

The University of Derby

**Reconceptualising the Third Teacher:
A study of trainee experiences of work-based learning on Level 3 Early Years
programmes**

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Submitted as fulfilment of Doctor of Education

July 2023

Abstract

There is a paucity of research exploring learning and pedagogy in the Early Years workplace. This thesis addresses that gap by exploring how learning and pedagogy are differently experienced by early years trainees pursuing a Level 3 early years apprenticeship and a full-time diploma early childhood programme. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides the theoretical framework for this qualitative study, which was predicated on the belief that knowledge is gained from practice through experiences of the learner within the ecological theory model and that further development is built upon interactions within the workplace. Eight early childhood practitioners participated in the study, which adopted a case study approach and utilised a range of methods including on-line interviews, focus-groups, observations, and reflective diaries contributed by the participants.

The study illustrates how potential work-based learning opportunities are mediated by the type of learning programme pursued by trainees, also demonstrating how early childhood practitioners with a stronger learning orientation achieve higher levels of work-based competence/expertise of being an early years professional. Colleagues and supervisors' social support within practice was found to play a significant role in job competence/expertise, highlighting the need for highly trained practitioners within the area of early childhood. Related to this, the study found that the role of the 'third teacher', or learning within the early years workplace environment, is significant in outcomes for trainees in the Early Years sector. The informal relationships that the trainee professional makes with other colleagues is based on the findings of this research, which has given a new idea to how early years professionals are learning whilst undertaking their training courses. The thesis clearly argues that there is a change in what is meant by the third teacher and reconceptualises what it means, regarding early years work-based learning.

It concludes that there are significant differences in the work-place learning opportunities offered to trainees on different programmes, and that the importance of developing informal connections with early years colleagues provides the basis for work-based learning in Early Years training.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASCL	Apprenticeship, Skills and Children and Learning
BERA	British Educational Research Association
C/E	Competence/expertise
DFE	Department for Education
EPPE	Pre School-Education Project
ERR	Employee Rights and Responsibilities
EYE	Early years educator
GLH	Guided Learning Hours
IfATE	Institute for Apprentices and Technical Education
IL	Informal Learning
LCP	Learner Centred Pedagogy
NPQEYL	National Professional Qualification in Early Years Leadership
RQF	Regulated Qualification Framework
SASE	Specification of Apprenticeship Standards in England
TC	Threshold Concepts
TCP	Teacher Centred Pedagogy
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNCRC	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WAL	Work Applied Learning
WBL	Work-based Learning
WHO	World Health Organisation
WPL	Workplace Learning
YTS	Youth Training Schemes

Preface

I confirm that the work included in this thesis has been written entirely by myself and that ethical approval was granted by the University of Derby ethics committee.

Acknowledgements

My Ed D has been a journey, and it is a good place for me to acknowledge all of those who have made this journey of mine possible.

My dedicated supervisory team; **Professor Liz Atkins** and **Professor Bill Esmond**. Their guidance and support have been exemplary. They have kept me on track, assisted when illness and diversions have cropped up along the way and have reassured me throughout this process.

My participants – dedicated early years professionals, without whom I would not have got anywhere with this research and not had the findings to be able to write my thesis. The professionals who I deem as the experts have all been amazing, accommodating and for that I am truly thankful.

Any journey is made better with those who travel alongside. I want to thank all my colleagues. The great ECSDN Executive team, requires a special mention, **Philippa Thompson, Dr Tanya Richardson, Dr Jackie Musgrave, Dr Helen Simmons, and Dr Helen Perkins**, who have encouraged me and assisted me where it was needed. To **Wendy, Rosie, and Vic** who have been my Ed D buddies throughout and to my good colleagues **Caroline Prior, Dr Valerie Daniel, Ruth Swailes, Jo Gilks, Dr Sue Allingham, Kate Barker, and Maureen Hunt**. For believing in me and being so supportive of my work every step of the way. They have kept me thinking, kept me questioning and have been a great support.

The research journey has not been without its problems, with obstacles such as Covid-19, it wasn't easy and came with many challenges. This meant that the research had to be changed due to the pandemic.

Finally, and by no means least, the real life, the ones who give me fire in my belly, my wonderful husband **Gary**, and my mum **Sue**. Without their encouragement, I would not have had the support and inspiration to carry this journey on. Thank you to every single one of you. Much love and respect to you all.

Chapter 1

Research Context

Introduction

From an educational point of view, the early years workplace is an important and generally overlooked site. It allows perspectives on learning which can be difficult to perceive in schools, colleges, and universities, in which a more formal, purposeful, and explicit approach obscures the informal, unintentional, and tacit aspects of teaching and learning. In drawing attention to the practice of informal learning, workplaces point towards a broader conception of learning within early years practice. Furthermore, sociological research on workplace learning suggests that learning informally through practice is as significant as formal learning for individuals and organisations (Coffield, 2002; Eraut, 2007). The way in which individuals and teams learn through their work may also help us understand and optimise learning processes in work for early years professionals, which leads to a further understanding of vocational education and training. Much of the research within this study, focusing on the literature, is positioned in the early years workplace as a site for learning and has developed clear themes from the literature review about the extent to how early years practitioners are learning within the workplace, or alternatively about the organisation of the workplace and how this supports learning.

The research is positioned in the early years, in terms of being able to understand the role of being an early years professional and what this involves by investigating the learning that happens within the workplace for students on an early years educator level 3 course. Previous research in the field has focused heavily on the role of professionalism for practitioners (Osgood, 2006), but not necessarily how professionals acquire those skills and who from. Therefore, the study addresses a gap within the academic literature where it brings new literature and knowledge to both the Technical Vocational Education Training literature and the early years. The early childhood sector is in crisis (Burgess-Macey et al., 2020). The research will empirically and theoretically explore work-based learning for early childhood professionals, and how this learning supports the expertise needed to be an early childhood professional (Nutbrown, 2012), but at the same time explore key points to address the

recruitment and retention crisis outlined by Burgess-Macey et al. (2020). The research will give an account of those early years professionals who have participated in this research to help scope the outcomes of this thesis, focusing on learning and the workplace as a mode for learning and how students are supported both formally and informally on their early years course.

Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1992), argues that knowledge is gained through experience, and that further development occurs through interaction with colleagues over a period of time. I wanted to use Bronfenbrenner over other theories such as communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991), as I wanted to highlight how Bronfenbrenner's theory positions the learner within the centrality of a process which focuses on their individual learning within the context of work-based learning. Rather than that of communities of practice where there are many interactions with a group of people learning together. As a result of the theoretical framework, this research has a clear and robust approach to the literature review, which then supports the data collection and the findings. There may be a perception that the theory is too complex for use in either research or the classroom. Bronfenbrenner (1977) argues that by using the Person Process Context Time (PPCT) model, proximal processes can be simultaneously influenced by three types of person characteristics (demand, resource, and force) for each individual involved in the proximal process of interest, as well as four levels of context (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem) (Tudge et al., 2016). It is possible that this is one reason why so many researchers tend to view the theory as something much simpler, one that focuses only on how context influences development.

However, as the thesis will go onto explain Bronfenbrenner's theory (e.g. Tudge et al., 2009; Tudge et al., 2016), it is not necessary to include all types of person characteristics and all levels of context in any given study. Any research based on his theory must include proximal processes as an essential component. Specifically, the study must focus on the activities that are typically taken part in by the developing individual. According to Bronfenbrenner (1992), proximal processes are affected by individual characteristics, so the study must include at least a few individuals who differ on one or more relevant characteristics. Furthermore, since the theory states that the proximal processes are also affected by context, at least one level of

context must be considered in the study and for this thesis the context is the formal and informal learning within the early years setting.

Focus and detailed rationale for the research

A rationale for the study is presented, in which I first justify its specific focus in relation to other research into workplace learning, situating it within the practices of the early years. To understand workplace learning in the early years, first we need to understand the early years workforce. In recent years, despite significant increases in the take up and provision of early childhood education in the UK, the sector has struggled to recruit and retain professionals. Limited development opportunities and low wages have contributed to this trend (Bury et al., 2020). To be able to accomplish an understanding of this, I will discuss the theoretical framework used within this thesis. The purpose of this study was to investigate what practitioners say about the experiences they encountered through their programmes including their experience of work-based learning. This study addresses a gap within research by exploring how learning and pedagogy are differently experienced by early years trainees pursuing a level 3 early years apprenticeship and a full-time diploma early childhood programme. These courses are currently one of the most popular routes into the early childhood workforce in England and are designed to provide early years professionals with a nationally recognised qualification. To qualify as a high-quality early childhood educator, there is a set of criteria that must be met.

The Department for Education (DfE) is responsible for defining and outlining Level 3 qualifications and the content that early years practitioners must possess to be included in the ratios specified in the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (2021). According to the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (2021), all early years providers are required to meet certain standards to ensure that children can learn and develop, and that they are provided with opportunities where they are healthy and safe. This thesis demonstrates the specific competencies and expertise needed for work-based learning that are informed, both formally and informally, by the professional development of early years practitioners. In addition, it demonstrates that the social aspects of early childhood practice from colleagues and supervisors are closely related to the competence/expertise of early

years professionals. Moreover, the study provides evidence that early childhood practitioners with a stronger learning orientation achieve a higher level of work-based competence/expertise, providing some insight into why individuals participate differently in learning opportunities that are offered within the work environment.

Placing Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1992) work at the centre of the theoretical framework enabled me to place the early childhood practitioner at the centre of the learning process. By exploring how knowledge is acquired within the early years workplace through formal and informal learning, the research hypothesises a model for professionals in the early years through what is meant as the third teacher. This allows the research to establish a link between the early years professional, their practice and how this then relates to the role of being qualified and undertaking a role which informs early education and care. As part of this research, qualitative data has been collected from early years professionals to develop a conceptual understanding of the links between practice, learning, and pedagogy, which builds on and extends from previous literature and research.

To reconceptualise what is known about the third teacher in the early years, Malaguzzi's (1996) research and concept of the third teacher has been used. In his view, the physical environment plays a significant role in children's learning and development. In Malaguzzi's philosophy, the importance of creating a space that is engaging, stimulating, and reflective of the children's interests and needs is emphasized. The importance of the classroom environment has long been recognised by researchers as places of learning without the need of a teacher in its physical form (Malaguzzi, 1996). The Reggio Emilia approach specifically in early childhood education outlined by Malaguzzi is a philosophy surrounding the notion that "children explore visual and expressive languages in strict synergy with verbal, body and logical ones" (Lorenzo, 2019, p.130). However, this study reconceptualises two aspects of what is known about the third teacher. To do this, it is a necessity that I incorporate the environment as a concept where learning takes place, from a student's perspective, then bring on board the role of mentors and colleagues within the settings that support those students in becoming qualified early years professionals. The third teacher approach defined within this research as informal learning with colleagues provides trainees with the opportunity to move from being educated themselves to practicing as professionals (Nolan

and Molla, 2017). This is a new phenomenon and one that has been developed through interpretation of the participants data and experiences. Taking this on board this approach links to Bronfenbrenner's microsystem in terms of positioning the student in the centre of their learning and placing them within a context of environmental factors. I had to reconceptualise the understanding of the third teacher by drawing on the data and reflecting on the research. Firstly, it is important to recognise how the environment supports development of an early years professional within the early years work setting, and secondly, those professionals who are well established within the settings support the mentoring and development of the early years professionals expertise. Therefore this thesis is going to demonstrate what the meaning of the third teacher is and how we can demonstrate the importance of informal learning for trainee students on work based programmes in the future.

I believe that this investigation is worthwhile for three main reasons. Firstly, this study aims to enhance the evidence base for a clear understanding of learning and work-based practice, especially within early years, which is highly dynamic and rapidly changing. Secondly, the study aims to provide insights into how early years professionals might develop through both informal and formal learning within early years settings. Finally, these insights can be applied to other contexts of early childhood practice and will enhance further training pedagogies for future trainees within the technical vocational education and training sector and the early years. I intend to examine Bronfenbrenner's theory and his Process Person Context Time (PPCT) (Xia et al., 2020) model to conceptualise learning practices within the early years, which will examine the links between formal and informal learning.

Research questions and objectives

The research will answer the following objectives, and questions.

The research objectives:

1. To understand early years practitioner's experience of their Level 3 qualification.
2. To establish an understanding of how formal and informal development of early years practice has supported their competence/expertise to become an early years practitioner.
3. To identify key features of work-based learning within early years training.
4. To identify whether the two early years qualifications prepare early years practitioners to become qualified and ready to practice.
5. To establish an understanding of the early years workforce and the mentorship provided both formally and informally to early years trainees.

The objectives addressed in this research focus on responding to the following research questions:

- RQ1: How do early years practitioners develop early years knowledge while undertaking their level 3 early years training course.
- RQ2: Can any differences be identified with regards to how early years trainees develop both formally and informally within early years settings.
- RQ3: How do early years practitioners apply the work-place learning which supports the competence/expertise to become a qualified early years practitioner?

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 discusses a wide range of sources including contemporary debates on vocational education and early years and how this links to the theoretical framework. I have developed a theoretical model which focuses on the experience of the early years learner within the context of the Person, Process Context Time model (PPCT) focusing on their own learning within the workplace, and this is also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 3 focuses on the review of the literature which also gives the focus to the theoretical framework. This is placed within the centre of the literature and has supported a discussion and themed sources including contemporary debates on vocational education and early years. However, the literature review demonstrates the relevance of this research for vocational education and training, within the context of time and vocational level 3 qualifications within the early years. This will then draw upon pedagogical considerations for work-based learning in the early years. The chapter draws upon the relevance of the literature in the context of the learners' development and early years competence/expertise. A discussion of work-based learning is a centralised part of the literature review, and a holistic literature search is attributed to the focus on answering the research aim, objectives, and questions. There will be a clear themed discussion on the early years, including centralising the professional within their own practice and highlighting their personal development. The literature will discuss early years trainees formal and informal learning practices and how these support the gaining of knowledge through work-based pedagogy.

Chapter 4 is the methodology. The chapter positions the study and provides a detailed account of the design of the research, the procedures for the data collection, ethical considerations and the measures adopted within the research. In addition to this, the chapter draws attention to the procedures which are adopted for the qualitative data analysis, linking back to Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1992) theoretical framework and PPCT model. It illustrates how potential work-based learning opportunities are mediated by the type of learning programme pursued by trainees, which also demonstrates how early childhood practitioners with a stronger learning orientation achieve higher levels of work-based competence/expertise. Within this study the early years professionals construct their own

realities and have a unique experience of their education during their programme of study. The central aim of how early years level 3 trainees experience work-based learning to support a transition from theory to practice will be explored.

Chapter 5 - In this chapter the research findings are outlined and discussed. These findings are organised by answering the research questions. According to Merriam (1998), data analysis is the process of making sense of the data. The questions for this research were linked to the aim of the thesis. The chapter explores the thematic analysis, by analysing and reporting on key themes which were found within the data. The chapter then explores the interpretation of the findings. The chapter explores each theme through narration of what the participants have stated and how this links to the wider context of the research questions. This chapter concludes by introducing an organisational perspective to the study by maintaining its focus on the work environment of the early years and presents important implications for vocational learning practices within the early years.

Chapter 6 discusses how work-based learning and pedagogy are differently experienced by early years trainees pursuing a level 3 early years qualification. It draws upon evidence from the research and demonstrates that there is a significant difference between work-based learning and how this is applied through different programmes of study. The chapter explores a further concept of the findings and constructs a summary evaluating the key components of the data which have been identified within this research. It focuses on a new concept which investigates the role of experienced early years colleagues and how they play an important formal and informal mentoring role about being what this research determines as the 'third teacher'. Further investigation into the concept of the 'third teacher' has been demonstrated through this research and a detailed analysis is presented within this chapter.

Definition of terms

Many of the terms utilised in this thesis are open to interpretation and have multiple (sometimes conflicting) definitions. However, for clarity the purposes of this research, the following definitions and meanings have been adopted.

Early Years sector

The fragmentation of the early years sector is reflected below. However, all the participants in this study are from group-based providers.

- **School-based providers:** nursery and reception provision in schools, including before- and after-school provision and maintained nursery schools.
- **Group-based providers:** childcare providers registered with Ofsted and operating in non-domestic premises. These will be privately owned nurseries and playgroups.
- **Childminders:** Ofsted-registered childminders providing early years care and operating in domestic settings (excluding providers solely on the voluntary register).

Early Years Professional/ Early Childhood professional

This means the professional working within early years settings. An early years or childhood professional is anyone who directly works with young children from infancy to age 8. Most often referred to as an early childhood educator, these professionals include teachers, daycare workers, outreach workers, nursery nurses and childminders. Brock (2013) argues that early childhood practitioners are characterized by their commitment to young children - they speak with authority and have a wealth of expertise and knowledge when discussing early childhood issues. Despite this, it has historically been difficult to define the nature of professional knowledge, skills, and beliefs in the field of early childhood education.

Payler et al. (2017) discuss that there are a wide variety of titles and roles across the United Kingdom. Titles such as room leader or team leader are effective in describing local roles. There is a lack of clarity about other titles, and a lack of agreement about roles devalues the work; titles are not regulated or registered, fragmenting professional experience. Payler term

is problematic, therefore within this thesis the professionals are identified as early years professionals meaning a qualified early years professional at level 3.

Work based learning

Work-based learning is any programme of training undertaken by students or employees while working. This approach to learning contrasts with institution-based methods of learning, which tend to take place in a classroom, laboratory setting or even in the home via remote learning methods. Work-based learning (WBL) has been described in many ways and has been subject to multiple interpretations and these include in workplace learning, most often divided into formal and informal learning (Manuti, 2015; Rintala et al., 2018). Within this thesis work based learning will mean the practice gained by being an apprentice or diploma student whilst undertaking training to become an early years professional.

Pedagogy

Most simply, pedagogy is the “how” of teaching. It is how the practice of educating and supporting early childhood development takes place, including the techniques and strategies that can be used to provide opportunities for early learning and how the relationships and interactions with children can affect them. However, for this thesis the focus has been on vocational pedagogy as it aligns to the core aspects of the research. Cedefop research paper number 47 (2015, p.17) focuses specifically on student-centered pedagogy in the context of vocational pedagogies. A range of learning theories, teaching methods, and teaching cultures are incorporated into vocational pedagogy in order to make educational provision more accessible and responsive to learners.

Competence/expertise

It has been observed that the words 'competence' and 'competency' have been used inconsistently and sometimes in a confusing manner. Generally, competence is viewed in literature as a set of abilities associated with performance in a specific context, whereas competence refers to a specific capability (Frank et al., 2010).

However it may be argued that standards and competencies are critical structural supports for any professional workforce, including early childhood professionals, and that workforce

capacity building, career progression, and career longevity can be supported by the foundation of consistent competency expectations. These debates highlight the fact that competency is a problematic term. However, in the childcare sector the term is used interchangeably to indicate a level of expertise or qualification and the thesis uses this demonstrate the relationships of those who hold early years expertise within the early years workplace. I am therefore using it in this context. However, during my discussions in chapter 3, which explores vocational qualifications, it has explored that competence can be a narrow, genericised curricula, which is structured around the performance of competence which has provided generations with impoverished curricular in the context of the curriculum (Esmond and Atkins, 2022).

Training and Qualifications

Training and qualifications in the early years were streamlined by the Coalition Government in 2010 – 2015. However, Nutbrown (2021) argues that for educators to be free and capable of being innovative and creative in meeting young children's individual and specific needs, high quality continuing professional development is as important as initial, career-specific qualifications. The two qualifications explored within this thesis are apprenticeships and an applied general qualification level 3 early years educator. Apprenticeships are defined by McNally (2018) as a programme of work and study for young people who are transitioning from full-time education to the workforce (BIS, 2013). Applied generals are more broadly based, introducing the industry area primarily for progression for further study into higher education. The Department for Education (DfE) (2018) states within a report for 16 to 19 performance tables: qualifications in the applied general category; an applied general qualification is an advanced qualification, normally level 3, that allows students between the ages of 16 and 19 to develop transferrable skills and knowledge. Mellor (2015) expands on this and states that an applied general qualification is a level 3 (approximate A Level equivalent) vocational qualification. This thesis will use the term apprenticeship for those participants who were employed and on a programme of study, and diploma learners meaning those participants who were taking a full time applied general in the early years.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The chapter will demonstrate that the theoretical framework is at the centre of the thesis including drawing upon the research questions:

- RQ1: How do early years practitioners develop early years knowledge while undertaking their level 3 early years training course.
- RQ2: Can any differences be identified with regards to how early years trainees develop both formally and informally within early years settings.
- RQ3: How do early years practitioners apply the work-place learning which supports the competence/expertise to become a qualified early years practitioner?

The chapter discusses a wide range of sources including contemporary debates on vocational education and early years and how this links to the theoretical framework. I have developed a theoretical model which focuses on the experience of the early years learner within the context of the Person, Process Context Time model (PPCT) focusing on their own learning within the workplace. However, there are similarities between the Bronfenbrenner ecological theory and that of Situated Learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). However, there is scope to demonstrate how the model builds on the PPCT model to explore the external learning opportunities that the early years professional will get from their own learning experiences. Moreover, the literature review will demonstrate the relevance of the need for this research for vocational education and training, for the context of time and vocational level 3 qualifications within the early years. This will then draw upon pedagogical considerations for work-based learning in the early years. The relevance of the literature between the personal development of the learner and the impact of work-based learning is positioned as an important factor for the development of specific early years competence/expertise.

