that fall within this context. It can be deduced then, that practitioners should be aware of the potential for political pressures to shape how documentation is implemented in practice, and equally how parents and children are included in the process.

Fleet (2017) suggests, there are many complex layers to documenting children's experiences, and as discussed in this section, it has potential to illuminate practice with children and families which can contribute to partnership. It will be challenging for the adults who document, though, to balance the possible strengths documentation offers with political demands, especially if practitioners are drawn into focusing solely on the assessment requirements of the EYFS. Technology offers creative options and also challenges in equal measures. Being digital means children's stories are available instantly, entries are spontaneous and the marketed online applications (Apps), such as Tapestry, are often promoted as saving time (Cowan & Flewitt, 2021). Nevertheless, converting to this digital method relies on all parties having the knowledge to use it and additionally, there may be an assumption by practitioners that parents have the technological tools, and the time to comment and upload digital artefacts. Moreover, documentation, in digital format emphasises the adult role as onlooker, with children being observed in all aspects of their lives, their experiences and learning surveyed, thus, making them subjects to be evaluated (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010). This leads to questions about how their actions are interpreted, further highlighting the powerful role of the adult. The subsequent section of the literature review will focus on this aspect, it will discuss the way the child is positioned in the documentation, exploring how the adults interpret children's experiences and critically examine what this means for partnership.

3.6. The position of the child informed by documentation.

Documentation positions children at the centre of their pictorial biography and as discussed, it is a tool that has become integral to ECEC practice. Literature in the

previous sections introduced the concept that there are different interpretations of documentation, and as discussed, there are benefits and challenges that can be associated with the practice of documenting. When exploring how the child is perceived through the images and narratives in documentation, Sparrman and Lindgren (2010), offer a significant critique, questioning whether documentation is actually a process of training children to accept surveillance as the norm. Furthermore, they argue that documentation makes visible otherwise unseen experiences; and this raises questions of an ethical nature (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010, p. 249). Practitioners have a powerful role in that they choose what to document (Dahlberg, et al, 2007), and as previously highlighted, the need for practitioners to be reflective, to challenge and take responsibility when deciding what to document, is key, as is the need to recognise the way their subjective thinking will influence their practice. This means, it is vital for the key person to adopt a reflective and reflexive stance as they are the person who will be negotiating and sharing documentation with parents. This is especially important, as they will be trying to balance, according to Albin-Clark (2020) a professional agenda to assess children, which may be in conflict with what they feel the parent wants to see. Additionally, the practitioner child relationship could also be affected if the act of documenting only enables an adult agenda (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010, p. 259).

In contrast, documentation does, nonetheless, offer the prospective of seeing the child as a central character in their own individual story, and digitalisation opens up this potential even further as it implies that they can also become involved in the collaborative nature of pedagogy rather than purely the object or receiver of early years services. De Sousa (2019) discusses the value in documentation when it is utilised as both a tool for professional development and also enhances the participation of children. This reinforces the benefits of documentation as a process for communication and the creation of a culture where many voices are represented as proposed by Dahlberg et al. (2007). The potential for capturing and recognising children's everyday experiences is one such way that children can be understood (Chesworth, 2016, p. 296). As Birbilli (2022, p. 310) points out, documentation can serve multiple audiences – children, parents, other practitioners and policy makers and each of these audiences will have their own interpretation of what is documented and what this means for the children featured in the documentation.

Documentation is, as previously discussed, not a neutral process and although it is often regarded as a method for promoting children's autonomy and "genuine listening" (De Sousa, 2019, p. 382). Komulainen (2007), Spyrou (2011) and Arnott and Wall (2022) stress caution, as the text and images of the children in documentation represents a powerful dialogue that is not always analysed thoroughly by the adults who document. Consequently, It is important to remember when documenting, that capturing the children's images and interpreting their story contributes to the existing ECEC discourse of social construction (Dahlberg et al., 2007), as it is informed by the interactions between the child, the parent and practitioner. And, as Birbilli (2022, p. 317) explains, this frames documentation as a "polyphonic" text, meaning it should be viewed as a process that can serve many purposes and many audiences, which is an interesting perspective for thinking about how the child's actions are listened to, perceived and understood. The concept that documentation is a tool to enable listening relates to how it is used to enhance pedagogical practice, however, as Arnott and Wall (2022, p. 63) propose, listening is about so much more than hearing. So even though documentation, especially in a digital format can capture children's moving and audible images, it should be considered necessary that documenters challenge their own preconceptions about its purpose..

Listening, therefore, is about being aware that children communicate in both verbal and non-verbal ways, with their bodies and their interactions (Arnott & Wall, 2022). Documentation, therefore, has the ability to capture children's multiple voices, however, it is only ever an instrument used by others to represent a moment in time. Alasuutari (2014, p. 243) emphasises this point further, suggesting that when children have their daily lives recorded, their voice is also "transformed into contexts and situations in which the child is not present". Thus, this does not necessarily mean children are being listened to but demonstrates how children are positioned, by the adults, and although documentation can be regarded as providing a window into the child's world, it is also is a way of monitoring and gazing at their physical, emotional and social spaces (Steeves & Jones, 2010).

3.7 .Chapter summary, partnership, pedagogy and documentation in ECEC practice

This chapter has reviewed a large body of literature and has explored partnership working in early childhood services and how working with parents and carers has developed overtime as a pedagogical practice. McDowall Clark (2013) discusses the way politics, attitudes and values can influence interpretation of the word partnership, suggesting it can mean different things to different people and their organisations. This added to the discourse about relationships and social construction of childhood, further supports the notion that ECEC practice is complex. As indicated, documentation is a tool regularly used in practice to capture children's everyday experiences, but as explained in the literature, it is clear that there is ambiguity in the language used to describe how children are represented and their experiences interpreted by the adults who care for them.

The next chapter considers the methodological approach adopted when conducting the research for this thesis. Focusing on the experiences of a group of mothers whose children attend a preschool in the North of England, and their key person, the chapter explores the way the study used a digital documentation tool to facilitate a conversational interview about their working partnership.

Chapter 4. Methodology, methods, and data collection

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter I define the methodological and analytical approach undertaken when conducting the research for this thesis. Influenced by my previous experiences of working with parents in a variety of early years and family services, the chapter outlines the research design underpinned by my ontological and epistemological foundations. The study set out to explore the perspectives of a group of mothers and practitioners and focused on their experiences of partnership working, in the context of their preschool setting. In English ECEC settings, the mandated EYFS promotes a shared pedagogy in order to help each child have the best start in life (DfE, 2021b, p. 5). Parents and practitioners are expected to follow a formal process for communicating, sharing important information about the child and their home-life, alongside promoting their developmental needs. The research phase of this doctoral study involved conducting interviews with mothers and practitioners in the preschool setting – given the alias Kinderclass. Each interview used the setting's digital documentation tool, Tapestry (The Foundation Stage Forum Ltd, 2022) as the conduit to facilitate a discussion about partnership working.

4.2. Methodology - what and how?

In England early childhood settings follow the mandatory EYFS, and as such practitioners are directed to engage in partnership working in order to help children achieve and reach their potential (DfE, 2021b). This perspective sits within a particular ideology, where parental involvement is framed as an essential factor in influencing the academic achievement of children, therefore, shaping their future position and success in society (Van Laere et al., 2018). Additionally this philosophy supposes that there is equal investment in the relationships that form between the parents and practitioners (MacNaughton, 2005), which in turn will impact on the child. ECEC settings are instructed to promote “positive relationships” in their endeavour to develop a mutual partnership with each parent, this is seen as enabling for children to learn to be “strong and independent” (DfE, 2021b, p. 6). It is this acceptance and promotion of collaboration and improved outcomes for children,

which will be interrogated further through the method of phenomenographic interview explored in this chapter.

The ECEC model of partnership working presumes that parents and practitioners naturally develop a working relationship, however, relationships need to be nurtured, there are often many complex influences at play, including past experiences, policy and practice (Dahlberg et al., 2007). When children start to attend early years provision, [nurseries, pre-schools, childminders] parents and practitioners are required to communicate and work together in a variety of ways, usually this involves engaging in verbal communication and sharing observations of the children playing in the home and setting. The pedagogical approach promoted by the EYFS, requires parents and practitioners to work together to enable children to benefit from the opportunities ahead of them (DfE, 2021b, p. 7). Therefore, the early exchange of experiences, not only informs the practitioners in the setting during the initial settling-in phase for children, it can also affect their ongoing learning and development.

In the literature review the concept of documentation as a pedagogical tool was introduced, alongside the challenges that exist when trying to define it in practice. For the purpose of this thesis documentation is regarded as a reflective and holistic process, and one that involves the collection of artefacts - narratives, photographs and videos of children in the home and preschool setting. It is a formal process, instigated by a setting, that enables information to be shared, but also illustrates children's learning and development and it is recognised as sound pedagogical practice in ECEC (Alcock, 2000; Chicken, 2022; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rintakorpi et al., 2014). The process of documenting should ideally be a collaborative activity, and it offers the potential to capture children's experiences in the setting and home, helping parents and practitioners to know what they are interested in and plan for their learning and development (Rintakorpi et al., 2014). Additionally, documentation according to Dahlberg et al. (2007, p. 142) offers practitioners the space to reflect on their practice and construct an ethical relationship with others - parents/carers/siblings - which can contribute to partnership.

ECEC settings in England have collated children's learning and development in one form or another for a number of years, however, there is an increasing use of digital documentation platforms being adopted by settings (Cowan & Flewitt, 2021). While

digital versions allow for observation, photographs, and videos to be instantly exchanged between parents and practitioners, it should not be assumed that there is equality of access for every parent. Lack of internet access and individual circumstances and preferences may mean it is not agreeable for all. Additionally, documentation, whether paper or digital takes many forms, and as Dahlberg et al., (2007, p. 143) are keen to point out, the benefits of capturing a moment in a child's life should not be confused with "child observation", as this can lead to it being used as a tool to measure children against developmental norms.

In reality documentation is often used as a vehicle to assess and measure children's progress and digitalising the process can feed into this discourse (Cowan & Flewitt, 2021). Documenting learning is heavily influenced by government policy, section 2 of the EYFS, is an example of this as it reinforces the view that assessment "plays an important part in helping parents, carers and practitioners to recognise children's progress", (DfE, 2021b, p. 18). Such tensions are constant reminders of the political influences that exist in ECEC practice and as this thesis aimed to examine and explore what partnership meant to the participants, it was necessary to take a critical view of the processes that feed into partnership working. This was made possible by integrating each child's digital story into the research method. The result being that the documentation became an interesting provocation during the interviews, so rather than a method in its own right it provided a window to see how the participants worked together as they negotiated, and discussed how they supported children's development, care, and early learning.

4.3. Ontology, Epistemology – interpreting assumptions in partnership

When conducting research into educational practice, as in this qualitative thesis it was important to acknowledge that all of the participants brought their own experiences to the study. Each mother, practitioner, and me as researcher had previously engaged or were involved in partnership working. The research, therefore, was concerned with investigating an understanding of reality, so the perceptions of partnership, and this was influenced by the mothers, practitioners and my own ontological assumptions (Cohen et al., 2003; Waring, 2021). It seemed inevitable then, that each participant's insight into their working relationship would have been shaped by their cultural and social experiences, so their values, beliefs, and their

underpinning pedagogical relationships (Waring, 2021, p. 16). Being aware of these ontological assumptions meant that I was conscious of the need to be reflexive, to consider and challenge my understanding of the research process and what it meant for the participants.

As explored in the literature review, pedagogy is a term used in ECEC practice, even though it is not always clearly defined (Crow & Froggett, 2018). However, it proved helpful for understanding how each participant had formed an opinion of what partnership meant to them, as it enabled me to explore how they co-operated in the method of documenting children's experiences (Rintakorpi et al., 2014). As Pascal and Bertram (2012) point out research in ECEC, is more often than not conducted by professionals working in the early childhood field, so previous experience and an academic interest in making a contribution to practice are what drives the research process. Nonetheless, investigating practice where children and their parents are in receipt of a public service, as in early childhood, also brings with it political and ethical tensions. Pascal and Bertram (2012, p. 483) refer to praxeology as a way to explain how research in early childhood is "co-constructed by those who are in the field of inquiry" knowledge, is co-produced by the researcher and participants and this explanation about reality has some resonance with my own philosophical beliefs of practice and research.

The first step in any research process is for the researcher to understand and be able to articulate the assumptions that underpin their study, and this is necessary states Moss (2005) especially when exploring pedagogical practice. Assumptions about parenting practices, political and professional expectations and the construction of the child were instrumental in framing and influencing the way the research developed. In ontological terms this research acknowledges that the participants, and myself as researcher have lives that have been shaped by our values, beliefs, prior and present experiences, consequently, they are a product of social construction (Denscombe, 2014, p 96). Understanding this context was important when identifying how the research methods were chosen and the subsequent approach to analysis. Hence, evaluating the basis of such assumptions, throughout the research process should enable the researcher, suggests Waring (2021) to not only understand their own philosophical position, but also those of others, allowing for a much richer and deeper insight into the lives of participants.

This was particularly significant in this study, when conducting research in the field of ECEC, as it involved exploring the social world of children alongside their mothers and key person practitioner.

Ontology, can be described as being on a continuum with realism, a singular objective reality at one end, constructivism and multiple realities at the other (Waring, 2021, p.16). This research, aimed to understand the participant's perspectives, and for that reason takes the view that there is an interrelationship between individuals and their environment. Moreover, it acknowledges that each participant had their own perception of their world influenced by their own alternative realities (MacNaughton et al., 2001). Understanding that the parents and practitioners brought to the study, their own individual viewpoints and perspectives, including those related to parenting, professional practice and the children, opened up the potential to respect their multiple or alternative realities. Furthermore, my role as researcher meant that I could not be totally impartial; my interpretation of partnership working had been moulded by my previous professional experience in ECEC. Consequently, it was equally necessary that I sought to respect each participants unique interpretation of their social world and that of the children in their care.

In research that seeks to understand the perspectives of others, there are a further set of assumptions to be explored and challenged indicative of how the researcher interprets the social world of the participants (Moss, 2018b). Additionally, it refers to the epistemological position of the researcher and the way knowledge is understood based on the assumptions that develop during the study. When working together in early childhood settings parents and practitioners are expected, according to the EYFS to have a shared focus in caring for the child/ren (DfE, 2021b), this is a political philosophy, informed by research that associates the relationship between the key adults in a child's life with their future outcomes (Ball, 1994; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Sylva et al., 2004). Government policy, has sought, over the last 25 years to introduce a raft of policies aimed at reducing child poverty and narrowing inequalities, increasing the pressure on early childhood settings to conform to certain curriculum practices alongside caring for children. It is argued, subsequently, that this drive to improve outcomes for children has fed into the discourse of readiness – particularly readiness for school (Kay, 2021). Being aware that these tensions relate to the balance of power between political, professional and parental expectations

was vital when exploring my own epistemology as they would undoubtedly have implications for understanding the perspectives of the participants and their competing personal and professional agendas.

4.4. Research approach

Research that seeks to understand the perspectives of others, as stated in the aims of this thesis, calls for a qualitative research approach. The research questions were initially written to enable the study to investigate the views of parents and ECEC practitioners, about their experiences of partnership working; consequently, it seemed appropriate to adopt an interpretative paradigm. As is the dynamic nature of interpretivism (Waring, 2021), the questions were reviewed and remodelled to take account of the different internal and external influences that arose during the research phase. According to Moss (2018b, p. 28), a paradigm is the “lens through which we see, interpret and make sense of the world” and as such interpretivism, in the context of partnership has different implications for each partner. Interpretivism is associated with exploring how knowledge is socially constructed (MacNaughton et al., 2001) and this is reinforced in ECEC practice through the EYFS, therefore, although this thesis recognises that parent partnership is the term most widely used in practice, to describe the partnership, the parent most often associated with ECEC settings tends to be the mother (Ciblis, 2017, p. 56). Moreover, parents and practitioners are required to construct a relationship where they engage in an open and informative dialogue, focused on helping children to be confident, capable and resilient individuals (DfE, 2021b, p.6). It is from this perspective, that this research sits within a belief system that proposes partnership between parents and practitioners is a socially constructed product informed by the requirements of the EYFS and dependant on the needs and experiences of the individuals involved. Interpretivism, therefore, offered the possibility of not only understanding the perspectives of the participants, but it also provided a lens to comprehend how they balanced the different expectations placed upon them together with interpreting and representing the experiences of the children in their care.

Documenting children’s experiences and recording their learning through observations and photographs as explained in chapter 3, has a long history in ECEC, both internationally and in England. It is now a recognised pedagogical

practice used in early childhood settings (Alcock, 2000; Dahlberg et al., 2007), even so, it has many interpretations, and each setting will develop their own process of documenting ranging from recording assessment information to being a reflective pedagogical tool (Dahlberg et al., 2007). When I approached Kinderclass preschool to take part in the research for this thesis, I was aware that they had an already established way of using their digital version of documentation to communicate with parents, it was used to build a story of the child's early experiences and assess their learning. This interpretation appeared to align with the suggestion that documentation, when used in a holistic way, could be a tool with "pedagogy as a focus" (Alcock, 2000, p. 1), as it had the potential to demonstrate and influence practice (Fleet et al, 2017 p. 4). As such, the opportunity to integrate their documentation approach in the research study seemed fitting, as it appeared to be a collaborative tool the parents and practitioners were familiar with. Additionally, I was interested in seeing how parents and practitioners worked together and used documentation to negotiate their ideas about the children's care and education. Ultimately, I was intrigued to see if the activity of co-producing the documentation influenced their relationship and their partnership.

When planning the thesis I made a conscious decision to focus the research on the partnership between the key adults, nonetheless, using the children's documentation meant their images, and pictorial biographies were present in the documentation entries. This meant they had a palpable presence which presented an interesting methodological and ethical dilemma. Birbilli (2022) suggests documentation can represent multiple voices (p. 310) and when developing and designing the research approach I was mindful of the way the different voices, parent, practitioner and child could be interpreted. The children's everyday experiences were represented in the digital documentation and this aligns with sociocultural theory as it posits that the lives of children are shaped by their historical, cultural and ecological experiences (Rogoff, 2003, p. 50). Therefore, as a concept it suggests that everyone children come into contact with are of significance. When this concept is related to partnership, it provides an opportunity for parents and practitioners to understand child development and childhood through their interpersonal relationships. Consequently, the lives of the children, their families and the practitioners were inevitably linked together, and it was impossible

to separate their experiences. Given that the practice of documenting is not neutral, and there are choices to be made about what to document, (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rintakorpi et al., 2014) the selection of images and their interpretation was of equal value. This point is salient, as documentation is regarded in practice as a tool to make children's lives visible, yet this also means that there should be a caveat around the way their interests are interpreted through the eyes of the people who care for them – in the home and ECEC setting.

4.5. Phenomenology versus phenomenography!

Phenomenology and phenomenography according to Larsson and Holmström (2007, p. 55) “share the same term, phenomenon” and whilst both approaches are concerned with human experience there appears to be quite subtle differences between the two. In qualitative research phenomenology is more regularly referred to and described as an approach that seeks to understand the things [phenomenon] experienced by people (Denscombe, 2014, p. 95), so their individual relationships and those of the world around them are also important (Marton, 1988, p. 144). In contrast phenomenography aims to describe the ways different individuals understand and perceive the phenomenon, so what they think about their world (Larsson & Holmström, 2007; Marton, 1988). As phenomenology and phenomenography share similar traits, with the emphasis on exploring the lived experiences of individuals, each approach seemed to be an appropriate fit for this research study - ontologically and epistemologically. In addition, they offered the potential to accept that groups of individuals see reality differently and in partnership working this meant there was an acceptance that either approach would recognise the experiences, values and beliefs each participant contributed to the relationship. The ontological world view at the heart of this thesis, accepts that there are multiple realities (Denscombe, 2014, p. 97; MacNaughton et al., 2001) meaning that there is no one way to understand and interpret the pedagogical experiences shared by the adult participants or indeed the children.

Phenomenography was chosen as the methodological approach for this thesis due to the potential for investigating how the mothers and practitioners perceived and understood their partnership, and this was in contrast to focusing on partnership as a phenomenon in its own right as in phenomenology. The approach was first

considered plausible when I came across an article by Quilong Zhang, in which he describes using a phenomenographic interview method with parents and teachers to understand their perspectives of on assessment practices in early childhood education in New Zealand (Zhang, 2017). Zhang also discussed the place of documentation in ECEC, and this focus sparked my interest, particularly as the phenomenographic interview process promoted collaboration – as the interviewer and participants “jointly constitute experiences and understandings’ meaning questions naturally ‘evolve” (Zhang, 2017, p. 258).

Like phenomenology, phenomenography has similar ontological assumptions about the way the social world is constructed by individuals (Larsson & Holmström, 2007, p. 56), and in this study, it opened up possibilities for understanding the shared experiences of the mothers and practitioners. Critiques, such as Stolz (2020) argue that the differences between phenomenology and phenomenography are too close to call. However, as a researcher with previous experience of practice in ECEC, I interpreted that phenomenography also placed the researcher within the research process, as described in the interview method by Zhang above. Marton (1988) suggests that phenomenography as a research approach considers how relationships are connected by thought, action and feeling. In the context of this thesis, the methodology provided a way of trying to understand what would happen when the participants spent time working together as they observed, discussed and created a shared understanding of the child’s needs both in the home and preschool setting. Furthermore, the research approach was perceived to have the potential to consider the participants experiences and how they used these to negotiate and create meaning in relation to their different approaches to caring for the children (Larsson & Holmström, 2007, p. 56).

4.6. My position standing on the edge or being within.

As a researcher with many years of experience of working in ECEC, it was essential that I recognised my position in the research process and potential for bias. The research focus had evolved through a passion for early years influenced by many years of working with young children and their families. Nonetheless, when planning the research I was mindful that my first-hand experience also meant that I was in a privileged position due to my knowledge about child development (Hughes &

MacNaughton, 2000). Conducting research into one's own profession, can be enlightening as it can identify and highlight suggestions for improving practice but as Pascal and Bertram, (2012, p. 479), speculate, this can only be realised if the research is conducted in an ethical and democratic way. It seemed, inevitable that challenges would emerge, as it is widely accepted that there are many different forces such as the presence of power dynamics, that influence ECEC practice (Moss, 2018a). So at the start of the research process I found myself reflecting on my positionality, my personal interests and my professional expertise, and whether I was a researcher or a participant. Being aware of one's positionality according to Mannay (2016) requires the researcher to explore both the practical and moral aspects of the situation. Consequently, it was vital that I realised I was no longer on the inside and able to influence and shape the practice of others, but on the outside a visitor and not able to take practice for granted. In relation to early years pedagogical practice, this meant adopting a reflexive approach where the presence of professional power, was personally acknowledged and challenged (Pascal & Bertram, 2012).