Key Components of the theoretical framework

A theoretical framework, according to Rojas Smith et al. (2014), is a key concept for the purpose of producing a convincing question, as well as the insights for the design of the research. However, to produce a convincing question I needed to use a theoretical framework which supported the decisions to link the experiences of the participants to a theoretical model of Bronfenbrenner (1992) theory using his Process Person Context Time (PPCT) model. The theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's theory which underpins this research will give an understanding of work-based and institution-based training routes for early years qualifications. It will provide a context which is based in time and how young people prepare for the role in becoming an early years professional. I have adopted a qualitative approach to my research; my reasoning is argued by Freire (1985) who suggested:

For me, the concrete reality is about more than isolated facts. In my view, thinking dialectically, the concrete reality consists not only of concrete facts and physical things, but also includes ways in which people involved with these facts perceive them. (Freire, 1985, p.30)

I have found that Friere's argument of people's perceptions is important and significant in terms of my own understanding of the world, which has led me to use Bronfenbrenner because it facilitates the understanding of individual experiences and perceptions. In this research, learners who have not taken a traditional route to academic qualifications and have chosen a vocational qualification are placed within a broader framework that allows learners to decide on which course they wish to pursue. Looking at Freire's quote, the definition is about giving the students a voice which is about supporting the narrative of this research with an already disadvantaged early years sector in terms of position of the early years practitioner within education, the genderised workforce and pay and conditions. For this reason, I began by scoping the literature. In addition to Friere's work, a further consideration of concepts such as Sociomaterialism (Fenwick, 2015). According to Fenwick (2015), social and material aspects of human behaviour and practice are inseparable and intertwined. According to this theory, material objects and environments play an active role in shaping social interactions and practices rather than merely acting as passive entities. As a result of this perspective, the traditional dichotomization between the social and material realms is challenged and a more integrated perspective is suggested. The sociomaterialist approach discussed by Fenwick

(2015) can be particularly useful in examining educational practices and technologies, according to Fenwick (2015). The approach can assist researchers in understanding how textbooks, computers, and classrooms interact with social practices such as teaching and learning within this context. Sociomaterialism provides insight into how educational practices are enacted and how they can be improved by examining the interplay between these elements.

Sociomaterialism is characterized by its ability to account for social practices' complexity and contingency. Sociomaterialism acknowledges that social practices are constantly evolving and dependent on various factors, including material objects, social norms, and individual agency, rather than treating them as fixed or predetermined. This perspective enables researchers to gain a more nuanced understanding of how social practices are enacted and how they can be altered. Schatzki (2001) proposed practice theory, an interdisciplinary approach to the study of human activity and social interaction. According to this theory, human behaviour is not determined by individual intentions or external structures but is rather determined by the ongoing performance of social practices.

Linking Baker and Leslie's (2017) research about healthcare professionals moving between different settings (classrooms, hospitals, and communities), I was mindful of their proposition and wanted to use these to help scope both the literature and the theoretical framework for this research. (Figure 2.1 demonstrated on the next page).

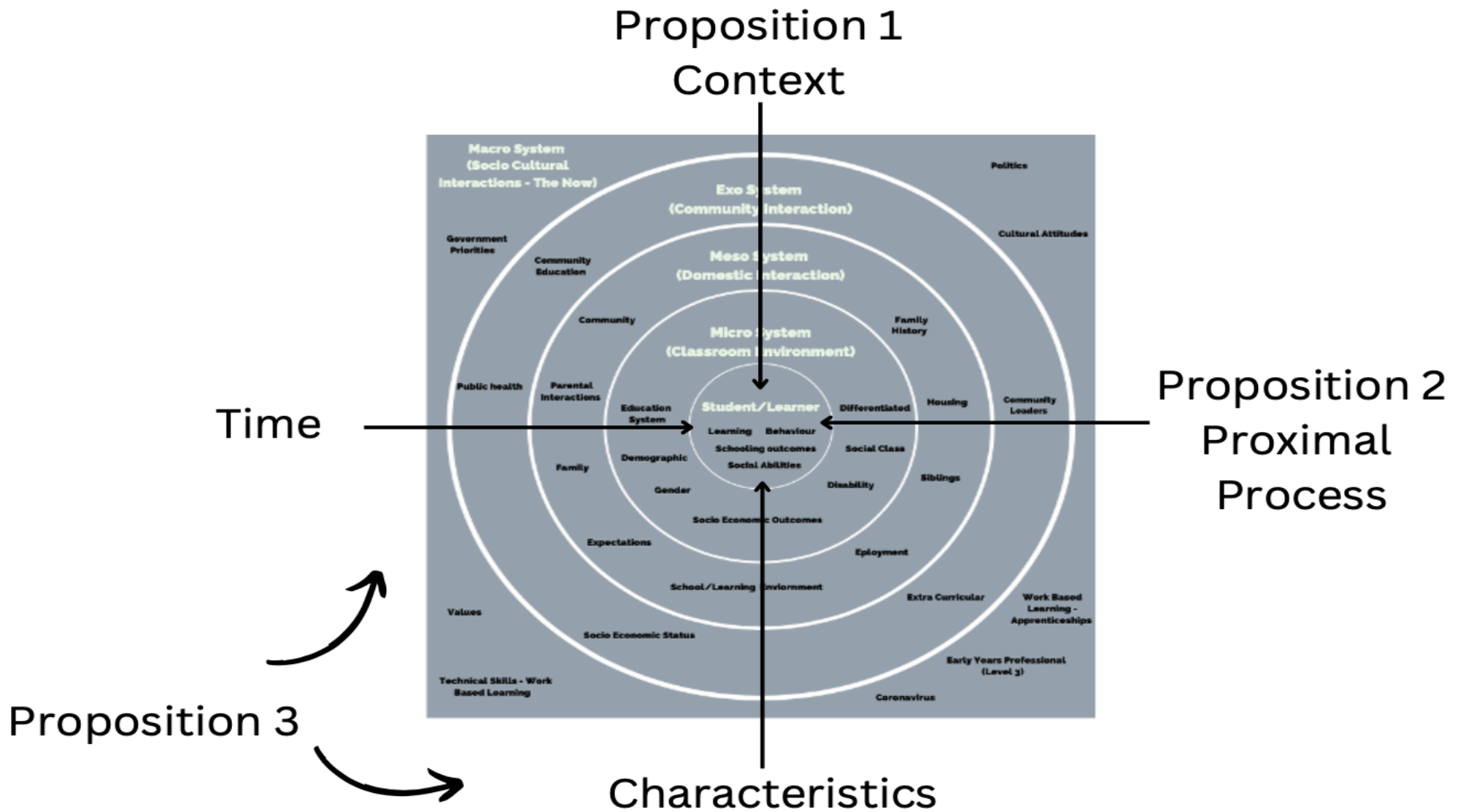


Figure 2.1: Theoretical Framework showing how the bioecological theory and PPCT model combined with types of work-based pedagogies builds the developing early years professionals' knowledge, skills, and competence/expertise

As shown in Figure 2.1, the theoretical framework incorporates the bioecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1992) with Scholtz's (2020) use of work-based pedagogies to explain the role of work in learning. I have adapted Bronfenbrenner so that this is used as a methodology for understanding development and to help theorise different modes of learning within the workplace. Based on Tomlinson's (2004) early use of work-based learning to describe the same phenomenon, the types of early years professionals were described. Considering the importance attached to the work of governments, educational institutions, and other organisations (Nixon et al., 2006), there is a discussion on how work-based learning aligns to institutional learning. In my research, the theoretical framework served as a guide for establishing my research design and guiding the analysis and discussion. Moreover, the colleagues who are based in the early years workplace can support this link to workplace learning by demonstrating how they learn through the interactions which happen within the early years workplace.

The participants' resilience and motivation levels for participating in work-based learning, which I consider to be affected by their chosen course and the characteristics associated with this, is an important focus of this research. Developing early years professionals is influenced by the experiences that they get individually or collectively with other colleagues (proximal processes). As a result, the processes are also influenced and affected (whether positively or negatively) by the various environmental systems (context) and the structures, elements, and activities found within them. Time reflects the various changes that occur over phase in everyone's life. During the time on their vocational course, these processes, the intensity, frequency, and output will vary as they interact and develop as a continuous cycle.

Using the PPCT model to develop the research

Early childhood education programmes are designed to develop professionals who will teach and care for children between the ages of 0 and 5 in England. Those who are already in early years settings have access to qualified and experienced early years professionals who can assist in the development of those learners who are on a work based learning programme and accessing their early years setting. The potential benefits, however, extend far beyond the individual. This argument is based on the recognition that such programmes provide a flexible

interface between theory, practice, and research. By situating this research within a theoretical framework, I can explain, rather than simply describe, what is occurring within the educational system. The student (replacing Bronfenbrenner's child) is depicted in figure 2.1, however ecologies do not have an absolute centre. The student has a 'relational position' within an ecosystem, rather than always being the centre of attention (Elliot and Davis, 2018). To study early years work-based learning from different theoretical and conceptual perspectives, it is crucial to be able to move our gaze to the centre of our attention. Dependent on who or what is in focus, the number of elements, their proximity, and the extent of overlap will vary. As the chronosystem encompasses all the systems, it reflects the past, present, and future of each of them, with some fading and others taking centre stage.

A work-based early childhood training programme will be based on a theoretical model that focuses on the social and educational outcomes of the learner. It will be used to examine the wider relevance of the study that has generated researchable questions, such as

- Course-level interactions (microsystems)
- A systematic approach to locating individual students (and their learning) within interconnected systems (meso- and chrono-systems).
- Reflecting on the goals, design, scope, and potential impact of early childhood education practices (macro system)
- Developing early childhood professionals in the context of policy and practice (exo system)

Bronfenbrenner PPCT model and its application to this research

For the context of this research, I examined Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, more specifically the PPCT model. (Demonstrated on the next page).

Bronfenbrenner’s (2005, pp5-7) propositions and their alignment to the research objectives.

Bronfenbrenner’s Propositions	My research objectives (RO)
<p>Proposition1: human development takes place through the processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a regular basis over extended periods of time. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as proximal processes. (p.5)</p>	<p>RO1 RO2 RO3</p>
<p>Proposition 2: the form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes affecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the biopsychological characteristics of the developing person; of the environment, both immediate and more remote, in which the processes are taking place; and the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration. (pp. 6-7)</p>	<p>RO2 RO5</p>
<p>Proposition 3: Proximal Processes are the primary engines of human development and become progressively more complex through reciprocal interactions taking place between a person and other individuals, objects, and symbols in the immediate external environment. (p.6)</p>	<p>RO1 RO2 RO3 RO4</p>

Table 2.1: Bronfenbrenner Propositions and links to the Research Objectives

Bronfenbrenner focused very much on children and their development within families in his work. However, this is not to say that his theory could not be applied to adult learning and development, and, more specifically, the work of development for early years trainees through the experience, interactions, and learning opportunities they get from within their workplace and from other colleagues when in the workplace. Work-based learning within early years practice for vocational learners is the focus of my study and my decision to apply this theory to my research was framed on the process, person, context, and time (PPCT)

dimensions of the model. Newman and Newman (2016) argued that Bronfenbrenner's theory is now used by many fields and disciplines. The works of Gessler et al. (2021); Jamaluddin et al. (2021) and Panopoulos and Drossinou-Korea (2021) are all examples of studies in which Bronfenbrenner's theory was adopted to learn about general human development, including how his theory can be used in general education, vocational education, and training. They all define how Bronfenbrenner's work has supported their research and state:

The basic assumption of Bronfenbrenner's theory is that people develop whilst interacting with their environment. The approach, which has been transferred to German VET research. (Gessler, Bohlinger and Zlatkin-Troitshankkaia, 2021, p.5)

According to Jamaluddin et al. (2021), Bronfenbrenner provides a theoretical framework for studying the learning environment that has the space and opportunity to promote learning (Joyce and Weil, 1996). According to their research, the learning environment has a direct impact on the experience of students within the context of their classroom. According to Puteh and Ibrahim (2010), the learning environment is a place where students and educators gather for a period to participate in learning activities. A comparative study of the internationalisation of vocational education and training has been conducted by Gessler, Bohlinger and Zlatkin-Troitshankkaia (2021). Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a conceptual framework, the authors examine curriculum implementation at the microsystem level. Additionally, it examines the mesosystem for developing a quality management model for vocational education and training (VET). The exosystem is then explored, forming a regional focus for vocational education and training.

Tudge et al. (2016) have argued that Bronfenbrenner's theory has been misused in a variety of ways. However, it is important to recognise the complexity of his theory, and it was necessary to be mindful of this complexity when applying it to the current research. Thus, in order to understanding how humans develop, I have linked it back to the research discussed above (e.g., to Gessler et al. (2021); Jamaluddin et al. (2021) and Panopoulos and Drossinou-Korea (2021). In addition to providing insights into how human development occurs in their various fields, the PPCT model provides a guide as to how policy makers are addressing related matters within the early years with regards to learning and training within the vocational education training sector. I was motivated by these considerations to explore how the four

dimensions of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model process, person, context, and time would apply to my situation. Given the nature of my research objectives and questions, it has been appropriate to draw upon the four dimensions of the PPCT model to analyse the relevance of work-based pedagogy for early years professionals. These are now explained, focusing on how they support the current research. Process is about the individual, the participants within this research, and their interactions, both formally and informally, within the environment. These interactions could be with many different people such as the children, the colleagues, the parents and carers and the teachers who are teaching them for the qualification. All of these link to the experiences that they will acquire during their time as a trainee early years professional. The dimensions of 'proximal' and 'characteristic' are related, in that the frequency and quality of these proximal processes determine the degree to which a person grows and develops, but the interrelationship between the other dimensions also affects its effectiveness. The 'characteristic' is the social connections that will be made by the professionals and any traits that they bring to the learning situation.

Process

Bronfenbrenner (2005) referred to the process in which an individual interacts with the immediate external environment (also known as the proximal process). Tudge et al. (2009) characterised these as a process within activities in which the individual regularly engages and which help them make sense of the world. According to Bronfenbrenner's (2005) explanation of processes, these activities could include feeding or comforting a baby, solving problems, reading, and carrying out other activities, which many of the participants in this study relate to.

Proximal

According to Bronfenbrenner (2005, p. 6), proximal processes are the "primary engines of development." Further, he asserted that the frequency and quality of these proximal processes determine the degree to which a person grows and develops, but the interrelationship between the other dimensions also affects its effectiveness. The theory of Bronfenbrenner would suggest that the effectiveness of the types and forms of pedagogy that early years professionals engage in within their environment depends on the nature of the environment where they take place. The proximal dimension of this model provides a clear rationale as to why this theoretical framework is relevant for my thesis in that it positions the individual at the centre of the learning process. Bronfenbrenner (1979) called this the 'microsystem', the innermost level which can be seen as a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the person. This links well to the research objectives of investigating the experience of work-based learning for the early years practitioner. It is also important to consider the frequency of the activities, their quality, and their purpose. Proximal processes in which early years professionals could participate include activities such as reading, providing secure attachment and play environments, assessing and planning children's play and learning, facilitating sessions, and collaborating with colleagues and parents. This process needs to occur with the individual on a regular basis as interactions with resources and objects or with others in the immediate environment; it should be bidirectional and become increasingly complex with time (Lerner et al., 2005, p. 9).

Characteristics

The characteristics are key elements that determine the direction of the proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). These authors argued that the 'person' refers to the personal traits that an individual brings to a social situation; in terms of this research it links to colleagues, time, peers, and the resources that are available. To allow development to occur in a specific manner and continue as needed, characteristics are said to set proximal processes in motion. In bioecological terms, resources are the abilities, experiences, skills, and knowledge required for proximal processes to be effectively executed. As a result of demand characteristics, the social environment can encourage or disregard the occurrence of proximal

processes depending on how it reacts. Putting these factors together, the proximal processes determine whether a person develops. As an example, an early years' professional with low ambitions may not be interested in engaging in useful proximal processes or pedagogies that will enable them to acquire the skills they need to improve. Conversely, an early years professional who recognises that they may be lacking certain skills and wishes to improve would seek out opportunities to acquire those skills. Interactions within the social environment may have a positive or negative effect on early years professionals. It may be that these interactions take place with colleagues. It can either promote or disregard the development process depending on the support they receive from them or their relevant educational institutions.

Putting this into context, it is important to recognise that proximal processes occur in a variety of settings (micro, meso, exo, and macrosystems). Early years professionals and educators/leaders within the settings should be able to recognise which systems encourage or discourage the development of early years professionals to adjust their behaviour to gain the best results in understanding pedagogies. In the absence of an understanding of how their context affects their development, a student may be susceptible to missing learning opportunities or not being able to respond appropriately to situations which affect their development.

According to Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994), the chronosystem can be viewed as an alternative to the PPCT model's time component. Throughout time, a person, and the environment in which they operate, undergo change and stability. In considering time as a factor that influences human development, Bronfenbrenner (2005) believed that developmental changes are influenced by events in one's life or experiences resulting from the environment or factors within the person. In the case of early years professionals, time includes all the experiences they have encountered over the years during their training that have had a positive or negative impact on their professional development. These events would include family and social life, employment, promotions, transfers into work-related areas, as well as other circumstances, such as policies and societal changes (for example, natural disasters that adversely affect one's livelihood and a country's economic situation, in this case COVID 19). According to Newman and Newman (2016), few studies capture all four

dimensions of the PPCT; however, Tudge et al. (2009) recommended that this must be stated if not all dimensions are utilised.

Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model and the research objectives

Bronfenbrenner (2005) identified ten propositions which he claimed are needed when setting out the foundations for the bioecological theory. Three propositions are most closely related to my research objectives (Table 2.1) and describe the early years professionals' practices in relation to work-based learning and pedagogy. Together, these three propositions provide a comprehensive analysis of the parameters on which my research is based. Therefore, I decided to concentrate on these and not to use the other seven propositions. Bronfenbrenner, however, acknowledged that other developmental processes such as intellectual, social, and moral development require a scientific basis to measure these changes over time. The purpose of the current study is not to discuss the life history of early years professionals. In contrast I examined, described, and considered the PPCT model and my research objectives, the collaborative development of early years professionals' practice within their environments. This research describes their experiences, pedagogy of practice, and current practices over the past two years, as well as their desired future endeavours. The development of early years professionals could be mapped in a more detailed manner, but this is beyond the scope of my research.

Proposition 1

According to Bronfenbrenner (2005), Proposition 1 is the result of both subjective and objective experiences of an individual in their environment. These factors drive the course of human development and may be phenomenological (the way in which one perceives and changes the environment throughout the course of one's life) or experiential (subjective feelings such as hopes, doubts, and personal beliefs). However, there are times when negative and positive experiences can contribute to shaping one's life course of development.

The subjective and objectives experiences of the early years professionals within their practice and becoming qualified level 3 professionals could provide useful insights into their journey. As part of the application to this proposition, it may be possible to address research objectives

1, 2, and 3. Proposition 1 allows me to analyse the experiences of early years professionals in their immediate workplace environments, as well as relate to my research objectives, which are to understand how these early years professionals perceive work-based pedagogy and determine the experiences that have contributed to their development as practitioners.

Proposition 2 and 3

These propositions are internalised as they are more objective in nature, theoretically interdependent, and more closely aligned with the PPCT model. This has enabled me to employ a research design that is based on Bronfenbrenner's (2005) theory.

Proposition 2 is more affiliated to the processes that can be labelled as theory within the training (the written work) and which become more progressively complex, through reciprocal interactions because of Bronfenbrenner (2005) argues that a reciprocal interaction can be seen between a biopsychological individual and the objects, people, and symbols in their immediate external environment. Effective interactions are those which happen regularly over extended periods of time. These interactions in the early years environment are known as proximal processes (the primary functions of development) (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). However, Consider, for example, how work-based learners have progressed through their course and where they are in their career now. As they develop, their interactions may provide such evidence. To achieve the research objectives, interviews, focus groups, reflective journals and observations were conducted. However, it is important to state that this research project is a snapshot of their progression, rather than a longitudinal study of their progression over time.

As outlined in proposition 3, the proximal processes which produce development should be considered in terms of their form, power, content, and direction. According to Bronfenbrenner, these elements:

vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person (including genetic inheritance) and of the environment - both immediate and more remote - in which the processes are taking place; of the nature of the development outcomes under consideration and of the continuities and changes

occurring in the environment over time, through the life course, and during the historical period in which the person had lived. (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, pp. 6-7).

Taking this into account, this proposition should work with propositions 1 and 2 and may be applied to all my research objectives, thus making a strong case for the use of evidence to support the positioning of work-based pedagogy within the PPCT model for early years professionals. According to Bronfenbrenner's theory, people develop by interacting with their environment. Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al. (2017) have employed this approach, which has been transferred to German VET research (e.g., Kell, 1990). In this case, I refer to Kell's 1995 interpretation. The work process focuses on developing and changing the environment, while the learning process focuses on developing and changing oneself:

This separation and demarcation assume (at least) two differently structured (organised) microsystems in which persons (can) develop differently: the workplace and the learning place. As specific environments, both 'places' are in different (topologically nested) environments. (Kell, 1995, p. 376)

Rationale for choosing the theoretical framework

Unlike other psychological theories which study individuals in laboratories or in isolation from their surroundings with little context given to the influence that they make, Bronfenbrenner's theory is the opposite to this as it studies the development of an individual in their natural environment. There are a range of theories which might have formed the theoretical framework for this study. Key amongst these is Lave and Wenger's concept of situated learning (1991). However, I have decided to use Bronfenbrenner (1992) theory as the theoretical framework because it is a study of relational learning for the early years professionals over a certain period of time in which external and internal factors play an important part for the development of oneself. The learning and the relationships which are built upon during a 2-year vocational programme of study will be explored in the context of being a qualified early years professional. However, it is important to recognise the crossover of both theoretical frameworks as outlined in Figure 2.2 below. Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model incorporates the learning and relationships within the early years settings by demonstrating the learning for the individual and the relationships which are needed to encourage an environment of learning within early years practice. Even though I am using this model, it is important to see how this research also links to other theoretical frameworks. It is possible to make links to the

theory of Communities of Practice (CoP) as this also shows how people learn within the workplace; it was Wenger's work in artificial intelligence in the early 1990s that led him to develop CoP thinking (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014). He realised that while computers could store vast amounts of factual data, they were unable to capture or model the meaning of what participants were able to volunteer. Lave and Wenger (1991) conducted anthropological studies into a variety of social groups, including native African tailors, Mexican community midwives, and apprentice meat cutters in the US, to resolve questions about the nature of knowledge. As a result of these studies, Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed the concept of a CoP, a group of people with a shared interest and shared learning. Relational interactions within the workplace of early years professionals were also a key indicator and the external and internal experiences were an interesting point to consider (Donati and Archer 2015), but the centralised position of the learner and the relational experiences given to the practitioner by more experienced colleagues makes Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model more appropriate for this thesis, given that it reflects the way that learning is scaffolded and relational over time. It is also important to make the connection that this theory also looks at the social aspects of learning, the experiences that are offered and how this links to the learning within the workplace.