I was also mindful that there were perceived advantages in researching partnership in ECEC as this was familiar territory, and it was an area of practice I felt comfortable with (Mannay, 2016, p. 30). In contrast though, familiarity may also be a hindrance, experience and professional knowledge can seem threatening and unintentionally lead to parental knowledge being underestimated, meaning they are regarded in a less powerful position (Einarsdottir & Jónsdóttir, 2019; Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000). Consequently, this places professionals as the empowered partner, and as Moss (2018a, p. 90) notes, [when reflecting on the work of Michael Foucault], power is often localised, implying the need to be aware of the unique emotions and unconscious processes that are present in relationships. Furthermore, power can take different forms, so alongside being conscious of the role professional power can play, I was also aware that the dynamics of power can shift between individuals and organisational and political structures.

4.7. The sample: Introducing the setting and the participants.

The research focus, as explained in section 4.4, the introduction to the research approach, was to explore partnership in ECEC, and the way documentation

facilitated this. I approached Kinderclass Preschool, an established community run setting, for children aged 2-4 years, based in the North of England. The setting is in a suburb of a large town, it serves a number of neighbouring areas which according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (H.M. Government, 2019) have a high proportion of families on a low income and who are classed as living in disadvantage. As such, Kinderclass supports a number of children to access extended childcare and education. Kinderclass was known to me prior to commencing this research as one of my responsibilities as a University Lecturer has involved visiting students whilst they were attending their early years placements, and the setting had previously hosted a number of students. The preschool manager and I had a history of planning support packages for students, and during my visits I had become aware of the setting's pedagogical practice and ethos for working with parents. Kinderclass had also purchased Tapestry, marketed as an online learning journal (The Foundation Stage Forum Ltd, 2022) as their preferred way of documenting children's daily experiences, using it as a tool to share observations with parents and develop a pictorial biography of each child.

It was the familiarity with the setting and their use of digital documentation that I believed made them a suitable location in which to conduct the study. Their suitability based on the premise that as a research base they had the qualities necessary for informing practice (Coe, 2021, p. 51). This method of sampling is regarded as purposive, as the setting and subsequently the participants were recruited due to their prior experiences (Cohen et al., 2003, p.104). An added advantage was the established relationship Kinderclass had with the University, as three of their practitioners had either studied or were in the process of studying the Early Years Degree part time, – so they were familiar with using research to inform their practice. Kinderclass had also been recognised for their work with parents and carers by Ofsted - the regulatory body in England that inspects childcare, and education. After initial discussions with the manager, about the possibility of conducting the research with the parents and practitioners who attended and worked at Kinderclass, I then approached the management committee to request their permission; once gained, ethical clearance and permission was sought and granted from the University ethics committee (appendix.2).

Prior to the field work commencing, an introductory meeting took place in Kinderclass with the manager and staff team, the aim being to explain the research aims and possible timetable for data collection. The practitioners were asked to identify parents of their key children with whom they had an established relationship, and who they regarded as being familiar with Tapestry. The sampling method, as previously acknowledged was based on suitability, and not representative of all parents who use ECEC services. Cohen et al. (2003, p. 104) claim this method is selective and biased. However, in justifying this approach I believed the practitioners in Kinderclass knew the parents of the children best and as an outsider I did not have the familiarity needed to approach the parents. This method of selection was not without risk; it placed the practitioners in a position of power and could be regarded as an example of the potential for bias that Cohen et al. (2003) were describing.

Mothers and fathers were primarily approached by the practitioners, and although one father initially asked for further details, he decided not to take part in the study. The reason for this was not disclosed and ethically his right to do this was respected (BERA, 2018). This resulted in a total seven mothers agreeing to participate, their children aged between 2 years 4 months and 3 years 6 months at the time of their interview and all were either funded to access the Kinderclass (or had previously accessed funding) under the policy, 'free education and childcare 2-year offer' (H.M. Government, n.d.). Introduced as part of the strategy to improve children's outcomes the policy aims to reduce the attainment gap to by enabling children from disadvantaged households and/or who have identified needs access to quality early years provision (Albakri et al., 2018; H.M.Gov.UK, n.d.; Teager & McBride, 2018, p. 4). The community location as explained earlier in this section meant that most of the children when they started attending Kinderclass were in receipt of the 2-year funding, and whilst being eligible for government funding to attend ECEC, was not stipulated as a criteria for taking part in the research, the mothers who volunteered were in receipt or had accessed the funding for their children.

Table 1 includes details of the mothers, their children and the practitioners – all names are pseudonyms.

Child and Mother	Children's details	Practitioner	Interview date
1. Sofia child of Jessica	Sofia was 2 years 8 months and had an older sister who attended the setting.	Charlie	11/11/16
2. Zahir child of Hiresh	Zahir was 2 years 5 months and had an older sister who attended the setting and a baby sister at home.	Aliysha	31/3/17
3. Asha child of Jen	Asha was 3 years and 6 months and an only child. She was the eldest child in the study.	Becky	12/07/17
4. Jack child of Gabby	Jack was 2 years 4 months and had an older sister who attended the setting.	Becky	17/11/17
5. Jamie child of Karen	Jaimie was 2 years 9 months he had four older brothers who all attended the setting.	Lisa	24/11/17
6. Hannah child of Sarah	Hannah was 2 years 10 months and an only child.	Becky	8/12/17
7. Harriet child of Kate	Harriet was 2 years 6 months and had a brother who attended the setting.	Aliysha	8/12/17

Table 1 - mothers, children and the practitioners

4.8. Research method

The phenomenographic interview method as described in section 4.5, was chosen due to the potential it offered for using prompts, rather than direct questions to develop the dialogue between interviewer and participants (Zhang, 2017). Using the settings digital documentation alongside the prompts meant that each the child's visual biography was integrated into the interview space as a conversation piece, so

whilst the children were not physically present their story became a key feature. Sparrman and Lindgren (2010) discuss the way technology has increased the visibility of children, and in practice I was aware that as participants (me included) we were viewing and discussing the children as they engaged in their everyday tasks. This raised ethical considerations which will be discussed in more detail in the ethics section. Nevertheless, as Alcock (2000) explains documentation, when used as a reflective tool can open up possibilities for discussion and this was certainly the case for the mothers and practitioners during the interviews.

A small side room adjacent to the preschool classroom was the location allocated for conducting the interviews. Offered by the setting because it was familiar to the participants; parents and practitioners regularly used the room if they needed to talk or share issues related to the children. The practicalities of using this room meant that it was a space owned by the practitioners, and accordingly it could be regarded as feeding into the discourse, whereby professional expertise may be regarded as being privileged (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000). As each interview started, the process of gaining consent and permission to record was introduced. The practitioner was then asked to open up the child's documented biography on the settings laptop and each child's story was then shared with the mother and me and a description of the child's first day at the setting developed. Interviews offer participants the option to share their own story (Mears, 2023), and this was my intention for introducing the phenomenographic interview method. Nevertheless, as it was the practitioner's responsibility to open up and introduce the narrative in the documentation, inevitably they initially directed the conversation. This meant that I had to find ways of interjecting. Phenomenographic interviews are intended to be collaborative and participatory, and data evolves as the conversation develops (Zhang, 2017). Even so, the method can also highlight the different power differentials between the participants, and I was aware that, my involvement and the presence of the practitioner meant that our collective professional experience could be intimidating for the mothers and this could be a limiting factor in the data collection. The triangular diagram below is an example of the way power was present in each of the interviews (see Figure 2).

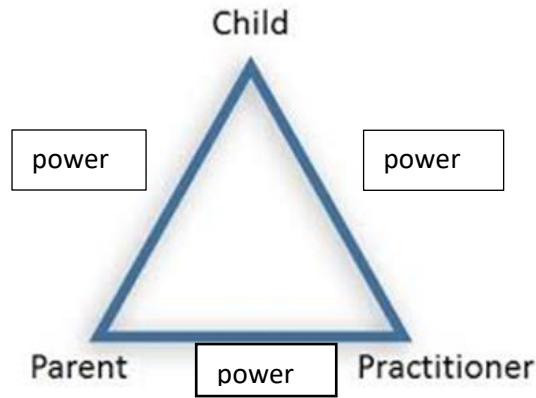


Figure 2 - power differentials between researcher and participants

4.9. Ethics

Research conducted in the real world and especially in the field of early childhood education, brings with it particular ethical issues that are influenced by politics, power and the complexities that exist in relationships (Moss, 2018a). This is compounded when practitioners or ex-practitioners in my case, undertake research in a familiar field as this can bring about a tension and participants feeling obliged to take part or answer questions in a particular way. Pascal and Bertram (2012, p. 480) discuss the need to have a “sharpened focus on ethics” when conducting research in and on one’s practice and I was mindful of this stance both during the interviews and throughout the analysis.

Ethical permission to carry out the research for this thesis was granted by the University of Huddersfield ethics committee (appendix 2). The study followed the BERA (2011; 2018) guidelines and also took into consideration the ethical principles set out in the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) (Bertram et al., 2015). Both codes of practice state that research on, with and for children supposes that researchers have considered their best interests and comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (BERA, 2018; Bertram et al., 2015; United Nations, 1992). Whilst this research study did not directly involve the children the method of using digital documentation as a prompt in the phenomenographic interviews, offered a way of seeing and interpreting what the children were doing, in their everyday activities. The presence of the child in the images, added an extra ethical dimension in relation to ensuring their best interests were respected (United Nations, 1992), as their actions were interpreted by the

adults, they became a potential silent partner. Ethical issues relating to work in ECEC practice have been identified and addressed throughout the thesis, the following section details the way an ethic of respect (BERA, 2018, p. 8) was undertaken when conducting the research at Kinderclass Preschool.

4.9.1. Consent, transparency and right to withdraw.

As Kinderclass is a community run preschool setting, the first stage of gaining consent to conduct research was to ask for formal permission from the preschool management committee (appendix. 3). Once this was granted I met with the manager and practitioners, it was at this stage the aims of the study were discussed in detail and practitioner information given (appendix.4). Four practitioners agreed to take part in the research and each practitioner recruited parents from their key group of children, as previously explained in section 4.7, the sample. Although I was informed that initially a group of both mothers and fathers were interested in taking part in the study, seven consenting mothers attended a meeting with me to discuss the research one morning at drop-off time, and the participant information letter was shared. Interview dates were arranged with each mother and practitioner at a mutually convenient day and time. In order to gain formal written consent from each participant (appendix 5) time was dedicated to the research process at the start of each interview (BERA, 2018). This included a discussion about confidentiality and that I would not be identifying the setting, in the subsequent research report. Additionally their anonymity was also guaranteed, as pseudonyms for both adults and any children discussed during the interview would be used in the reporting of findings. The ethical principles of EECERA propose that early childhood researchers should operate within an ethic of respect (Bertram et al., 2015) and I sought to do this by being open and honest with the participants, and respecting their rights, including their right to withdraw from the research at any point. All participants agreed to contribute and were aware that the data collected would be used to inform ECEC practice.

As each interview used digital documentation that contained images, videos and observations, a virtual story about the children captured over time, assent from the children was somewhat accepted. Sparrman and Lindgren (2010) discuss that, in documentation, children are often captured from above – a birds-eye view (p. 255).

This places the adults as onlookers; therefore, it was important to recognise that we were interpreting the children's actions and this meant being open and transparent during the interview about what appeared to be happening. It also became apparent as the interviews progressed that the documentation featured the children's siblings and sometimes their friends, meaning these other children were recognisable in the visual artifacts. The inclusion of other children in the documentation and subsequent conversations posed an ethical challenge, as neither their assent nor consent had been considered prior to the interview starting. I became mindful of the need to be aware of my social responsibility (Bertram et al., 2015) and steer the interview conversation if children outside the family or the parameters of the interview were discussed. The documentation was included in the interview as a provocation only, and not aimed to give children their own audible voice, rather it offered a visual approach into seeing what children did in the home and setting. Nevertheless, using the documentation placed the children at the centre of the interview, meaning their voices were interpreted and filtered by the adults in their lives.

The phenomenographic approach offered opportunities for the practitioners and mothers to respectfully share important information relating to the preferences and needs of each individual child. The conversational nature of the interview enabled a dialogue to develop about the children's cultural experiences along with their developmental needs, and ways to support their early learning experiences. Whilst it is recognised that using digital documentation can offer a creative method to inform early childhood practice (Cowan & Flewitt, 2021). I was also aware that using the documentation to facilitate the conversation in each interview meant that there was a lack of structure, posing a risk that the discussion could lose focus. Additionally, this interview style had the potential for an imbalance of power between i) the adults and ii) their perception and interpretation of each child (BERA, 2018; Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010). This meant that the research process needed to be conducted carefully and ethically, as research conducted in this way is still managed and interpreted by adults (Gallacher and Gallaher, 2008, p. 505; Lomax, 2012, p. 106).

4.9.2. Privacy and data storage

BERA (2018) states that research participants must be afforded treatment that respects their right to confidentiality and anonymity, and in doing this everyone has a

legal right to understand how their personal data is stored. During the timeframe of this research the Data Protection Act 2018, became law, replacing the previous 1998 Act. This new Act includes the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which gives explicit details about data storage and access. As each interview was recorded and stored securely on a password protected data storage device, it complied with the Data Protection Act 2018. During the introduction to each interview, participants were made aware that their data would only be shared in discussion with my supervisor as detailed on the participant consent form.

4.9.3. Safeguarding and disclosure

In accordance with the EYFS there are safeguarding and welfare requirements that must be adhered to when working with children (DfE, 2021b) and these reflect the statutory guidance aimed at protecting children as directed by the government (H.M. Government, 2018). As a University Lecturer and person who visits settings I have a detailed understanding of national and local safeguarding policies and also hold an enhanced criminals record certificate provided by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). Safeguarding and protecting children's rights when conducting research in ECEC is essential and the EECERA ethical code states that research should "operate within the spirit of Article 3 and 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" (Bertram et al., 2015, p.7). Whilst the research for this thesis did not directly involve the children, their stories in the digital documentation were at the centre of the data collection, and as such, any disclosure that may have put a child at risk of harm was raised alongside confidentiality and anonymity (BERA, 2018).

4.10. Analysis

This last section is concerned with the analytic process, the chapter explores how I used Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022) informed by sociocultural theory to analyse the data. Firstly, I discuss the initial phase of analysis, so in phenomenographic terms – "what" the data seemed to reveal about the way the mothers and practitioners worked together and 'how' they interpreted and talked about what they observed (Larsson & Holmström, 2007 p. 57). On the first reading, the seven interview transcripts were read inductively and annotated, this revealed 'what' was said by the mothers and practitioners when they shared the documentation and 'how' they talked about what they saw the children doing.

Secondly, the data was organised and read through three different viewpoints, informed by sociocultural theory and the work of Rogoff – so the annotations were organised to see where there were aspects of , individual, cultural and interpersonal activity (Rogoff, 2003, p. 58). This concept provided an opportunity through which the data sets could be explored together with the historical, political, and cultural influences on partnership working. Using this layer of analysis, driven by sociocultural theory offered the opportunity to examine the way the child was perceived by the adults and their actions interpreted – so, the child being present and visible in the documentation but missing from the shared physical space.

The final stage in the analytic process included examining the way interpretation was used by the parents and practitioners, and myself as interviewer, recognising the subjective assumptions that were present in the interview transcripts and also in my reading of the data, this is where the data was explored through a reflexive lens (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Finally drawing on sociocultural theory and the ‘Funds of Knowledge’, as this notion has potential for understanding where children are positioned in partnership working, provided an opportunity to understand the knowledge and skills children were gaining from their experiences with others (Chesworth, 2016; Hedges, 2015; Hedges et al., 2011).

4.10.1. Developing the analysis

Analysing qualitative data is a process in itself, it involves organisation as a means to make sense of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 6). Additionally, there should be a recognition that participants have different values and beliefs informed by their different perspectives of reality. It is also a complicated process that requires reflection and this takes time, meaning, the process of analysis should not be taken for granted (St. Pierre and Jackson, 2014). This was particularly the case during my study, and I did at times feel like I was falling into the “black hole” described by Lather (as cited in, St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014 p. 715). I found myself being swayed by different approaches to analysis, constantly looking for a clear way to read the data, so that I could make sense of and interpret what I thought I was seeing. I read with interest about the need to familiarise myself with the data, and not to rush into theme production, but to see generating themes as an active process (Braun & Clarke, 2018). I did, nevertheless, often fall into the traps I was seeking to avoid,

rushing to theme generation, and questioning the method of coding the data. This uncertainty, although uncomfortable, meant that reflection became a tool to review the data, to question my assumptions and to recognise the subjective traits in the analytic procedure.

Reflective practice is encouraged in ECEC and seen as a tool for professional development encouraging practitioners to look back and examine their pedagogical decisions (MacNaughton, 2005). Adopting this notion of reflective practice when reading through the transcripts, enabled me to 'look back' at the interview transcripts, to question my assumptions and to dig deeper into the different layers of data. The initial notes on the transcripts had been grouped into initial themes, looking back meant re-examining my notes and how I had interpreted them, a process I returned to many times during analysis. Additionally, it was important to recognise my own professional history and how my values and beliefs could lead me to reflect on the data in a subjective way. The concept of reflexivity, as explored in chapter 2, became key here as it enabled me to acknowledge my personal perspectives (Mannay, 2016), and call into question the way my pedagogical practice could influence the data analysis.

Reading the data in a reflexive way and acknowledging my own subjective lens became an important and conscious action in the process of analysis. Braun and Clarke (2021, p.40) define the reflexive approach to data analysis as being a staged process, which requires the researcher to recognise that themes are generated through active engagement with the data in a personal and value laden way. I understood this in practice to mean that reading and re-reading the transcripts would enable me to naturally identify patterns of shared meaning and ultimately lead to the generation of codes (Braun & Clarke 2022 p. 35). This was not, however, my initial experience, and coding was something I found challenging – even questioning whether codes were in fact necessary. I soon realised this was not an uncommon worry during the analytic stage, but nonetheless at the time it was unnerving. Augustine (2014) portrays a similar quandary suggesting that coding is often expected in qualitative research, as a means to demonstrate validity valuing the contributions made by the participants. In contrast, if coding data is taken for granted, as an elementary process the meaning of words can sometimes be seen as something to be categorised and devoid of meaning (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014).

Acknowledging no one size fits all, I interpreted RTA to be an influential method as it enabled me to interrogate the data alongside recognising my own professional heritage. Being reflexive and adopting a reflexive approach to research acknowledges that personal and professional values influence the assumptions and decisions made when probing the data. Therefore, the process of using Braun and Clarke's model to guide data interrogation enabled me to recognise how my understanding of child development theory and experience of ECEC practice informed my understanding and analysis of the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2022). Additionally, RTA offered the opportunity to be transparent about the way my own assumptions could influence theme generation and how my own and the values and beliefs of the participants could be understood in an interpretive and creative way. The next section provides a detailed account of the six phases of RTA as interpreted and applied to this thesis.

4.10.2. Phases – using RTA to understand the, what and how?

1. Familiarisation with the data - In order to explain the detailed process of analysis and interpret the content of each interview conversation, the first stage of analysis involved re- engaging with the interview content by reviewing each transcript individually. This process of listening to each recording enabled me to also check the accuracy of the transcription, to acknowledge the way each participant, including myself as interviewer engaged in the conversation. I was immersed in the data from the outset as the conversational nature of each interview meant that I was as much a participant as I was an interviewer, and this was in-keeping with the phenomenographic approach. This meant that I was already familiar with the data, before actively engaging with analysis, due to the way conversation had developed. Acknowledging the need to be reflexive at this point was critical, as I read through each transcript it was important to recognise my contribution, and that of each mother and practitioner.

The interview texts were read one by one, as this enabled me to become familiar with each set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2018), on each of the transcripts I made notes of interest and added comments relating to my observations, this detail can be seen in figure 3.

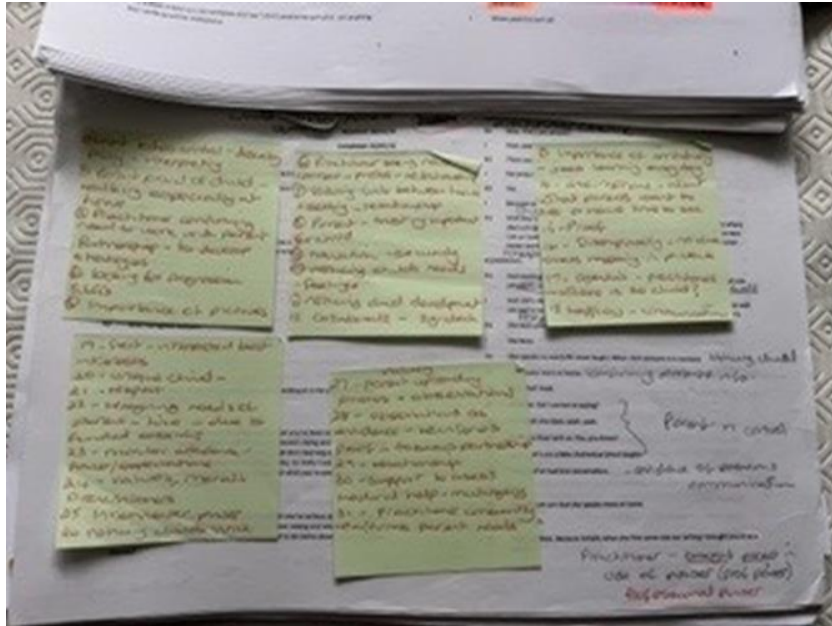


Figure 3 - familiarisation

I was initially struck by the way each conversation described what the practitioners had observed the children doing in the setting, what the mothers felt important and how they also described sharing the documentation with their children. Collectively it was apparent that the mothers valued seeing what their child did on a daily basis, explaining that it was important to see that their child was 'happy'. Equally I was also able to hear my own contribution to the discussions; phenomenographic interviewing accepts the inclusive role of the interviewer, nevertheless, it was quite uncomfortable to hear how much I interjected at times. As I continued to develop the analytical process of reading the data critically (Braun & Clarke, 2021), I was able to explore the 'what and how' aspect further (Larsson & Holmström, 2007 p. 57) through asking myself a number of reflective questions: 1. what was familiar about the data?, 2. what was unfamiliar/surprising about the data?, and 3. How through communicating and sharing the documentation each participant was able to talk about their relationship and how this helped them to work together, in partnership? Through my interpretation of the data I was able to start to understand what working in partnership meant in this instance for these participants. Finally summary notes were made on post-it notes to capture the essence of the conversation. At this stage the process was completed by hand on the paper copies of the transcript.

2. Coding – I was mindful to not rush the process of developing codes and themes, but to work steadily in a systematic way (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 53), and this next

stage developed in two phases. I soon realised that the initial annotated summary notes contributed to my understanding of 'what' I could see in the data, as the intention was to consider the participants' experiences (Larsson & Holmström, 2007, p. 56) however, at this stage it felt that there was more to develop before I could assign a code label or call them codes. Acknowledging the reflexive nature of RTA, was something I needed to keep reminding myself and stepping back in order to see and make sense of the data clearly became necessary, as I was at times so immersed in the process of analysis.