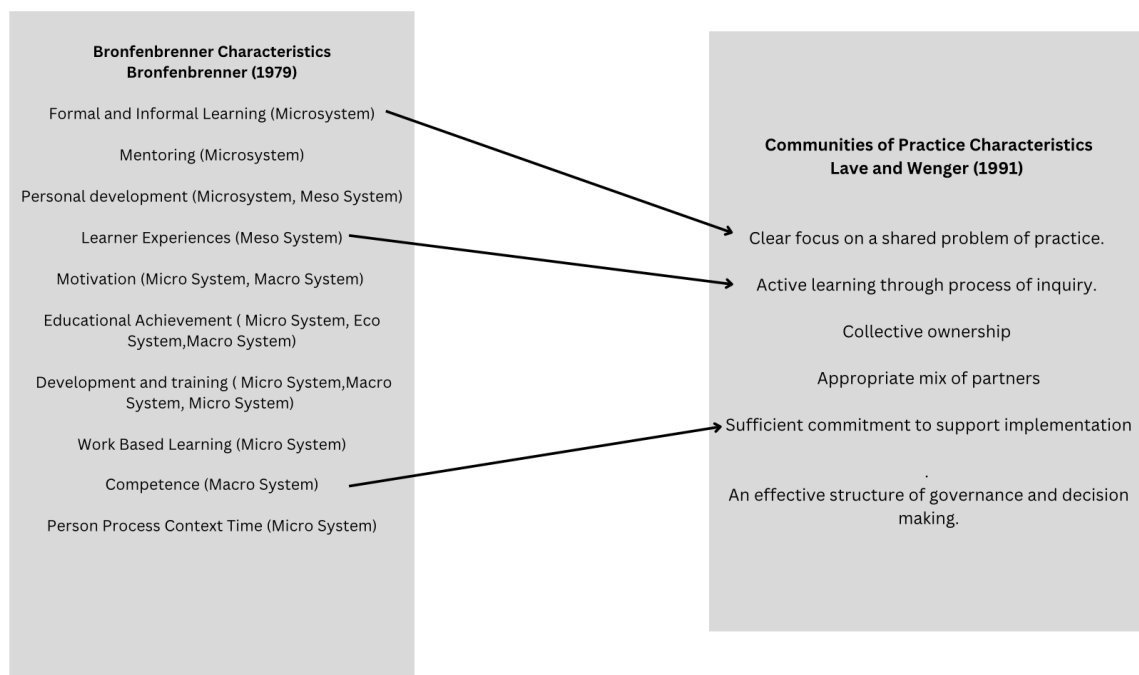


Figure 2.2: Similarities of characteristics between Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Demonstrating the aspects of the theoretical model for this thesis.

However, focusing on this research, I wanted to demonstrate the acquisition of learning in the workplace; justifying using Bronfenbrenner as my theoretical framework was an important aspect of this. As Figure 2.2 demonstrates, it shows the links between Bronfenbrenner and communities of practice, focusing on the areas which relate to the experience of the learners, the motivation and the educational achievement for workplace competence/expertise which can be demonstrated through the theoretical model I have developed by adapting Bronfenbrenner's theory. Community of Practice (CoP) refers to a group of people who are learning collaboratively, contextually, much like a master and apprentice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). It is important to note, however, that unlike the mentor/apprentice relationship, the participants are not required to reach a pre-determined level of expertise or to then leave the group to train up their own group of novices. In contrast to traditional craft apprenticeships, communities of practice were not entirely compatible with the conditions of more modern apprenticeships (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). However, Bronfenbrenner's theory does not diminish the learner, put places them at the central point of their learning, and sees how the environmental factors support each aspect of their learning through the workplace, their institution, and their journey of becoming a qualified early years professional. However, it is an important point to highlight that there are some crossover characteristics between the two theoretical frameworks, but as identified by Figure 2.2, it has shown which areas could link together and those characteristics which are defined by Bronfenbrenner's model, specifically for this research. There are limitations of Communities of Practice where the learner is insufficiently centralised within the theory, which leads me to use Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model highlighting from many emerging economies that there is a long way from the education centred space of the early years to be recognised and valued.

Using PPCT model to develop a research theoretical framework

This study enables me to offer a theoretically informed, coherent response to the literature above. I agree with Ellaway, Bates and Teuinessen (2017) that context should not be treated as an intervening variable but as a fundamental component. As a result of this research, it is not only the context but also the contextual change that needs to be addressed in the education of early childhood professionals within the context of this study. To be able to take advantage of the PPCT Model, I wanted to develop a piece of research that would take

advantage of a small-scale piece of research while still having a connection to a larger audience.

Starting at the micro level, I reflected that individual experiences will be constructed by direct interactions or experiences with students, technology, tutors, colleagues, and family members. It would be appropriate to conduct research at this level to examine the background, motivations of individuals and the benefits they derive from becoming qualified early childhood professionals. Students are diverse in terms of age, gender, professional background, career point, and culture, and this is considered through the experience. Having the ability to understand our learners and attributes they require through this investigation is valuable in and of itself in terms of understanding them. However, the application of an overarching theoretical framework allows for moving beyond an individualistic approach (Aitken et al., 2019).

There is a possibility that it will orient towards individual agency at the micro level. By examining the mesosystem, we can focus on how structure influences participants' experiences and outcomes. I could have explored further programmes based on how the curriculum is intended to shape participants' experiences and outcomes. It is possible to evaluate the curriculum in relation to its purpose using the knowledge gained at this level. It was the principal aim of this research to examine how such programmes are delivered in practice, linking the structure of the programme with the members of the team as individuals. This implies that one aspect cannot be viewed in isolation from another.

The exo system was considered by Bronfenbrenner to be out of reach of the individual, who was assumed not to have an impact on decision making at this level. Early years students are affected by the exo system when regulatory bodies make policy decisions, such as the requirement that trainers acquire evidence of necessary skills. At this level, research has focused on how institutional processes support educational outcomes. By utilizing the PPCT model, we are reminded that structure and agency are interdependent rather than deterministic. While it is not certain that the individual student at the time of their studies will have no impact on decision making, the research suggests that as the student becomes more senior and more confident in engagement, the student may evolve and influence those across different ecological systems, including institutional and regulatory bodies. In addition,

because the participants continue to practice alongside their studies, they have also become active participants in other, practice-based mesosystems. As a result of participating in the PPCT model, departments and institutions can enhance and inform their dialogue between immediate work with their teams and wider departments and institutions.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review demonstrates that even though the professional qualification and the methods of delivery are different, in the context of learning, time and teaching methods, the qualification awarded to the learner at the end of the 2-year course gives the same qualified status within the early years. Discussing work-based learning is a centralised part of this literature review and is attributed to the focus on addressing the research objectives, and questions. There will be a clear themed discussion on the early years, including centralising the professional within their own practice and highlighting their personal development. The literature will discuss early years trainees formal and informal learning practices and how this supports knowledge through work-based pedagogy. To position this, I have used Bronfenbrenner's theory by using the Process Person Context Time (PPCT) model so that the literature will focus on these key themes: Vocational education and learning, work-based learning in the early childhood sector, vocational pedagogies, early years level 3 qualification, early years placement, mentoring within the early years environment, self-efficacy amongst vocational students, situated learning, identity and professionalism, motivation and engagement which includes perceptions of the sector.

Within the context of my thesis the literature demonstrates that there is a clear link between what the practitioner already has gained in the way of knowledge and what they already know, bringing with them what they are learning within the classroom and how this is then applied within the context of the early years work environment. I will present the theoretical framework and the justification for its use in my research, focusing on work-based learning for early years educators. I will first offer a rationale for the choice of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Bioecological Theory of Human Development, more specifically the Process Person Context Time (PPCT) model and examine its relevance to my research. I will then explain how I have developed a theoretical framework that was used to guide the development of my research, including the analysis and evaluation.

Vocational education and learning

Vocational education has been described as a learning process which is organised by governments to produce skilled workers (Handayati et al., 2020). However, in the field of education, the vocational education sector has become one of the broadest ranges of instruction, including its transformation, formation, and associations.

According to Moodie (2002):

There is no single characteristic that can consistently identify vocational education in different jurisdictions or even in the same jurisdiction, over different historical periods. (Moodie, 2002, p.251)

The vocational education and training (VET) sector can be seen as a transition from childhood education to work, normally as an alternative to academic study or even as a pathway towards it (Schmidt, 2020). The participants within this research have transitioned to be an early childhood educator and all the qualifications associated with this profession are vocational and not academic. Vocational education is internationally broad and diverse, but it can be argued that its primary purpose is to prepare individuals for work in a range of disciplines. VET is widely accepted for its potential to improve the social and economic circumstances of individuals, nations, and communities (Renold et al., 2018; Wheelahan and Moodie, 2016). However, there is a misconception around many concerns relating to the equity of VET funding which has been extensively discussed by scholars (Klomp, 2019; Wheelahan and Moodie, 2016; Wolf et al., 2016). Moreover, within the context of the Early years education qualification, the basis of quality and its reputation has been highlighted and compared (Nutbrown, 2012), but this is also clear with other VET programmes across the education sector such as nursing (Billett, 2020; Clement, 2014), and whether it enables or constrains the aspirational achievements of those who access it (Atkins, 2010; Tuparevska et al., 2020).

Within the key education context, for example, becoming an early years professional, the programmes within this vocational education area are the least homogenous and varied in terms of their purposes, institutions, and participants (Billett, 2011, p.4), even though Billett used this term more broadly, focusing on many areas of the vocational system. It could be argued that there are similarities in the broadest sense of educational focused learners that have similarities with all vocational learners. Many scholars are finding ways to assist

individuals to identify the occupations to which they are more suited and to develop initial capacities within that occupation, by favouring vocational learning to enhance education and not to limit it to a role of a job (Dewey, 1916). However, VET is said to prepare a learner for the world of work (Giroux, 1985). With much of the focus on developing occupations and capacity, several VET systems have been established by nations by addressing many social problems. All young people are assumed to be able to manage their transitions effectively based on their access to high levels of cultural capital, maximum agency potential, as well as the dispositions, subjectivities, and attitudes associated with being good navigators in new economies (Wyn, 2005, p. 218). These include the lack of skilled labour, youth unemployment and the disengagement of young people from society. However, researchers such as Atkins (2009) have found that youth from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to enrol in low-level courses that do not provide much opportunity to improve their economic and social position (Atkins 2013; Wolf 2011).

Moreover, there is a belief that vocational education should have a purpose which focuses on both the general and vocational aspects. However, it could be argued that it should be viewed as part of a general education and include opportunities in relation to the broader culture of the meaning of work as well as technical training, for example, technical training in a particular occupation skill or technique (Chauvin 2008). Research shows that there is a close collaboration between learners, the vocational institutions, and the workplace which benefits learning (Virtanen et al., 2014). Billett (2002) identified certain factors which shape how learning proceeds in the workplace. He focused on the dual bases of how workplaces afford the opportunities for learning and how the individual engages in their work activities with certain guidance provided by the workplace. In terms of this research, linking the opportunities which have been given to the participants will be based on their individual interactions with their learning institution, the early years setting and the environment and the participants interactions both formally and informally with their colleagues, which this research is defining as the third teacher in the context of work-based learning. Moreover, this research is using Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model to engage in both the individual's learning and how this relates to the concept of their immediate interactions from their colleagues. The colleagues within the setting are best positioned to be seen as the third

teacher in the learning process to support the learners with their learning progress of becoming an early years professional.

As described, vocational education possesses various purposes and can also include a range of learners and courses. Wolf furthered this discussion in the UK Review of Vocational Education (2011) (known as The Wolf Report). The correlation of low academic achievements within the early years profession and the continual of recruiting highly disaffected young people. The stark difference within the early years sector is the limitation of the courses available for the sector to engage in growing their provision much wider in scope for qualifications. Wolf stated:

There is no formal definition of 'vocational education' in England, and the term is applied to programmes as different as the highly selective, competitive, and demanding apprenticeships offered by large engineering companies and the programmes which recruit highly disaffected young people with extremely low academic achievement. (Wolf, 2011, p.23)

Taking on board the range of vocational education makes describing it unitarily difficult, and researchers have devised many definitions which give a distinctiveness on many levels (Abery et al., 2015). In addition to combating social inequality, a functioning VET system contributes to a country's economic and social development. VET institutions can benefit all actors involved if these expectations are met; however, in many countries, VET fails to meet these expectations, and potential candidates often perceive themselves as unemployed due to a lack of practical experience (Bornali, 2021; Pilz et al., 2022). Giroux (1985) described vocational education as a:

practice that emphasises the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that relate to a student's future participation. (Giroux, 1985, p. 5)

Bathmaker et al. (2016) argued that, within the UK, 50 per cent of learners do not go onto higher education but go onto further education and training and work; those tend to be from disadvantaged and lower socio-economic backgrounds, and they face lower pay and remuneration and greater complexity in their choices (Avis et al., 2017; House of Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility, Gov.uk. 2016). The interpretation is that these students are practicing within a workplace. Steedman and West (2003) stated that vocational education is:

a system of education which has its subject matter, knowledge used within certain trades, occupations, or professions. (Steedman and West, 2003, p.1)

There are many variations of vocational education across different countries and organisations. In Australia the context and the characterisation of VET is that it provides occupational training which is required by enterprises and industries (Karmel, 2011). The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) defines technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as ‘comprising education, training and skills development relating to a wide range of occupational fields, production, services, and livelihoods’ (Umbach and Wawrzynski, 2015).

There are similarities to the definition taken from the Australian context (Karmel, 2011), which has an occupation focus. A review of vocational education, referred to as ‘technical education’, was carried out as the Sainsbury Review (2016). The review argued for a ‘new’ system of Technical Education to develop skills needed by the UK. Sainsbury (2016) expanded on this and explained that although this has been attempted by many predecessors before, vocational reforms have not been able to equip 16–24-year-olds within England with the desired skills for employment.

Work-based learning in the early childhood sector

Work-based learning (WBL) has been described in many ways and has been subject to multiple interpretations and these include in workplace learning, most often divided into formal and informal learning (Manuti et al., 2015; Rintala et al., 2018).

In many aspects of work-based learning, the model has also been described as ‘work experience’. Costley and Lester (2012) identified models of work-based learning, focusing on seven clear outcomes (Table 3.1). For some of these models, students do not need to be employed to gain their experience within practice.

Models	Typical Attributes
1. Work-based studies degree (for individuals)	Content negotiated by learner, P/T degree programme, F/T employment
2. Degree in cohorts	Content designed with contribution of employer, P/T degree programme F/T employment.
3. Foundation Degrees	Content designed in HE in relation to employer, F/T or P/T degree programme
4. Sandwich Year	Content designed with employer, 1 year F/T work as a part of vocational or degree programme.
5. In house training (e.g., NVQ, Apprenticeships)	Contribute to job roles during employment.
6. Work placement within a programme of study	Specific outcomes to be delivered for programme of study.

Table 3.1: Models of Work-based Learning (Source: Costley and Lester (2012, p.6)

In Table 3.1, the learner can identify the main points of what they are learning in their organisation. However, there is a wider debate which questions the creation of knowledge, therefore raising further debate about whether workplaces are suitable for learning (Fuller and Unwin, 2011). Major (2016) explained what is meant by work-based learning and recognised that the workplace is both the subject being studied and the place where the

learner is working; thus, the workplace becomes a place of learning in its own right. He also considered the relationship between an individual's professional development and the workplace in which they are working. Allan (2015) explored workplace learning as a subject of WB learning and that work-based learning is a division of work-related learning. Kyndt et al. (2016) referred to WPL as:

the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for improving the quality and progress of work in situations at or near the workplace. (Kyndt et al., 2016, p.436)

The last few decades have seen unprecedented levels of change and expansion of provision in the early years sector in England. As Kendall et al. (2012) pointed out that there was a rise in employment of mothers of pre-school age children due to the New Labour government initiatives. There was a change in social policy allowing more women to go to work as childcare was made accessible with the expansion of early years provision the New Labour in the 1990s onwards (Cameron et al., 2002). This was under the umbrella of being able to raise many outcomes for children in the early years and work towards reducing poverty. However, researchers have situated these changes by focusing on neoliberal policymaking with an emphasis on increasing state control of the early education sector by:

forming the skills and attitudes which are needed by a productive workforce.
(Connell and Lynott, 2013, p.204)

The early years sector in England gained much of its recognition by developing the early years and demonstrating the importance in children's lives (Hallet, 2013). There was a national drive called the National Childcare Strategy, launched in 1998, which highlighted the importance of investment in training 'to bring people up to a national standard' (Cameron et al., 2002). There were further developments of high-quality pedagogical practice taken from the Children's Plan 2010, which focused on more highly trained early years practitioners, with the implication that this would have a more positive impact on children.

Under the Labour administration, over a period there was an increase in the level of qualifications which were held by early years professionals. However, this was not a consistent picture across the whole of the early years sector (Faulkner and Coates, 2013). The Department for Education (DfE), under the Conservative and Liberal coalition government,

and led by Cathy Nutbrown, set out to review childcare qualifications and early education. The role of this review was to make key recommendations to be able to enhance the sector.

Recognition within the early years sector is that work associated with learning has been a model incorporated within vocational studies. However, there is still much of this acceptance that learning is happening within institutions. Education programmes which support such an association have been implemented in many countries and policy makers have endowed this fundamental recognition. There are many views, but a prevailing one has been the emphasis on offering work experience within work environments. Despite many challenges (Choy and Billet, 2013), it can become a valuable source of formal and informal learning. This is further explored in the research by Clarke and Copeland (2003) who observed that:

workplaces can be rich learning environments. (Clarke and Copeland, 2003, p.234)

However, Tam and Gray (2016) emphasised that:

learning for employees is increasingly regarded as a requirement at work. (Tam and Gray, 2016, p.19)

Focusing on these two quotes there is a recognition that the skills related to practice which are required for early years workers was a theme which links within the Wolf Report (2011). Wolf explored many benefits for practical skills for workers within society. The DfE (2013) made a response to this report and argued that students who enrolled on vocational courses needed to gain practical skills to enhance progression in their chosen field. Nutbrown (2012) went further than this and explored the focus on the skills of early years workers within the industry, arguing that they should be provided by those vocational courses within the UK. Nutbrown (2012) suggested that early years professionals need to have a real-world placement and it is a vital part of skill-based learning. Even though the focus of these qualifications was to bring in more placement opportunities, the evidence was based on practice and government expectation rather than justifying or changing the narrative around what work-based learning needed to be for early years professionals.

A theme associated with work and learning therefore is 'co-operative education', being informed and guided through the discussion around integration of work and learning (Fleming and Zehwaard, 2018). The research from New Zealand increasingly focuses on work-

integrated learning (WIL) models and contexts are diversifying, leading to a need for research to provide strong evidence to inform decision making and advance practice (Zegwaard and Hoskyn, 2015). This links with the vocational educational approach of the Early years educator qualification. The Early years educator (EYE) was introduced in 2014, for practitioners seeking a Level 3 vocational qualification. The qualification has been the subject of many revisions which has meant it has become controversial, including much frustration across the sector, because it requires applicants to hold GCSE English and maths at grade A-C. This was a deterrent for many applicants, and still presents a recruitment challenge to training providers and employers (Osgood et al., 2017). Changes within vocational education have been continual within England (Wolf, 2011) and are continually increasing within the education of 16–19-year-olds. What Wolf discussed is the need for an introduction of changes to assessment methods which creates the notion of being able to create early years practitioners that have vocational and industry experience (Nutbrown, 2012). However, it is impossible to discuss work-based learning within the early childhood sector without identifying the current research around professionalism and practice. A link between work-based learning has been identified by using reflection for those working within the early years (Brock, 2013; Willan, 2017), which can offer opportunities which consider and develop practice. Work-based learning (WBL), also known as practice-based learning or professional practice, can be seen as a vital component to vocational courses. Musgrave and Stubbs (2015) expanded on this and stated that:

the skills and knowledge that you gain from WBL can dramatically increase your employability. This focus is especially pertinent because the early years workforce is becoming increasingly professionalised. (Musgrave and Stubbs, 2015, p1)

Musgrave highlighted the importance of placement experiences, creating a sense that this is an essential part of training for early years professionals within England. However, Reid (2016) ascertained that placement opportunities are a long-standing feature of vocational education programmes. Moreover, The Nutbrown Review created a focus of WBL as a vital application to becoming an effective early years practitioner:

Practice placements are an essential part of training Students need to observe and work alongside practitioners whose practice is high quality Only settings that are rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted should be able to host students on placement. (Nutbrown, 2012, p7)

The early childhood workforce is routinely demonstrating the influence of the quality of early years practice (Fukkink and Lont 2007; Urban 2010; Jones 2014). Modernists focus on qualifications, while postmodernists highlight limitations of modernism. By deconstructing this an empirical knowledge base is created, which creates an uncertainty as to what those within the early years are expected to know. Bernstein (1999a, 2000) drew on a model of the early childhood knowledge base that incorporates multiple forms of knowledge. The focus based on knowledge emphasises the socio epistemic properties of differing knowledge, which is stored and those within early childhood draw upon to guide their work every day.

Tam and Gray (2016) went further and suggested that:

workplace learning strategies.... Contribute to future firm growth, competitiveness, and sustainability.

(Tam and Gray, 2016, p.672)

However, Elkjaer and Nickelsen (2016) stated that:

a professionals' actions at work are as common in WPL as they are in WBL.

(Elkjaer and Nickelsen, 2016, p.266)

The researchers above stated that there is a place in work-based learning where a specific learning is taking place within the workplace. However, Lefebvre (1991) explored the concept of being unbounded by a physical location and suggested that there is a more fluid characteristic of perceived, conceived and lived in spaces of work. Esmond and Atkins (2022) discuss the need to increase the contribution of work-based learning within England's vocational 'further education' (FE) sector. The role of WBL in further education has been strengthened since Conservative led governments came to power in 2010. However, the system is poorly resourced now. Esmond and Atkins (2022) state that work-based learning in short periods also became mandatory for full time advanced secondary VET programmes moving on from the Wolf Report (Wolf, 2011). However, the Sainsbury Review (Independent Panel of Technical Education, 2016) proposed an overhaul of 13,000 vocational qualifications, since many are seen as having little value (Independent Panel for Technical Education, 2016). However, the term work-based training appears to have been introduced into literature around the early 1980s (Purcell et al., 2000). Moreover, it has failed to capture the attention of many pedagogues. Tomlinson (2004) used the term but did not define the term; Brooks and

Everett (2008) went further to define work-based training and defined it as job-based learning and associated with 'lifelong learning'.

Ellström and Ellström (2014) presented work-based training as the same as vocational education and training, with an emphasis on competency-based education. Matovu (2017) suggested that it can be a viable approach in trainees. The apprenticeship position within the workplace is closely associated with workplace-based learning. This could be seen as a phenomenon and does not appear much in the research on work and learning. Sajjad and Mahboob (2015) used both terms 'workplace-based learning' and 'workplace learning' interchangeably. Scholtz (2020) argues that workplace-based learning is another term for work alongside learning and they equate this to internships. This view is also reinforced by Hagser and Sandberg (2017) where they state:

workplace-based learning can be seen within the experiences of early childhood student teachers in their encounters with 'education for substantiality in their workplace-based learning experiences. (Hagser and Sandberg, 2017, p.413)

However, some theorists do maintain that workplace-based learning is associated with workplace learning because it aims to create a learning environment which allows workers to acquire necessary competencies within their workplace. This is captured by Longmuß and Hohne (2017) who stated:

Workers with vocational training backgrounds can reach their higher qualifications levels, therefore opening new opportunities for advancement within their field. (Longmuß and Hohne, 2017, p.263)

The idea that being in work has an association with learning has become accepted by many scholars. Education programmes support the view that work experience and work environments are integrated, despite many challenges surrounding the transfer of knowledge (Choy and Billett, 2013), which links to formal and informal learning. Learning in the workplace is linked with achieving multiple goals within 'production environments'. Billett (2002) proposed that:

learning is not reserved for activities and interactions intentionally organised for learning (for example those in educational institutions. (Billett, 2002, p.457)

Hodkinson (2005) argued that learning within the workplace is emphasised through differences between the two domains and can be seen as fields of practice. The overarching theme here is the association with work and learning coming together as a co-operative education (Fleming and Zegwaard 2018). Work orientated pedagogies are deeply embedded in theories of learning, which encompass experiences, encouraging the learner to reflect and develop a process of action; this was originally promoted by Kolb's experiential learning model Kolb (1984). According to Ferns et al. (2014), experiential learning:

finds its roots in the philosophy of Dewey who argued for the well-structured experience as being a valuable and rich source of learning. (Ferns et al., 2014, p.1)

Experiential learning, which relates to the work environment, can encourage a learner to reflect on work experience, considering self-diagnosis through work-based projects and reflective journals. Brooks and Everett (2008) referred to this type of learning as 'work orientated learning, and Houston et al. (2016) referred to this as 'cooperation in work orientated learning'. Vähäsantanen et al. (2017) have used the term which refers to work related learning meaning learning and professional identity, but in this research, the term refers to the development of "professional agency" and the "transformation of work practices" (Vähäsantanen et al., 2017, p.253).

It could be argued that work-based learning is an overarching concept, as it has been applied for many years and often serves as the default perspective for any learning associated with work environments or context. Atkinson (2016) argued that work-based learning is learning that occurs in a work environment, through participation in work practice and process. However, Ball and Manwaring (2010) argued that work-based learning:

uses the immediacy of the work context to provide practice and to encourage reflection on real issues leading to meaningfully applicable learning. (Ball and Manwaring, 2010, p.4)

Within work-based learning it is important to consider boundary crossings. Esmond (2021) states that boundary crossing is a concept for educational practice which originated from concepts of learning and problem solving grounded in activity theory (Engeström and Karkkainen 1995). and Engeström and Karkkainen (1995) used the term 'boundary crossing' to characterise a dimension of expertise: specific concepts, transportation of ideas and

instruments from unrelated domains into specific domains of inquiry, rather than using engagement in a range of activities. Guile and Young (2003) contended that the notion of boundary crossing by schools and colleges can provide opportunities for students to solve problems that they encountered within the workplace. They stated that:

Learning in modern workplaces is a process of participation but it also involves the acquisition of knowledge which may or may not be available in the 'communities of practice' in which people find themselves. (Guile and Young, 2003, p.66)

Costley and Lester (2012) argued that work-based learning:

sits in the university as a transdisciplinary field, rather than as a mode of learning within a specific area of study. (Costley and Lester, 2012, p.259)

However, in their early work Armsby et al. (2006) referred to work-based learning as a "mode of study" rather than an academic discipline. Helyer (2015) argued that work-based learning focuses on:

the learning that naturally occurs at work and emphasises that all levels of employee are work-based learners. (Helyer, 2015, p56)

I am now going to explore apprenticeships as a subcategory of vocational education. The term 'apprenticeship' is often used colloquially by people from different backgrounds which refers to a model of work-based learning which has enabled a person to develop or require the desired levels of expertise they need in their occupation (Fuller and Unwin 2011).

Apprenticeships in England are thought of as a programme of work including study for young people as they transition from full-time education into the labour market. This was not the case for many starting an apprenticeship in England in 2017, who were over 25 years of age. Most of these were already in employment (The Sutton Trust, 2017). Since 2010, there has been a significant growth in apprenticeships. However, during the Covid pandemic in 2020 the growth of these apprenticeships has decreased considerably following on from turning them into standards and introducing the apprenticeship levy. According to statistics on Gov.uk (Apprenticeships and traineeships 2020/2021) apprenticeship starts were down by three percent.

Although apprenticeships normally combine part-time formal education alongside training and experience within the workplace, the details of how these are financed vary across many programmes, countries, and sectors (Wolter and Ryan, 2011). Compared to other countries such as Austria, Germany and Switzerland, apprentices in England are more likely to be given lower-level opportunities. However, there is currently a move towards a higher education offer with more standards being developed at level 4 and above. Strikingly, from the apprenticeships in 2011 only 60% of apprentices were under the age of 25; in other countries the focus is aimed at those leaving full-time education to enter the labour market (Bursnall et al., 2017). In recent years policymakers and politicians have blurred the defining boundaries of the apprenticeship. This is often being used where qualifications are now the apprenticeship and more recently there has been a shift in moving away from vocational qualifications embedded into apprenticeships and having them as stand-alone qualifications without linking to a vocationally robust qualification. Recent work by Grollmann et al. (2017) focused on cross country comparisons of car service apprenticeships. Taking on board that the apprenticeships were of similar duration and standard in Germany to that of the UK, Grollmann et al. (2017) argued for a model for apprenticeships, like in Germany, whereby a greater level of subsidy for work-based learning would need to be considered.

The apprenticeship levy was introduced in 2018 which coincided with on-going reform of apprenticeship standards. There has been a significant growth amongst those aged 19 to 24. The number of under 18 years olds starting apprenticeships showed stability between 2003 and 2016, and it is rare for individuals to go straight from school to an apprenticeship after GCSEs (Hupkau and Ventura, 2017). Conlon et al. (2017) noted the context in which the increase in apprenticeship numbers occurred; there were many initiatives including Train to Gain initiative in 2010. Even though there was an increase in apprenticeship numbers, there was a rapid decline in the number of people receiving funded training (Hupkau et al., 2017).

Valuing apprenticeship is to look at the extent of many factors, including job prospects and better employment. A major incentive for apprentices may be the opportunity of learning through doing as a way of exploring the world of work. Progression to additional education and the labour market takes different forms. In England there is flexible education and training systems and a robust labour market, which ensures movement towards employment as well

of being able to move from vocational to academic routes (Keep, 2017). The analysis by Keep (2017) of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) demonstrates that progression opportunities are an incentive for individuals.

Employers play a role in apprenticeship reform in England but compared to other countries previously discussed above, employers still have a long way to go to being able to develop a stronger consideration to development of qualifications in the workplace. The key point is that the apprenticeships remain a provider rather than employer-led form of training (Fuller et al., 2015). This underpins the concept of occupations which emphasise apprenticeship systems.

However, apprenticeships are not the only part of education reform. Technical education and work-based learning have also had a review since the Wolf Review (2011). The Wolf Review (2011) discussed the relevance of low-level qualifications with the requirement for all learners on courses between ages 16-19 to include a qualification alongside maths and English. The report demonstrated the need for technical experience and was advocating for all 16-19 students to undertake an element of work experience. Moreover, The Sainsbury Review and Skills Plan (Sainsbury, 2016) proposed a great change within the sector, exploring longer work placements, which in turn proposes a bridge between education and employment, rather than the work-based learning requirements recommended the 2016 skills plan implemented Wolf's recommendations. Esmond (2017) stated that in England, workplace learning has, until recently, played a marginal role. The Wolf Report (2011) proposed a model of post 16 'technical education' which aligns to the findings of the Sainsbury Review (Sainsbury 2016). They both outline that technical education is detailed as the main contribution to training by 2022. Expanding on this, Gov.UK, The Post 16 Skills Plan (2016) demonstrates that government policy is moving on with the planned expansion of technical education.

Vocational pedagogies

To discuss the notion of vocational pedagogies adopted in vocational programmes that prepare students to facilitate play, learning, and development in young children, it is necessary to examine how pedagogy compares with vocational pedagogy. Meyer et al. (2006) defined pedagogy as ‘any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another’ which may involve complex processes influenced and shaped by one’s own views on society, human learning, knowledge, power, and education, whilst Bernstein (1999b) presented pedagogic practice as a kind of social context where cultural production-reproduction occurs as existing or new forms of conduct, knowledge, practice, and criteria are developed by an appropriate and knowledgeable person. It is evident from both definitions that educational practice, including pedagogy, has undergone a significant change. Schools and teaching have for decades been largely structured based on the Piagetian model of cognitive development which posits a progression from one stage to another. Thus, to reflect the idea that development always precedes learning, teaching, and learning should be linear and incremental. A new model of pedagogy has been developed because of Vygotsky's work on development, whereby learning is viewed as a more complex activity involving multiple actors and factors that interact among each other, as well as tools and artifacts within the learning environment (Vygotsky, 1978). According to a cultural historical perspective, the mind is the result of joint mediated activities that aim to develop, co-construct, and distribute knowledge and learning (Daniels, 2001). It is understandable that pedagogy is more directly related to the technical and vocational aspects of vocational education. Lucas et al. (2013) defined vocational pedagogy as:

the science, art and craft of teaching that prepares people for working lives. It is critically shaped by the decisions that are taken by teachers – both high-level strategies, and ‘day-today-in-the-moment’ ones – and the values that inform all interactions with students. Pedagogy is necessarily concerned with the particular practices and processes by which knowledge is produced, skills are developed, and habits of mind are cultivated. (Lucas et al., 2013, p.8)

However, defining vocational pedagogy is important, as it has been contested in many aspects of pedagogy. The evidence suggests that there is a serious consideration of pedagogy which is largely missing within vocational education and, therefore, vocational learners are the losers

of this as a result (Lucas et al., 2013). However, the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning report (CAVTL) suggested:

A robust vocational teaching and learning system must be underpinned by a serious focus on vocational pedagogy. (CAVTL, 2013, P.13)

The Cedefop research paper number 47 (2015, p.17) on Vocational Pedagogies and Benefits for Learners: Practices and Challenges in Europe focuses specifically on student-centred pedagogy. Vocational pedagogy is defined as an array of learning theories, teaching methods, and teaching cultures that make educational provision more accessible and responsive to learners using these theories and methods. This requires closely synchronizing it with the learning processes, connecting it to individual learners' interests, dispositions, and needs. Following Bernstein (2000), it is important to conceptualise pedagogy more broadly as a process, encompassing a range of possible settings and relationships which might frame the acquisition of knowledge, values, and behaviours (Hanley and Thompson, 2021). As Bernstein has conceptualised pedagogy more broadly, he stated how the knowledge, values and behaviour could be developed:

Pedagogy is a sustained process whereby somebody(s) acquires new forms or develops existing forms of conduct, knowledge, practice and criteria from somebody(s) or something deemed to be an appropriate provider and evaluator. (Bernstein, 2000, p.78)

As argued by Boud and Hager (2012), the emphasis on conduct and values in addition to knowledge has a particular importance within vocational contexts. According to Bernstein, pedagogies are determined by rules or certain principles governing how curricula and its content are to be distributed, contextualised, and evaluated.

Strategies exploring social mobility, defined as movement of people over time from one socioeconomic position to another, have now become a focus of education policies, based on the presumption that increased educational qualifications will result in increased upward social mobility (Bathmaker et al., 2013).

Qualifications in vocational subjects are usually offered at school or college, where they can be combined with general academic study. In contrast, the German vocational education

system allows students who are 15 or older to opt out of full-time education and attend vocational schools where work-based learning takes centre stage (e.g., apprenticeship programmes where 70% are work-based and 30% are school-based). In England, vocational qualifications have been reforming alongside wider changes to qualifications and secondary education, which could have implications for how vocational education is perceived and used. Specifically, in England, young people are now required to continue in education or training until the age of 18. The DfE states that students who fail to achieve a good pass in mathematics and English must continue studying them as part of their programme of study to progress to further study, training, and employment. The Department for Education (DfE) has recently introduced major changes to vocational education. Post-16 technical education will be improved with the introduction of the T-Level, a new qualification enabling students to enter the workforce immediately after completing their studies. A technical route at Key Stage 5 will be offered through this qualification, which is developed in collaboration with employers and businesses. Students will learn both in the classroom and on-the-job (placement or work-based learning). Whilst there are continual developments in vocational education, different trajectories have been followed (Kuhlee and Laczik, 2015). In the context of the UK, Bathmaker et al. (2016) indicated that the goals of the coalition government from 2010 and the Conservative government from 2015 have emphasised vocational education and training as the preferred pathway to education qualifications for some types of individuals.

For young people leaving secondary education, Atkins (2017) argues that career-decision making and youth transitions are powerfully affected by class fractional positioning and class - based differential access to valorised capitals. In turn, this means that those from more advantaged class fractions are better able to exploit serendipitous opportunities or events, whilst the more disadvantaged are not (Hodkinson, 2008; Ball and Manwaring, 2010; Bimrose and Barnes, 2008). Atkins (2017) examines the relationship between Pierre Bourdieu's position and inequality in society, articulating how young people are constrained and enabled in the transition from secondary education to the workplace. Further to this she argued that the concept of navigating school to the world of work allows an opportunity to develop an understanding which avoids a polarised explanation of social structures or individual free choice (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1998).

Disadvantaged young people have been particularly impacted by the apprenticeship reforms. The Public Accounts Committee (GB Parliament, 2019) has highlighted that the way the apprenticeship programme has evolved increases the risk that those with lower skills and from disadvantaged communities miss out on the potential benefits of apprenticeships. The Deaton Review of Inequalities (Nuffield Foundation, 2021) had found that there had been fewer apprenticeship starts amongst disadvantaged apprentices since the introduction of the levy and those apprentices are less likely to complete their apprenticeships. Esmond and Atkins (2020) recognise that there is a drive to increase the contribution of workplace learning in the further education system and this has strengthened since the conservative led government came into power in 2010. They continue to claim that many young people entering further education in England display characteristics of social and educational exclusion. These learners have been conceptualised in policy as having low aspirations, being problematised, disaffected and disengaged (Atkins, 2009, 2017; Billet, 2011). Similarly, a specific group of young people – mainly women, prepare for occupations in service industries such as care, hairdressing, and beauty therapy (Thompson, 2019).

Esmond and Atkins (2022) discuss the principles of welfare vocationalism which draws heavily on their recent research projects. Welfare vocationalism refers to a set of VET programmes which includes broad vocational education as its lowest level, and some of these programmes are of a higher level, preparing young people from working-class backgrounds, predominantly women, for employment in gendered occupations. A number of these occupations require emotional labour, such as childcare and hairdressing. Young and Hordern (2020) argue that this is echoed by contemporary narratives surrounding T levels, in which the government rhetoric around these changes is positive, but academic criticism is directed at the reforms. In addition to being socially and economically excluded, most of these young people who engage in welfare vocationalism at its lowest levels have had a negative experience during their education. According to Esmond and Atkins (2022), evidence from their study indicates that these young people still aspire similarly to those of their higher achieving peers, but do not have the support, knowledge, or cultural capital to pursue such goals, which are considered unrealistic, which has been previously demonstrated by Bathmaker (2001) and Atkins (2017).

Individuals that leave school without succeeding in their GCSE' could be defined as those seeking a second chance education. 'Second chance' education is another opportunity for an individual who for some reason did not succeed in their 'first chance', but who could potentially succeed eventually (Inbar and Server, 1989, p.232). Several studies have examined the role of second chance education and have expanded the conceptualisation of second chance learning. Many scholars have conducted substantial studies of second chance education in Australia and merits some close alignment to that within the UK context (Wyn and Cahill, 2015). Other researchers have also conceptualised second chance education as alternative education or flexible learning programmes (Te Reile et al., 2016). However, the idea of a second chance and alternative education is criticised and seen as peripheral to main education provisions (Vadeboncoeur and Velloso, 2016). There is a provision for alternative pathways for school leavers in Europe. Young people re-engage with education through many different institutions, such as college, training organisations and sixth forms.

A report by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Julius et al. (2021) argues that apprenticeships have the potential to act as a vehicle for social mobility for young people. The report is backed up by the Social Mobility Commission that recent estimates suggest that disadvantaged young people with an apprenticeship qualification earn, on average, over ten percent more by the age of 28, compared to individuals holding a same level qualification (Social Mobility Commission, 2020). Apprenticeships currently only account for a small share of the qualifications which are undertaken by young people. In 2019, the National Foundation for Educational Research concluded that only seven per cent of 17-year-olds in full time education were studying for an intermediate or advanced level apprenticeship as their highest qualification (Julius et al., 2021).

The early years level 3 qualification

Qualifications in the early years have continually been under scrutiny and evaluation over the last 10 years. The regulator, The Department for Education, sets out the standard of these early years qualifications. Nutbrown (2012) has completed a review of qualifications in the early years and stated:

Some current qualifications lack rigour and depth, and quality is not consistent. I was concerned to find a considerable climate of mistrust in current early years

qualifications, and anxiety, which I share on reading of evidence that standards have in some respects declined in recent years. (Nutbrown, 2012, p.50)

There are many qualifications which are currently accepted in England to work as a qualified early years practitioner. The Children's Workforce Development Council in 2011 listed over 365 qualifications which were deemed as being a qualified early years professional and being able to practice. These ranged from level 2 (vocational) to level 7 (postgraduate). The review of childcare in 2013 entitled 'More Great Childcare' (DfE, 2013) suggested that this proliferation of early years qualifications lacks the rigour and depth needed to be an early years professional. McGillivray (2011) has argued that this complex system of qualifications and training routes to be an early years practitioner has led to a lot of confusion about identity within the sector from employers and even by those practitioners themselves, which stated that they were confused about what is required to be a qualified professional in the early years.

In recognition of this confusion, the DfE attempted to streamline the number of qualifications that would be accepted to be an early years practitioner in 2012. The Independent Review Foundations for Quality Nutbrown (2012) was commissioned by the government to evaluate the qualification system in the early years sector. The review looked at training for new professionals to early years and childcare and considered how to restructure the workforce to address retention problems, through initiatives such as promotion progression into leadership roles. Nutbrown was very complimentary of the early years colleagues, but she reported many flaws in the system that did not support or equip early years practitioners for their role working with children. Nutbrown (2012) further discussed requirements for those qualifications below undergraduate, currently level 2 and level 3.

Table 3.2 below explores what information is available regarding early years policy and guidance. (Demonstrated on the next page).

Policy and Guidance	Year	Subheadings
Early Years Foundation Stage	2020	Early years foundation stage (General information)
	2017	Early years foundation stage statutory framework (EYFS) (Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage)
	2012	Full and Relevant (Early Years qualifications: pre-September 2014 criteria) DFE Full and relevant criteria for early years qualifications started before 1 st September 2014
	2016	National Curriculum assessments: EYFS
	2020	EYFSP handbook Statutory Framework for the EYFS Guidance on exemptions for early years providers
	2019	2019 early years foundation stage: assessment and reporting arrangements (ARA)
	2013	Greater Childcare More Affordable Childcare
	2017	Early Years Workforce Strategy (2017 – 2019)
	2018	The Social Mobility Action Plan

Table 3.2: Early Years Workforce Review: Revisiting the Nutbrown Review – Policy and Impact (2020).