During each interview the conversation had centred around the child, their family and their daily routines. This enabled me to investigate further the what and how (Larsson & Holmström, 2007) as each mother and practitioner shared "*what*" they could see their child doing and what made them happy. Through reading the transcripts I was able to recognise familiar patterns in the data, the mothers talked about the need to feel they could trust the practitioner, and they appeared reassured by their relationship with the staff in the setting; especially if they had already developed a shared history due to a sibling previously attending before they transitioned to full time school. What was also evident was "*how*" the mothers focused heavily on their feelings of anxiety about leaving their child for the first time or being unsure whether they should only settle them in a setting if they were going back to work.

Participating in the interview process enabled me to examine "*how*", the mothers and practitioners shared and negotiated information about each child and how I interpreted their conversation as it was important to explore how my own 'voice' influenced their dialogue. I also felt it was essential to understand the practitioners' perspectives, so what they believed was the purpose of collecting observations, photographs, and videos and how, through the window of digital documentation they developed a story about the child, their day and how they planned for their needs. Additionally, I was curious as to whether developing and contributing to the documentation was a reciprocal process.

Although at times this stage of developing the coding process was messy, and often I found myself questioning the process and feeling "stuck" it was essential to be reminded of the quote by St Pierre and Jackson (2014, p. 715), "that the process of

analysis should not be taken for granted”. Coding, became at this point, a way to start thinking about sociocultural theory, and also how the data could be interpreted to answer the research questions. In the final stage, before moving on to generating the themes I created a wall chart, illustrated below in figure 4, to map the summary comments around the three sociocultural lenses identified by Rogoff. In common with Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 57). Using this analytical method meant that I grouped the semantic or descriptive codes around the participants individual experiences, identified their interpersonal relationships and explored where their cultural experiences were evident (Rogoff, 2003).

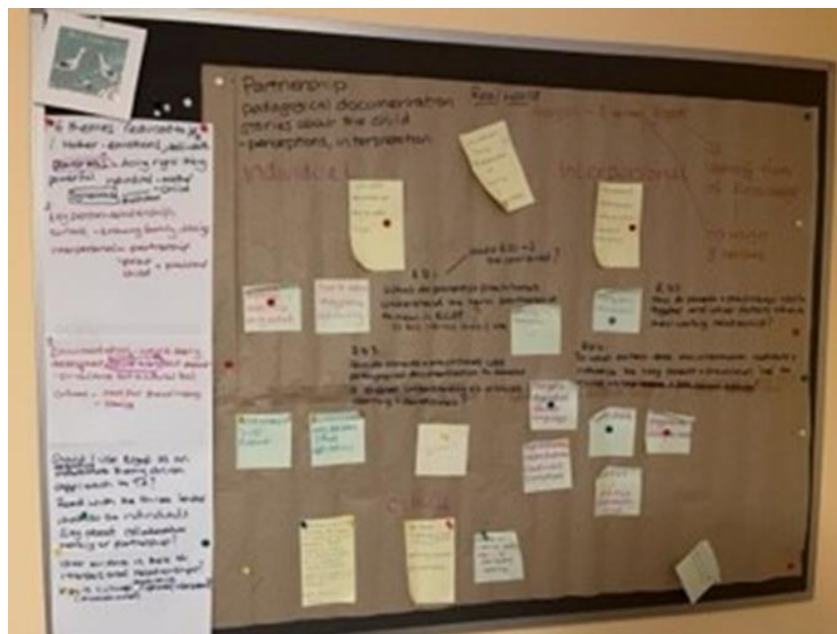


Figure 4 - coding

3. Generating initial themes – The wall chart became a valuable technique for visualising the data, becoming a thematic map that encompassed, latent, more implicit coded summaries (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 57) and I refined the groupings by linking the theoretical lenses around the thesis research questions. As patterns of meaning started to make sense, potential themes and sub-themes were developed. The data started to tell a story and answer the research questions. Nonetheless, in thinking about the relationship between the inductive summaries, the tentative code labels, and theory I was still mindful to not make assumptions and that the data needed to be further interrogated. At this point, it seemed appropriate to read the transcripts again, highlighting both on the transcripts, see figure 5, and the thematic

wall map, where I could see connections in the data to individual, interpersonal and cultural characteristics (Rogoff, 2003 p. 58).



Figure 5 - generating initial themes

This theory driven action was helpful in that I was able to see connections between the literature review and the data, nevertheless, it did not prove successful in moving forward the theme generation and I once again felt stuck. At this point I decided to experiment with the data by exporting the transcripts into the electronic computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) (appendix 1) NVivo (QSR International, n.d.). Although it was a process that I was unfamiliar with and necessitated me learning the basics via video tutorials, using NVivo enabled me to clarify the connections between the initial summary comments, codes and theory, it also helped me to question and feel confident in my assumptions and group together sections of the data that related to each code label.

Returning to the thematic map, once again, meant that I could now see more clearly the connecting patterns and start to identify potential themes Figure 6.

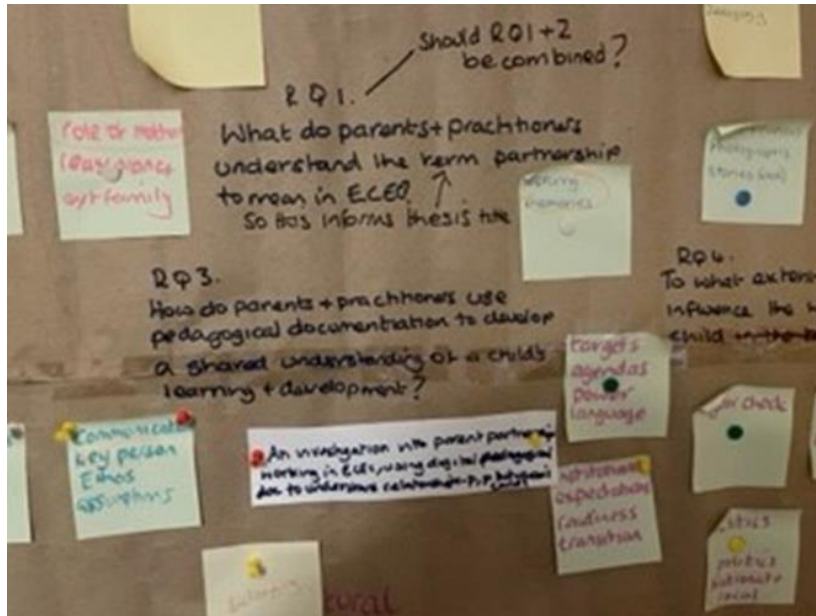


Figure 6 - identifying patterns

At this stage it was not felt that the themes were final, just a guide to help me identify what may be of interest in the text. Alongside the interview transcripts and with the permission of each mother, I was given an excerpt of each child's documentation, they included a copy of the narrative observations and photographs recorded on the child's first day, as used in the interviews. This data provided a prompt, and when read alongside the interview transcripts it was helpful for providing an aid memoir and verifying what I could hear in the interview recordings. I made notes at the side of photographs and comments, trying not to jump ahead and think about the meaning of each word or sentence. A criticism of small qualitative studies is that they are often difficult to replicate and triangulation through the introduction of additional data sources is regarded as one way to check the consistency of the data (MacNaughton et al., 2001, p. 36). However, Braun and Clarke, (2022) question whether it is ever possible to accurately represent the voices of individuals. This extra data added a complementary layer to the active stage of the theme development rather than triangulation, nevertheless, it provided a richer way to interrogate the data. And, when the data notes were added to the thematic map they were summarised together with the codes to identify potential themes.

4. Developing and reviewing themes - Theme development continued to be a methodical process, it involved reflecting back at the codes, drawing up new code maps, redrafting my ideas. It was during this phase I began to see how the themes I

had identified related to the research questions, the coded data excerpts could be aligned to both the questions and the literature, however, during a supervision meeting I was questioned further about my assumptions for each theme. These questions centred around seeing the themes as statements that supported working in partnership with parents from a normative perspective (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010). I had devised themes based on my own beliefs and those prescribed in the EYFS, which related to the expectation that partnership is a positive experience for those involved (DfE, 2021b, p. 5). I was encouraged to scrutinise the data further, to be reflexive (Pascal & Bertram, 2012) and in doing this I was reminded of the point made by Mannay (2016, p. 30) about the pitfalls that can arise when conducting research in familiar territory. I realised that my previous experience as a practitioner, whilst helping me to be close to the data had also potentially influenced my judgement, and my professional expertise was in fact dominating my outlook (Brooker, 2010).

5. Refining and naming themes - Acknowledging that working with parents in the past had influenced my values and beliefs in relation to parent partnership, I entered the process of clarification and naming themes by adopting a strategy of theme definition. This involved developing a table and short abstract for each existing theme (Braun and Clarke, 2022 p. 108), using the following questions to guide me:

- What the theme is about? (Central organising concept).
- What the boundary of the theme is?
- What is unique and specific about each theme?
- What each theme contributes to the overall analysis?

(Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 111).

Candidate theme	Theme definition	Theme name
<p>1. Partnership gave the mothers a sense of belonging and security.</p>	<p>This theme is about the emotional feelings that mothers discussed when they were talking about their child and their own experiences of attending the setting. A boundary is that sharing emotions highlighted responses about professional roles, extension of the family or not – especially from the practitioners.</p>	<p>1. There is an affective dimension to partnership, involving an emotional exchange of ideas and ideals – for the mother – for</p>

	<p>Unique and specific is the way that mothers talked about the importance of feeling connected to the setting and the involvement of family.</p> <p>Contributes to overall analysis as it answers RQ1, emphasising the way partnership is dependent on communication, relationships and taking the time to build a rapport.</p>	<p>the practitioner. Emotional exchange and negotiation and navigate competing discourses about the best interests of the child everyone is trying to work out in relation to the documentation to the child</p>
<p>2. Partnership enabled the mothers to have information about their child's learning and development.</p>	<p>This theme is about the way mothers looked for confirmation that their child was gaining in a positive way from preschool, that they were happy but also learning.</p> <p>Boundary is that confirmation was wanted to make sure the child was ready for the next step- nursery or school.</p> <p>Unique is the way that sharing the documentation captured memories, but also that documentation was not as accessible as first thought.</p> <p>Contributes to analysis as it answers all RQs, themes could be combined with theme below to include sub-themes to explore perspectives of mothers and practitioners – see below.</p>	<p>2. Theme 2. Digital documentation, a tool for partnership opportunities to share but for what purpose? contributed to a shared pedagogy.</p>
<p>3. Partnership gave the practitioners a more intimate knowledge of the child.</p>	<p>This theme is about how practitioners, who were the child's key person formed a relationship with the child and their family.</p> <p>Boundary could be explained as the way getting to know the family is not only based on communication but also through the observations which in turn are used as an assessment of ability. This in itself is a surveillance of the child and their family.</p> <p>Unique is the way practitioners also noticed the child – at play and gained an intimate knowledge of their needs.</p>	

	Contributes to overall analysis as it answers all RQ, it also raises questions about the key person role, the way information is used to 'tick a box'	
4. Partnership is a statutory requirement of the EYFS.	<p>This theme is about the way government policy impacts on the day-to-day care and education of young children pre statutory school age. The structures that are in place ensure settings are conforming to prescribed expectations, documentation is part of this structure as it contains observations that are then used to assess the children against expected developmental norms, so it addresses all RQs. The boundary is that as a stand-alone theme it seemed to be limiting. It is unique in that both practitioners and the mothers both appear to subscribe to these expectations and learning, assessment – requirements of the EYFS also were apparent in theme 1, 2 and 4. It contributes to the overall analysis by offering the potential to explore the readiness debate.</p>	Decision to not include it as a theme – policy and legislation is present in all the other themes.
5. Visibility of the child through documentation.	<p>This theme is about how the mothers and practitioners interpret what they believe they see through documentation – what the child is choosing to do, what they think they are saying. The boundary is that the child is only ever seen through the perspective of the adults who care for them. Unique is that their discussions of the documentation reveals the children's distinctive traits, their relationships with others and routines. The theme answers research Q 2 and 3 and contributes to analysis as it can be related to sociocultural theory - the funds of knowledge and also the practice of surveillance.</p>	3. How digital documentation frames the 'child.' - Visible but not physically present!

Table 2 – methods used to define themes

Table 2 contains the thought process developed through theme definition, by defining each theme. I realised where patterns occurred and the similarities and

differences and this led me to amalgamate theme 2 and 3. It also made me question theme 4, realising that as a standalone theme the potential for contribution and analysis was limited as the statutory element of the EYFS could also be linked to theme 1 and the way the mothers and practitioners talked emotionally about partnership. The political aspects of the EYFS were also present in the requirements of the documentation and the way the mothers and practitioners interpreted and perceived the child's actions. This led me to settle on 3 themes as detailed below:

1. The affective dimension to partnership – the emotional exchange of ideas and ideals for both the mother and practitioner.
2. Documentation as a tool for partnership - providing opportunities to share but for what purpose?
3. How digital documentation frames the child.

6. Writing up - interpreting and presenting the data, what each theme

contributes to the story - Writing up each theme is considered to be a key component of analysis, and as such is regarded as necessary in order to ensure the data analysis is valid and of quality (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This stage of the process, however, was not without complications, the more I looked at the data, related it to the themes and attempted to write up the findings I still continued to question my interpretation. Understanding this is an accepted dilemma in RTA did not entirely help me to have confidence in writing the findings chapter. I returned to the six stages and particularly the initial familiarisation stage a number of times, reminding myself of what I was seeking to understand about partnership working and how my data was contributing to this. The following reflective questions were helpful in enabling me to expand the “what and how” further (Larsson & Holmström, 2007, p. 57).

1. What was familiar about the data?
2. What was unfamiliar/surprising about the data?
3. How through communicating and sharing the digital documentation, each participant was able to talk about their relationship and how this helped them to work together, in partnership?

Undertaking this process, enabled me to define the most significant elements in the interview transcripts, in the initial coding phase I had identified and labelled my early

ideas – so what had struck me in the data – these ideas had been mapped and contributed to code labels and theme generation. As a final exercise reverting back to these ideas and plotting them against the reflective questions and themes enabled me to see a way forward in structuring the findings and analysis chapter.

4.11. Chapter summary

In the subsequent chapter the findings from the seven interviews are presented and discussed in detail. The chapter opens with a reminder of the research questions, and a summary table that outlines the themes and salient points, by way of offering a preview to the chapter (Braun & Clarke, 2022 p. 130). Each theme is then discussed using excerpts from the data, capturing the voices of the participants. Interpretation is used to discuss the 3rd and final theme as this relates to the child – their presence/but absence in the interview space and documentation.

Chapter 5. Presentation and analysis of the findings

5.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter presents the findings and analysis from the seven interviews conducted in Kinderclass preschool. The interviews followed the phenomenographic method, chosen for its collaborative and conversational style, yet potential to reveal nuanced data (Zhang, 2017). Using this approach offered the potential to reveal the way the participants reflected on their relationship and experiences of partnership working. The first section of the chapter introduces the challenges I experienced as a researcher with previous practitioner experience, and I acknowledge how both roles, entwined and influenced each other during the interviews and analysis. The chapter then focuses on the findings from the interviews with the seven mothers and four respective practitioners – as introduced in table 1 (see chapter four, page 64) - and the way they used their version of documentation, to share, record, reflect and celebrate the children's abilities and learning.

During the phenomenographic interviews the digital documentation provided a focal point for each conversation, and a shared dialogue was encouraged between the participant mothers and practitioners. This is in keeping with studies that advocate documentation as a tool to make pedagogical practices visible (Alcock, 2000; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rintakorpi et al., 2014). Additionally the chapter will explain how the documentation within the setting offered a lens for seeing how each child was framed by the adults as they discussed, negotiated, and celebrated what they saw. Nevertheless, the discussions about the child, their care, learning and development, whilst seemingly informative and collaborative were entirely from an adult perspective. This point is noteworthy, and relevant in order to understand potential factors that might influence partnership relationships between parents and practitioners in early childhood practice.

5.2. Analysing the data, analysing oneself – being reflective and reflexive

The data collection and analysis as explained in chapter 4 of this thesis, was primarily aligned to RTA following the six-step approach as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2022). The method encourages reflexivity, a key skill necessary for any

researcher, as it recognises that research is not a neutral process. Although the term reflexivity has more than one meaning in research (Kara, 2015, p. 71), it was applicable in this study due to the emotional connection I have with early years practice as explored in the introduction to this thesis. It was essential, therefore, that I questioned my own assumptions and beliefs about what may constitute partnership working throughout the thesis. Acknowledging my epistemological stance throughout the data analysis, was of equal importance. I was aiming to understand the way partnership had developed between the mothers and practitioners recruited to the study and interested in how their assumptions and beliefs had shaped their relationship, and how they worked together in support of the children.

Due to the small-scale nature of the study I could only ever reflect the participants' experiences captured and constructed in that moment, also recognising that their discussions about the children were co-constructed and consequently open to interpretation, by the mothers, practitioners and me. Subsequently, when reading the data it was essential that I adopted a reflexive approach that considered the unequal roles that are present in empirical research, including the imbalance of personal and professional roles, the dynamics of power, and most importantly the representation of the children in the documentation.

The phenomenographic interview is a collective experience according to Zhang (2017), so as interviewer I was involved and entangled in the data collection process. During the interviews the participants invited me to contribute to their discussions about ECEC practice and comment on the photographs and videos they shared via the digital tool. This meant that I was also positioned as an insider researching familiar territory (Mannay, 2016 p. 30). An example of this occurs in the following extract from the interview with me, Karen (Jaimie's mother), and practitioner Lisa. The conversation had focused on Jamie's passion for playing in the garden at home, as opposed to his apparent preference to stay inside at preschool.

Karen (mother) Um he loves playing out in the garden.

Me Does he?

Karen But he doesn't really play out here [preschool] much does he?

Practitioner Lisa No. He tends to stay inside more.

Karen Yeah.

Practitioner Lisa It's more, he likes reading his book or playing in the sand area.

Jamie's enthusiasm for reading books came through strongly, he enjoyed reading them at home and in preschool, with his mother, Karen and Lisa. The conversation continued for some time until I steered the conversation around to talking about the two-year assessment. I had completely closed down the conversation about Jamie and his books and used my professional experience to influence the interview discussion, as shown in the following extract:

Karen (mother) Yeah. But, but the book thing, he loves books.

Practitioner Lisa Yeah he does.

Me That's good.

Karen Still loves books at home as well.

Me And, and obviously um when children are two they tend to have um a development check and they do also have um a two-year assessment that potentially are supposed to join up.

Practitioner Lisa Yeah.

Me I think in reality they don't always do that. Is that something he's already had with health visitors or anything?

Practitioner Lisa No.

Me (directed at Karen) You've not had any?

Karen I haven't had.

Practitioner Lisa No.

Karen Nobody's been to nursery either, have they?

Practitioner Lisa No.

Me Call it a two-year check.

Karen Yeah.

Practitioner Lisa Yeah.

Me Two-year development check.

Karen No.

Me Um and.

Practitioner Lisa We'd, we're going to do that with Jamie towards Christmas. It's just because I've had um I wanted to get him, to know him better.

Lisa explained to Karen that she was intending to complete Jamie's assessment later in the year, as she wanted to get to know him better first. The conversation

continued to focus on the way Kinderclass conducted the 2-year assessment. Lisa explained how she used observations of Jamie to inform her assessment and how she would include Karen in the process. Further on in the conversation I interjected again, as I shared the way 2-year assessments had been conducted when I was previously employed in practice, I explained:

Me In my previous job we used to have health drop-ins in the children's centre where we did the two-year checks. So the health visitors would do like a play drop-in, and they would do their [the children's] health checks there.

The extracts of data above show how I had contributed and shared my professional opinion in the interview about the 2-year assessment process. My comments were informed by practice and also an awareness that when introduced the assessment had been intended to be integrated between health and early education services, as recommended in the 2011 review of the Early Years Foundation Stage (Tickell, 2011, p. 22). On reflection, I was making a number of assumptions about the assessment process and the way it appeared less integrated between Kinderclass and their local health team. When reading back and analysing the interview transcript I could see how my previous experience had crept into and dominated the discussion. Believing that I was participating in the way the children's digital stories were understood, my contribution had closed down the conversation. I had added a dimension of professional power to the interview, using my expertise to dominate and introduce my own professional agenda (Brooker, 2010; Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000).

It became clear when analysing the data that I that needed to accept and challenge my own preconceptions, to recognise and critique in an ethical and reflective way, through a reflexive lens. Political changes, location of the preschool and also time lapse since I worked in practice meant that the experiences of the mothers and practitioners were inevitably different to mine. I needed to step back, and while I did not do this in the interview I was able to reflect when analysing the data how I had steered the discussion away from Jamie and his love of books. Reflecting on this experience was uncomfortable but enlightening, being aware, meant I was able to acknowledge and be critical as I continued to read the transcripts (Kara, 2015). This example of researcher entanglement is just one instance where I have attempted to scrutinise my own position as a researcher (Mannay, 2016). Additionally it enabled

me to be mindful that the generation of knowledge either co-constructed during the interview or interpreted through reading the data is, consequently, not value free but interpreted by the participants, including me as the researcher (Attia & Edge, 2017; Mannay, 2016). Being so close to the data generation in the interview meant that I had unconsciously affected the direction of the conversation and ultimately the findings. Knowing this reminded me that my role was to investigate partnership working, including the relationships between the mothers and practitioners rather than influence and shape practice.

Personally, I am a mother and now grandmother and have lived experiences that when combined with professional knowledge have inextricably shaped my own values, beliefs, and principles. As Mannay (2016) posits, shared knowledge and understanding can be both an advantage and disadvantage (p. 30). So whilst my own professional and personal history appeared to be helpful in enabling me to be involved in the interviews it was also a constraint, limiting the conversation and indeed my interpretation of the data. Consequently acknowledging my own dispositions when carrying out research into ECEC practice meant being open and honest about these underlying tensions. Sharing my knowledge and experience of working, with health visiting teams, was in fact, an example of professional power, and I had unconsciously, dominated sections of the interview by contributing information about my own practice, albeit briefly.

5.3. Analysing the data, the interviews

The chapter now focuses on the presentation and analysis of the findings from the seven phenomenographic interviews. This interview method was chosen as it is conversational in nature, with the ability to encourage all participants to share their understanding of partnership working. Questions are not structured but “evolve” during the interview process (Zhang, 2017, p. 258). Analysis of the interviews led to the identification of three themes, the themes and key messages are summarised below.

Theme 1. The affective dimension to partnership, involves an emotional exchange of ideas and ideals – for both the mother and the practitioner.

Key messages. The feeling of familiarity and shared history was evident in the interviews and the key person relationship and security for the child was important. Underlying tensions around, professional power influenced by political expectations around the construction of the child attending ECEC became evident (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Highlighting as the participants collaborated together the emotional side of partnership working.