In 2012 there was no requirement to hold a qualification in English and maths at the point of entry for trainees. However, the Nutbrown (2012) review started to identify key changes that early years practitioner literacy and numeracy skills are fundamental in improving the quality of early childhood education and care. This was a move towards enhancing the academic abilities of trainees entering the early years workforce. Nutbrown suggested that a minimum requirement was necessary which resulted in Level 2 English and maths (GCSE grade C and or above) as the entry requirements of the profession. This new policy began in in 2014 with the Coalition government, as a requirement for all applicants to Level 3 Early years educator courses. However, this proved very controversial as many trainees did not see this profession as an opportunity any longer, which resulted in applications for this course declining.

However, the government under Theresa May underwent an impact assessment which introduced deregulatory measures that came into effect in 2017 (DfE, 2017). The reasoning behind this was that they did not deem the skills needed to do the job at level 2 and 3 warranted a grade C GCSE level or above. This resulted in the deregulation of the GCSE requirements which was carried out to alleviate the recruitment crisis of staff and trainees, especially at this time. It was clear that the higher entry requirements ended up acting as a deterrent for many applicants, which resulted in a recruitment challenge for training providers, so the deregulation was welcomed by others. This means that they have allowed level 2 functional skills to be accepted alongside other suitable level 2 qualifications including GCSEs, which also meant that they could continue to be counted in ratios within the settings. The Childcare Act 2006 made reforms to inspection and early years regulation with the new Ofsted Childcare (Compulsory and Voluntary) Register which was introduced in the same year. In 2008 the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was introduced. From this, qualifications which allowed a licence to practice in the early years became a regulated qualification due to the staff to child ratio.

More recently there is now a push for greater early years work-based learning programmes within the sector. For example, in 2021 a new Level 5 apprenticeship called Early Years Lead was introduced and, in 2022, there was another work-based leadership qualification called the National Professional Qualification in Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL). Both qualifications are available to level 3 EYE professionals if they meet the leadership criteria. Focusing on the

NPQEYL there is a set framework which is monitored and overseen by the DfE. The framework sets out the knowledge, skills and behaviours that will be developed by teachers (a word which is used in the framework to mean those working in the early years) when they participate in the NPQEYL. The NPQEYL is open to all professionals who are aspiring to be leaders within the sector and have a full and relevant level 3 EYE qualification.

The EYFS framework underpins the standards of the early years and childcare learning and development. The framework was recently reviewed in 2021. The aims of the review were:

- To improve early years outcomes for all children, particularly those who are disadvantaged, in the critical areas that build the foundations for later success, such as language development and literacy.
- To reduce unnecessary paperwork for practitioners and teachers so they spend more valuable classroom time supporting children through rich curriculum activities.

There is a continual movement from within the sector, regulated by the government, to change a perception so that the sector is viewed as early years education rather than childcare. Studies which support the change of this perception include the Study of Early Education and Development: Good Practice in Early Education (DfE, 2017). This document explores what good quality early years setting could look like, which includes how they become sustainable for good practice which can help towards improving children's outcomes.

To be able to deliver a high-quality early years' experience, a highly skilled, qualified workforce is needed. However, more recently the early years workforce continues to report challenges with recruitment, retention, wage stagnation and changing employee qualification requirements (The Guardian, 2022; Early Years Alliance, 2021; London Early Years Foundation 2022). However, a 2019 investigation by Nursery World magazine focuses on childcare practitioners 'living in poverty' (2019) found that 14 per cent of those working in the early years sector were living in relative poverty (defined as households earning an income of less than 60% of the UK average, which was £17,640 a year at the time of the investigation). Similarly, research into the early years workforce published by the Education Policy Institute in 2019 found that, at the time, 45% of those working in the sector were claiming state benefits or tax credits.

The BBC ran a news article which discusses a number of nursery closures and parents left without childcare as providers shut (2022). It addressed issues around the fact that parents are being left without childcare as nurseries shut at short notice due to financial pressures and staff shortages. The article states that the Early Years Alliance, which represents around 14,000 providers in England and has nurseries of its own, said that the sector is facing its worst crisis in recruitment and cost increases in 20 years. This implies that the sector is not being invested by the government, which coincides with increasing costs for essentials such as food, energy, and staffing.

However, a report by National Centre for Social Research, focusing on the early years workforce, was commissioned in 2021 (Butt et al., 2021). The authors argued that the qualifications in the early years were inadequate. Managers were interviewed as part of the research and concluded that professionals understanding of what poor quality NVQ training and BTEC qualifications was due to qualifications lacking theoretical and practical application. They also stated that contemporary qualifications did not teach the practitioners the meaning of purposeful play or how to interact with children (Bury et al., 2020).

Early years placement

Early years is a fundamental foundation for children's creativity and developing innovators, laying the foundations for creative thinkers (Leggett, 2017). Leggett (2017) emphasised the importance of early years educators being able to promote their practices through pedagogy to encourage creativity with the children in their settings. Beghetto and Kaufman (2013) mirrored this assumption and suggested that it was an optimal time to develop early years professionals' confidence and awareness of their abilities in using their pedagogical knowledge before they start any formal teaching. This can be achieved through many practices already widely known in the sector, for example, through reflection. A fundamental part of early years practice is that of reflection. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2004) identified that early years practitioners who continually look for ways that they can adapt and improve their practice in settings are more effective and more open to change and challenge (Mandlenkosi et al., 2021). Paige-Smith and Craft (2011) identified that practitioners who reflect on their own practice are also able to reflect and respond coherently to children's learning.

Students on the level 3 early years educator course have a requirement to engage in work experience which allows the development of such skills needed to become a qualified professional. Svojanovsky (2017) argued that work placement and the experiences that students get from them cannot guarantee insightful or valuable learning on their own. However, he further suggested that the need for these students to learn the process of reflection and how this experience can contribute to learning. The research also identifies the need for students to experience something called a paradigm shift to be reflective and use this to support development within their practice. It could be argued that what comes with the prestige of having placement embedded into an early years programme is how early years practitioners develop professionalism. There has been extensive research on professionalism in the early years (Hargreaves, 2003; Sachs, 2001; Simpson, 2010). Stronach et al. (2003) argued that the development of the professional happens within contradictions and dilemmas of a student's own experiences. There is some cross over from Brock's (2006) work where they developed a concept of a 'professional student' that can be applied to technical education. Even though their research was aimed at higher education professionalism, this concept can be linked to the ideas of developing professionalism in the early years workforce and being associated with level 3 early years professional development. Brock (2006) argued that:

...the importance of students developing qualities and skills associated with professional behaviour and professionalism. The development of the professional, qualified in the ECE workforce. However, the professional student depends on the curriculum, the ability to develop reflective practice and a range of workplace experiences, as well as the college-based teaching. (Brock, 2006, pp.430)

Brock highlighted the importance of a multi modal approach where high quality teaching and the experience from placement is important. However, there are concerns that the diploma learning experience can become distant to that needed for practitioner experience, and this may hinder professional development. Having work-based practice alongside the classroom knowledge is acknowledged as good practice in developing professional practitioners (Campbell-Barr et al., 2020; Nutbrown, 2012; Vandebroek et al., 2013). Further acknowledgments by Dyer and Taylor (2012) explored the importance of the nature of placements which may affect outcomes and the development of competencies of developing the skills needed to become an early years professional. The placement is an important factor,

including the quality. Nutbrown (2012) placed a greater emphasis on the placement provider and the relationships that are built within that context.

Research by Vincent and Braun (2011) reflected on the versions of professionalism offered within the Further Education (FE) system. They had found that students' understanding of relating professionalism became quite narrow. The research had demonstrated generic professional behaviours, such as being reliable and punctual. Their research also argued that students valued the theory that they were able to relate to practice, such as legislation and policy matters. However, the participants did not link to professionalism as a body of knowledge and instead emphasised that working with children was more of a common-sense approach. In research there are evident links between students' placement experiences and that of their experience in FE and their professional development. Brock (2006) concluded that professional development depends on a range of placement opportunities to develop their vocational competence/expertise. Moreover, Hughes and Menmuir, (2002) and Nutbrown (2012) argued that practitioners develop professional attributes such as in-depth practical knowledge and reflective skills. Moreover, this can be the same for the early years professional.

Thinking about the social process that is involved within the workplace and reflecting on the role of the early years professional, it is the social process which is of importance for this thesis. However, the view the professional, by developing a sense of self allows the professional to be able to interact with others (Cooley, 1964). Cooley (1964) argued that an aspect of gaining an image through that of a self-concept or reflection is how an individual looks and responds to others. However, practitioners in the early years often take on the role of a key person, where they build relationships with the child, the family and other colleagues. The promotion of a child's emotional well-being is an important factor to take on board, alongside that of the early years professionals' own development and learning (Elfer et al., 2012). Early years practitioners carry out an element of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), by spending a lot of time and being with children, caring and managing the daily needs of children. Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) have discussed that there is a need for further development based around a 'presence' which links to their professional role, which in turn allows a professional to be able to engage with a child effectively. An early years professional

needs to understand how to meet the needs and demands of being an early years professional (Page and Elfer, 2013).

Mentoring within the early years environment

Chaplin and Munn (2020) state that, in the UK, mentoring was introduced in the 1980s to support the retention of newly qualified teachers. Education views mentoring positively, but it is under-theorised (Devos, 2010). Mentoring, according to Callan (2006), can be traced to ancient Greek mythology, where Telemachus, son of Odysseus, was raised by a critical friend named Mentor without Odysseus's presence. Garvey (2007) pointed out that mentoring has been adopted across a wide range of fields, and there are many approaches to mentoring, although there is no agreed definition of the practice (Hobbs and Stovall 2015).

There is a considerable amount of research which focuses on teacher training. In England, recent workforce reforms have aimed to increase the number of Early Years professionals who hold graduate Teacher Status which has demonstrated a particular focus on this teacher training by increasing the number of early years professionals (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010). Due to this, pathways to Early Years Status are relatively new and shaped by a changing political and economic environment. In Henshall et al. (2018), pathways and motivations for studying EYTS (Early Years Teacher Status) are explored. Even though the courses in this thesis are level 3, there is much scope regarding the kind of mentoring support that could be adopted by the Early Years Teacher programmes.

Currently, there is little official guidance and empirical research on mentoring in the early years (Children's Workforce Development Council, Gov. UK, 2010). In addition, there is a lack of shared professional understanding of the roles of mentor/mentee within the field (Rodd, 2013; Hammond et al., 2015; Department for Education, 2017; Solansky, 2010). Mentoring provides trainees with the opportunity to move from being educated themselves to practicing as professionals (Nolan and Molla, 2017). Before becoming integrated into a community of practice, the apprentice must move through the apprentice liminal state of not knowing (Meyer et al., 2006). Mentoring does not emerge from a vacuum, it is situated in a social and political context, and mentors must be aware of the contexts in which they work (Pfund et al., 2016). This mediates the discussion around the mentor's and the third teachers role within

the workplace environment and those professionals who are not the mentors' but work directly with the trainee picking up the mediated role of the third teacher within the work environment, supporting the learning which takes place within the workplace through informal connections. It is necessary for the mentor working with early years trainees to have in-depth knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), as well as the Full and Relevant Standards (Early Years), against which trainees are assessed, as well as the Department for Education (DfE, 2017) being the quality assurer to maintain that these qualifications are robust and integrated into policy and law. Furthermore, mentors' need to understand the relevance of these standards in terms of quality inspection, as well as in terms of improving outcomes for children. In addition to providing mentorship, mentors are also required to assess and grade trainees, as is the case in programmes such as the Early Years Educator programme (Aubrey et al., 2013). Mentoring relationships have been shown to be effective in dealing with professional challenges if the mentoring relationships are sufficiently strong (Fletcher 2012; Lloyd and Hallet, 2010). The focus here is on the mentor providing guidance and support, to develop the trainee's professionalism, although it is worth noting that what it means to be a professional is itself highly contested (Moss, 2017). Using a feminist praxis, Hammond et al. (2015) examined mentor practices for early childhood teachers across seven European nations. The research of Hammond et al. (2015) encourages mentors and mentees to co-construct knowledge, contest taken-for-granted policies and practices, and even subvert hierarchies to enable an 'engaged pedagogy'.

According to Nolan and Molla (2017), for critical reflection, comfort and dilemma are two essential elements, particularly for new and geographically isolated early childhood teachers. Their argument is that a supportive and respectful mentoring relationship, in which confidentiality is maintained, creates comfort, and the sense of a safe space in which mentees can discuss their practice and ask questions. As far as practitioners are concerned, dilemmas are situations in which their expectations do not match their practice context. It has been shown that mentoring relationships can provide a space to explore the underlying assumptions that contribute to this dilemma, leading to opportunities to change practice (Nolan and Molla, 2017). It is essential for early years professionals to reflect critically so that they can act as agents for change (Patterson and Thornton, 2014; Nolan and Molla, 2017). One common problem in mentoring relationships in VET and more specifically in the early years is

a lack of communication. Effective communication is essential for building trust, understanding expectations, and addressing concerns. (Lock et al., 2006). When mentor's and mentees fail to establish open and honest lines of communication, it can lead to misunderstandings, frustration, and a breakdown in the mentoring relationship. Another issue that can arise in mentoring relationships is a mismatch in expectations. Both a mentor and mentee may have different ideas about the purpose, goals, and timeline of the mentoring relationship. Misaligned expectations can result in disappointment, as mentees may feel unsupported or mentor's may become frustrated with the mentee's progress. It is crucial to ensure that both parties have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities from the beginning. Additionally, a lack of commitment from either the mentor or the mentee can also contribute to problems in mentoring relationships. Mentoring requires time, effort, and dedication from both parties. If either the mentor or the mentee fails to invest the necessary time and effort into the relationship, it can lead to a lack of progress and engagement (Straus et al., 2013).

Self-efficacy amongst vocational students

Bandura (1977) stated that there are four sources of efficacy which influence self-efficacy and beliefs. Based on Bandura's (1977) social-cognitive theory, self-efficacy is defined as:

belief in one's ability to plan and execute the courses of action required to accomplish desired outcomes. (Bandura, 1977, p. 3)

According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy expectations may be influenced by the following four sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological and emotional arousal. In terms of self-efficacy, mastery experience is regarded as the most influential factor. The mastery experience provides the most accurate assessment of one's own potential for success. The concept of vicarious experience refers to learning through the experiences of others (by watching, hearing, or reading about). As a third source of persuasion, verbal persuasion refers to feedback from others who are important to you. One's own perception of physiological and emotional states may also play a role in physiological and emotional arousal. However, the strength of all sources depends on the individual's perception of the experience.

According to Zee and Koomen (2016), work-related self-efficacy is a significant predictor of successful professional practice. Despite this, there is a significant lack of knowledge regarding the self-efficacy of early childhood educators. According to Suchodoletz et al. (2018), self-efficacy is also an aspirational outcome for continuing education. When assessing teachers' work-related self-efficacy, Schmitz and Schwarzer (2000) emphasised that key context factors of the specific teaching area must be considered. A major indicator of high interaction quality in early years professionals is child-centeredness, such as considering children's perspectives or providing high-quality feedback in response to what children say or do (La Paro et al., 2012). As a result, it is an important aspect of early childhood education. Thus, I define work-related self-efficacy in early childhood education (educator self-efficacy: "ESE") as the degree to which early years professionals feel capable of engaging in child-centred educational activities. Much research has been focused on pre-service and early years educators since this is when teacher self-efficacy is formed and is most susceptible to change. Studies have reported increases during pre-service (Klassen and Chiu, 2010; Durksen et al, 2017; Dicke et al., 2015; George et al., 2018), but decreases during the first year of practice (Woolfolk Hoy

and Spero, 2005). Early years professionals are expected to be affected by a variety of personal characteristics. It has been reported that several studies have examined early years teachers' years of experience, but the results have been inconsistent. Durksen et al. (2017) and Bullock et al., (2015), for example, have found some associations between teacher self-efficacy and experience. Suchodoletz et al. (2018) reported that any associations between self-efficacy and experiences had many variables. In most cases, these studies used cross-sectional data; however, Suchodoletz et al. (2018) used longitudinal data. According to Klassen and Chiu (2010), professional experience may not be linearly related to self-efficacy.

According to different studies, the ideal length of training and level of education of early years educators are inconsistent (Tschannen-Moran and Johnson, 2011; Pas et al., 2012; Suchodoletz et al., 2018). In vocational programmes, students may be provided with an opportunity to combine theoretical study with practice, enabling them not only to acquire relevant theoretical knowledge but also to gain relevant practical experience to deepen their understanding of theoretical material (Stansbie et al., 2016). This type of pedagogy and its application has been shown to benefit a student's development of academic and practical abilities during a learning process (Kolb, 1984). Vocational programmes of study, such as diplomas and apprenticeships, are an important way students can participate and authenticate work environments (Steinmayr and Kessels, 2017). In practice, however, work is based on real-world situations that are supervised by teachers, and learning is centred around the reproduction of knowledge without a specific progression, meaning that you train professionals for the role that they are going into, without focusing on where they will be going next (Gilje and Erstad 2017).

Students can practice or learn knowledge in a less challenging classroom environment (Muijis and Reynolds, 2018; Scott et al., 2017); however, the authors argue that learning within the workplace has its own set of principles of awards and punishments that have behavioural implications. Moreover, Whitty and Wisby (2007) argued that working within internships has shown that students feel less safe and less certain. An individual's level of self-efficacy can be defined as their confidence in their own ability to apply their pre-existing skills to accomplish a given work related task (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy theory explains how it affects individual behaviour and effectiveness (Olivier et al., 2019). According to self-efficacy theory,

an individual's level of confidence in their ability to perform a task influences their behaviour. A person will often choose to engage in activities in which they are confident and avoid activities in which they lack confidence (Klassen and Klassen, 2018). A common expression of self-efficacy in an academic setting is academic self-efficacy (Honicke and Broadbent, 2016). However, many students within the vocational field demonstrate that their self-efficacy and self-esteem are very low (Kelly and Price, 2009).

It is always necessary for students in vocational education to possess a high level of self-efficacy or confidence when making career decisions (Duru et al., 2021). As both Bandura (1995) and Santrock (2008) have pointed out, self-efficacy is an important psychological capital that provides a sense of confidence in completing a task. In this context, level refers to completing a problem, strength refers to an individual's optimism regarding the outcome of a decision, and generality refers to the individual's belief in their abilities (Fort and Puget, 2022; Bruning et al., 2013). According to research, self-efficacy indicators which position confidence in selecting a goal are important factors that influences a student's career decision (Bandura, 1977; Park et al., 2022). The environment where a student learns, provides opportunities for them to actively interact in the learning progress (Onyema et al., 2020). However, much of the environment has become virtual due to the pandemic (Onyema et al., 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020). The lack of interaction between teachers and students in online learning negatively impact students' communication and collaboration skills (Salta et al., 2022). Da Silva et al. (2014) stated that students develop their potential in an appropriate media through guidance and counselling.

Situated Learning

This research focuses on learning within a work context and linking Bronfenbrenner (1992) to an educational model based within an early years setting, meaning that early years professionals already come to the role with a higher-level awareness of work-based learning. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), a social practice theory of learning is based on the process by which new entrants to a particular activity or workplace obtain the skills, knowledge, and habits necessary to become 'full participants'. During the 1980s, anthropologists began to take an interest in the meaning and processes of learning as a part of social activity. Besar (2018) argues that situated learning theory:

holds that effective education requires learning that is embedded in authentic contexts of practice, wherein students engage in increasingly more complex tasks within social communities. (Besar, 2018, p. 49)

According to Kell (1995), teaching and learning arrangements can be divided into problem- and project-based learning, collaborative online learning, and microlearning. In a school or a company, clustered arrangements are called a 'learning place'. Furthermore, workplaces cannot exist independently of their contexts, but rather are elements of an organisation based on division of labour. Further, workplaces are interconnected structurally (hierarchy) and procedurally (work process) and form an integrated microsystem within a company. Institutionally, these microsystems can be integrated into different mesosystems. Microsystem 'learning places' can, for instance, be in a school or a company. Hence, it is crucial that the conditions of the mesosystem influence the conditions of the microsystem without necessarily determining them. For example, a training centre in a company can be integrated into the production system or also define its identity at a distance from and in contrast to the production system. In the original CoP thinking formulation (Lave and Wenger, 1991), the concept of socialisation played an important role, as newcomers to a group move from peripheral participation to full participation. As a result, they become part of the shared practices, beliefs, vocabulary, and tools used by that group. Newcomers take time to integrate into the community, so participation is peripheral at first. To describe peripheral participation, Wenger used the term 'legitimate peripheral participation' (LPP). It is not assumed that participants will find this process harmonious or comfortable. Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the theory of situated learning, which emphasizes the importance of context and social interaction in the learning process. According to their theory, learning occurs through participation in a community of practice, where individuals engage in real-world tasks and develop their skills through collaboration and observation. Lave and Wenger argue that learning is a social process, and knowledge is constructed through active engagement with others.

In contrast, Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory takes a broader approach to understanding human development. Bronfenbrenner proposed that development is influenced by multiple layers of environmental systems, ranging from the microsystem (immediate surroundings) to the macrosystem (cultural values and beliefs). He emphasized

the importance of the interaction between individuals and their environment, suggesting that development occurs within the context of these systems. While Lave and Wenger focus on the social aspects of learning, Bronfenbrenner's theory provides a comprehensive framework that considers the influence of various environmental factors on development. Lave and Wenger's theory highlights the significance of social interaction and situated learning, while Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasizes the broader context in which development occurs. Both Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory have made significant contributions to our understanding of human development and learning. However, they differ in their emphasis and scope. Lave and Wenger's theory focuses on the social aspects of learning, while Bronfenbrenner's theory considers the broader ecological systems that shape development.

By comparing Lave and Wenger to Bronfenbrenner for this thesis reveals different perspectives on human development and learning. Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction and context in learning, while Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory considers the influence of multiple environmental factors on development. Both theories contribute to our understanding of how individuals develop and learn, albeit from different angles. Participants in a CoP orchestrate work practices, responding to demands collectively and inventing solutions. Practices are always developed to meet the needs of participants. It is possible, however, that these practices do not always meet the needs of those attempting to manage them. It has been argued by Wenger (1999) that CoP's are as important to street gangs as they are to workplace units. Practices developed may not be appreciated by outsiders. An illustration of this was how these working practices of people within a claims processing office led Wenger (1999) to define CoP's in terms of three dimensions. In the first place, practice is based on the mutual engagement of its participants. Second, the community participates actively in a joint enterprise. As a result, participants develop a shared repertoire of tools and resources for negotiating meaning over time. Among the examples given are routines, words, symbols, and concepts that are shared among community members. In different environments, the theory has been adapted. Adapting CoP theory within these organisational and cultural environments may have resulted in these different interpretations. According to Wenger (2010), individuals

will develop and apply the theory depending on their own circumstances - this is not necessarily a weakness of the original theory.

Even though CoP theory originated as a critique of orthodox assumptions about teaching and learning, Amin and Roberts (2008) argued that it has evolved into a generic and formulaic method for maximizing learning in organisations.

Further to this definition Handley et al. (2006) explained that Situated Learning theory holds learning to be:

integral to everyday practice in workplace, family, and other social settings. The focus shifts from decontextualised 'objective' knowledge to the accomplishment of knowing in action and in practice. (Handley et al., 2006, p.641)

Lave and Wenger (1991) suggested that there are some communities of practice who share the same knowledge, where a group of professionals share a craft. In thinking about early years professionals and seeing them as educators, then education becomes the community of practice. Aspects that the professionals know include pedagogy, identifying learning, working with children, and developing a curriculum.

Situated Learning theory differs from the Bronfenbrenner's theory in that it does not assert that people can gain objective knowledge through independent study. This process is heavily incorporated into the procedure of becoming an early childhood professional. When it comes to development as an early childhood professional, Situated Learning theory does not fully account for how learning takes place without social interaction. The acknowledgement that communities of practice are not only susceptible to change through the involvement of novices leads Lave and Wenger to suggest that 'everyone's participation is peripheral in some respects' (Lave and Wenger 1991, p. 117). By proposing this concept, Lave and Wenger are emphasising that communities of practice are more than merely repositories of technical skills and knowledge involved in the community's activities. In their view, this is a necessary condition for knowledge to exist, not to mention the interpretive support necessary to make sense of its heritage.

Alternatively, they view the knowledgeable practitioner as someone who not only possesses the necessary knowledge and skills but is also a full participant in the cultural practices of the

community due to their membership. Therefore, as Hodkinson (2005) has argued, Lave and Wenger recognise the importance of placing an individual within a community of practice (although they do not explore this in detail). In terms of their approach, it implies that people learn through mutual engagement in activities that are defined by the negotiation of meanings both within and outside of a community. Community of Practice (CoP) theory has been applied critically and insightfully, as well as poorly (Tight, 2015; Tummons, 2022). There are many limitations which are involved with communities of practice. One of these limitations is the availability of time in which an individual can engage in the activities that are necessary for them to be effective. Organisations are becoming more complex, including the role of key stakeholders within the environment and the level of complex knowledge which is necessary to understand that given environment (Bowditch et al., 2007). Since a community of practice is a social configuration, it is likely to reflect the wider social structures, institutions (or their absence), and sociocultural characteristics of the context in which it is situated (Roberts, 2006). As such, societies with strong social structures and a sociocultural environment that emphasizes community over individualism may have more effective and stronger communities of practice (Roberts, 2006)

The early years environment

Malaguzzi (1996), often referred to as the "third teacher," was an influential figure in the field of early childhood education. He believed that the physical environment played a significant role in children's learning and development. Malaguzzi's philosophy emphasized the importance of creating a space that is engaging, stimulating, and reflective of the children's interests and needs. Within the classroom, researchers have long drawn attention to the significance of the environment (Malaguzzi, 1996). The Reggio Emilia approach specifically in early education which is outlined by Malaguzzi is a philosophy surrounding the notion that "children explore visual and expressive languages in strict synergy with verbal, body and logical ones" (Lorenzo, 2019, p.130). This can be perceived to be a visual, or the physical layout of a learning space which links to an ability of being able to complement traditional lessons for student learning. With limited research on the workplace being seen as the third teacher, the initial concept of the third teacher comes from Reggio Emilia which describes the environment as the 'third teacher' which relates to the environment or the classroom.

This is because it speaks to the children about what ‘they can do and how they can work together’ (Ludlow, 2012). While there has been significant research from early years theorists over time, current discussions also point to the importance of well-planned aesthetically pleasing learning spaces. Taking this to the workplace, this raises the question as to where the third teacher sits within all of this and how does the work-based environment support such a notion of being portrayed as a learning space. The link that learning occurs within the workplace by identifying that it supports the need for development of an early years professional is not new. However, Gallacher and Reeve (2019) argue that the increasing globalisation and outcomes related to the economy and state:

there is a growing point that ‘knowledge economy’, which in turn helps to give rise to a dialogue of competitiveness in the workforce which provides a level of skill. (Gallacher and Reeve, 2019, p.1)

Research conducted by Kaarby and Lindboe (2016) argued that the workplace as a learning environment in early childhood teacher education has a place within the context of learning for vocational early years practitioners. Their research took place within Norwegian Kindergartens and demonstrated that students who were training connected through experienced based and research-based knowledge within the workplace (Raelin, 2008). Within the workplace they were able to try out, reflect and build their personal knowledge. Within the research outlined by Kaarby and Lindboe (2016) the students explained that it is common for some employees to experience resistance and be perceived as a threat by their colleagues. At the individual level, students are afforded relatively similar learning conditions, but at the collective level, there is a great deal of variation. Concepts are used by students at work. Concepts are applied in experiments, while more research-based conceptualizations are considered less relevant to kindergarteners' daily lives. Managers perceive students as valuable resources who contribute new knowledge to the workplace. However, they do not focus on their students at a collective level, but rather on an individual level. Early Years employers are interested in workplace learning, in that there are certain benefits which are accrued by investing in the workforce and its development.

The most recent workforce strategy for the early years was published in 2017, focusing on building the reforms introduced by More Great Childcare published in 2013, which outlined the government's approach to raising the quality of early childhood care and a response to

the Nutbrown review of qualifications. As of 2013, the government has developed national qualifications for Early Years Educators with a view to ensuring that level 3 childcare qualifications prepare trainees for a level 3 job position, as well as establishing early years initial teacher training. As part of our commitment to professional development, we have also funded several projects in the voluntary and community sector (VCS). The employers and industry were highly consulted and wanted the strategy to have a practical effect on employers and employees. Working with stakeholders, we have identified challenges related to attracting, retaining, and developing quality staff that government could assist in overcoming. Despite this, further education and the training sector were not consulted in the development of these changes. The DfE (2022) outlined a £180 million investment to improve children's development in the early years. As part of this investment, those who are working within the sector need to have access to work-based training, including graduate level specialist training opportunities. This points to an employer driven approach and interest in workplace learning. Forrester (1999) was analytical about how workplace learning is represented and pointed out how a broader set of promoted interest are fore fronted. In his research about VET education and training in Britain, he noted that the contribution of learning within employment is mostly linked to the government to have distinctive advantages for individuals, both in terms of employees and society.

The last few decades have shown an increase in recognition that the workplace is a legitimate place of learning, where knowledge and skills are embedded within certain roles. Much research has agreed that a rich learning environment can be achieved within the workplace (Hager, 2001; Beckett and Hager, 2002; Boud and Middleton, 2003). Boud and Middleton's research highlights the significance of self-assessment in promoting effective learning. By engaging in self-assessment activities, students can develop a deeper understanding of their own progress and take proactive steps towards improvement. Educators can incorporate self-assessment strategies into their teaching practices to empower students and foster a culture of continuous learning. Billett (1996) has stated that certain changes are needed to represent workplaces within contemporary times which gives a focus on the importance of a workplace and how this is significant as a place for learning.

Writing around informal learning and the characteristics of informal learning can be seen in the research of Lindeman (1926), Dewey (1938) and Knowles (1970). They all state in some way that adults who are taking part in learning become more aware of learning and understand the need for self-direction explored by certain experiences. Research by Marsick et al. (1999) and Bell and Dale (1999) have considered a link between the learner and the environment and make further claims that much learning takes place by interactions with others within the workplace.

The term 'informal learning' was introduced in the 1950s by Malcolm Knowles, who pioneered much of this work around adult education. Many researchers have since written about informal learning and has given many perspectives. Eraut (2004) described the construction of a dichotomy between formal and informal learning as indicative of 'lazy thinking'. He furthered his argument that workplace learning comes a little closer to the informal rather than that of a formal continuum. Eraut (2004) implied that informal learning has a social recognition which is being able to learn from others. There is a broad body of knowledge of professional development, and, through this, learning transpires in many ways and is not limited to one approach, in this case the formal approach (Evans, 2019). There is a growing interest within this area as it is situated within cognition theory, where learning is conceptualised as sociocultural rather than seeing it as an individual process of knowledge (Kirshner and Whitson, 1997). Moreover, taking on board the learning acquired by apprentices and what impact the workplace has on them is defined by Messmann and Mulder (2015). They define them as an activity of learning, which can be carried out in relation to work alongside work tasks. Therefore, apprentices and their learning within the workplace can be seen as informal, hence it is taking place without being institutionally sponsored, which focuses on the interactions and experiences.

The presentation of informal learning can be a contrast to formal training, with a key distinction on the locus of control. This means that informal activities can be depicted as putting the learner at the centre, while formal learning presents itself as trainer centred (Garavan et al., 2002). There are further conceptualisations of informal learning to consider, which can be deemed as a social or an individual activity. Individual learning takes place without social interactions, which can arise from reflecting as an individual by looking at work

situations or interacting with others (Doornbos et al., 2004). There is a development of learning seen as a direction where learning is relational which means that an individual learns from being with others but it does not mean that the interaction contributes to the development of other parts of learning. Examples include role modelling and receiving feedback. As within some aspects of social learning, Doornbos et al. (2004) saw all participants being able to learn from the interaction of being aware of respective learning. Examples include discussions in a group, being able to reflect on situations of work, and evaluate different perspectives and constructing shared meanings.

It could be argued that informal learning includes specific activities. This means that an activity of learning is then determined by the nature of a task in the work environment Messmann and Mulder (2015). Bednall et al. (2014) recognised that categorisations of informal learning are developed through competencies which are required by an individual. They effectively operate a complex and ever-changing work environment. However, Marsick and Watkins (1999) explored that Informal learning is contextual, which means that people face challenges within certain situations (Marsick and Walkins, 1999). However, Janssens et al., (2017) informed the literature by discussing that Informal learning can be defined as a deliberate or reactive learning activity. This can take place within the workplace, as an individual, within a social interaction and then leading to development of competence/expertise. They have also informed much of the research by exploring how an individual develops through their job in the workplace through a process such as social interaction and engaging in practice, by proxy developing their competency. There is much research within education from scholars such as Esmond, (2017) and Fuller and Unwin, (2009) which has considered how arrangements through institutions, within training and education systems, are able to shape vocational learning experiences. Mazonod (2016) examined how national education and training systems influenced the quality of learning within an apprenticeship. Her study highlights a comparison between English, French and Finnish apprenticeships, but that national education systems determine conceptualisations of apprenticeship as education or training.

The study highlights how culture from a historical perspective including the institutional and political context plays a role in that of influencing vocational education (Messman and Mulder, 2015). Other researchers such as Avis et al. (2017) have investigated issues such as race and

ethnicity, analysing experiences and participation of minority groups of students in VET. There has been a growth of publications which consider factors related to participation, policy, how these relate to completion rates, social policy, and economic benefits of an apprenticeship (Chankseliani and McCowan 2021). During the past two decades, informal learning has gained increasing attention. Increasing learning opportunities and explicitly including informal learning activities have been claimed to be advantages of competency-based training over job-based training (Segers et al., 2018). As opposed to formal learning, informal learning is usually continuous. For instance, formal learning activities are structured, externally validated, conducted in a classroom, are controlled by a trainer, and have external stimuli. Informal learning, on the other hand, lacks structure, is not externally validated, lacks a classroom setting, and is internally motivated (Segers et al., 2018). It is important to note that formal and informal learning are on a continuum. For example, formal learning situations may incorporate informal learning activities such as discussion during breaks (Segers et al., 2018). There is a learning success both in formal (e.g., Sitzmann and Ely, 2011; Panadero, 2017) and informal learning and those successes of informal learning depends largely on self-regulation (Vancouver et al., 2017), as informal learning is primarily controlled by the learner (e.g., Noe et al., 2014).

At the other end of the spectrum, is that of vocational learning. Bourdieu's (1998) concept of habitus is an important point to understand and it could be argued that it is an important preliminary step to understanding the concept of vocational reasoning of why certain people are undertaking apprenticeships and diploma education. Bourdieu described this as habitus, as a cultural habitat that is internalised and influenced by a subconscious in how an individual acts, feels and thinks (Bourdieu, 1998). Moreover, Colley (2006) drew on a notion of learning to labour in the nursery as part of her research with trainee nursery nurses, most of them teenage girls, while on their two-year course. She referred to sociological theories of the relationship between structure and agency, including Marxist feminist analysis and key theories of Bourdieu.

A study by Ingleby (2017) explored early years educator's perceptions of professional development in England. This study argued for the importance of professional development within early years practice and argues that learning for these professionals is now seen as a

'low priority. Waters and Payler (2015) defined an early years professional as those who are charged, as part of their professional role, to take on board the care and education of young children. The professional development of early years professionals in England is also influenced by the educational initiative of the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage, 2021). The blanket approach which comes from this emphasises the importance of developing children's skills in what Nutbrown (2012) referred to as 'quality learning' which is associated with 'quality professionals'.

Theory-practice integration

As a major factor determining professional development, the close relationship between theoretical and practical knowledge has attracted particular interest in technical vocational education and training (T-VET). The relationship between theory and practice has been attributed a key role in professional learning (Beckett and Hager, 2002; Gessler and Howe 2015), the transfer of knowledge during school-to-work transitions and the development of expertise throughout lifelong learning (Tynjälä 2008). Identifying this relationship is expected to provide new research tools and perspectives as well as advance pedagogical approaches.

A cornerstone of technical vocational education and training (TVET) is the integration of theory and practice. Integrative learning is difficult to link, let alone to understand how it takes place in practice and what it produces. It has been identified that integrative learning is crucial to initial vocational learning as well as the development of further professional expertise (Beckett 2000; Gessler and Howe 2015; Guile 2006; Hiim 2017; Tynjälä 2008). Schools and workplaces, theory and practice, concepts and experience, or formality and informality have been often used as examples of integration. The very purpose of integration is to integrate all these entities. Integrating theory and practice has been emphasised as a prerequisite for developing vocational and professional expertise (Tynjälä 2008). Furthermore, theoretical concepts that are rooted in professional practice are critical to all professions and professional practices in modern society since they provide descriptions of why and how explanations are important, as well as broadening social perspectives on vocational practice (Hiim 2017). Within a complex society, many vocational tasks require advanced practical and theoretical knowledge, making the notion that vocational knowledge consists largely of manual skills highly questionable. In technical vocational education and training, however, it

is of the utmost importance to recognize that vocational knowledge and competence/expertise include theory (Hiim 2017).

There is a growing body of research on integrated learning in TVET; however, little is known about what such integration entails or how it proceeds (Barber 2012). Additionally, there appears to be a gap between theory and practice that remains unresolved (Hiim 2017). Barber (2012), however, argued that while previous research has attempted to describe the process itself, many questions remain unanswered. To achieve training that is closer to practice, as well as focusing on the learner as a subject (Cimatti, 2016; Maitra and Maitra, 2021). A key component of this is the creation of authentic and practical action situations in class. In this context, the most important thing is the creation of complete practical actions, a combination of acting, thinking, and doing. There are several actions-oriented tasks that need to be taught in combination, not in isolation (Pilz et al., 2022), such as analysing, planning, deciding, implementing, controlling, and reflecting. Contemporary vocational qualifications, including those in early years, are outcomes related following the widespread adoption of this mode of learning and assessment in the early 1990s.

Identity and professionalism

Winch (2021) argues that competence is adopted from a pragmatic conception of being able to carry out an array of tasks within the workplace. This could effectively be defined as an occupation (ESCO, European Commission, 2019). Looking through history and the role that NVQs played, The National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) had no choice but to adopt the position echoed by the European Commission regarding occupations, if they wanted NVQs to be widely accepted by employers (Raggatt and Williams, 1999). Winch (2021) debates that employers were usually not interested in what educational level the qualification was deemed equivalent to, but whether it was a signal of being competent to undertake the role. However, a professional qualification is seen as a social guarantee of professional competence/expertise (Winch, 2021). Since the 1980s, the EU has considered many factors in the development of education policy, the main aspect being that of economics (Cino-Pagliarello, 2020). However, Winch (2021) argues that education and skills development are not always linked to certain competencies and states that this sits with national governments to decide what certain professional competencies are. Winch explains that:

qualifications have to respect the needs of various stakeholders: learners, employers, occupation, government, clients, the public and providers of the qualifications. (Winch, 2016, p.555-556)

Professional qualifications are a guarantee of competence/expertise, but competence/expertise of qualifications can be outlined in the original design of a specific qualification (Brockmann et al., 2011; Telling and Serapioni, 2019). Competence based education (CBE) is common in various countries linking to the work which focuses on the transition from the school environment to employment, which learners will encounter after they have left formal schooling (Brockmann et al. 2008, Mulder et al., 2007). Competence/expertise based education is an innovation in (vocational) education aimed at improving students' competence (Evans et al., 2021). CBE is linked to graduates as it was a way of finding out the skills and knowledge that they had when they were in the workplace (Biemans et al., 2004). However, there are links to this thesis by examining the competence of early years professionals. CBE research has largely focused on how it is implemented, and the difficulties teachers have encountered in doing so (Koenen et al., 2015). The extent to

which CBE succeeds in achieving students' greater skills and whether CBE leads to greater student satisfaction remains unclear despite its widespread adoption throughout European countries and beyond (Lassnigg, 2017; Wesselink et al., 2017).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1992) proximal processes enhance an individual's competence/expertise and reduce a degree of dysfunction (Gessler et al., 2021). The experience of early years practitioners are interrelated with the quality of early childhood education and care, and ultimately the outcomes for children and their families (e.g., Sylva et al. 2004), raised concerns regarding the appropriate knowledge, skills, and competence/expertise requirements for ECEC professionals. Studies on competence/expertise requirements in early childhood education and care (CoRe) have examined conceptualisations of competence/expertise and professionalism in early childhood practice, and related issues across Europe (Urban et al., 2012). The researchers noted potential benefits that might arise from allowing some 'space' for professional identity to emerge. In countries or regions with clear competence/expertise profiles for the profession and training, it appears to be beneficial for clarity, continuity, and professional identity:

The downside of continuity, however, may be lack of innovation. Clarity may result in over-technical specifications, leaving little room for reflexivity, and a clearly defined professional identity may lead to a closing of the profession to influences from outside. Developing broad (rather generic) competence profiles that leave enough room for local interpretations and adaptations appears to be a viable option for dealing with these dilemmas. (Urban et al., 2012, p.37)

There have been a variety of definitions and descriptions of the concept of identity. In his exploration of teaching, Spillane (2000) suggested:

By identity I mean an individual's way of understanding and being in the world, in this case the world of work. Although identity includes what one knows and believes, it also encompasses dispositions, interests, sense of efficacy, locus of control, and orientations toward work and change. (Spillane 2000, p. 308)

According to Wenger (1998, p. 151), identity is constructed through interaction with others who belong to the same community; 'learning involves becoming a different person and involves the construction of identity' in a reciprocal, iterative, and ongoing process of learning. The process is both individual and social in nature. Lightfoot and Frost (2015) acknowledged that changes in professional identity are connected to the concept of human agency when

studying early childhood educators in England. Through professional learning, agency is promoted. However, several studies have examined the meaning of professional identity and professionalism for early years practitioners following the launch of the EYPS (e.g., McGillivray 2011, Simpson 2010, Murray 2013). McGillivray (2011) suggested that the variety of titles used by early childhood practitioners may have contributed to uncertainty about identity. Brock's (2013) research examined early childhood educators' views of professionalism across a range of policy initiatives in England, with the second phase taking place in 2006 and 2007. By drawing upon the professional knowledge of participants, Brock (2013, p. 34) developed seven overarching dimensions of professionalism by refining three generic themes ("professionalism, working relationships, curriculum and pedagogy"). The dimensions of Brock theory are knowledge, qualifications, training, and professional development, skills, autonomy, values, ethics, and rewards. Brock's (2013) initial overarching themes are similar to those reported by Dalli (2008) following a national survey of early childhood teachers in New Zealand. However, despite widespread use within literature in education, there is still an element of confusion concerning the precise meaning of competence/expertise and competence/expertise-based education (Frank et al., 2010). Competencies can generally be described as the skills that enable a person to successfully perform specific tasks in a work environment (Le Deist and Winterton 2007). There is a substantial amount of literature that uses the terms competency-based learning and outcome-based learning interchangeably. Additionally, competency-based education has several definitions, but most include at least four characteristics. To receive (micro) and advance to the next level, learners must demonstrate mastery of a skill or competency. Second, in addition, learners are able to receive extra time and/or individualised instruction. The third method of assessing student mastery is through the application of skills. The fourth and final point is that a traditional classroom setting is not necessary, since students can also learn on the job, during internships, job shadowing, through online, blended or distance learning, or in other ways (Scheopner-Torres et al. 2015).

The development of competency models (Mansfield, 1996; McLagan, 1980; Rothwell and Lindholm, 1999) is one of the comprehensive approaches that can be used to understand the required knowledge, skills, and abilities within a profession. McClelland's (1973) work is seen as pioneering and highlights that there is not one single definition to represent the term

competency. McClelland (1973) looked at a set of traits which lean towards that of job performance and effectiveness. Boyatzis (1982) explored the relationship which is developed from an individual to superior job performance. Moreover, Spencer and Spencer (1993) looked at how skills are obtained through on the job training and life experience.