Theme 2. Digital documentation as a tool for partnership – sharing documentation provided opportunities to share but for what purpose?

Key messages. Documenting children’s experiences in ECEC is intended to facilitate a shared pedagogy, but this implies it is shared equally. Sharing each child’s digital story, did enable an exchange of information and ideas, but it was in the main instigated by the practitioners. The influences of government funding on attendance and assessment practices, were reinforced by a strong emphasis on being ready – for, the next steps, particularly the discourse around being ready for school.

Theme 3. How digital documentation ‘frames’ the child. Visible in many ways!

Key messages. Children were not included as participants in the study, so not physically present, but their voices, feelings, wants, and needs were interpreted by the mothers and practitioners. The children had a presence, in the documentation and their relationships with their siblings were discussed at length leading to questions about how they were, observed, photographed, and captured in the documentation. Equally though, the child was celebrated and their unique funds of knowledge added to a rich mix of memories, shared by the mothers and practitioners.

In the following three sections I explore the way the participant mothers and practitioners engaged with the documentation, using it as an information tool to communicate about each child. I also question the way the children are viewed through the documentation by the participants, their presence visible in the images, and their voices interpreted by the adults, at the same time they were absent from the interview spaces. Through a reflective and reflexive thematic approach, described in detail in chapter 3, each section explores the shared patterns identified

in the data, supported by relevant literature to answer the following research questions.

1. How do the key adults work together and what factors influence their working relationship?
2. How is digital documentation used by the participants to develop a shared understanding of a child's learning and development?
3. To what extent does digital documentation contribute to and influence the way parents and practitioners see the 'child'?

5.4. Theme 1. The affective dimension to partnership, involves an emotional exchange of ideas and ideals – for both the mother and the practitioner.

Each interview started with the practitioner opening the child's digital document and this quickly became the focus of the conversation. The photographs, videos and observations prompted the mothers to reminisce and supported by the practitioner they reflected on significant events that occurred for their children, both at home and during their days in the preschool. I was able to observe and invited to participate in the way each mother and practitioner engaged, communicated, and shared their individual observations of the child. The documentation provided a visual record of their child's early experiences at Kinderclass, as they engaged in activities and with staff, and other children. All seven mothers expressed their wish for their child to be happy and settled when attending the preschool, this seemed to be related to their feelings around separating from their child. Early in the interview with Jen, Asha's mother and in response to being prompted about what had influenced her choice of preschool, Jen described the mix of emotions she experienced when starting Asha at Kinderclass. Jen's response to the prompt was not unique, as Kate, Harriet's mother and Sarah, Hannah's mother also talked about challenges they had experienced settling their children into preschool. However, as the following section from Jen's interview highlights, leaving her daughter in the care of others also highlighted a number of other issues that could relate to how motherhood and the role of the working mother is portrayed in society:

Jen (mother) I was a bit, I wouldn't say neurotic, but I were, it was a very hard decision for me to make.

Me Right.

Jen Because I haven't gone back to work yet.

Me Mmm.

Jen So I was like, am I doing her a disfavour by any, but I wanted, I re-, really I wanted her to be with other children.

Me Mmhmm.

Jen Because I'm an older mum and I, none of my friends have got, and she just loves children.

Me Yeah.

Jen So this is, that was why I really wanted her to come.

Me So you wanted her to come.

Jen Yeah.

Me And mix and socialise with other children?

Jen Yeah, and I was just really, really, really nervous at first, just about am I making the right decision? Like I say they let me come, I know some people come about two or three times, I must've come about ten times.

Practitioner Becky It doesn't matter. You was welcome.

Jen I was like here every single day.

Becky You was welcome.

Jen For about, you know, just to get her settle in, until I felt.

Becky Yeah.

Jen And everybody said to me it's okay, you just come.

Becky Yeah.

Jen Whenever you want.

Me Mmhmm.

Jen You know, and you.

Becky Whatever made you feel happy.

Jen Yeah, and they said 'just.'

Becky Yeah.

Jen Keep on coming until you're happy for Asha to start, and I was.

Becky You're not going to want to send your children to somewhere where you're not happy.

Asha was Jen's only child, her decision to send her to preschool was, as she said, so that she could mix with other children. However, she also expressed a nervousness about starting Asha at preschool which seemed to be driven by two

more subtle reasons, that she had not yet returned to work and was also an older mother. Becky the practitioner reassured Jen, and her worries about not being in employment or an older mother were not dwelled upon, however, her mention of not working may relate to the fact that the preschool place for Asha was funded under the policy, “free education and childcare 2-year offer” (H.M. Government, n.d). So for Jen, the entitlement to funding reinforced an underlying tension around childcare and access to work, emphasising the historical and political rhetoric of accessible childcare and maternal employment (Page, 2013). This complicated interplay highlights the interconnected emotions and tensions around the political emphasis on entitlement to childcare, an area that will be further explored in the discussion chapter.

As the mothers shared their accounts of why they chose the Kinderclass for their children rather than other preschool settings, they used similar emotive language to describe the reasons for their choice. They talked about the importance of ‘a *safe environment*’ or hearing ‘*good things*’ about the preschool and the sense that they regarded Kinderclass as a secure place is exemplified across the data set and particularly evidenced in the interview with Kate, Harriet’s mother. When prompted to talk about their relationship and their thoughts on the key person role, Kate said that she was confident Harriet would settle with Aliysha. Although she acknowledged there had been days when Harriet was less keen to go to Kinderclass, their respect for each other can be seen in the following exchange:

Kate (mother) I think it gives me confidence because I know, sometimes when I leave Harriet, she doesn’t want me to go, and it’s nice that she can go to you.

Practitioner Aliysha Yeah.

Kate And it’s kind of a, a figure that she, you know, she’s got confidence in that’s going to look after her, because she, she does spend all the time.

Aliysha Yeah.

Kate With you, you know, and you’re observing her, so she does see you a lot.

The recognition by Kate, that Harriet was comfortable to leave her because she had a secure relationship with her key person, is an example of the way personal and professional emotions can inform an attachment-based pedagogy as described by (Page & Elfer, 2013, p. 555). This is the concept of providing young children with one

or two principal practitioners, who get to know the child and their family well. This practice is compulsory in England and mandated in the EYFS, as the role is regarded as essential for ensuring “every child’s care is tailored to their individual needs” (DfE, 2021b, p. 27). In each of the interviews the mothers described their relationship with the setting and the need to see their child happy. Additionally, they emphasised the importance of open communication with the key person and the other practitioners in the preschool. Partnership, thus, could be said to have an affective dimension for the mothers, they placed great significance on their need to feel involved in their children’s day to day activities and to ensure that their children were settled in a secure relationship with their key person. Equally, documentation also played a part in providing the mothers with vital visual information about their child.

As previously explained, settling her daughter at preschool had been challenging for Asha’s mother Jen, but eventually after attending most days for “*about three weeks*”, she had felt confident and happy to “*let her go*”. Becky (practitioner) had understood Jen’s need to feel reassured, and her patience continued when Asha was upset on her second day, however, receiving a notification from Tapestry as explained below was a real comfort for Jen:

Jen (mother) She’s, she’s, the first time, the first day it was all very exciting for her, and then I left and she didn’t really notice. The second time she realised I was going to leave.

Me Of course, yeah.

Jen Um and that’s when um she was upset um she was crying her eyes out, and then I was crying my eyes out.

Becky (practitioner) Mmm.

Jen And I was outside.

Becky Mmm.

Jen And then straight away I got a Tapestry notification, or a text on my phone saying, ‘we’ve sent you a photo on Tapestry.’

Becky Oh h-, right okay.

Jen Which was, Asha, was playing.

Me Yeah.

Jen So literally within five minutes of me leaving here.

Me Yes.

Jen You know? And then I run, ran home (short laugh) to get to see, and she was happy as Larry, and that just made me feel, you know, this.

Becky Brill, oh great.

Jen You know, because you can say 'oh she's fine, she's fine,' but when you actually get the, obviously I believe you.

Becky Yes.

Me Yeah.

Jen You know, but.

Becky But to actually see it.

Jen To actually see her happy and playing.

Me and Becky Yeah.

Jen That was just a massive comfort for me, and that really helped in the early weeks when I was a bit.

Me Mmm.

Jen Oh have I done the right thing?

For Jen receiving the Tapestry notification soon after she had left Asha at Kinderclass on her second day, gave her concrete evidence that Asha was happy and playing. The photograph for Jen was key, it enabled her to feel comforted that her decision to leave Asha in the care of others was “*the right thing*” and being able to visualise Asha being settled far outweighed anything Becky could have said to reassure her and further reinforces the complexities surrounding the social construction of motherhood (Page, 2013, p 552). Documentation here provided a way for Jen to see Asha through her own eyes, although potentially staged and constructed by the practitioner, the photograph provided Jen with a window into Asha’s world, albeit at a set moment in time (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

In their interview Sarah, Hannah’s mother and practitioner Becky, also focused on Hannah’s first day and week at Kinderclass. Whilst sharing the documentation they talked about initially seemed to agree that Hannah had settled well, however, it was practitioner Becky who raised the point that the separation between mother and child had sometimes been difficult in the early days:

Practitioner Becky Right so April [pause], she’s smiling. Look.

Sarah (mother) Oh she loves playing with other children.

Me Did she [Hannah] settle in quite quickly?

Becky Yes she did.

Sarah Yeah.

Becky Yes she did didn't she?

Sarah Yeah

Becky We have had a few hiccups haven't we?

Sarah Yeah.

Becky Where she's, ah with the separation, ah when she first comes in.

Sarah Because she's, yeah, she's used to spending all of her time with me so um, because it's just me and her at home.

Me Right. She's your only one?

Sarah Yeah, so she, when it came to the time where we had to separate.

Me Mmm.

Sarah She was a bit, she didn't understand why, but now she just doesn't even say bye, she just runs off..

Although in the interview Sarah agreed with Becky's account, it was interesting that it was the practitioner who introduced an element of doubt about how Hannah had taken to being separated from her mother. This could be translated as an example of an unequal power dynamic between the parent and practitioner, often exhibited in partnership working (Brooker, 2010). As Hughes and MacNaughton (2000, p. 243) posit, the balance of power when two or more people are engaged in a relationship can often be uneven, and in early childhood education this can be due to the practitioner being in the privileged position of holding professional expertise. This could be regarded as a key concept, in relation to partnership and the way power is exhibited in relationships. Becky's comments about separation changed the course of the conversation, enabling her to use her professional power to primarily take control of the interview conversation. Interestingly, later in the interview the balance of power moved again. Sarah, when prompted to explain what she understood the key person role to mean, regained some control of the conversation when she talked about the value she placed on Hannah having one "key person" as this helped her to feel reassured that someone was really looking out for her child, when she could not be there:

Sarah (mother) I think it's important because there's so many children in the nursery that they could just be overlooked in a group. And I think it's important that they have that one figure that's not only somebody that they can go to,

and they know it's their person. Because every time Hannah turns up to nursery she, first thing she says is Becky.

Becky (practitioner) Aww bless her.

Sarah But it's also nice knowing that there's a person that has a handful of children each that are sort of un-, you know, their charge, and that are there to look after them and follow them and just.

Becky So, yeah.

Sarah The observations that I can't make because I'm not there.

Becky Mmm.

Sarah Because I do like to know what she does each day, because she spends a lot of time with me, so when she's not with me I'm a bit like 'oh'.

Becky Aww.

Sarah What's she doing!.

Sarah's narrative here is an example of the trust she places on her relationship with Becky but also her expectation on the key person role. It could be argued that there is an interplay and underlying tension between the mother and practitioner. Sarah in her eagerness to know what Hannah is doing when not with her is delegating a particular responsibility to Becky as she wants to make sure Hannah is not overlooked and receives the attention she desires for her.

5.4.1. Partnership means relationships.

A familiarity between each practitioner and mother became evident in all of the interviews. Even though there were tensions, around professional power, anxiety around leaving their child and the desire for the mothers to know more about their child's experiences when away from them as explained in the previous examples of interview data. There were also instances of empathy, trust and reciprocal goals expressed during the interviews, when combined, these factors could arguably be said to impact the way they worked together in partnership. When discussing the photographs and videos captured of past events the interview conversations included sharing early memories, examples of their first meeting and how they had become familiar with their key child. For five of the mothers this relationship had started with a sibling as Kinderclass had a tradition of offering the family the same key person, where possible as the following data excerpts show:

Practitioner Charlie But I've known Sof, because I had, I had um I was key person to Fiona [older sibling].

Me Mmm.

Charlie Which is Jessica's oldest daughter.

Interviewer Yeah.

Charlie So I've known Sofia since she were born haven't I?

Jessica Yeah you have.

Charlie You know, as far as.

Jessica Since she was in my tummy (short laugh).

Charlie Yes I have. So, you know, so we have built up a rapport.

Similarly in their interview practitioner Aliysha and Hiresh, Zahir's mother also talked about the decision for Aliysha to be his key person.

Practitioner Aliysha And I was her [sister's name], I was her key person as well.

Me Oh okay.

Aliysha Yeah.

Me Now that's interesting. So, so is that conscious? Do you, were you consciously going to be Zahir's?

Aliysha Yeah we do, if they've got siblings coming in we tend to be their key person.

Me Their key person. Because you've got a relationship.

Aliysha Already, yeah.

Me Mmm. And how important to you then is it having a good relationship with Aliysha?

Hiresh (mother) I think it's good.

Me Mmhmm.

Hiresh Because like I could feel that I could talk to her straight away, so I kind of prefer one person to kind of, like you say, with the siblings.

Aliysha Yeah.

Hiresh Have one person and you know what they're like. They're familiar with the parent and kind of like the children as well.

Me Mmhmm, mmhmm.

Hiresh And I think it is important to be able to speak to the key person.

Degotardi and Pearson (2009) describe how the relationship between mothers and practitioners in early years settings are often presumed to be "dyadic", but in reality there are influences and connections with other family members that influence

partnership working (p.145). The two data excerpts are examples of how the relationship between the mothers and key person was already established prior to the child starting at Kinderclass, and for mothers, Jessica and Hiresh this seems to have been a key factor.

Correspondingly relationships were also important for Sarah, Hannah's mother, when asked about partnership she explained:

Sarah (mother) It's really important to me because um I wouldn't want to send me child who was like my little pride and joy, I wouldn't want to send her somewhere that was like institutionalised and cold and.

Me Okay.

Sarah I'd want to send her somewhere that feels like a family.

Me Right.

Sarah And I feel like this nursery does.

Becky, Hannah's key person confirmed that one of the aims of the preschool was to nurture the children:

Practitioner Becky That is really nice. Oh Sarah, thank you.

Sarah short laugh

Becky That's, that's, that is one of our aims, you know, to try, and to nurture them, you know?

Sarah Yeah.

Me Mmm.

Becky We are the parent when the parents are not there.

Me Yeah.

Sarah Yeah.

Becky You know? So I treat the children as I would treat my own children.

Practitioner Becky suggesting that the key person is a parent substitute (Degotardi & Pearson, 2009, p. 147) is an interesting interpretation of the care role, and this could call into question the way working with children is interpreted, by the workforce and others including parents and the wider political arena. Similarly Gabby, Jack's mother and practitioner Becky in their interview explained that they had got to know each other because Becky was the key person for Jack's sister and on starting at the preschool Becky had requested that she became key person to Jack:

Practitioner Becky oh yes, cause I was I key person as well wasn't I?

Gabby (mother) yeah you were, yeah, yeah.

Becky and we had a really good relationship, me and [sister], we really did.

Gabby oh yeah, yeah

Becky and I think because of that as well when Jack came along.

Gabby yeah

Becky well id said I want Jack erm.

All Laughter....

Becky I said I don't, I am not bothered what anybody says, I'm having him.

Gabby yeah, laughs.

Becky and everybody said that's fine.

The example above whilst appearing to confirm that Kinderclass engaged in a practice of allocating the same key person to family members, differs in that it was Becky the practitioner who stated quite possessively that she was going to be Jack's key person. There appears to be no sense here of a professional boundary, rather a personal preference or expectation that Becky would be the key person for Jack. However, the assumption that this relationship is a reciprocal one, is another example of the presence of professional power (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Gabby did not disagree with Becky's point of view but perhaps did not feel able to do so.

On the one hand this continuation of allocating the same key person could be regarded as reinforcing quality practice and providing consistency of care as in the "triangle of care" (Brooker, 2010, p. 185). Yet, the continuity was not followed through for every child whose sibling had previously attended, as practitioner Lisa and Karen, Jamie's mother discussed at the start of their interview:

Practitioner Lisa Um someone else had him before me ah and I've had him since September.

Karen (mother) Yeah.

Lisa Because we had a bit of a change around.

Me Oh.

Lisa And his key person got all the three-year-olds and, I think it was nursery children, so we were all shuffled around. So I got Jamie.

An organisational restructure dictated a change of key person for Jamie, and the terminology used of "I got Jamie" places him as a subject, to be moved potentially at

the convenience of the setting. There was an expectation that Jamie would be able to cope with the change and easily settle with a new key person, which is in conflict with the notion of familiarity as explained in the earlier examples. The principle of the key person role supposes that a relationship is constructed between the parents/carers, key person and the child and whilst during the interview Lisa and Jessica seemed comfortable with each other, assumptions were made in relation to the impact on Jamie.

5.4.3. Theme summary.

The data explored in this theme demonstrates the complex nature of relationships, and the way partnership is influenced by an array of emotions. The interview data highlighted how seemingly positive factors, such as keeping the same key person, or being able to visit as often as felt necessary were helpful in establishing partnership. Also present were subtle challenges, in relation to the anxieties felt by the mothers and professional expertise and power. The mothers and practitioners shared their individual experiences, perceptions and ideals, which led to discussions around separation for the mothers but also for a minority it revealed a deeper insight into their own insecurities, around what their child was doing while away from them. The practitioners, in many instances sought to reassure but there were also more explicit examples of power, from the parents and professionals.

The trust in the key person relationship could be viewed in different ways, being familiar with each other through a shared history and/or feeling comfortable. The familial ethos expressed by some of the mothers could be an example of how trust was felt to be present in their partnership. Yet, the role of the key person as a parent substitute was an interesting interpretation shared by one practitioner, and in a small scale study this finding is not generalisable, yet, it does contribute to the discourse where care and education are seen as competing rather than complimentary factors (Page, 2018). And, as there are clear requirements to maintain a professional relationship in the EYFS (DfE, 2021b), balancing the structural and organisational processes, alongside teaching and care can be challenging, it would appear, for all involved in a partnership.

5.5. Theme 2. Digital documentation as a tool for partnership – sharing documentation provided opportunities to share but for what purpose?

Documentation as a process for recording and capturing what children are doing (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p.144), in early childhood settings it often used to inform teaching and learning (Alcock, 2000, p. 2). Tapestry, the documentation tool of choice as employed by Kinderclass preschool, as explained in the introduction of this chapter, was a digital biography of each child, used to share, record, reflect, and celebrate their abilities and learning. As previously stated in chapter 3, the mothers in the study accessed the preschool place at Kinderclass under the government funded policy free education and childcare for 2-year-olds. Early reports about the implementation of the policy suggest it was introduced to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged children, so that they were ready to benefit from school (Gibb et al., 2010, p. 5; Tickell, 2011). At the time of writing this thesis the government website emphasises the “free” entitlement to “education and childcare” accompanied by a list of conditions around income and need rather than the educational achievement element (H.M. Government, n.d.). It is unclear why the educational achievement target is now less explicit in information about the policy, nevertheless, as the findings below illustrate alongside family finances, readiness for school was a term recognised and used widely by the practitioners and mothers in this study.

During their interviews and whilst looking at the documentation five out of the seven mothers specifically talked about their personal experience of accessing a funded preschool place for their child, with three mothers, Gabby, Jessica, and Hires, stating that without it they may have only been able to afford to send their children to Kinderclass one or two mornings a week. In the following example, Gabby, Jack’s mother discussed what she felt the funding had meant for her and Jack. Her comments were triggered after being asked if she would have still brought Jack to preschool if the place had not been funded, and although the conversation is primarily about the financial aspect, Gabby also talks about teaching and learning:

Gabby (mother) No, hmm, maybe well one or two mornings that I could afford for myself.

Me Mmmm.

Gabby If it wasn't for the funding, like I said, I wouldn't be able to afford him to come and do what he does now and I think he would lack then.

Me So you think it's important that he gets that funding and he gets...

Gabby If there wasn't any funding then he may, I could only afford for him to come M/ Tuesday mornings then the rest of week he'd be at home with me.

Me Mmm.

Gabby He wouldn't be able to socialise with other children and build..

Me Hmmm.

Gabby Bonds.

Practitioner Becky That relationship up.

Gabby Yeah and other things cause where a mother can only teach her child so much whereas a child will learn things of other children as well.

Although Gabby did not explicitly relate Jack's preschool attendance to him being ready for school, she talked about the importance she placed on Jack socialising and being with and learning from other children. She also talked about her own role as a mother and teaching Jack, but her comment regarding this suggested that she felt there were limitations on her role as Jack's teacher or educator. This is in contrast with the discourse that emphasises the role parents play in influencing their children's future outcomes (Field, 2010; Tickell, 2011) and the ideology that exists around parenting and the home learning environment.

Hiresh, Zahir's mother and Jessica, Sofia's mother both expressed that they paid for extra time for their children to attend Kinderclass, by topping up their 2-year funding.

Hiresh (mother) And I pay for an additional half day.

Practitioner Aliysha You do, yeah.

Me Mmm. So you um did you feel, would you, do you think you would've brought Zahir to nursery, or to pre-school, at two without the funding or do you think that funding has really helped?

Hiresh No the funding has helped.

Me Mmhmm.

Hiresh I think I might have sent him for what, like a day or something.

Me So that's been something that you've found really useful.

Hiresh No the funding has really helped because like we're struggling financially anyway because my husband's self-employed now.

Me Okay.

Hiresh So we're kind of just paying the mortgage and the bills. I mean if we didn't have the funding I think we would've really struggled to send Zahir.

Hiresh in the excerpt above explained how she felt the funding had enabled her to send Zahir to Kinderclass, similarly Jessica, Sofia's mother in the example below also shared how without the funding she would not have been able to afford Sofia's fees.

Me Um you feel that that's been something that's been really valuable for, for you?

Jessica (mother) It really helps. Otherwise she'd, she'd only be here, because we do pay for sort of one morning a week.

Me Mmm.

Jessica But even, even though it's not a lot of money it's coming out of our budget, which.

Practitioner Charlie It is a lot of money.

Me Yeah.

Jessica Which we couldn't actually, we wouldn't be able to pay for the amount of time that she comes here.

Hiresh and Jessica both referred to their family finances, and it was clear from their comments that the access to funding had opened up the opportunity for them to send their children to Kinderclass.

Further into the interview with Jessica, Sofia's mother, a significant development occurred when the practitioner Charlie and Jessica were discussing the 2-year-funding and how this would change when Sofia became three. As Charlie talked through the funding process she also voiced that she felt the funding should be available to all children. This developed into an interesting exchange, with Charlie sharing her own opinion about the 2-year funding, and how it was targeted at families in a specific socioeconomic group:

Charlie (practitioner) You know, and, you know, and as far as the practitioner's point of view, you know, it's fundamental that, you know, these children.

Jessica (mother) Yeah, because I do think every child deserves.

Charlie You know?

Jessica To kind of.

Charlie I, I, I think you're possibly right there mum. I think every child does deserve it, you know? However.

Jessica It, yeah, it just doesn't work out that way, but (short laugh).

Charlie It just, it doesn't work out, you know?

Me Mmm.

Charlie But the, the children what we class as disadvantaged.

Jessica Yeah, yeah.

Charlie What, potentially disadvantaged children.

Jessica Yeah.

Charlie We are now trying to narrow the gap in early years edu-, you know, by offering the early years education and embedding things.

Me Mmhmm.

Charlie In the, in the, you know [pause], in the pre-school.

In this example of the interview data both the mother and practitioner are debating the right for every child to benefit from a funded place at preschool, with Jessica (mother) stating that she felt every child deserved a funded place. Charlie (practitioner) appeared to agree with Jessica but also positioned herself very clearly as having a point of view from the practitioner perspective and her comments about “*these children, disadvantage, and narrowing the gap*” speak to the discourse of professional power (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000; Pascal & Bertram, 2012). She also reinforced the political dialogue that advocates preschool attendance as a means to improve children’s educational outcomes (Ofsted, 2014), through her introduction of the concept of narrowing the gap. Charlie, in this instance is framing the child and childhood from a particular political perspective and one that could be perceived to construct the young child attending preschool as a subject to be educated (Moss, 2005, p.164). This could be related to the fact that practitioner Charlie was also the manager of the setting, so in a position of authority with a personal stake in ensuring the setting follows government policy and expectations. This dual role of preschool manager and key person to Sofia could also account for the way Charlie used her professional knowledge and terminology to imply that the preschool saw the funding as a way to embed early years education. This section of the data reveals how partnership in ECEC often appears on the surface to be collaborative, however, there are also competing personal and professional agenda’s present influenced by affordability, disadvantage and children’s achievement.

Achievement was also highlighted in the interview with Aliysha and Kate, Harriet's mother, Kate expressed that she would still have brought Harriet to Kinderclass preschool, regardless of receiving the 2-year funding, and related this to her experience with her older son who had found adapting to full time school difficult. Kate was clear that for her, Harriet was attending preschool in order to help her be ready for school, she explained:

Kate (mother) I think she needs that interaction ready for school.

Me Mmm.

Kate Because I d-, I just don't see how children can go from home to school straight away.

Practitioner Aliysha You know when they don't have that.

Kate No. I think it's so important, definitely. Even [pause], even if it was absolutely kind of skinting us she would, she would be coming.

Me Mmm, mmm.

Kate Even if it was just for a couple of.

Me Couple of.

Kate Hours a week, it's better than nothing.

In each of the examples above, the mothers engaged in interview conversations about their family finances; learning and being ready for school was in some instances clearly articulated and in others more subtle. The preschool experience for Gabby, and Kate, Jack and Harriet's mothers provided an opportunity they felt for their respective children to learn and be prepared - for, full time education. And although for Hireh and Jessica this concept was less explicit they still aligned themselves with the idea that attending Kinderclass offered their children opportunities for learning prior to starting school. As the interview with Jessica, Sofia's mother and practitioner Charlie, progressed the conversation became increasingly focused on the need to monitor children's attendance and Charlie explained that the preschool had an obligation to report to government on whether parents were taking advantage of their 2-year funding as she explained:

Practitioner Charlie These are funded sessions that mum is enti-, mum and Sofia are entitled to.

Jessica (parent) Yeah.

Me Mmm.

Charlie She's under the umbrella of the two-year funding.

Me Yeah, mmhmm.

Charlie So mum and, you know, we, we have to be mindful of the attendance as well.

Jessica Yeah, yeah.

Charlie Because we've, you know, we've got to monitor attendance.

Me Yeah, yeah.

Charlie Especially when they're, they're funded.

Whilst this need to monitor attendance may not immediately be regarded as related to school readiness, the findings of this study suggest, there may be a link. Despite the government website being less explicit, the 2-year-offer originated as a programme to improve the social and cognitive outcomes of disadvantaged children (Gibb et al., 2010). The view about reporting attendance expressed by practitioner Charlie, when translated to practice relates to the targets around improving educational outcomes that are expected of all preschool settings in the EYFS into practice (DfE, 2021b; Teather & Milton, 2011). Practitioner Charlie, dictated this concept to Jessica rather than in collaboration with her, and this raises questions about the expectations and decisions made in early childhood between parents and practitioners, particularly the sharing of professional and parental knowledge (Hughes & MaNaughton, 2000). This was again highlighted later in the interview, Jessica and Charlie were discussing an observation in the documentation of Sofia socialising with another practitioner. When prompted to explain what they understood the observation to mean Charlie started to talk about Sofia's development which led into a dialogue about Sofia's 2-year assessment and the decision to move Sofia from a morning to an afternoon preschool place:

Jessica (mother) And she seems to be coming (short laugh) on leaps and bounds, to me.

Me Yeah.

Practitioner Charlie And she loves afternoons. It's, it's slightly quieter.

Jessica Yeah.

Charlie For her.

Jessica I think that's what she needs really.

Charlie And, you know, and we had a discussion about it didn't we?

Jessica Yeah.

Charlie And we felt it was in Sofia's best interests.

Jessica Yeah.

Charlie To move her to afternoons didn't we.

Following what seemed to be a collaborative decision Charlie changed the direction of the conversation:

Practitioner Charlie And I, and I'm finding her more receptive on an, as a professional.

Jessica (mother) Yeah.

Charlie I'm finding her more receptive on an afternoon. Um I don't know how you're, are you, you're okay with afternoons aren't you?

Jessica Yeah we are, we are. It's just (short laugh) a couple of times she's a little bit tired, but.

Me Okay.

Charlie She's fallen asleep and couple of times.

Me Yeah

Jessica short laugh

Charlie And I, I've, you know, I've even said to mum 'so you can have a break by all means bring her in a pushchair'.

The decision to move Sofia, was perceived to be in her best interests but it was also entangled with the belief that she would be more receptive perhaps to learn from her environment and engage with her key person. However, conversely, changing to an afternoon place meant that Sofia was sometimes asleep – challenging the concept that the decision was entirely in her best interest, especially as Charlie encouraged attendance so that Jessica could have a break. There are several competing narratives in the examples of data in this section, the mothers and practitioners entered into conversations about how they saw the preschool as a valuable resource, in preparing the children for their next phase in education. However, there were also overriding pressures present that fed into the political and professional discourse (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2011), such as the expectation that Jessica should take Sofia to Kinderclass, due to the requirement to report on the uptake of the 2-year offer, and the stance of carer for both Sofia and Jessica, adopted by Charlie. It was less obvious how the documentation facilitated the way they co-constructed an understanding of Sofia's learning and development. Nevertheless,

these tensions could arguably be interpreted as a barrier for collaboration, and this could interfere with the way they work together to support the needs of the child particularly as Jessica was still encouraged to take Sofia to preschool even when she was asleep.

5.5.1. Documentation as an assessment tool

In all of the interviews the digital documentation was the centre piece and prompt for the interview conversation as at the start of each interview the practitioner opened up the story behind the child's first day. Documentation is regarded in ECEC practice to be a versatile tool for capturing children's experiences, nevertheless, it is also constructed by the adults who decide what to document (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Leading to different perceptions about who documentation is for and during each of the interviews, whilst discussing the visual and narrative artefacts, the power differentials between the participants became evident. As (Brooker, 2010) notes this is often assumed to be related to the professional role as they are frequently seen as the "expert" (p. 184). Previous data extracts presented in this chapter have reported examples of where professional expertise has been exhibited. In the following example when encouraged to expand on her rationale for changing Sofia from a morning to an afternoon place (as detailed in the preceding section), practitioner Charlie talked about her initial concerns for Sophia's personal, social and emotional development:

Practitioner Charlie She wouldn't speak at all, and just wouldn't interact. She wasn't upset, by no means, about coming.

Jessica (mother) No.

Charlie She was quite happy to walk in wasn't she? Am I correct in saying?

Jessica Mmm. Yeah, yeah she were fine.

Charlie She was quite happy to walk in. However I was getting no interaction at all from Sofia.

Jessica Yeah.

Charlie And I brought mum in to help me as a practitioner.

Jessica short laugh

Charlie Because my theory is mum knows best.

This excerpt illustrates how practitioner Charlie informed and requested help from Jessica following her assessment of Sofia. Charlie's justification for "bringing mum

in” emerged in the interview, she felt Jessica was best placed to help her understand how to support Sofia, and this belief, it can be said, is influenced by research findings that highlight the importance of the home learning environment (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Pugh, 2010; Sammons et al., 2015). It could be perceived that Charlie engaged Sofia’s mother Jessica in a form of partnership, but it is less apparent that this was a collaborative arrangement. The language used by Charlie appeared to describe an expectation placed on Jessica to come into the setting, to engage in a meeting as a way to gather “*strategies*” and while the strategies were intended to help them to gain a better understanding of how to support Sofia’s development, there was also an expectation for Jessica to cooperate with Charlie’s wishes.

The stance taken by Charlie is an interesting factor to reflect on, as it could be interpreted that she was encouraging a shared pedagogy by demonstrating in her commitment as key person to Sofia, to being attentive to her developmental needs (DfE, 2021b, p. 21). It also highlighted the way professional power was enacted then retracted by Charlie, as she placed an expectation on Jessica and guided her behaviour (MacNaughton, 2005). Furthermore she navigated and used her professional role to encourage Jessica to conform by asking for her support with her daughter, claiming that “*mum knows best*”.

Further into the interview Charlie formalised how she had used the documentation to assess Sofia against the milestones in Development Matters (Early Education, 2012):

Practitioner Charlie Um the observations what I do of Sofia, um I do them as a practitioner to um ensure that we’re, that I’m making progression with Sofia and she’s working towards the early learning goals.

Jessica (mother) Okay, mmhmm.

Charlie Ah in, in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Jessica Mmm.

Me Mmhmm.

Charlie And just to make sure that everything is, mainly at this stage I’m looking at the um three prime areas of learning.

Me Okay.

Charlie That is my main focus, which is the personal, social and emotional development.

Me Mmm, mmhmm.

Charlie Communication and language and her physical development.

Me Mmhmm.

Charlie Which, I do, I do spot the specific areas of learning as well, which is your literacy and your maths and your understanding the world.

Me Mmm.

Assessment featured similarly in the interview with Gabby, Jack's mother and practitioner Becky, after being asked to talk in more detail about what Jack liked to do at Kinderclass Becky described how she had been posting observations of Jack for Gabby to see, as the following detailed example shows:

Practitioner Becky Ok so erm yeah, with me being Jack's key person I have been putting observations on for him, erm or for mum should I say, I'm just going to go back to October lets go [operates computer] there. So we've got the pasta threading what we do now is erm, we've started to do activities every single day now.

Me Okay

Becky for 2-year-olds erm we have different members of staff that are doing activities for 3-year-olds and I'm part of the 2-year-olds so we are doing an activity every single day whether it's to do with the EYFS or where, you know where we are doing the observations we can see where we may be lacking in we need to do an activity to tick them boxes in the EYFS and Development Matters.

Me right okay

Becky So we can do an activity where we can tick them boxes or well do an activity that is around the theme that we are doing and the theme this term is the Gingerbread Man. So, we've been doing lots of different activities with the Gingerbread man. But today cause its Children in Need we have been doing spotty pictures and we've had the pomp oms on the interest table. So this will have been one activity where erm we needed some fine motor skills so we decided to do some threading with the threading pasta so you can see I've put some photos on and erm, just a little bit of writing we don't, we haven't, we did used to do long observations but we found and by speaking to other parents as well that the parents were not really reading what we were writing and we could write quite a lot but some parents were not really reading it, all they wanted to do was see the pictures.

Me Ok, so that's

Becky So we are trying to take more pictures and just doing less writing but...

Gabby (mother) I think the writing, well I read the writing cause it explains what they are doing, cause it explains how they are getting on with stuff.

Becky Good

Gabby He wouldn't do that at home, laughs.

Becky Well he was really involved in that, he was really.

Gabby We've got the bobbins and string.

Becky Oh yes

Gabby But he would quite happily get a car and run the car round the floor at home.

Becky Look, look at the concentration on him, I was thrilled to bits with this.

Gabby Yeah well I was shocked when I saw it but when I read how he was doing it, that he was listening to how he was to do it.

Becky He was really listening, and you can see how involved [he was] mmm.

Gabby And you can see he's picking them up with some tweezers as well.

Becky Well he explained to me, he was asking me what I was looking said I was cutting it

Me to Gabby So I see you then spend time talking to Jack about what you've seen and what you can see him doing and then.

Gabby Yes it's like when I can get it on my phone I say oh look it's a picture of you at playgroup and he'll come and sit with me and we will have a look at them and stuff like that] brilliant.

Becky's account of completing activities with Jack suggest that she felt pressure to provide evidence, to tick a box to show that he was developing his fine motor skills. Being 2 years 5 months there was still approximately two years before Jack was due to transition to full time school. Nonetheless, Becky seemed to express that she felt an obligation to assess Jack against the developmental norms in the EYFS and Development Matters, through completing targeted observations of him at play (DfE, 2021b). Becky also shared in the interview that the preschool had taken the decision to modify their approach to documenting learning, reducing the quantity of observational writing and focusing more on the images. This rationale appeared to be based on conversations with a minority of parents and an assumption that the parents valued seeing the pictures of their child rather than reading longer narrative observations.

Gabby clearly articulated that she valued the written observation and the visual images in the documentation, for her, reading a narrative alongside seeing the

picture helped her to see that Jack was involved and also listening when engaging in different activities comparing this to the different Jack she saw at home. This was a strong assertion from Gabby and one that could be perceived as an example of her challenging the settings change in practice and equally asserting her own power and agency, as mother and expert (Brooker, 2010, p. 184). She justified this further into the interview as she stated she felt it necessary to be able to see and understand what Jack had been doing, whether he had moved around different activities and whether he had been socialising with other children. For Gabby the documentation, photographs, and the story behind them was a way of understanding Jack's world while he was away from her.

Being aware of what her child did during her time in preschool was something Sarah, Hannah's mother expressed the documentation had offered her. When asked about Tapestry (The Foundation Stage Forum Ltd, 2022) Sarah described, as can be seen below that it was a way to know whether her daughter was learning from her experience in the preschool:

Me So what, what do you know about what Tapestry is and what it can do for you?

Sarah (mother) Um I know it's a sort of virtual tracking of my child's progress at nursery and what she manages to get up to.

Me Mmhmm.

Sarah And it tracks her development and how she's progressing.

Me Okay. So, so do you think that's really important, that her development's tracked?

Sarah Yes.

In the interview with Hires, tracking development also featured in the discussion about the documentation, and practitioner Aliysha referred to how she had completed a baseline assessment of Zahir when he had started at Kinderclass:

Practitioner Aliysha Because when they come for their first day we do like a big observation.

Me Mmhmm.

Aliysha And then we do like a baseline to see where they are.

Me Okay.

Aliysha And then we work towards the next age band.

As she pointed out the photographs she had taken of Zahir's first day she explained what she had observed:

Aliysha Yeah (all laugh). So yeah. And then playing, he likes to play with toys. He's just exploring what he can play with, and then they've got loads.

Me So you take photographs of this first um day.

Aliysha First day.

Me And, and then observe. And then do you link that to.

Aliysha Yeah, and then I've got to write down, I guess (short laugh).

Me Yeah.

Aliysha You know, like it's like a big observation.

Me Yeah.

Aliysha Like what they do and stuff.

Me Yeah.

Hiresh That was very helpful, to see how he got on, on his first day, and he was, I could kind of see what he was doing.

These four examples of data demonstrate how the documentation provided a focus for talking through the child and their experiences at preschool but there was an emphasis on meeting developmental milestones and learning. In my initial conversations with the practitioners, when I was introducing the aims of the research, I had formed an opinion that the mothers regularly contributed to their child's digital story, on the surface it had seemed to be a resource that was shared regularly between the mothers and practitioners. During the interviews it became apparent that this was not necessarily the case, the practitioners were the instigators, taking the responsibility to generate the documentation, as a means to gather information and inform their assessments of the children. This was not really a surprise, as according to Dahlberg et al. (2007), there is always a choice about what to document and in this instance the practitioners were choosing the artefacts based on their requirement to measure children against the requirements of the EYFS.

5.5.2. Theme summary

This theme has highlighted the underlying tensions that can exist in early years practice when working in partnership. The mothers and practitioners in the study were committed to supporting their child's learning and development and they used

the digital documentation in the interview as a lens through which to share their hopes and intentions. Arguably this was perceived by the participants to be in the best interests of the children, but political influences and the requirement to monitor targets were never far from their conversations. Reports such as - Are you ready (Ofsted, 2014) and A World Ready to Learn (UNICEF, 2019), contain a strong message that children's early experiences shape their future success (Ofsted, 2014 , p. 4). And, although it is also recognised that environmental factors have an impact on children's outcomes, longitudinal research such as that conducted for the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education Project (EPPSE) propose that, attending preschool together with positive parenting experiences via the home learning environment "help to promote better long term outcomes for children" (Sammons et al., 2015, p. 8).

There is a concern, nonetheless, highlighted in these examples of interview data, that being ready potentially could be prioritised above children's holistic development, increasing the pressure on preschools to model themselves as "mini-primary schools" (Needham & Ülküer, 2020 p. 211). The data presented, thus far, appears to support this philosophy as there was an emphasis by the practitioners on monitoring preschool attendance and meeting targets for children to reach their expected developmental milestones. Furthermore, there were instances where the mothers were also required to help practitioners meet their responsibilities and to support their children in a particular way, contributing to a socially constructed view of parenting and particularly motherhood (Page, 2013). This calls into question the way partnership may also be socially constructed through the discourse of policy.

5.6. Theme 3. How digital documentation 'frames' the child. Visible in many ways!

What became apparent during the interviews with the seven mothers and four practitioners at Kinderclass Preschool was the way children had a presence even though they were not physically involved in the interviews. They were visible in the documentation the photographs, videos, and the accompanying narrative observations revealed short stories about the children's lives, creating a visual or pictorial biography of each child (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010 p. 248). The digital App Tapestry (as explained in Chapter 1 and 4) (The Foundation Stage Forum Ltd, 2022)

interpreted, in this thesis as the tool used by Kinderclass to document children's experiences, was used in the interviews to develop a story about each child. As they talked together, the participants commented on what they perceived the children were doing, thinking, and saying as they viewed the entries in the documentation. Their conversations opened up into wider discussions, about their children's lives, sharing what they believed their children were learning, both in the home and in the setting. Recognising that adults frame children's experiences (Arnott & Wall, 2022), the interview became a space where, the children were represented and their actions interpreted, and while on the surface the conversations felt collaborative and supportive, this was entirely from an adult perspective.

Documentation has the potential to be more than a means to record and monitor children's progress, as this simplistic perspective can miss opportunities to share memories and engage in conversations with both children and adults, and minimise the pedagogical possibilities documentation can have (Alcock, 2000; Merewether, 2018). The increase in the use of technology has enabled documentation to become digitalised and online systems are being increasingly used to capture children's experiences (Cowan & Flewitt, 2021). Using such a system in Kinderclass was preferred by six out of the seven mothers, with reasons given such as, it enabled them to see their child playing with other children. The example below endorses the view that documentation can illustrate the "many forms of learning" as advocated by (Cowan & Flewitt, 2021, p. 3), as Jen, Asha's mother talks about her pleasure at seeing her daughter in the documentation:

Jen (mother) You know, just, it was just a wonderful moment, it really was.

Becky (practitioner) short laugh

Jen of them all playing and dancing and running around together.

Me So video as well as photos are really important.

Jen Oh yeah they send, yeah.

Me Aren't they?

Jen Oh definitely. Um [pause] it was a little snapshot, and they was just all dancing, and they were just all so happy, and that really, I really enjoyed that one. You know, you go back to the ones, I mean I've replayed these videos time and time again.

Me Mmm.

Jen Because I just absolutely love watching how she is with other children.

As explained in the introduction to this section of the chapter, six out of the seven mothers expressed a preference for the digital version of documentation but there was one mother, Karen who preferred the previously used paper-based version. Karen, Jamie's mother's reasons for this are described in the extract below:

Karen (mother) It's a bit impossible. Um and to be quite honest as well I'm a little bit old-school. I prefer it in a, in front of me.

Me Ah do you?

Practitioner Lisa Yeah, yeah.

Karen So when they first set this up I was a bit like [pause] I don't.

Lisa Right, yeah.

Karen It's not my favourite.

Me Yeah, okay.

Karen it's not my favourite thing.

Karen continued to explain that she still had her two older children's folders from when they attended Kinderclass and from time to time she would look back at them:

Karen (mother) I always know that I've got [brother A], I've got [brother B] and.

Me Yeah, yeah. So you'd like something to hold and see and feel and, and something that's really tangible like that, yeah.

Karen Yeah. I mean like, they're like this thick and when you, like it goes through from when he was like a baby to like, do you know, leaving to reception.

Practitioner Lisa Yeah.

Karen And it's got everything in it that's.

Me Yeah, yeah.

Karen That's, do you know? It's got every picture in, every collage he made, every photograph with a caption next to it.

Although aware that she could access the documentation instantly, Karen had not taken to uploading her own photographs to Tapestry, even so, she did "have a browse now and then" and had commented on a few observations:

Karen (mother) But I don't think I've ever actually uploaded anything have I?

Practitioner Lisa No, I don't, no not since.

Karen No, I don't think I have, and like I say it's just [pause] the timescale.

Lisa Mmm.

Karen I just, don't seem to just have time to do that. I've got four children at home.

These two contrasting opinions highlight the potential that digital documentation can offer both practitioners and parents, it has the possibility of capturing observations of children “in the moment”, rather than retrospectively, both in the home and preschool (Flewitt & Cowan, 2018 p, 7). However, it cannot be taken for granted that every parent has the time or inclination to contribute to documentation practices. In addition, documenting children’s lives in this way is also regarded as a form of surveillance – they are being looked at – often without their consent, and this raises questions about the assumptions adults make when viewing and discussing what they see (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010; Steeves & Jones, 2010). Such assumptions became evident when I was analysing the interview data, particularly for the five children whose siblings had previously attended the preschool. A number of the photographs and videos included the children, with their siblings and this meant that not only were they discussed individually, but also their collective experiences playing with their siblings at home, as the following interview extracts demonstrate.