Engagement in the workplace activities that offer learning opportunities are now being regularly discussed, which includes in educational programmes, such as those focused within this study within the early years, on the individual's learning, including that of their working lives (Segers et al., 2018). With a focus on learning and action-oriented teaching, this method of imparting knowledge, skills, and competencies also impacts the role of the teacher. Students are actively involved in shaping instruction in a student-centred action-oriented approach (Tam, 2000). Teachers are seen more as facilitators, assisting students in developing their own learning strategies and actively constructing educational content.

According to Williams (2020), pedagogies are predetermined to be narrow, limited, and focused on skills until they are mastered. The concept of vocational education can, however, be broadened by encompassing a curriculum that is robust, as well as being focused on the types of skills that employees are required to possess in the workplace. The broader range of pedagogies can then be considered based on the learners' interests and readiness.

This study focuses on the developing professional in the early years which takes on board the factors of informal learning in the workplace. It incorporates the position that there is a discourse around what is defined as good teaching in vocational education. Gamble (2013) argued that teachers are facilitators of learning; learners play an active role in the construction of knowledge, and learning is situated and social.

Billett (2016) succinctly outlined the challenges for vocational education to develop in students:

1. an understanding about their selected occupation,
2. the canonical knowledge of the occupation,
3. occupational principles and practices that can be adapted to particular work settings and tasks, and
4. the broad range of capacities required to achieve these goals.

(Billett, 2016, p.124)

Motivation and engagement – perceptions of the sector

There is an underlying assumption linked to work-based learning which is to provide an alternative learning pathway that can support student engagement in learning (Crul, 2018). As research continually shows, student engagement is important which achieves positive learning outcomes (Rotermund, 2010). However, Gallacher and Reeve (2019) argued that engagement concerns a person's active involvement during a task. The complexity of how student engagement as a process is related to students learning context and self-systems processes, is well captured by the wider motivational framework self-system model of motivational development (SSMMD) (Nouwen and Clycq, 2019). Engagement is mainly connected to the person's active involvement in a task or domain, while one's motivation illuminates the reasons why a person is engaged.

A research project, commissioned in January 2020 by the NatCen Social Research, focused on Understanding the Early Years Workforce. The authors found that there are specific journeys that a person takes through the sector. As categorised in the report, there are three types of professionals who were identified:

1. Career Professionals – those who entered and remained in the sector because of an inherent interest in the early years education.
2. Inspired Professionals – those who entered the sector because it was convenient but remained because they had developed a passion for early years education.
3. Pragmatic Professionals – those who entered and remained in the sector out of convenience.

(Bury et al., 2020, p.1)

As the categories outlined above were determined by analysing the motivations of an early years professional for entering and remaining in the sector, there is a considerable need to focus on the learners' experiences of work, work-related decision making and how this transfers to the typology of being an early years professional (Bury et al., 2020). However, referring to the theoretical framework, motivation and engagement play a fundamental role in the learning process as it demonstrates the unique relationships that early childhood educators form with children and their families that motivate them to work in this field. It is imperative that they build strong relationships with children and their parents or guardians to effectively teach and learn.

Early childhood educators can better understand each child's needs, strengths, and interests by establishing a supportive and nurturing relationship. As a result, they can tailor their teaching approaches, activities, and resources to meet the individual needs of each child. Early childhood educators are motivated by the bonds they form with children and their families. Additionally, early childhood educators are motivated by the opportunity to become lifelong learners. To stay current with the latest research and best practices in early childhood education, they understand that education is an ever-evolving field. To enhance their skills and knowledge, they actively seek out professional development opportunities, attend workshops, and engage in ongoing learning. In addition to benefiting their professional development, this commitment to continuous learning enables them to provide the best possible education to the children they are responsible for. I am now going to explore the motivation of an early childhood professional against the compliance and conformity of the professional.

It is important to note that early childhood professionals are being faced with a neoliberal lens within the approach, which has resulted in conformity, compliance, and performativity. The early childhood sector requires practitioners to conform to standards, meet the needs of children, bridge funding gaps, meet the standards that are regulated within their settings, including the children they are caring for, and work closely with parents and carers for a lower salary than their peers in other educational fields. The motivations of these early years professionals comes from a place of what is expected of young women and how they should

conform. The article 'And hairdressers are quite seedy' by Vincent and Braun (2010) examines the motivations for women entering the early childhood workforce. The authors argue that childcare training is a morally valuable concept for young women who have left school but are unable to obtain the qualifications required to enter other professions, arguing that childcare training is a concept of redemption for them. Vincent and Braun, (2010) considers childcare a morally sound career choice that benefits others as well as transforms an individual's life.

Andrew (2015) clarifies that childcare remains a profession:

Performed almost entirely by those who have fewer other employment options.
(Andrew, 2015, p. 242)

According to Andrew, these people will work under poor conditions while having limited knowledge of the extent to which they will be exploited (Friere, 1985). Women's motivations and choices as to why they choose to enrol in childcare courses must be examined. The choice of a career in childcare is influenced by many social factors, such as class, gender, and race (Colley, 2006), and the extent to which the choice of a career in childcare limits other employment opportunities for women is another factor to consider (Andrew, 2016). The VET research indicates that students are expected not only to meet these expectations, but also to be able to make connections between subjects, to integrate theory with practice, and ultimately, to experience coherence to develop vocational competence/expertise, which is both demanding and stressful (Aakernes, 2018; Gessler, 2017; Hiim, 2017). Apprentices are exposed to demands and stressful situations just as full-fledged employees are (Duc and Lamamra, 2022). The coherence between the theoretical content taught in vocational education programmes and the practical experience can be challenging for VET students (Aarkrog and Wahlgren, 2022; Gessler, 2017; Hiim, 2017). To foster coherence in VET, school-based and work-based learning must be in harmony (Hanssen and Utvaer, 2022; Hiim, 2017; Louw and Katznelson, 2019).

Chapter summary

Taking the view of communities of practice as an important focus, even though it is not the main framework of this study, there are key points which link to the role of the apprentice. However, there is a natural application to work based learning through the workplace itself

being a place where skills and knowledge are continually developed. As part of the literature review, the theoretical framework has been used to position the early childhood professional within Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model and the PPCT model (2002). As a theoretical framework, it has been instrumental in supporting the themes of the literature. It was important to first describe the context of the early childhood sector. It has been explored and critiqued in terms of how early years qualifications are embedded within the sector, as well as a position taken on the two courses, the early years educator level 3 diploma and the level 3 early years educator apprenticeship. Based on a thematic analysis of literature, the early years professional has been considered by identifying work-based learning, motivations, and colleague mentorship to demonstrate how all these factors can support the professional development for the learner both formally and informally within early years practice.

Reviewing a large body of literature has given me an opportunity to scope the research questions, the emerging themes of discussion and how they could be categorised into three overarching themes:

- early years identity and experience,
- membership and mentorship,
- and learning both in the context of formal and informal opportunities within the early years work setting.

The chapter has considered the formal and informal learning which takes place for a learner within the early years. Key concepts surrounding learning and training within work environments have been discussed. The chapter has outlined the position of the early years professional, reflecting on what could motivate the early years professional, positioning the early years environment and centering the learner to demonstrate the professionalisation of their role, the competence/expertise needed and how they develop over time. Centralising the early years professional attributes to my theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1992) theoretical model as the literature search has provided the predication of the theoretical framework which argues that knowledge is gained through experience, and that further development occurs through interactions within the workplace. As a result of using a framework to structure thinking, the PPCT model characteristics have been discussed

more thoroughly. The Bronfenbrenner PPCT model, for example, can be used for a wide variety of educational research purposes, including any kind of educational research to assist scholars in thinking about their topic and developing questions, including work-based learning, broader access, professionalism, and teamwork as others have found.

Secondly, it focuses on the early years work environment, identifying certain factors that support the transfer of knowledge acquired in formal and informal aspects of training within the early years workplace. This has informed the design and model of the research which touches on the understanding of work-based learning and why it is needed to support and inform the ongoing development of the early years professional. The chapter has explored how the literature places the environment and the professionals within it, by mentoring the early years professional's development and considering an adoption of how Bronfenbrenner theoretical framework can allow the transition of stages throughout the learning process.

Chapter 4

Research design and method

Introduction

This study illustrates how potential work-based learning opportunities are mediated by the type of learning programme pursued by trainees, which also demonstrates how early childhood practitioners with a stronger learning orientation achieve higher levels of work-based competence/expertise. Within this study the early years professionals construct their own realities and have a unique experience of their education during their programme of study. The central aim of how early years level 3 trainees experience work-based learning to support a transition from theory to practice will be explored. The chapter positions the study and provides a detailed account of the design of the research, the procedures for the data collection, ethical considerations and the measures adopted within the research. In addition to this, the chapter draws attention to the procedures which are adopted for the qualitative data analysis, linking back to Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1992) theoretical framework and PPCT model. It is conceptualized that the four levels of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model could be mapped onto the research process representing all three research traditions, namely qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research, and it is applicable to social and behavioural research (Frels & Onwuegbuze, 2013). However, this study is a qualitative study adopting a multi method case study approach which utilises a range of ethnographic methods to illuminate the work based learning experiences of early years professionals. According to Silverman (2020), research methodology refers to the choices we make when planning and conducting a research study, as well as how the data will be collected and analysed. It is therefore within this methodology that determines how I will approach a particular phenomenon. The chapter also discusses the methods and the chosen methodology, exploring why a case study and not an ethnographic study was a chosen method overall for this research.

Positionality: A history of where it began

In this section I explain my positionality and how it underpins the study, investigating early years trainees within the early childhood sector. The interest of studying this has come from my own professional role as a Principal Lecturer for Childhood, Early Years and Education and as an early years educator having worked within the Early Years for 15 years.

If we regard children as brilliant, capable, strong, and clever, then we must show that the people who work with them are also brilliant, capable, strong, and clever. (David, 2004, p.27).

Before any research could begin it was important to consider my own positionality. The experience throughout my doctoral journey has been enhanced through my research project by having opportunities to reflect on key points of my research by using a theoretical framework. Rossman and Rallis (2012, p.95) asserted that a theoretical framework should provide 'a central argument'.

In 2006, I worked as a part time FE tutor teaching level 2 and 3 early years professional qualifications. This was alongside my full-time role as a nursery practitioner in a large special school. Working alongside other practitioners and teaching other nursery professionals part time, I was able to recognise that my ontological assumptions of early years practice were being reflected, shaped, and challenged. The professionals had a purpose within their work, and I wanted to find out what this purpose was. I wanted to find out how early years professionals were learning holistically from their institution and what experience they get from within their work-based settings. Before qualifying, I knew that A levels were not the right direction for me. My own learning began when I enrolled onto a BTEC diploma level 3 early years qualification. The fact that I was able to include my own practice and link to the units I was being taught allowed me to understand the links that were being made between theory and practice. I had never learnt in this way before. After qualifying and becoming an FE teacher, I was able to develop that relationship from theory to practice much more closely. One aspect of being able to do this was visiting the students on placement. Seeing students in

their work environments had engaged me in being able to acquire further foundations of early childhood and ignited something in me to explore an academic interest in this field.

One of my roles within the FE provision was to support and mentor the student practitioners, which I enjoyed, assessing their progress through practice, including their knowledge of child development, the development of linking theory to the application of what this means within practice. I started to notice a difference between students studying for national diplomas and those completing an NVQ apprenticeship. The differences that I had experienced were that of how each student was able to link what they had learnt in practice. On the other hand, the diploma students were able to produce a more academic assignment. Some students would come and join my sessions to gain the knowledge sections of their courses. It was this that got me thinking about the different vocational aspects of the early childhood workforce. I was able to recall a session with the national diploma students who were able to link the concepts which were learnt in class and relate these to practice. In contrast to this the NVQ, Apprentice students had no theoretical underpinning knowledge but extensive experience from within practice. I had noticed that they appeared not to join in with the discussion, which amplified that there could be a gap between these two qualifications.

As a researcher

Engaging in postgraduate study has allowed me to foster a further interest in early childhood and the importance of qualifications and how they are seen and used within the early childhood sector. This started when I was teaching both apprentices and undergraduate degree students in a lecture. It allowed me to see how differentiated learning was key, from my own perspective of teaching different learners and the stark differential between the in-practice learning and classroom learning.

The Effective Practice for Pre School-Education (EPPE) project (Sylva et al., 2004) found many outcomes for children, by exploring that practitioners who are knowledgeable and capable can lead effective early years practice. With the government not pursuing a graduate workforce, seeing a level 3 as the national qualification, I stand by my belief that it is important and relevant to have brilliant, capable, strong, and clever professionals (David, 2004) which

has informed my approach to this research. It could be argued that the importance of relevance of those words are difficult to comprehend in a workforce of individual professionals. However, it is a starting point which allows me to add a context to my work. It is important to acknowledge my positionality; in accordance with LeCompte and Preissle (1993), I accept as a researcher my characteristics will influence the research process. I am also aware my personal values will have an impact not only on my choice of thesis topic but also on the way that I have chosen to conduct this research.

I have values which are conflicting between both personal and professional. I have a loyalty to my workplace, alongside deepening the need to develop research integrity and maintaining a critical distance when this is needed. According to Rokeach (1973), which focuses on values as mode of conduct and which he calls 'instrumental values', I feel that values sit at the heart of my research and a reflective process is needed for me to continually uphold these. He further argued the need that moral values, which is what a person feels is the right thing to do, and competency values, which is what an individual believes is the most effective way of doing things, is important. It is identified by Rokeach (1973) that 'terminal values' relating to a person's hopes of achievement (personal values), how they want society to operate are an important feature.

I have found that speaking about my values and beliefs has been difficult both personally and professionally. Until starting my postgraduate study I have not had to think about my values and beliefs in such a deep and thoughtful way. One aspect of my research is about the position of early years professionals and what knowledge has been gained from the work-based learning whilst on an early years programme of study. My childhood was one of joy and happiness due to my parents doing their absolute best, but I always knew that I was different to many of my peers within school due to living in severe poverty. These formative experiences led to values and interests around access to education for all learners. I also feel that this has supported me in my ideas of maintaining, where possible, my own perceptions, beliefs, values, my assumptions, and position which has played out during the process of the research.

Qualitative research is entrenched in values as researchers bring much of their own values and biases to a study. This can influence the findings and interpretation (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011). Dahlberg et al. (2001) encouraged the researcher to be an open and receptive person to the information surrounding the phenomenon of the study, which allows the researcher to see things in multiple ways. I have been reflecting on how to take this approach on board for my research. Firstly, I will need to maintain an open position and make myself focus on what is being studied. Secondly, I will have to show willing, be able to listen, understand what it is I am being told and make sure that this is an approach with no judgement. Being a researcher means being able to suspend any assumptions and be open to gaining new knowledge from the participants. I will be taking an interpretivist approach, focusing on establishing rich insights from participants based in the early years sector which will be a small in-depth study.

I hold the position that children need to have early years professionals who can understand children which includes understanding their needs (David, 2004). This will form new knowledge for the sector, and for myself as the researcher, and will support the ongoing dialogue of policy around qualifications and work-based learning within the early childhood sector. My own personal experience and the closeness to the sector meant that I came with an element of insider knowledge. Clough and Nutbrown (2012) and Merriam (1998) suggested that an insider perspective enables the participants' views to be revealed. The positionality will be placed around the research questions and linking to the justifications outlined within the methodology. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) argued that there are three ways in which a researcher can develop their positionality. Firstly, locating themselves about the subject; secondly, locating themselves about the participants; and thirdly locating themselves about the research context. My earlier comments on my background and my own experiences of education allows my research to be based within a political context. It is my own beliefs that have drawn the idea of pedagogy and how this links to work based qualifications in the early years. I was able to get to where I am today, by being given an education from my post 16 studies. Vocational education, therefore, has its benefits for some learners and I want to heighten the value of such programmes within our educational system. Having approached my positionality and acknowledging how it links to my approach to the research, I have

avoided excessive 'navel gazing' but established my place within the context of this research (Sultana, 2015, p.376).

Reflexivity

Wang et al. (2015) suggested that a narrative process enables the researcher to take a viewpoint which can be deemed as important so that there is an element of critical reflexivity. Reflexivity is the examination of a person's own beliefs, which can include the judgements and practices while undertaking the research process, and the influence that this can have on the research. It involves the questioning of one's own assumption. Finlay (1998) considered that questioning one's own assumptions requires openness and an acceptance that the researcher needs to embed into the research. It is important that as a researcher you think about how you start to make judgements about your data. Therefore, I have been able to make connections between my positionality and becoming reflexive. Being able to acknowledge and make allowances to reflect on my views, the values, my conduct, and the output of my research is held together through the research design. Reflexivity informs my positionality by requiring me to understand self-consciousness about my views and my position about how it has directly and indirectly influenced the interpretation, the execution and design of the research data (Greenbank, 2003; May and Perry, 2017).

According to Bryman (2016), reflexivity requires an element of researcher sensitivity with a focus on a political, cultural, and social context. Conversely, Greenbaum (2003) and Bourke (2014) explained that an individual's ethical practices, their personal integrity and the social values can influence the research process. The researcher's positionality of being subjective should be situated within their research to include a change over time (Rowe et al., 2017). Using a reflexive approach, I can have an awareness that my positionality should not be fixed and is always context and situation dependent. Engaging with an approach of reflexivity allows for a reduction of bias and the ability to gain more of a focus on a partisanship within the research (Rowe, 2014). Despite this, it is still never possible to describe reality (Dubois, 2015) truly and objectively. There is an assumption that no matter how much a researcher engages with reflexive practices, there will be a form of bias and subjectivity.

Conceptualising Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theoretical model for the research process

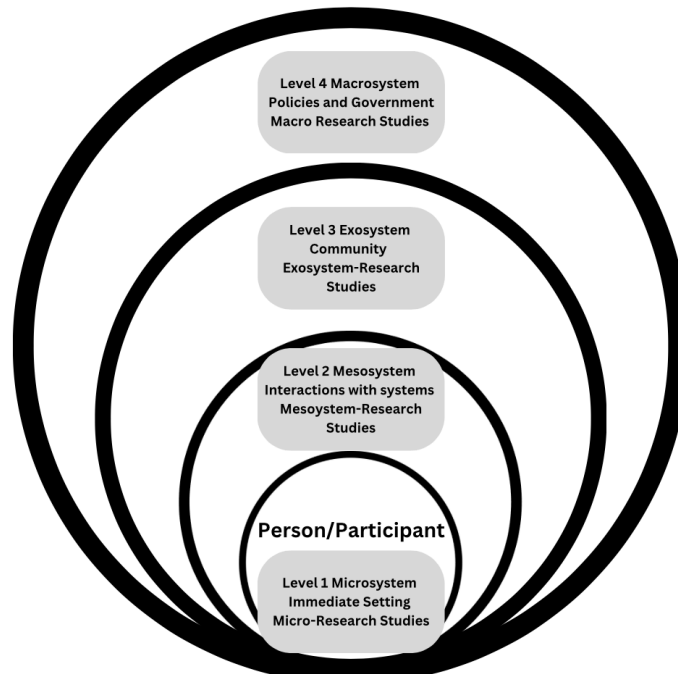


Figure 4.1: A visual representation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Systems Model and levels of research

To demonstrate how the theoretical framework has been mapped to my research, I have conceptualised Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model. It focuses on why I have chosen certain research methods to gather data that would support a degree of information from each of the systems described in the Bronfenbrenner (1979) model. I have provided a more detailed description of each system in the following table 4.2. Analysing each aspect of the system and choosing the most appropriate research method to address each part of the systems theory model. In order to generalize findings, concepts, models, and theories, I use the four-level conceptualization since it helps me determine whether the findings, concepts, models, or theories are generalizable and link to the methods chosen for this case study.

In Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model, there are four levels of environmental influence, the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. These levels, known as systems, include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Each system has its own unique influence on an individual's development, and understanding these interactions is crucial to comprehending the complexities of human development. In the case of this thesis it positions the early years professional and explores the development of the individual within the context of work based learning when they undertook their level 3 early years qualification. Each of which impacts a person's development differently. According to Bronfenbrenner, the microsystem represents the immediate environment in which children/adolescents or more specifically to this research the early years professional interact closely, such as their workplace and home. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979):

a microsystem refers to a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by a developing individual within a specific physical and material environment. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22)

The PPCT model, also known as the Person, Process, Context, Time, is a valuable framework which has been used to guide the development of this methodology. Because of this model, the methodology has been able to provide a structured approach that has considered various factors which has supported the outcomes of the approach taken for the methodology. Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model has influenced the methodology by using the Ecological Systems Theory, which posits that individuals are shaped by the interactions between multiple levels of the early years environment. Alternatively stated, the macrosystem, the highest level, comprises the larger cultural context (e.g., society, community) surrounding the individual, and within the context of this research it is where the formation of relationships and learning are built through the experiences of the participants.

Case study as a research methodology

My chosen approach is interpretivism as it is deeply informed by philosophical assumptions (Mertens, 2015). Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.26) argued that all qualitative researchers are guided by highly 'abstract principles' which Guba and Lincoln (1989) stated that:

.... the researcher's epistemology, ontological and methodological premises be termed a paradigm.... a basic set of beliefs that guides the researcher's action. (Guba and Lincoln 1989, p.17)

Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggested that a case study is a useful approach to researching human affairs. Guba's work links well with my own research as it links to the naturalistic world, how we understand this and how we become subjective through these experiences. Stake (2000a, p.20) commented that 'case studies will often be the preferred method of research because they may be epistemologically in harmony with the readers' experiences and thus to that personal experience'. This study adopts an interpretative paradigm (Yin, 2014), which seeks perspectives through multiple lenses. It is the link to a central argument; the context of the research is that the study needs to argue for originality so that the thesis is deemed to be worthy.