Kate, Harriet’s mother during her interview with me and practitioner Aliysha, focused on a photograph she had uploaded of Harriet playing with her older brother:

Kate (mother) But um so if she's doing new things or she's playing with her brother really nicely, because it's, they do fight a lot.

Me Mmm.

Kate So it's nice, the odd moment when they, they are playing together. It is cute.

Me Mmm.

Kate Um and it's nice to see.

Me That's nice.

Kate And it's nice to look back then as well.

In this short account, it is clear that, Kate, Harriet’s mother appreciated how the documentation enabled her to capture her children playing cooperatively together and this can be likened to what Flewitt & Cowan (2018) describe as the “silent signs of learning”. Kate had chosen the photograph, (having uploaded it previously) and

through sharing it in the interview it was possible to see the potential documentation had as a pedagogical resource. By communicating the story behind the photograph, Kate's contribution to the interview and equally this research is important, and this finding is comparable to Alcock's (2000) description of pedagogical documentation, in that it was, for Kate, a tool that helped her to understand and appreciate a moment in time that encapsulated Harriet and her brother playing together. This is more akin to the principle that children's learning can be made visible through documentation, as in the Reggio approach and as Merewether (2018) explains this visibility of individual and group learning has the potential to be explored and developed further together with parents and practitioners. Kate also mentioned that she liked the instant access the digital format afforded her and this is in-keeping with the findings reported by (Flewitt & Cowan, 2018, p. 2), whereby parents liked the accessibility of digital documentation. Furthermore, as detailed in the extract below, Kate also saw how documentation helped her to understand and replicate Harriet's learning and offer similar activities at home. This point emphasises how documentation can help parents and practitioners work in partnership. It also highlights the link between documentation and learning in the home as the example from further into the interview demonstrates:

Kate (mother) And it's just so much easier now, and I can see it instantly rather than kind of waiting for the end of the year.

Me Yeah.

Practitioner Aliysha (practitioner) Yeah.

Me Yeah.

Kate It's nice just to get on and see what she's doing.

Aliysha Yeah.

Kate And then I'm confident that she's making progress and learning, and I can see what she's been doing exactly, and then what she's been doing I can sort of like do that at home as well, so.

Me Okay.

Aliysha Yeah.

Kate We're on the same page.

There appears to be contrasting messages in the two extracts above, on the one hand the interview between Kate and Aliysha revealed the positive aspects of documentation. Kate welcomed being able to see her children together at home and

the access to what Harriet was learning while she was at Kinderclass and described how seeing this helped her to continue with similar activities at home. However she also talked about, the importance of seeing Harriet making progress, and the description of being “*on the same page*” as Alysha was an interesting one as this perspective could refer to them having a shared goal (Cottle & Alexander, 2014, p. 641). Nevertheless, translating what is seen in the documentation as evidence of Harriet learning, also means that she is being observed and her actions evaluated (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010), arguably positioning documentation as a tool for assessment (Albin-Clark, 2020, p. 142). The comment from Kate about being on the same page is not only evidence of monitoring Harriet’s learning, but it could conversely be interpreted that Kate was scrutinizing the preschool and their ability to progress Harriet’s learning. Feeding in perhaps, to the previously discussed school readiness debate (Kay, 2021; Needham & Ülküer, 2020).

In the interview with Hiresh, Zahir’s mother and practitioner Aliysha, Hiresh had explained how she felt attending preschool had helped Zahir to develop his communication and language skills. However, she also included information about his baby sister and how his newfound language skills meant that Zahir could alert her when his baby sister needed something:

Hiresh (mother) He’ll say ‘mummy [J - ulti] like she’s throwing up.

Aliysha Yeah (short laugh).

Hiresh In Urdu we say ulti.

Hiresh And I’ll be like ‘okay’. Then he goes and wipes her up, then he, he takes them and then he wipes her lips

Aliysha short laugh

Hiresh I tried to make a video.

Hiresh had tried to capture Zahir’s action in a video, sharing the information with both Aliysha and me enabled Hiresh to talk with pride about Zahir and how he cared for his baby sister.

Similarly Jack’s older sister often featured in the interview with his mother Gabby and practitioner Becky, but in contrast to the data examples above, the focus on his sister had the potential to take the attention away from Jack. Gabby repeatedly talked

about her daughter and her time at the preschool, comparing how her [daughter] had found it difficult to be separated from her:

Gabby (mother) But [sister]and Jack are one extreme to the other.

Becky yeah

Gabby so completely different Jack will just throw himself straight in and won't be bothered whereas [sister] will stand back and sort of look round and take note, I mean and just watch and then think well I'll give that a try, whereas Jack will just think well I'm off.

I was conscious of the presence of the sibling's biographies in the interviews and used prompts to re-focus the conversation where I could. I recognised that for some of the mothers sharing stories about their child inevitably meant they would share information about their relationships with other family members, particularly their siblings. Even so, ethically, there was a tension about sharing information in such an informal way as neither child had an audible voice.

This was further highlighted in the interview with Karen, Jamie's mother, when she discussed her decision to delay the school start date for Jamie's brother, she explained that she had felt her only option was to keep him at Kinderclass:

Karen (mother) Um [brother] is actually still here.

Me Oh okay.

Karen Um (coughs) without going into his, it's not about Joseph, but to cut a long story short he was, he was meant to start school in September. Um the school preference that they gave me um wasn't acceptable.

Me Ah right.

Karen Um I'd have had four children in four different schools.

Me Oh my goodness.

Karen Yeah.

Me Mmm.

Karen So um well I had the decline that so now we're waiting for, he's third on the waiting list, so we're now appealing and waiting for a place to get him with his siblings.

Although Karen recognised that Jamie was the focus of the interview she shared some personal information about her decision and reasons for Jamie's brother continuing at Kinderclass.

These examples of the children alongside their siblings are instances of the way documentation has the potential to make visible things that would have remained invisible (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010 p. 249). The children's social experiences with their siblings were evident in the photographs and videos and their meaning discussed and translated during the interviews. Comparisons between siblings were made in relation to the children's development and learning and the documentation when shared during the interview, illustrated how the different children's voices were portrayed, by the adults. The ethical guidelines presented by BERA, call for researchers to ensure that consent is gained from parents and carers when children are very young and unable to give their own informed consent (BERA, 2018). Although this study did not include direct research with the children it was vital that consent and anonymity were respected throughout. Nevertheless, the findings did highlight for me a tension in the way the photographs and narratives represented each child, their lives at home and preschool and the way the adults construed their voices, especially the siblings who were not the focal point of the interview (Birbilli, 2022). Having discussed how the adults used the documentation to discuss their children's experiences alongside their siblings, the chapter will now concentrate on the way the digital stories developed and what this could offer in respect of the child and partnership working.

5.6.1 Funds of Knowledge

Sharing the children's digital stories during the interviews enabled the mothers and practitioners to draw attention to the children's "visible" identity (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010, p. 249). As previously highlighted, the digital documentation developed by Kinderclass had many interpretations, nevertheless, it provided a conduit for seeking to understand each child's experiences (Alcock, 2000). When analysing the data it became noticeable that the mothers and practitioners, were co-constructing knowledge about the children and that in part, I was also contributing to this discourse. They were interpreting, through the documentation, how the children were learning, and living their lives shaped by their experiences of participating in family life (Chesworth, 2016 p. 295; Hedges et al., 2011 p. 189). The Funds of Knowledge is a theoretical construct that has its origins in sociocultural theory and reflects the interconnectedness between the home, and a child's social and educational networks (González et al., 2005). During their discussions about what

they could see in the artefacts, the mothers and practitioners narrated a story based on what they believed their children were thinking and doing. As the following extracts of data show, I suggest these connections or Funds, were evident in the examples shared by the mothers.

Hiresh, Zahir's mother had made the decision that Kinderclass was the right setting for him based on her previous experience. She explained that she had taken him regularly to the setting when his sister attended, meaning he was familiar with the environment. As Hiresh talked about her trust in the practitioners she also justified that she thought Zahir had been able to demonstrate how he trusted the staff and felt comfortable in his own distinct way by taking his shoes off when he arrived in the setting, as this excerpt explains:

Practitioner Aliysha And when, the first day he arrived he always took his shoes off, the first few days.

Me Okay.

Aliysha And now he just gets on with it.

Hiresh (mother) Because at home we were always, at home or at my mum's house he's always just take his shoes, because he's used to taking his shoes off.

This description of Zahir taking his shoes off, could be interpreted as a direct link to his cultural traditions shaped by his experiences at home or at his grandma's house. Rogoff (2003) proposes that cultural experiences, are important for developing thinking and when connected and influenced by social and historical events the potential for learning is maximised. Hiresh and Aliysha were respectful of Zahir's wish to remove his shoes, and did not resist his need to do this, rather, Aliysha explained:

Practitioner Aliysha So I was like let him do what he wants to do.

Me Yeah.

Aliysha Just let him enjoy himself.

Hiresh's second story related to Zahir and his lunch contained in his backpack, which Aliysha said he insisted on keeping close during his first couple of weeks.

Aliysha And he used to leave his lunch pack.

Hiresh Yeah, well see.

Aliysha And hold his backpack. But slowly by slowly.

Me Mmm.

Aliysha He's come on. Now as soon as he comes through the door he'll just give it to me.

Me Mmhmm.

Aliysha But for the first week and two he just used to leave it on.

Hiresh I think he didn't have that trust.

Me Mmm.

Hiresh Like ooh where am I? and familiar people. I don't know them, should I trust them with my things?

Aliysha Yeah.

Me Okay.

Hiresh So now I've noticed he even says to me 'mummy bag off'.

Aliysha Yeah.

Me Yeah, yeah.

Aliysha As soon as he comes through that door it'll be 'bag off'.

The narratives described by Hiresh and supported by Aliysha describe Zahir as he started to navigate his own familiarity with the environment and staff at Kinderclass. His actions, interpreted by his mother and key person demonstrate his self-motivated routine influenced by his social and cultural experiences (Hedges et al., 2011). The presence of familiar traits, such as, taking off his shoes and keeping his backpack on were Zahir's way of making sense of his new environment. He was demonstrating what he needed in order to feel secure in the setting and I argue this was helped by his funds of knowledge.

Similarly Jen, Asha's mother, shared her memories of Asha at a family friend's wedding:

Jen (mother) Ah there's been a couple of the wedding ones.

Becky Oh right, yes.

Jen Where she was a flower girl for a wedding, my best friend's wedding, a couple, well last month.

Becky Yeah.

Jen She really, she picked the photos to show you.

Becky Aw did she?

Me Okay.

Jen Because I says like, yeah I said, well I says we're going to show, well she knows what Tapestry is anyway. I said we're going to show Becky and Charlie and everybody just what you've been doing.

Becky When she [Asha] came in after the wedding, she came in and told me that she wore a pretty dress.

Jen Mmm.

Becky And um she was a flower girl, and I put an observation of what Asha had said.

Jen Mmhmm.

Becky Didn't I?

Jen Yeah, mmm.

Becky And I put that on Tapestry so that Jen could see what it, what Asha had said to me.

Although these interview excerpts are consistent with the literature that advocates documentation as a tool to celebrate and understand each child and their unique experiences and capabilities (Emilson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2014). It became clear when analysing the data that the documentation not only centred on the child but their position within the whole family and the wider community.

5.7. Chapter summary

The data presented in this chapter has highlighted the interpersonal relationships formed between seven mothers and four practitioners, their partnership generated as a result of working together to support seven children who attend Kinderclass Preschool. Organised into three key themes and using digital documentation as a conduit, analysis of the data illustrated how personal and cultural experiences influenced discussions about the child, their family and themselves (Rogoff, 2003). Working in partnership, is an expectation in early childhood settings in England and legislated in the statutory EYFS (DfE, 2021b, p. 5). Nevertheless, a collaborative partnership is not without challenges, relationships are complex, as the data excerpts in the chapter illustrate. They are shaped by the different values, beliefs and experiences, people bring to them (Cottle & Alexander, 2014). The findings in this thesis demonstrate that there were values and beliefs shared by the mothers and practitioners, such as those about the children being happy and forming a trusted relationship with the key person. In contrast, tension around what the children

were learning, assessment practices and the policy that requires ECEC settings to report attendance were also evident.

During the interviews the mothers and practitioners co-constructed stories about the children, they used the documentation to reminisce and share their ideals, but these hopes and values were also laden with power differentials, adult to adult and adult to child (Arnott & Wall, 2022; Brooker, 2010; Hohmann, 2007; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2011). The practitioners openly talked about the expectation placed on them to monitor and assess children against development milestones and achievement targets, and, coupled with the mothers desire to see their children learning, the narrative around being ready for school was clearly evident.

The children, although not physically present in the interviews had a presence, their voices represented by the mothers and practitioners through the digital documentation. Each child's story was recounted and their interests, their engagement with the resources at home and in the in preschool shared by the adults. However, discussing the documentation during the interview also led to a retelling of personal stories relating to the brothers and sisters of the child who attended Kinderclass. Ethically this created an interesting challenge for me during analysis, as consent to share the sibling's stories had not been discussed from the outset. It occurred in the interviews only where the siblings had previously attended Kinderclass, I became aware of the dilemma in some of the interviews, and although at least one mother refocused her conversation, generally it seemed an acceptable thing to do. I propose this is an example of how documentation makes visible what would ordinarily be less exposed, and, potentially unnoticed (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010, p. 249).

The overarching research aim was to investigate parent partnership and the relationships that develop in ECEC practice, and it became clear when analysing the data that many factors exist and contribute to partnership working. The following discussion chapter will identify and examine the findings in relation to the research questions. Firstly I will explore how the mothers and practitioners demonstrated their commitment to working in partnership and identify the explicit and implicit factors that appeared to influence their working relationship. Secondly I consider how the mothers and practitioners used Tapestry, their version of digital documentation to

share their understanding of each child's needs, their learning and development. Thirdly I propose to highlight how the documentation influenced, shaped and contributed to the way the participants saw each child.

Chapter 6. Discussion

6.1. Introduction to the chapter.

This chapter considers the implications of the findings previously discussed in chapter 5 and uses them to answer the three research questions, identified at the start of this thesis. At the outset, the overarching focus and aim of this study was to investigate parent partnership working in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The complex nature of relationships means that partnership with parents is difficult to define as emphasised throughout this thesis (Cottle & Alexander, 2014; Degotardi et al., 2013). Parent partnership does, however, have a long history especially in educational settings, and the 1967 Plowden Report is often quoted by researchers and educationalists as being a turning point for seeing parents as partners, not only in primary education but also for younger children (Sims-Schouten, 2016). The report, commissioned by then Minister of Education, contained recommendations for nursery education, and the report made claims about the benefits for children when there is an association between parents and educators.

It follows that one of the essentials for educational advance is a close partnership between the two parties to every child's education..... There is certainly an association between parental encouragement and educational performance”(Central Advisory Council for Education (England), 1967, p.37).

This extract from Plowden, although quite dated, has significance for this study and ECEC practice, not only as it recognises the need for collaboration between parents and carers but due to the perceived link between partnership and educational performance. Research question one of this thesis sought to understand the factors that may influence the working relationship between the key adults that are involved in the lives of young children who attend ECEC settings. In this thesis the key adults who took part in the research were seven mothers and four practitioners. It is interesting to note that one of the key findings of this study, discussed by all of the participants endorses the claims made about the link between partnership and children's educational achievement as proposed in the extract published in 1967, by Plowden above. During the conversational interviews the mothers revealed their desire to see the children learning, engaged with activities, and socialising with other children. In response, the practitioners stressed their obligation to assess children

against pre-determined targets, and common to both parties was the emphasis they placed on the setting helping the children be ready for school. Although the discourse of school readiness is not a new phenomenon in ECEC practice, particularly in the United Kingdom (Kay, 2021, p. 172), this finding is particularly meaningful due to the children discussed in this thesis being aged three and under. Despite the small research sample size, there is a recognition that the mothers and practitioners interviewed for this study engaged in a dialogue that normalised assessment practices. In part, this was facilitated by the meaning they applied to the documentation, subtly, but nevertheless contributing to a discourse of accountability and surveillance in ECEC practice (Kay, 2021; Ofsted, 2014; Roberts-Holmes, 2015; Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010).

The participants, were interviewed using the phenomenographic method, as detailed in chapter 4; the emphasis being to engage them in a conversation where they shared information about their child at home and in the setting. Each interview included a discussion about the child's everyday experiences facilitated by the photographs, videos and narratives presented in the digital documentation. Using the three themes as presented in chapter 5, the key findings of this study are summarised below:

- Partnership work involves a sharing of emotions, this was evident when the mothers and practitioners discussed their relationship. Their understanding of the key person role, their values, expectations and experiences of jointly caring for the children were openly shared. On the surface it could be interpreted that they were broadly in agreement and collaborating with each other, subtle but underlying tensions around political expectations and professional power were evident. In contrast, the mothers also had clear expectations about the care and learning they expected for their children, which could also be construed as them exerting their own power.
- The influences of government funding, monitoring and assessment practices, were reinforced in the interviews. There was a strong emphasis on being ready – for the next steps, particularly the discourse around being ready for school. This is noteworthy as this discourse is often assumed to relate to children aged around 4 to 5 years, and the children

discussed in this study were all much younger and between 2 and 3 years old.

- There are targets in place to monitor children's attendance at preschool when they are in receipt of the two-year funding, this monitoring, in some cases was in conflict with what could be regarded as being 'in the child's best interest.' This was demonstrated in the data sample on page 107, where the mother was encouraged to take her daughter to preschool during her lunchtime nap.
- Documentation enabled an exchange of information and ideas, and whilst parents did engage and contribute, it was instigated in the main by the practitioners. The instant access provided by a digitalised documentation format had many possibilities, from reassuring the mothers that their children had settled to opening up access for a shared dialogue about the child in the home. However, not every parent had the time, access to technology or the preference for digitalised documentation and this raises questions about equity in partnership working.
- Siblings were identified and discussed readily as their images appeared in the documentation, their behaviour, relationships with the younger child shared together with details about their experiences at Kinderclass. This created an ethical tension about who is represented in the images and the way documentation exposes the child, their family and friends.
- Documentation, especially in digital format, has the potential to enable partners to share memories and celebrate the child and their unique funds of knowledge, for example, their familiar traits. Even though the children were not physically present, their presence was palpable, nonetheless, they existed in the relationship through the eyes of the adults.

My rationale for introducing phenomenography as the research approach for this study, was because I was interested in the experiences of the participants and the different ways they co-created meaning (Larsson & Holmström, 2007, p. 56). It became clear in the interviews that the relationship between the mothers and practitioners was an integral component of partnership working. Nevertheless, as Degotardi et al. (2013) state relationships are not neutral, and they involve interactions that overlap and interrelate. These interconnections were apparent when

using the findings to answer the research questions as it was evident that there were similarities and overlaps in the factors that influenced the way the mothers and practitioners worked together and used the documentation to discuss their perceptions of each child.

This chapter will now utilize the key findings supported by literature and sociocultural theory, to answer each research question.

6.2. How do the key adults, involved in the care of the child work together in ECEC, and what factors influence their working relationship?

This first research question in the thesis sought to consider the different factors that appeared to influence ECEC partnership working between key adults, and in this thesis, this is taken to mean mothers and the child's key person. The research in this study frames partnership as an evolving relationship, brought about by "shared goals, emotional bonds and connections" (Degotardi & Pearson, 2009, p. 145). Partnership with parents, however, cannot be viewed in isolation, and there are many interwoven relationships that impact on ECEC practice, including the position of the child in said partnership. It was interesting to see how digital documentation acted as a conduit for conversation during the interviews, facilitating stories about the children, their daily experiences and interactions with siblings and friends. Sociocultural theory supposes that any relationship involving practitioners and parents is inevitably entwined with the child informed by their historical, cultural and environment experiences (Rogoff, 2003). This provided a helpful theoretical context, through which to see how the adults interpreted the children's inherited "cultural tools and practices" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 52) and how this better informed their understanding of partnership.

During the interviews the mothers shared their feelings about leaving their children in the care of others but they also talked about placing their trust in the practitioners who worked at Kinderclass. Early connections were deemed to have helped build the foundation for partnership, these they suggested, were either due to their previous contacts with the setting through their older children or because Kinderclass had a good reputation in the community. Even so, the interviews illuminated the complex array of issues; implying partnership cannot be assumed to mean the same to every partner. Several factors are noteworthy and raise intriguing implications for practice,

they included feelings of anxiety, trust, respect, challenges to meet local and national targets, and in addition there were also more subtle aspects surrounding the way the child and their siblings were discussed and represented; each factor had the potential to influence the way the mothers and practitioners worked together in partnership.

6.2.1. Partnership as a collaborative relationship

Developing any relationship requires, understanding and commitment from all parties. In ECEC practice, as Degotardi and Pearson (2009) posit, partnership evolves over time and through relationships with others, so the wider family and community network are equally important (p. 145). This is where the Froebelian principle that “relationships are of central importance in a child’s life” (Froebel Trust, n.d.) can provide some context, especially in relation to the key person role. Practitioners have expectations placed upon them to work in partnership with parents and carers, the EYFS expects the key person to “offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with the parents” (DfE, 2021b, p. 27). Equally parents have expectations about the care of their child – so, when negotiating and sharing their goals for the children there needs to be an acknowledgement that partnership will have different interpretations depending on each partners experiences, meaning it should not be taken for granted.

Ensuring every child in ECEC has an allocated key person is a mandatory requirement in England and in accordance with the 2006 Childcare Act, the practitioner fulfilling this role is expected to become a familiar person to both the child and their parent/family (DfE, 2021b). The key person is also presumed to be caring, respectful, trustworthy and according to Brooker (2010) able to offer professional “welcome” to both the parent and child (p. 184). The findings, provided examples of collaboration, corroborating with those of similar ECEC studies, that suggest an anticipated value for children, and arguably for parents when there is an attachment with one or two allocated practitioners (Brooker, 2010; Cottle & Alexander, 2014; Page & Elfer, 2013). Alongside fulfilling their many caring responsibilities the key person is widely expected to support children’s learning and development (Page & Elfer, 2013). Balancing the two can be challenging, practitioners do not work in isolation from parents, and the findings demonstrated

this well through the emphasis on assessment and also the monitoring of children's funded places.

The relationship with the key person has been described as a triangle, Ball's (1994) description symbolises the association between parents, professionals and the community – forming a triangle of care (p. 9). This differs slightly from the analogy where the triangle represents the connections and interrelations that can exist between the parent, child and practitioner (Brooker, 2010; Hohmann, 2007; Page, 2018). I propose there were elements of both models present in the partnerships at Kinderclass – the connections between the mothers, practitioners evident, their roles complementary (Page, 2018), but not necessarily always reciprocal (Brooker, 2010), nevertheless, the connection with the environment and community were also present (Ball, 1994). In each of the interviews the dialogue that developed was centred around the child, there were complimentary statements used by the mothers and practitioners to describe their familiarity, and how they felt they had built up a “*rapport*.” This is in keeping with political expectations as defined in the EYFS and the concept of the key person forming a relational bond with the child and their family (Page, 2018, p. 129). Nonetheless, this could be interpreted as compliance, and this was illustrated in the research when the practitioner placed an expectation on the mother to use her preschool funded place when her daughter was asleep. It is argued, therefore, that a working partnership, in order to build a “*rapport*” should be open to scrutiny, this means striving towards a relationship that includes the fundamental characteristics of honesty, transparency and respect.

In ECEC as in education more widely, there is an acceptance that the differences between professional expertise and parenting practices can lead to a power imbalance (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000). This point has relevance for this thesis as familiarity and rapport cannot be presumed to mean that a partnership is collaborative or value free. Additionally the relationships between the adults and children were interrelated, influenced by a variety of different social and cultural factors, for example previous involvement with siblings and the necessity to fulfil professional responsibilities. And, although the child, and their interactions with adults, other children and their environment were openly discussed, prompted by the artefacts in the documentation, the involvement of children in the partnership was less obvious and not openly discussed.

The practitioners in the study did metaphorically embrace each parent and child, they used emotive words and phrases, for example, the mothers being “*happy*” to leave their child, and “*we had a really good relationship, me and [sister] we really did*” and “*just let him enjoy himself*” to describe their practitioner responsibilities. These examples could be interpreted that they were committed to their key person role, however, it was also evident that their professional expertise crept into the interviews and this sheds light on the imbalance of power that can have an impact on partnership in ECEC practice (Brooker, 2010; Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000). This was specifically highlighted when Sarah, Hannah’s mother expressed her belief that the setting should feel like a family and the key person should be someone that “*they [her child Hannah] know is their person*”. The practitioner confirmed this notion, explaining that the setting had an aim to “*nurture*” the children. These examples could be regarded as one of the ways the setting strives to meet their regulatory obligations in the EYFS (DfE, 2021b) and also ensure the key person is an “attachment figure”, who is “invested in the child” (Page, 2018, p. 129). However, the practitioner also added that she considered her role to be “*the parent when the parents are not there*”, raising a question about the construction of the practitioner role in ECEC practice, especially in relation to her caring responsibilities.

Historically care and early childhood education were perceived as separate services (Bertram & Pascal, 1999), as discussed in chapter 3, this changed after the election of the Labour Government in 1997 when the drive for integration of children’s services became a policy initiative. Fast forward ten years and Hohman (2007, p. 34) claimed that care was still the dominant discourse in ECEC. It is interesting to note then, at the current time of writing, 15 years later there are still disparities between care and education, confirmed in the findings of this thesis. Much has been written about attachment and relationship theory and the contribution of such theories to pedagogical practices (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Degotardi et al., 2017; Degotardi & Pearson, 2009; Page, 2017; Page & Elfer, 2013). Nonetheless, as highlighted in the explanation offered above and demonstrated in the findings in chapter 5, theme 1, there is a potential for conflict in the mother/parent/practitioner relationship if the key person role is translated into practice as taking the place of the parent or being a parent substitute. I suggest this can blur the boundaries between professional and parental expectations and responsibilities, it can also reinforce the view that

professional knowledge and expertise is superior (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000). Care is of course an essential aspect of the key person role and attachment relationships can provide security for the child and parent, however, as Page (2018), argues in her explanation of Professional Love for this to be reciprocal there needs to be an acceptance that relationships are complimentary rather than in competition with each other (p.129).

The relationship between each practitioner and five out of the seven mothers was well established as Kinderclass where possible, had instigated a system where they allocated the same key person for any subsequent sibling who attended the setting. Offering this consistency according to three of the four practitioners, had helped them to develop an early relationship with their key child, and their familiarity in the interviews was palpable. They talked about meeting their key child as a baby – or even before they were born, and they described their recent settling experience as positive, with one mother stating that having the same key person meant that she felt she *“could talk to her straight away.”* Adopting this approach could be helpful for laying the foundations of a reciprocal partnership and shared pedagogy, important for creating the professional welcome as described by Brooker (2010). However, this consistency was not afforded for every child with a sibling, and organisational decisions occasionally took priority, as was the case for one child when Kinderclass changed his key person over the summer. Whilst it is understandable that structural decisions are made in order to develop practice, this example is noteworthy and one worth considering in relation to how the setting communicate any changes to practice with parents and children.

6.2.2. Partnership is emotional work.

Several other factors appeared to influence the way the mothers and practitioners engaged in partnership working, including the need for emotional security, for them and their child. This was expressed through their concern when leaving their child in the care of the practitioners at the preschool. All of the mothers articulated their need to see their child happy, this was sometimes in relation to their care needs, so being happy to stay at Kinderclass in the early days or being happy to have their nappy changed. Happiness was also important for the mothers, and they expressed that their children being happy at the setting, meant they were also happy. The

practitioners, reassured the mothers by pointing out entries in the documentation where the children were perceived to be happy, playing with peers or engaged in activities. Happiness, it would appear seemed to be a word used to describe emotion more generally.

It was interesting to see how the balance of power changed during the interviews, and there were examples, where practitioners took the lead, as in the example on page 95 chapter 5. Both the practitioner and mother initially agreed that Hannah had settled well, only for the practitioner to interject and say that there had been “*a few hiccups.*” Comments such as this changed the direction of the conversations and reinforces the concept that there are different manifestations of power present ECEC partnerships. Additionally, this is an example of the way professional knowledge, when offered, could be regarded as being more powerful than parental knowledge (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000, p.243) which is also in common with the theories proposed by Brooker (2010); Cottle and Alexander (2014); MacNaughton (2005); Moss (2018a). Clear expectations articulated by the mothers related to care Kinderclass offered their child, they expected the practitioners to ensure they were happy. Nonetheless, the practitioners appeared to have their own interpretations of what this meant in practice, presenting a challenge between the setting’s policies, professional accountability and their responsibilities, to the child their mother.

Other emotions also surfaced during the interviews, such as the personal anxieties described by one mother, as she took a number of weeks to settle her child. Her anxieties seemed to be complicated by her insecurity about her perception of herself as “*an older mother*” and using the preschool place when she had not returned to work, and this could be explained by the way motherhood is framed in society. Although she justified her feelings by saying she thought Kinderclass was the right place for her child, her concern about her age and unemployment relate to the work of Page, (2013) who proposes that mothers often experience feelings of guilt when leaving their children in ECEC. Affordability was also a sensitive issue discussed in relation to family finances with the government funding recognised as helping them to access the place at Kinderclass. What was clear though, was that each mother expressed a desire that the preschool was right for their child and being right was also related to the children being able to learn from others, to socialise, and be ready for school.

6.3. How is digital documentation used by the participants and what contribution does this make to how ECEC practitioners understand the child's learning and development?

In answering this second research question there was evidence across the data set that the mothers and practitioners had established a process, including using documentation, for communicating and sharing information about the child. The participants talked about their daily two-way communication, and this was regarded as vital and necessary in order to best attend to and meet the needs of the child. However, it should be noted that this perfunctory conversational based communication, is just one aspect of parental involvement that contributes to partnership working (Kambouri et al., 2022). Informal exchanges of information were acknowledged to take place at drop-off and pick-up times, this was in addition to the way they used the digital tool Tapestry (The Foundation Stage Forum Ltd, 2022) to document their child's personal online preschool journey.

Although documenting children's everyday experiences is not a new concept, White (2020, p. 1) suggests, ECEC settings are increasingly using visual images to "narrate" children's lives. At Kinderclass this use of Tapestry meant each child had, as they started preschool become the subject of their own digital story. Using digital tools such as Tapestry is, not unique to this study, but the findings reported in this thesis contribute to the body of research that advocates documentation [using the digital format in this study] as a tool for understanding the child, their needs and the impact of the environment on their learning and development (Alcock, 2000; Cowan & Flewitt, 20021). More significant, however, was that the documentation was not entirely a shared tool for all of the mothers, and at least one mother made it clear that she found uploading digital content time consuming and preferred the previously used [with her other children] paper version. Her rationale being that the paper profile was something she could easily pick up, and it contained her children's paintings.

The online journal was accessed via the Tapestry App (The Foundation Stage Forum Ltd, 2022) and when commencing the interviews I had assumed that both the practitioners and mothers regularly uploaded and commented on the documentation entries. The mothers were recruited by the practitioners based on their relationship

and supposed collaboration with Tapestry, but during the interviews it became clear that the documentation process was instigated and in many cases driven by the practitioners. Content uploaded by the mothers was occasional, infrequent and limited to one or two photographs and comments on observations. ECEC settings are mandated in England to keep parents informed of children's progress and the EYFS requires practitioners to evidence their learning (DfE, 2021b), so it was no surprise that the practitioners were the main contributors to Tapestry.

An interesting point to note, was that after being asked to take part in the research there had been some attempt by several mothers to upload photographs and videos. On reflection this could mean that the mothers felt under pressure to contribute to the documentation, perhaps in order to participate in the interview discussion. It could also be argued that their compliance in the research process helped to construct the practice of documentation in this instance. Furthermore, using a digital platform is not necessarily a collaborative tool, it was evident that some of the mothers experienced barriers such as problems with passwords, lack of internet access and lack of time, this may exclude some parents from contributing to the documentation, and this is in keeping with similar studies (Cowan & Flewitt, 20021).

6.3.1. Documentation and assessment

As previously discussed, the pressure to provide evidence of how children learn (DfE, 2021b, p. 7) may have contributed to the documentation being in the main instigated and owned by the preschool. Moreover, documentation, be it in paper or digital format, is a socially constructed product, and although it is intended to reach and serve many different audiences, it will inevitably be shaped by its authors, and for purposes individual to them (Birbilli, 2022, p. 309). Despite challenges around uploading and contributing to the documentation, the mothers talked about their enjoyment of seeing their children in the images and reading the written observations. There appeared to be an openness to participation, which may as Dahlberg et al.(2007) posit, mean that there is the potential to realise what documentation can offer in the future.

Whist the documentation was not overtly co-constructed with the children there was evidence that some of the mothers attempted to engage their children in their digital biography. They described sitting down with their children and sharing the

photographs and videos together, and this they said enabled a dialogue to develop about their daily experiences during the time they were in preschool. It was less obvious that this practise was also employed by the practitioners, and this could mean there was a missed opportunity to recognise the potential to involve the children (Flewitt & Cowan, 2018). However, one mother reported that she had encouraged her daughter to choose photographs, following a special event, and these were then uploaded so that the child could share them with her key person. Sharing the documentation with the children in this way is an example of what Dahlberg et al.(2007) suggest encourages reflection and shared understandings. According to Alcock (2000, p. 3) this can add to the pedagogical value of documentation. The example in chapter 5 on page 123, of Asha being encouraged by her mother to choose photographs of her being a flower girl at the wedding, illustrated this well and is an example of embedding Froebelian principles into ECEC practice as described in the work of Flewitt and Cowan (2018, p. 2). So whilst evidence of co-construction was less obvious, there was an openness to sharing the documentation process between the mothers and the children. This development could be interpreted, therefore, as encouraging the children to engage in thinking and learning by reflecting on past experiences; and as Alcock (2000) suggests instrumental in co-constructing learning, leading to documentation being more than an assessment tool (p. 6).

Online tools such as Tapestry are marketed as instruments for documenting and assessing children's learning, they are also regarded as being complimentary to the EYFS. Whilst there are holistic possibilities, Tapestry for example, states it is a tool record children's experiences (The Foundation Stage Forum Ltd, 2022). It became clear during the interviews that they saw documentation as a means to track their children's learning; and one mother, Sarah, clearly stated that she regarded the documentation as a "*virtual tracking [tool].*" Practitioners also discussed tracking children against expected developmental norms, and "*ticking boxes*" positioning documentation as a tool for assessment.

Birbilli (2022), acknowledges the assessment aspect of documentation and endorses the view proposed by Dahlberg et al., (2007) that there is always a choice when choosing what to document; this relates to documentation being socially constructed as previously discussed. It became evident in the interviews that the practitioners

made their choices based on their observations but also on what they felt the child had still to achieve. Equally tracking in this way is a form of surveillance, children were being observed and their learning recorded to meet the specific goals depicted in the EYFS (Sparman & Lindgren, 2010, p. 249). This practice seemed to be normalised by the mothers and practitioners, and I propose should be recognised and acknowledged when establishing how pedagogical practice informs partnership. Similarly research by Flewitt and Cowan (2018) emphasised a mis-match between child-centred practice and the requirement to assess, therefore it is important that documentation is not just a means to check children's progress but also acknowledged for its potential to be participatory and multifaceted (Alcock, 2000; Birbilli, 2022; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Paananen & Lipponen, 2018).

Tracking also featured in another interview but in this instance there was an explicit link made to monitoring children's attendance in order to justify claiming 2-year funding (H.M. Government, n.d). As previously stated, all of the children were attending Kinderclass facilitated by the government funding for 2-year-olds (one child had recently moved to the universal 3-year funding). Family finances and accessing funding was discussed more generally in a number of interviews, however, the comments made around tracking in this one interview, see page 105, were contentious because the practitioner held a dual position, as the manager of the setting and also the key person. Discussing the documentation during the interview had inadvertently supported the practitioner to reflect on the way the setting reinforced policy expectations, and her position of authority became the main driver of the conversation. Further supporting the need to recognise the how professional expertise can dominate practice (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000).

Having the documentation in digitalised format, provided the mothers and practitioners with an instant access visual tool, and aside from the tracking aspect it offered an opportunity to see the children as individuals. Through discussion the mothers and practitioners talked about their observations, and they described how seeing their children socialising with other children and playing with the different resources had enabled them to continue offering learning opportunities home. This is an interesting finding as it could be regarded as confirming the benefits of the home learning environment (Sammons et al., 2015). It became evident in the interviews that the mothers valued reading the narrative observations but the digital

documentation generated at Kinderclass also conformed to a particular powerful discipline. Mothers talked about their wish to see their child make progress academically, and practitioners endorsed this by stating how they used documentation to chart and measure the children's learning, in order to help them be ready for school. These examples show how documentation was used to measure children against expected developmental milestones, potentially contributing to the normalisation of assessment practices (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 30; Moss, 2018a, p. 92).

6.4. To what extent does digital documentation contribute to and influence the way the mothers and practitioners see the 'child'?

This third research question centred on the child, present in the visual artefacts in the documentation. The rich data generated in all seven of the interviews was facilitated by the visual documentation and using it as the focus for each interview ensured that the research approach was inclusive and personal for the parent and practitioner participants. Applying this approach aligns with the methodological position of phenomenography, adopted in this research, as it takes into account of the various ways of seeing the children through the eyes of the mothers and practitioners (Larsson & Holmström, 2007). Phenomenography explores the way in which individuals experience, conceptualise, perceive and understand the world (Marton, 1988, 1p. 54). And, in the findings it became clear that the mothers and practitioners had developed a relationship where they negotiated an understanding about the children's learning and development, endorsed through the images captured in the documentation.

Each interview started with the practitioner opening the child's first day (or days) at Kinderclass, as captured on Tapestry (The Foundation Stage Forum Ltd, 2022). They recalled and narrated events leading up to and during each child's settling in period. For the mothers who had used Kinderclass for their older children, it was interesting to hear how their relationship had been established long before the present child had started to attend the setting. Examples were shared, that related to their early memories, so for example the practitioners talked about meeting their present key child when they were a baby, or even before, they were '*born*' as

described by Sofia's mother, Jessica when she mentioned being pregnant with Sofia when her older child had attended the setting.

These early connections as discussed previously, meant that the participants had an already established relationship, reinforced where possible by allocating the same key person for the siblings. This practice of continuing with the same key person, arguably builds on existing relationships and it could be regarded that this early association was supportive for the child and their family, with the potential to contribute to partnership working (Degotardi & Pearson, 2009). This meant that the practitioners already had an insight into the family dynamics and the mothers were familiar with the ethos and expectations of the setting. These familial connections became even more apparent when the mothers and practitioners brought the sibling's biographies into the interview conversations, as detailed further in this chapter. The benefits of a shared history, as described above could also be counterproductive for partnership as it can also lead to a familiarity and blurring of professional boundaries (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2011). Additionally, it should not be assumed that a shared history is without tension, as partnership in ECEC settings is in the main a policy directive (DfE, 2021b). Therefore there would need to be a recognition in practice that relationships are not without complication, even if on the surface they seem to be collaborative.

6.4.1. Seeing and curating

The videos as well as photographs were regarded as important entries in the documentation at Kinderclass preschool, they enabled the mothers to see their child in their environment, "*in the moment*" actively involved with other children. Capturing and combining children's experiences through "multimodal texts" such as video clips and photographs suggest Cowan and Flewitt (2021, p. 2), opens up new possibilities for documenting learning in ECEC practice and the digitalised profile used at Kinderclass provided an example of this practice. Documenting digitally as opposed to the paper version previously used by Kinderclass was favoured by all but one of the mothers, and arguably it provided instant access to the child's experiences in the home and preschool. However, as the practitioners and mothers had, in the main, selected the visuals, it could be inferred that they had essentially socially constructed their own version of the child's world (Dahlberg et al. 2007, p.144). For one mother,

Jen, on page 115, this construction meant she could revisit the film of her daughter and appreciate seeing her playing and dancing with other children in the preschool. Describing the video entry as a “*little snapshot*” she interpreted that this meant “*they [her daughter and friends] were just all so happy.*” This visibility of the children in the documentation did provide a partial window into their daily activities, nevertheless, the description that they were happy and enjoying their time at Kinderclass, was from an adult perspective. Even though their comments such as “*she loves it here, she absolutely loves it*” were sanctioned by the practitioners, it raises ethical questions about the visibility of the child and how their actions are curated in the documentation. Furthermore, this concept of the happy child, loving life at the preschool in accordance with Sparrman and Lindgren's (2010, p. 256) work, has implications for practice, as it positions children as the subjects of documentation and adults as the “onlookers”.

This thesis did not set out to replicate research studies that have focused on the voices on preschool children, there are many studies that have explored this area in depth, with the aim, suggests (Komulainen, 2007, p12), of giving “children a voice”. Nevertheless, the digital documentation tool acted as a focus in the interviews and the children’s presence in the videos, photographs and observational content was palpable. In accordance with studies that advocate documentation as a pedagogical tool for capturing children’s experiences (Alcock, 2000; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Merewether, 2018) this thesis has highlighted how the version developed at Kinderclass did indeed illuminate, in part, the way the seven children experienced life in their home and preschool. I propose that their version of documentation was an illustration of how the children were participating with and learning alongside others, albeit from the adults’ perspectives. In common with sociocultural theory (Chesworth, 2016; Rogoff, 2003), the children, their everyday experiences and those of their siblings were captured in a digital biography. However, the voices of very young children are often filtered by well-meaning adults (Wall et al., 2019, p. 264), and arguably this was confirmed as the mothers and practitioners made assumptions about what the children were saying, or what they might want or need.

Such assumptions were particularly expressed by the mothers who had previous experience of Kinderclass as they regularly introduced their older sibling’s experiences in the interviews. There appeared to be an acceptance that as they

featured in the documentation, photographed alongside their younger siblings, their stories were also for public discussion. Sparrman and Lindgren (2010, p. 250) coined the term “on-looking-ness” to describe the way children become the subject of documentation, and this description could be applied to the way the siblings had a presence when their biographies were shared in the interviews. The mothers readily talked about their older siblings and even though there appeared to be a perceived acceptance, or underlying agreement to share between the practitioners and the mothers, ethically this could be problematic as consent was implied.

During some of the interviews the mothers shared personal issues about their older children, and whilst they did not disclose matters that were of a safeguarding concern they did openly discuss the way Kinderclass had supported transitions and made comparisons between each sibling. These comparisons, arguably raise ethical questions about how children are generally regarded and their experiences viewed through the eyes of others (Elwick et al., 2014). Moreover, discussing the siblings in this way meant that their anonymity was not protected and their experiences became represented in the data. The process of documentation places children’s experiences in a spot-light where their social worlds can be celebrated, nevertheless, it is one way that children’s voices are marginalised as they are presented in documentation as subjects to be observed (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010).

Consequently, this thesis makes the point that there should be a recognition that if children are only visually present, their voice will only ever be an interpreted one.

Although documentation can be regarded as providing a window into the child’s world it is also is a way of monitoring and gazing at their physical, emotional and social spaces (Steeves & Jones, 2010). The findings illuminated the way the children explored spaces that were familiar to them, and their social interactions were discussed in detail. Their stories told through the visual images also highlighted their silence, and they still had a presence. Lewis (2010) and Spyrou, (2016) discuss the need to take children’s silence seriously, and whilst their concern is in the main with participatory research practices and children’s voices, I propose that silence in relation to this thesis, relates to the presence of the child in the documentation but their silence in the partnership. The children who attended Kinderclass, were not generally involved in the taking of photographs or the selection of images, so they did not overtly have a role in the process of documentation. And, whilst there were

examples of mothers sharing the contents of Tapestry, and one example of a mother encouraging her daughter to choose a photograph the documentation was owned and driven by the adults and particularly the practitioners.

The documentation contained narratives that were intended to be informative and collaborative, this was apparent when the mothers talked about the way the documentation enabled them to see what their children were doing whilst they were away from them. In contrast, though this need to see what the children were doing led to comments that could be perceived as being less trusting of the practitioners. As at least two of the mothers talked about the importance of being able to see, through the images and narrative in the documentation, that the practitioner was focused on or specifically looking out for their child. Additionally, there appeared to be an obvious value placed on the image/moving images of the child where they were perceived to be happy, or engaged in play, and this was placed, in some instances above any reassurance that the practitioner offered. This offers a critical insight into the relationship and trust between the mothers and practitioners, and suggests that communication although important, is much more powerful if combined with an image that the mother can interpret for herself.

For documentation to be truly participatory it should be a collaborative tool, and constructed with all partners including children (Oliveira-Formosinho & De Sousa, 2019). This research observed and experienced the collaboration between each mother and practitioner, with the children visually present in the documentation, their biographies recorded and retold by the adults, nevertheless, they did not have a physical presence. Sparrman and Lindgren (2010, p. 250) discuss the potential for documentation to enable children to be seen and heard, reinforcing the collaborative possibility of documentation but they also imply the need to be mindful of children's rights. Their point is salient, when considering how adults interpret their children's experiences in documentary artifacts as respecting that children have rights should be considered alongside the recognition that there are political influences also present in ECEC practice that may influence the way children's voices are interpreted. Children have a right to be listened to but as Wall et al. (2019) posit, it is not as simple as giving children an audible voice. If documentation has the potential to enhance practice (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010), including engaging children, it

should also be considered as a tool with multiple possibilities (Alcock, 2000). This includes engaging in respectful practice that appreciates its scope and limitations.