There is debate about the interpretation of the term 'paradigm' (Morgan, 2007) but within my research the term is used to define the epistemological stance for the research. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) used the term 'worldview' to encompass the philosophical assumptions that guide the research rather than the paradigm. The experience and reflective efforts bring a range of meanings of the phenomena to reflective awareness (Van Manen 1997). I am interested in the participants' perceptions and, linking to that of Van Manen, it explores the perspective of human science, allowing for insights into the complexity of people's experiences. This is mirrored with the focus of this research where it engages both the experiences and work-based learning approaches being investigated. This will allow me to explore the social realities through people's knowledge, opinions, interpretations, and personal experiences.

A case study was the most appropriate method to represent a life event which is set within the context of finding out the 'why' and 'how' within the phenomenon (Yin, 1994). Within this methodological approach I chose interviews, a focus group, observations, and reflective journals which has allowed me to explore the social realities by collecting data about people's opinions, interpretations, and their own experiences. Using observation as a tool for data collection and focusing on the social interactions and the behaviours which take place within them, has allowed me to triangulate the research methods and add value to the data which has been collected (Mason, 2006).

The design which has been adopted for this study is a multi-method case study approach. Using a case study approach has allowed me the flexibility to use interpretation of methods and to gain in depth data, with an important focus when researching with practitioners to gain a holistic examination of their experiences. Conversely, Stake (2000b) suggested that researchers are interpreters of situations or are constructors of knowledge through their own research. Being able to use a range of methods has allowed me to piece together early years professionals' understanding of their experiences and take on board the stories that they are telling me. This builds on Stake's (1995) perspective which aligns with my own epistemological position and relates to the justification of why interpretivism is important. However, Yin (2018) outlined that a case study is a preferred method where a researcher intends to understand a real-life phenomenon. Within a case study, the dynamics between the phenomenon and context can be blurred and are not always clear. Conversely, Wellington (2015) explored relatable research and discussed relatability versus generalisability, suggesting that we can learn many lessons from those approaches of small samples which can inform readers of case studies. Whatever the method, it is compatible with the lens which recognises the complexities and the nature of human behaviour (Twining et al., 2017).

Further exploration by Yin (2018) purported that case study research remains one of the most challenging of all social science endeavours. My role as the researcher was to design a good case study by collecting, presenting, and analysing the data rigorously. However, a case study is considered a more appropriate method for evaluation. Qualitative research and the case study method is a much-used research methodology (Panwar and Hansen, 2009). Case study

research is a comprehensive method increasingly applied with social sciences and health sciences research (Carolan et al., 2016). Carolan et al. (2016) argue that it is important to note that case studies do not use a prescriptive or unique methodological approach, but rather they are flexible in their methodological approach.

Mixed-method research is equally eclectic, with researchers choosing and integrating techniques from a variety of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches to study the phenomenon of interest (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012). Moreover, Trowler (2016), argued that there are practical benefits for doing a single site case study and that for a doctoral researcher, a multi-site study is usually too ambitious. Stake (1995) made a distinction between three types of case study which Stake believed are useful; The intrinsic case study is to gain a better understanding of a particular case, not because the case is unique or typical, but it has an interest. The second type is an instrumental case study which is used to provide an insight into a particular issue or clarify a hypothesis. The third is a collective case study (Creswell, 2012), which is a study of several different cases.

Taking on board Stakes three types of case study, the alignment to this thesis is the instrumental case study which is conducted with the purpose of understanding a broader phenomenon or theory. The phenomenon being the workplace learning for early years professionals and the theory focusing on work based learning. The instrumental case study is used as a tool to examine a particular case that is seen as representative of a larger population or concept. By using this method it is instrumental to this thesis by being able to draw generalizations and make theoretical claims based on the findings from the specific case.

However, the case study method has been subject to much debate surrounding its rigour, in terms of how reliable it is, and its internal validity and generalisability (Yin, 2013) and there has been much written about this over the past ten years (e.g Blatter and Haverland, 2012). The criticism of the lack of methodological reflection within case studies poses a possible issue in being able to explain the explanatory power and theory building potential of case studies. Case study exploration is suited to the early phase of research (Yin, 2013). Bassey (1999) explored this and stated:

The main characteristic of a case study is [the] concentration on a particular instance to reveal the ways in which events or situations come together to create types of outcomes. (Bassegy, 1999, p22)

The case study approach is considered by some theorists to be a method in the logical positivist tradition. According to Yin (2003), this approach can be carried out by collecting and analysing empirical data. Findings and conclusions are then derived from these data. However, in examining the types of case studies, whether single or multi-case studies, exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive, it becomes clear that case studies can take an interpretive approach as well. In general, these three types of case studies focus on social phenomena. The purpose of a case study is to determine what kind of phenomenon exists, then to explain how it occurred by providing a complete description. As a researcher, it is necessary to understand the perception of interpretive perspective when exploring, explaining, and describing this phenomenon, since reality can only be found in people's minds.

Many agree that generalisations can be made even if only one case or a small number of cases are examined. There is, however, a difference between this kind of generalisation and that intended by randomised control trials, and a number of authors have rushed to label it with an adjective to emphasize the distinction: analytic (Yin, 1984), retrospective (Stenhouse, 1999), or naturalistic (Stake and Trumbull, 1982). There have been authors who prefer to replace the term "generalisation" with another one: for example, relatability (Bassegy, 1999), or transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). A thorough description of a single case or a small number of cases, if it is of high quality, will enable other practitioners to see their own cases reflected and determine what applies to their own practices.

Erickson's (1977) research on qualitative research is a seminal contribution to the field of social science. Erickson, a renowned educational anthropologist, is well-known for his innovative approaches to studying human behaviour and social interactions. His work has had a significant impact on case study research, shaping the way researchers think about and conduct research. One of the key aspects of Erickson's research is his emphasis on the importance of context. He believed that understanding the social and cultural contexts in which individuals live is crucial for comprehending their actions and behaviours. By immersing yourself in the communities being studied, Erickson was able to gain deep insights into the

intricacies of human behaviour and social dynamics. His research methods were also distinctive. He advocated for a participatory approach to research, by actively involving the participants in the research process. This collaborative approach may gain a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena being studied. Case study researchers need to provide opportunity for vicarious experience. Our accounts need to be personal, describing the things of our sensory experiences, not failing to attend to the matters that personal curiosity dictates. A narrative account, a story, a chronological presentation, personalistic description, emphasis on time and place provide rich ingredients for vicarious experience. (1995, p.87).

Furthermore, case studies emphasise the holistic examination of the issue (Harrison et al., 2017). Therefore, a holistic approach is used. A case is analysed and brought into a broader category of cases. Afterwards, the researcher compares it with other cases with similar characteristics. I wanted my case study to provide an in-depth observation of the characteristics of an individual to analyse various phenomena in relation to that unit of study. This is in line with Stenhouse (1999) who stated that the task of a case study is to produce reports of experience and to offer evidence, not to deal with generalisations.

Boundaries of the case study

An analysis of a particular event, situation, organisation, or social unit is the basis of the case study research method. As a rule, a case has a defined space and time frame associated with it that is characterized by a phenomenon of some sort within a defined context (Miles et al., 2014, p. 28). An in-depth examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context is referred to as a case study. Especially if the context is relevant to the phenomenon - for instance, investigating a gap in academic achievement among second-generation immigrants in a high school (the phenomenon) is appropriate for a case study. Case study designs rely on multiple data sources for evidence because the boundaries between a phenomenon and its context are not always clear (Yin, 2018). Due to its bounded system, contextual nature, and study of process, this study is particularly suitable for a case study design (Merriam, 1998). Stake (2000a), like Creswell (2012), defined case study as the study of a "bounded system" (p. 436). According to Creswell (2012), "a bounded case is a case that is separated from other cases by time, location, or physical boundaries" (p. 485). In other words, it is possible to create limits around the object to be studied (Merriam, 1998). A case study can focus on a variety of different things.

As well as determining the extent to which the study should be limited, it should be placed within a theoretical framework. By conceptualising the subject matter of the study, a theoretical basis can provide a framework for the study. As discussed in chapter 2, this study is based on the theory of personal development and ecological development, which has informed both the planning and execution of this study. Along with the theoretical framework, the study has a clear understanding of what a case study is and what it entails. Several authorities have discussed this issue. According to Bassey (1999, p.57), the case study can be regarded as a prime strategy for the development of educational theory, which illuminates educational policy and enhances educational practice. According to Stake (2000b, p.448), the major conceptual responsibilities of the research include binding the case and conceptualising the study object. As a result of the objectives and aims of this research, the research questions, and the theoretical framework, a flexible approach was required for this study that provided the necessary data while allowing for a collaborative and dialogic approach. Initially,

the boundaries were clear, as two fixed groups were intended to participate from multiple institutions that deliver the early years educator qualification for two years (2019/2020). There were no predetermined boundaries for participants who participated throughout the study. Participation was voluntary and students self-selected. It is also important to consider what constitutes data and how it is collected when defining the boundaries of a case study. I had to consider which data collection method to use at the beginning of this study, since I elected to use a case study approach with multiple methods of inquiry. The methods used included interviews, focus groups, reflective journals, and observation of the participants. Methods were selected according to their suitability for the purpose and the amount of time available for their implementation.

Ethnography

As this study focuses on collecting data from a case study, there are many ethnographical approaches involved within this study. A large ethnography, for instance, may include extensive quantitative data analysis. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2019), the term 'overlaps' a variety of approaches within the field of qualitative inquiry. In addition to the seven principles for ethnographic research outlined by Walford (2001), Stenhouse (1999) outlined the use of historical and ethnographic case studies, which includes the use of multiple methods, the direct involvement of the researcher, and an in-depth investigation producing significant amounts of information. It is possible to conduct either action research or case studies that are not ethnographic in the strict sense of the word. It is important to note that while my work is not a true ethnography, it has adopted ethnographic methods to better understand the participants' experiences. In process evaluations, interviews and focus groups are commonly used qualitative methods; for instance, they may be used to ascertain whether participants accept an intervention (Kozica et al., 2015).

The qualitative method is used in social sciences research to answer particular social questions, such as why a particular reality is experienced by participants. The primary objective of these methods is to determine why humans act, think, or feel the way they do in their natural environment. Moreover, they can refer to studies on social movements and

organisational functioning (Daniel, 2016). Researchers traditionally studied patterns and systems of everyday life by living within a cultural group for long periods of time. It was an approach employed by anthropologists who stayed in the research context for a long period of time.

The philosophical perspective of the ethnographic approach cannot be separated from one of these three dominant perspectives. Positive, interpretive, and critical perspectives dominate the social sciences, each with a different perception of reality. Positivists believe that reality can be seen through the senses. According to Shakouri (2014), it is objective, natural, and governed by a fixed law. Consequently, interpretive theorists maintain that reality is 'not out there' but within human minds. As a social construct, reality is built by social interaction and experienced internally by members of society (Sarantakos, 2013).

Moreover, an interpretive perspective seeks to understand human action emphatically rather than to explain the forces that influence it (Bryman, 2016). Interpretive perspective is not concerned with explaining people's behaviour, but rather with understanding it.

People with powerful influence can manipulate and persuade others to accept things as they see or interpret. Among these three dominant perspectives, the ethnographic approach adopts the interpretive perspective. In social sciences, ethnography aims to understand people's relationships with their social environment. It does not emphasize understanding the 'surface relationship'. Ethnography, however, aims to go beyond this. A social phenomenon is analysed to discover what people think about it and what they do about it. Hammersley & Atkinson (2019) made some criticisms of ethnography which were directed towards quantitative researchers who use ethnography. He argued that the nature of the social world must be discovered, achieved first hand by observation in participants' natural settings. While ethnography places a greater emphasis on description, it also claims to offer a distinctive kind of description, a theoretical description. However, according to Hammersley and Atkins this description is not very clear. Hammersley and Atkins (2019) explained that there are many closely related criticisms.

Bittner (1973) provides an interesting variant of this argument. He maintained that ethnographers' marginal status, resulting from their desire to be both insiders and outsiders, undermines their ability to comprehend how participants experience the world. An ethnographer may view it as one of many possible cultural worlds, but for participants, it may simply be the way things are. According to Emerson and Holstein (2012), this problem arises in an illuminating manner. The scientific knowledge produced by science has been portrayed in some ethnographic studies as fabricated; the knowledge it produces is also depicted as 'constructed', which contradicts the assumptions of the scientists themselves. Another criticism is that most ethnographic studies neglect to examine the fundamental nature of the phenomena being studied. In this regard Emerson and Holstein (2012) criticized 'analytic ethnography' for importing sociological concerns rather than examining how the phenomenon being studied itself - in their case, the practice of natural scientists - is continually constituted. As with many other methodological terms used by social scientists, 'ethnography' does not have a clear and systematic definition. Therefore, it is used in a variety of ways on different occasions to distinguish between different types of work. Although there is little point in attempting to draw tight boundaries around its meaning, we must acknowledge the range of variations involved, and it is necessary to provide some indication on each occasion of use (Hammersley, 2006).

According to the methodological literature, the term 'ethnography' can be defined in many ways, some of which are not consistent with previous usage (Walford, 2001). There are many definitions that are not very informative, such as that of Wolcott (1999) and Maanen (1999), an anthropologist and sociologist in the field of education:

[Ethnography] is the business of inquiring into other people's business. (Wolcott, 1999)

Or that of van Maanen:

Ethnography is 'a wonderful excuse for having an adventurous good time while operating under the pretext of doing serious intellectual work.' (Maanen, 1999, p.276)

The main criticism of conventional ethnography on the ethnomethodological level is that it lacks sufficient rigour; ethnographic accounts are speculative or arbitrary, as they differ from participant understandings of the phenomena they are studying. Indeed, ethnographers impose external interpretations upon these phenomena. The complaint is that ethnographic accounts are little different in epistemic status from those offered by ordinary people. It is important to note, however, that conventional ethnography, despite its claims of adopting the native point of view or adopting an appreciative stance, is typically formulated in terms of sociological or anthropological theory rather than those deployed by participants in the settings studied. In addition, it is suggested that this creates a gap between ethnographic accounts and indigenous ones. One of the main disadvantages of ethnography is its potential for researcher bias. Since ethnography involves the researcher immersing themselves in the community or group being studied, there is a risk that their personal beliefs, values, and experiences may influence the interpretation of data. This bias can lead to skewed findings and undermine the objectivity of the research. Furthermore, ethnographers frequently explain away participant understandings, implicitly or explicitly, by applying a perspective that is at odds with participant perspectives.

Considering ethnography, I feel it is necessary to explain why I am not implementing an ethnographic approach. The ethnographic method can be time-consuming and resource intensive. Due to the immersive nature of ethnographic research, a significant amount of time must be spent in the field, building relationships with the participants, and gaining their trust. I have reflected that this is an important thing to do with my participants, which did happen at the introduction of the research, but the scope of the research was not to do an intensive study but a case study of the participants in the context of a snapshot of time. In certain research contexts with limited time and resources, this may not always be feasible. An additional disadvantage of ethnography is the possibility of observer effect. In the field, the presence of the researcher may alter the behaviour and dynamics of the participants, resulting in a distorted representation of reality. Research findings can be undermined and observations can be compromised as a result.

Finally, ethnographic research has the disadvantage of being subjective. In ethnographic studies, the researcher is responsible for interpreting and analysing the data. Subjectivity can introduce bias into the research process and limit the findings' reliability and validity.

It is important to be aware of the limitations and disadvantages of ethnography while it can be a valuable research method for understanding social phenomena in context. There are a variety of challenges related to researcher bias, generalizability, time and resource intensity, ethical challenges, observer effect, and subjectivity. To ensure the rigour and validity of the research, researchers must acknowledge these disadvantages and take steps to mitigate them in order to minimize their effects and this clarifies my position as to why my study is not an ethnographic study.

Carrying out a methodical study by using multiple methods

The term multimethod research refers to studies that combine qualitative and quantitative methods. Alternatively, different methodological approaches can be united in two ways:

- A mixed method study combines quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g., surveys and open-ended interviews).
- Multimethod research (Silverman, 2020) combines various qualitative approaches (e.g., interviews and observations).

The methods chosen for my research demonstrate a link with the work of Greene, who described herself as a 'practical methodologist' (Greene, 2014). Supporters of case study methodology have identified several advantages to adopting this approach, for example, examining people in real situations and offering insights not easily gained by alternative approaches (Burgess et al., 2006).

Bringing the participants into the research process is intended to enhance its rigour by providing them with the opportunity to express their thoughts, views, and opinions. In order for the research to be grounded in reality, it is hoped that the research will focus on learners within the programmes being studied. Case studies are widely used across a wide range of disciplines. Ragin and Becker (1992, p.1) argued that researchers use the word case "with relatively little consideration of the theories and metatheories embedded in the terms".

Within this study, the goal is to highlight the advantages of combining different qualitative methods to investigate the multiplicity and the contingency of the social world (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006). The use of multiple qualitative methods based on the same epistemological perspective can strengthen the quality of research (Justesen and Mik-Meyer, 2012), as different methods give the researcher the opportunity to see different angles and nuances (Essén and Sauder, 2017; Krølner et al., 2012; Tierney et al., 2019). Qualitative interviews can be conducted in a variety of ways, including individual interviews, focus groups, and online interviews, among others. However, observational research includes a wide range of techniques, including on-site participant observations, video- or audio-recorded observations, online observations, etc. (Järvinen and Mik-Meyer, 2020). This research does not include all possible combinations of qualitative methods. Instead, I use the most common combinations, that is, combining interviews with observations and/or documents (Justesen and Mik-Meyer, 2012).

Participant	Interviews	Focus Groups	Observation	Reflective Journal
Juliette	X	X	X	X
Charlotte	X	X	X	X
Ellie	X	X		X
Fay	X			
Kayleigh	X	X		
Hannah	X	X		
Tamsin	X	X		
Alice	X	X		
Kate	X			
Tilly	X			
Debbie				
Trish				

Table 4.1: An overview of the data collected from all participants.

Table 4.1 outlines what data was collected from all the participants. The study started with twelve participants which is outlined in Table 4.1 above. Four of the participants withdrew, although they all consented to my use of the data provided to the point of withdrawal. However, two of the participants had already made the decision to leave the research, resulting in no data being collected from them. Despite this, the data generated from these participants allowed me to triangulate effectively and reach a point of data saturation. It was important for me to outline the research to each participant before conducting interviews and focus groups and to ask all participants if they were still interested. My first conversation with each participant was informal, where I got to discuss many aspects of their position within practice and how they would contribute to this research.

Interviews

There are many approaches to interviewing which includes different ways to structure and design them. They are constructed rather than the interview being a natural occurring situation. However, it is a different approach to an everyday conversation. An interview can

be an in-depth method of collecting data, which involves an interviewer and the interviewee discussing specific topics. An interview can be described as “meaning making partnership between interviewers and their respondents”, which indicates that an in-depth interview approach is able to give a special kind of knowledge and produce a rich conversation (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007, p.128).

Coe (2021) describes three categories— a semi structured interview, structured interviews, and unstructured interviews. I opted to use semi structured interviews as the design of these, whereby key questions are asked which will illuminate a phenomenon to be further explored. This allows me as the interviewer to clarify, digest, probe and elaborate during the process. Using interviews to collect data is a purposeful method, according to Coe (2021). During the interview, the researcher attempts to discover and record the participants' experiences, as well as to examine the significance and meaning of their responses, and to learn about what the participants know about a topic. To gain an understanding of a person's lived experiences, Coe (2021) states that commonly used questions address matters of 'what' and 'how', and this approach is particularly useful in qualitative research.

Interviews were used as a method of data collection to gain insights into the participants' perceptions on learning within their early childhood workplace. Language which is spoken can be seen as a significant creation of a discussion with clear meanings outlined by early years professionals (Anning and Edwards, 2006). An interview can be seen as an inter-subjective process (Cohen et al., 2007), exploring the reality, where the interviewee and interviewer contribute. Stake (1995, p.64) stated that “the interview is the main road to multiple realities”, allowing each person who is interviewed to tell their story and describe their experience. Cannold (2001a, p.179) explained that interviews are there to capture voices and those voices could be “habitually marginalized”, which could include those early years professionals, who are not seen as powerful. The interviews had given an insight into the experiences and understanding of pedagogy within the workplace. The questions used to ascertain this were fundamental to the research in being able to answer the research questions (Appendix A4). However, within this thesis, all research was conducted online, using a platform such as Microsoft Teams, because of the uncertainties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It did, however, provide a unique opportunity to expand this study's geographical reach, which is

often constrained by a researcher's location (Carter et al., 2021). By conducting the research exclusively online, the carbon footprint on the environment is reduced, travel costs are reduced, and those with mobility issues are more likely to participate. Whilst there is much value in using interviews as a research tool, they also have their limitations. Therefore, I can accept that the data which is collected this way is not a full and definitive account and further questions may be needed. Indeed, Walford stated that interviews:

inform us of what the person interviewed is prepared to say about the topic in the social context time and the place where the interview is held. (Walford, 2001, p.95)

However, the information gathered during the interviews was not going to be the sole source of data, given that case study research is characterised by multiple methods, as there was also evidence from focus groups observations and reflective journals, which was used to triangulate what the participants said about their learning during the interviews. Walford (2001) stated that there is relevance to the interview data, which is more important to the amount of data being collected through what is being stated within the interview, answers which may not derive necessary from the questions. What this can mean is that the time which is planned with the participants is to be used well and not wasted on unnecessary questions (Cannold, 2001b). In contrast, Carter et al. (2021) found that while online data collection has a number of benefits, it can also limit participation to those with web-enabled devices and good internet connections. Furthermore, Carter et al. (2021) indicate that online