Rogoff (2003) proposes that human development is framed through participation which is influenced by sociocultural theory and shaped by an individual's historical and cultural experiences. In this thesis sociocultural theory was regarded as an influential concept for exploring documentation, partnership working and the way the child was represented and positioned. Moreover, this perspective enabled the exploration of parent partnership as a collaborative process, as it also provided scope to understand the interrelationships that develop between the adults and children when their historical, environmental and cultural experiences are shared. The children were positioned in the present, their actions as they engaged in day-to-day tasks at preschool discussed. Yet, the potential for them to be a co-constructor, was less obvious. This may be intentional, however, sociocultural theory, does open up possibilities for reflection including being able to consider the children's unique position in the documentation.

Across the data set there were examples where Rogoff's (2003, p. 58) developmental theory was observed, her three interconnected aspects - interpersonal, personal and - cultural provided an opportunity to understand how the participants used the children's visual and narrative documentation to interpret children's everyday experiences. It became clear that the children were recognised as being engaged in personal or individual relationships with their key person and there were also many instances, where the children were observed to be involved in social relationships. In common with Degotardi et al. (2013), I propose it was evident that the children's lives were connected and influenced by their many different relationships. The interviews also drew attention to the children's cultural connections, and the concept of the of the funds of knowledge offered an interesting lens through which to interpret how their actions and interests were perceived by the adults when viewing the documentation (Chesworth, 2016; González et al., 2005; Hedges et al., 2011). These connections were illustrated in the findings through the way the adults interpreted the narratives and visuals in the documentation.

Nevertheless, the different examples of children at play, actively engaged in the home and Kinderclass were, as previously debated, in some instances included for assessment purposes. Meaning that although the photographs and videos captured

children's interests, (Chesworth, 2016; Hedges et al., 2011) they were also used to measure children against expected norms.

6.5. Chapter summary

To conclude, this chapter has used the detail presented in the findings to answer each of the three research questions. The principal focus and aim of this study was to investigate parent partnership working in ECEC, and this discussion chapter has illustrated how the relationships with the mothers in this one preschool was influenced by many different factors. Working in partnership with parents supposes that it is a binary, relationship, between the key person and parent – in this study the mother. However, as this research demonstrates there are many different interrelationships present, and most importantly one of these is with the child. Documentation did open up possibilities for collaboration between the adults, it acted as a conduit in the interviews but there was further potential to see how documentation could be used in pedagogical practice, with adults and also for and with children. This will be explored further in the following concluding chapter alongside my contribution to knowledge.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

This doctoral thesis primarily set out to investigate partnership with parents in ECEC practice using documentation as the vehicle for exploring the perceptions of a group of parents and practitioners. The purpose of an Educational Doctorate is twofold; it has the potential to inform academic research and integrate this into practice, and this was my motivation when choosing which area to focus this thesis on. This chapter will now consider the implications of this research for early childhood practice and include my contribution to knowledge in the ECEC field. At the outset of this study, I had two clear aims with the intention of:

- Exploring the perspectives of a group of mothers and practitioners about what constitutes partnership working in Early Childhood Education and Care.
- Examining the way digital documentation informs how the mothers and practitioners share, co-construct and evaluate their understanding of child development and learning, when working together in partnership.

7.2. Parent partnership is not neutral.

It is widely recognised and documented throughout this thesis that relationships are not neutral. The dynamics of working with others are even more complex when you add to the mix the responsibility that accompanies sharing the care and education of young children. In summing up the contribution this thesis can make to knowledge and practice, I am reminded of the following quotation by Kathy Sylva and the team when publishing their report into the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project:

For all children, the quality of the home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. *What parents do is more important than who parents are* (Sylva et al., 2004, p. 1).

This last sentence stresses the important role parents have in their child's life. It has powerful ethical implications for practice as it recognises that while all parents at times, regardless of their socio-economic status will need advice, help and support;

their interactions with the children far outweigh other factors. The research presented in this thesis was conducted with mothers, however, in chapter 1, the introduction, I explained how often the term parents is used interchangeably. Notwithstanding the different titles used in practice, ECEC practitioners are in a fortunate position as they have the potential to foster relationships with parents that are reflective, open and transparent. In doing this they can work together to best meet the learning and developmental needs of children. This is a significant consideration for when developing a partnership, and one that this research has sought to highlight. This thesis has also demonstrated the imbalance of power that can exist if routines and practices are not fully understood or have equal meaning to all partners.

Using the collaborative research design with the seven mothers and four practitioners enabled me to explore their perception of partnership, nevertheless, being fully involved in the phenomenographic interview process challenged my position as researcher. Being embedded in the collection of data reaffirmed my ontological position as detailed in chapter 4, that each one of us had a different understanding of what working in partnership meant. It is impossible to generalise what parent partnership should look like in every ECEC setting as it will vary from place to place and partnership is a construction formed by the individuals involved. During this study the mothers and practitioners had developed their own pedagogical relationship and it was informed and influenced by different factors shaped by their social, historical and cultural experiences. They engaged in a working partnership, even so, different approaches to parenting, care and education became evident, some explicit but others less so. Consequently, it should be recognised that each partner's experience will vary and they will bring different qualities and challenges to the partnership. The key message being that power relations will not disappear and in any seemingly collaborative relationship, it will be necessary to understand that inequalities will inevitably be present, as will diverse and sometimes competing agendas.

Tapestry, the digital platform (The Foundation Stage Forum Ltd, 2022), utilised by Kinderclass encouraged the mothers and practitioners to recall past events and to make predictions about what they could see their child doing. Children learning and developing language and communication were highlighted by the participants, but the discourse of assessment was clear throughout. The practitioners articulated their

professional responsibilities, relating these to the requirements of the EYFS. Additionally, the parents spoke about their aspirations for children; they wanted to see that they were learning and that Kinderclass was preparing them for school. This emphasis on children's learning is not unique in itself. The discourse about children being ready is widely promoted and the EYFS requires practitioners to promote teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' (DfE, 2021b, p. 5). Nevertheless, the eagerness to prepare children for the next step exhibited in this thesis has implications for pedagogical practice between parents and practitioners, especially given that the children featured in this study were so young and aged between 2 and 3 years of age.

7.2.1. Documentation has a place.

Using observations of children to inform assessment practices has a long history in ECEC, as does using this information to document their learning and understand children's every day experiences (Alcock, 2000). In chapter 5, I described the way Kinderclass used digital documentation to inform their pedagogical practice, based on my evaluation that they used Tapestry to not only record assessment information but also to tell the child's story. The images, and narratives presented in the interviews represented the children's experiences in the home, with family members as well as day-to-day in the setting. Yet, the collaborative potential of the documentation was not fully realised, and it became clear in the interviews that the practitioners were the instigators in the main. This poses challenges for practice; documentation in digital form has many possibilities, so while it has the potential to be a participatory tool for making learning visible and shareable (Cowan & Flewitt, 2021, p. 3), the need to record children's achievements is ever present.

Practitioners have a professional responsibility to introduce the parent and child to the setting's policies and routines, how they collect information, observe, plan and assess children will be the basis of an induction to the setting. It will be during these early interactions that new and alternative ways to use documentation with parents and children can be explored, but practitioners will inevitably hold a position of power; and whilst they can actively encourage inclusivity, they should also take time to reflect on the potential for inequity. Furthermore, in order to realise the possibilities documentation can offer, it will be necessary to acknowledge and recognise the

barriers parents face in contributing to the documentation, and whilst, settings such as Kinderclass cannot mitigate all circumstances that may prevent parents uploading and contributing to their child's pictorial biography, they can look at creative ways to make participation possible.

7.2.2. How digital documentation frames the child

One of the benefits the mothers raised in the interviews was that the documentation helped them to "see" their child – this was related to being happy in the preschool, happy playing with friends, or engaged in play and learning. This perception of using the documentation to see is an important one; it suggests that the mothers believed the visual image, or video, captured the child and their feelings. However, this image represents a moment in time viewed through the eyes of the mothers and practitioners. The process of documenting involves the documenter making a choice about what to record, what to upload and why. Ethically this raises questions for practitioners and parents about how children's everyday experiences are captured in the images, and for what purpose.

Interestingly, it was not only the child who attended Kinderclass that was the focus of attention during the interviews. Their siblings were openly discussed as they appeared in the images in the documentation. This was an unexpected development and reinforces the argument that children's lives are not only being recorded but also surveyed (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010, p. 259). The preschool attendance of each sibling was openly talked about, there seemed to be an acceptance that being visible meant their stories could be included. And, whilst the contribution may be based on historical and familial memories and regarded as offering a contribution to the partnership, the relevance of sharing such information is questionable. Making such assumptions about the way children are interpreted presents moral dilemmas for researchers and practitioners as it positions children as subjects in the images. Lindgren (2012, p. 338) discusses how documenting children's experiences makes them visible, and this contributes to a discourse where their visibility frames them as "innocent" and as subjects to be observed - this perspective could be applied to the findings of this research. The mothers and practitioners freely talked about their children; they accessed and interpreted their social worlds through the visuals in the documentation, and for them this practice was undisputed and normalised. This has

implications for ensuring ECEC practice is equitable, if children are only ever viewed through the eyes of the adult onlookers.

Documentation is recognised in ECEC practice as a tool to enable, adults to record, observe, and assess and it is also described as a means to promote the child's autonomy through "genuine listening" (De Sousa, 2019, p. 382). I believe the potential of documentation is often misunderstood, as the possibility of developing the child's visual journey is overshadowed by the requirement to inform assessments of the children. For example, in this research it was less apparent that the setting used digital documentation to recognise children's autonomy. That said, the children had a presence, not only because their learning journey at Kinderclass was documented but also because their everyday experiences were spoken about during the interviews. In the discussion chapter, 6, I theorised that the children's funds of knowledge were recognised by the adults as a way to understand how the children negotiated their personal routines, informed by their historical and cultural experiences. When viewed through a critical lens, the act of documenting was not automatically disempowering for the children, sociocultural theory offered an opportunity to try and understand how the children were making sense of their day-to-day experiences. Therefore, it is suggested that applying the funds of knowledge approach may help parents and practitioners evaluate what they see but also how the use documentation in a more collaborative way with children. The caveat will still remain, however, that the adults who are documenting and interpreting children's experiences are in the more powerful position of being the onlooker, and this concept is an interesting area to explore further in research.

7.3. Study limitations

This small-scale qualitative study has shed a light on the experiences of a group of mothers and practitioners as they engaged in negotiating, what parent partnership meant to them and their children. The focus on partnership was brought to life in the study through the sharing of digital documentation. However, I recognise that when conducting research with a small number of individuals that focuses on a particular context, there are inevitable limitations. In this section I will consider these in relation to my professional role and the methodology used to gather and analyse the data. My various professional roles working in ECEC practice have undoubtedly helped

me to form a view of what working in practice with parents and their children looks like from my perspective. In chapters 4 and 6, I discussed my position as a researcher, being an insider but also on the outside. This dilemma is common to researchers who conduct research into their own profession. Even though I had read about positionality and the potential for bias, in reality being close to research focus and data was also a weakness.

I had a pre-existing relationship with Kinderclass; they were a setting who had supported the students attending the course I lead and I had visited and observed a number of students on placement in the setting in the two years leading up to the start of my doctoral research. Additionally, the setting was known to the University as a number of their employed practitioners had studied on the BA Hons in Early Years – a part-time degree course that I was also involved in teaching. This meant that I had an established professional relationship with the practitioners and it was important that I did not take this familiarity for granted. Nevertheless, knowing the setting provided me with an opportunity, as familiarity also meant they were knowledgeable about the process of research and how this could be used to support practice. During my visits to Kinderclass, I had been struck by their welcoming approach to visitors, and also had observed their interactions with parents and carers. The setting had a familiar ethos and after my initial approach, they offered to be the host setting for the research study.

Following ethical clearance, the practitioners were asked to talk to the parents of their key children. I was aware that Kinderclass used Tapestry as their documentation tool, and so asked the practitioners to approach parents who they felt they were familiar with using this process. Handing over the selection of parent participants introduced the risk of bias to the research process; I was aware that the practitioners could potentially choose parents they already felt they had a close working relationship with. However, as this thesis was concerned with perceptions of parent partnership, I took the decision that familiarity outweighed the potential for bias, based on the decision that the participant mothers would feel more comfortable discussing their relationship with their child's key person if they already had an existing relationship.

Using phenomenography as a research approach was chosen initially as I was attracted to the concept of the conversational interview. The interview method was both enlightening but also limiting as explained in chapter 6. I became involved in the dialogue about ECEC practice, and so entangled in the data collection process that I offered suggestions and also volunteered information about my previous professional roles. Analysing the interview data through a reflective and reflexive lens enabled me to recognise where my professional power had crept into the interview conversations, nevertheless, this is an implication that would need to be considered carefully if future research was to be pursued.

7.4. Recommendations for practice and further research

In discussing the research aims in the introduction to this chapter and in answering the research questions in chapter 6, I have referred to several implications for practice and future research. I recognise that parent partnership will differ in every ECEC setting; this is inevitable as each parent, child and practitioner is unique, influenced by their experiences, and they will each construct their own version of partnership. My recommendations are aimed at opening up opportunities for discussion in ECEC practice, as a provocation perhaps, and in doing so play some part in ensuring parent partnership is not taken for granted, but carefully considered. Recommendations for practice and future research are summarised as follows:

- Practitioners employed in ECEC are encouraged to reflect on their practice, this is an important personal and pedagogical tool. This recommendation is aimed at practitioners and suggests that reflection should include a recognition of the presence of professional power and how this can affect the dynamics within partnership relationships, both with the parents and the child. Partnership should be open to scrutiny, honesty and transparency.
- This second recommendation builds on the practice of reflection. If partnership with parents is to be a collaborative process, then using pedagogical documentation as a joint reflective tool has credibility. The digital format, as featured in this thesis, opens up the possibility of instant access and enhanced visual/virtual and creative opportunities to co-construct knowledge with adults and children. However, there

should be a caveat in relation to the assumptions made when using digital documentation; the documenter holds the power, they choose what to curate and this relates to how the child, their siblings and other individuals are positioned, present yet silent. Using documentation in practice should be conducted in a transparent and ethical way, recognising that it can only ever represent a moment in time.

- Finally, documentation is a tool for recording observations, but is used by adults to look at children; it positions them as a subject rather than partner, they are present but their thoughts, feelings and voice is represented by the adults who care for them. There is the potential to recognise what children are telling us, in their images and stories, by interpreting their funds of knowledge. It is important, therefore, to tune in and listen, all the while recognising it is the representation of a moment in time. This thesis has also referred to the body of work that challenges the way documentation is used in practice, to assess children against developmental norms. Tracking children's progress, being ready, especially for school appeared to be a common language used in Kinderclass, and documentation processes appeared to endorse this dialogue. Hence, this last recommendation is about being open and honest from the outset and recognising what documentation can offer pedagogical practice alongside being aware of its limitations.

7.5. The Covid-19 pandemic implications for future parent partnership work in ECEC

In concluding this thesis, it is important to reflect on parent partnership in 2022/23. This is because ECEC practice has endured a wide-ranging cultural change since I started to explore the research for this study. In 2020 the world was plunged into a pandemic as England reacted to Covid 19 and the impact on public health, businesses, schools and early childhood services were affected by a series of government enforced lockdowns. The impact for ECEC settings were numerous; working parents/carers if their employment was not regarded as essential, were either furloughed or instructed to work from home. This resulted in settings having fewer children attending which translated into financial insecurity and many settings struggled to balance their budgets (Hardy et al., 2022). Where parents/carers were

employed as key workers (essential for the infrastructure of the country), or if they were regarded as vulnerable (in receipt of funding under the 2-year-offer) provision at ECEC settings continued, where possible. Nevertheless, some settings closed temporarily (La Valle et al., 2022), resulting in patchy ECEC provision across the country.

Parent partnership as described in this thesis undoubtedly changed during the pandemic. ECEC settings had to follow guidelines to limit the spread of Covid-19. Where they would have previously welcomed parents and invited them into settings, for example at drop-off and collection times, or to stay and play, restrictions were put in place. As this study has explored, working in partnership involves fostering relationships between the key adults and children, communication happens spontaneously as well as through structured channels. The pandemic meant there was a restriction on parents being able to enter preschool settings, and whilst practitioners will have endeavoured to make sure communication between parents and practitioners continued to happen, undoubtedly this will have been a challenge.

Anecdotal evidence gathered through my role as placement tutor confirms that ECEC settings struggled to provide consistency for families and contact with parents had to occur through structured processes. Practitioners only way of ensuring essential information was conveyed to parents was at set times of the day and in specific places. This often meant talking to a parent in the setting's entrance lobby, or in some cases (as experienced personally when collecting my grandson) outside the main door; unsurprisingly this will have had an impact on partnership relationships. Nonetheless, digital pedagogical documentation, if used by a setting and accessible to parents, will have offered some benefits, ensuring there was a communication channel open between parents and practitioner, albeit in a virtual way.

7.6. Concluding comments

This thesis investigated parent partnership in ECEC, and the findings confirm that the relationships that form between the child, parent and practitioner are influenced by a variety of different social and cultural factors. Inevitably then, as society changes there will be an impact on the way partnerships are constructed. Degotardi (2015, p. 1) suggests that relationships should be at the “core of early childhood

practice”, and this notion resonates with the findings of this thesis. The adults who care for children have the potential to negotiate a pedagogical practice where they support children to learn through socially and collaboratively constructed interpersonal interactions. This means being open to understanding what each partner - parent, child and practitioner - brings to the partnership. Documentation can act as a channel to promote such collaboration, through the involvement of children in their own pictorial biography. However, if it is only ever from an adult perspective, opportunities may be missed to see how children can be involved, especially if there is an overreliance on assessment practices and documentation becomes a tool to monitor targets, placing children as subjects under surveillance (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010, p. 260).

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Appendix 1. CAQDAS

Example of CAQDAS, coding relating to children's monitoring and assessment using NVivo,

Reference 7 - 0.11% Coverage

That can bring out some speech and language as well.

Reference 8 - 0.30% Coverage

What I do is I'll write a list, and I write it down and think, I haven't seen Asha read for a while. Right, I need to do an observation on Asha reading.

Reference 9 - 0.34% Coverage

Um or um maybe thinking, oh she looks a bit low on counting, so [pause], so um (clears throat) I'll think, ooh I must get Asha to do some counting. No matter what we're doing.

Examples of documentation

Reference 2 - 0.19% Coverage

I think the Tapestry really helped me in the early weeks, especially if she had a c-, a wobble.

Reference 3 - 0.24% Coverage

And then straight away I got a Tapestry notification, or a text on my phone saying 'we've sent you a photo on Tapestry'.

Reference 4 - 0.12% Coverage

oh she's fine, she's fine', but when you actually get the,

Reference 5 - 0.04% Coverage

But to actually see it.

Reference 6 - 0.07% Coverage

To actually see her happy and playing.

Appendix 2. Ethical approval

Subject: Module 4 - Ethical Approval FINK

Hi, Following review of your Module 4 Research Plan submission confirmation that:

SREIC has awarded you ethical approval subject to on-going review by yourself and your supervisor. Prof James Avis, Dr Ann Harris.

Best wishes

Carolyn Newton
Research and International Administrator

T: 01484 478109

c.a.newton@hud.ac.uk www.hud.ac.uk

School of Education and Professional Development

University of Huddersfield | Queensgate | Huddersfield | HD1 3DH

Appendix 3. Researcher consent form E5

University of Huddersfield

School of Education and Professional Development

Researcher Consent Form (E5)

This form is to be used when consent is sought from those responsible for an organisation or institution for research to be carried out with participants within that organisation or institution. This may include schools, colleges or youth work facilities.

Title of Research Study: Working title: Valuing the relationship between parents, children and practitioners

Name of Researcher: Amanda Crow

School/College/organisation: University of Huddersfield

- i) This research project will focus on the relationships that develop between the parent/s, the nursery key person and the child. Of particular interest is the way we as adults see the child and interpret their thoughts, words and behaviours.
- ii) At this initial stage of the study, I would like to meet staff and their key parents, at a convenient time to explain the study after which I intend to spend time in the nursery setting.
- iii) I will then arrange to interview the parent and practitioner together.

I confirm that I give permission for this research to be carried out and that permission from all participants will be gained in line within my organisation's policy.

Name and position of senior manager:

.....

Signature of senior manager:.....

Date:

Name of Researcher:Amanda Crow, contact details 01484 478100, a.crow@hud.ac.uk

Signature of Researcher:

Date: 5th November 2016

Appendix 4. Participant information sheet

University of Huddersfield School of Education and Professional Development

Participant Information Sheet (E3)

Research Project Title: Valuing the relationship between parents, children and practitioners.

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information and discuss it with others if you wish and ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the project?

This research project will focus on the relationships that develop between the parent/s, the nursery key person and most importantly the child. Of particular interest is the way we as adults see the child and interpret their thoughts, words and behaviours. I am interested in the practices you use to record children's learning, including assessments and learning journals.

Why have I been chosen?

After an initial visit to the Preschool to discuss the project, your family was recommended to the researcher.

Do I have to take part?

Participation on this study is entirely voluntary, so please do not feel obliged to take part. Refusal will involve no penalty whatsoever and you may withdraw from the study at any stage without giving an explanation to the researcher.

What do I have to do?

This is the pilot and experimental stage of the study and I would like to be guided by you and your child. I will initially meet with you at a convenient time to explain the study after which I intend to spend time in the nursery setting observing and working alongside the staff. I will then arrange an interview with you to understand the way you contribute to tapestry, the online resource that is used in the setting.

Are there any disadvantages to taking part?

There should be no foreseeable disadvantages to your participation. If you are unhappy or have further questions at any stage in the process, please address your concerns initially to the researcher if this is appropriate. Alternatively, please contact the research supervisor Janet Fink School of Education & Professional Development, University of Huddersfield. tel. 01484 8262 or J.Fink@hud.ac.uk

Will all my details be kept confidential?

All information which is collected will be strictly confidential and anonymised before the data is presented in the Dissertation, in compliance with the Data Protection Act and ethical research guidelines and principles.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of this research will be written up in a Doctoral Thesis and presented for assessment in 2019. If you would like a copy please contact the researcher.

Who has reviewed and approved the study, and who can be contacted for further information:

The research supervisor is Professor Janet Fink and they can be contacted at the University of Huddersfield on the above address.

Name & Contact Details of Researcher: Amanda Crow School of Education and Professional Development room LS1/39. Tel 01484 478100/07734 370548

Thank you for your time.

Appendix. 5. Participant consent form

Participant Consent Form (E4)

Title of Research Study: Valuing the relationship between parents, children and practitioners

Name of Researcher: Amanda Crow

Participant Identifier Number: XX

- I confirm that I have read and understood the participant Information sheet related to this research and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
- I understand that all my responses will be anonymised.
- I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.
- I agree to take part in the above study

Name of Participant:

Signature of Participant:

Date:

Name of Researcher: Amanda Crow

Signature of Researcher:

Date: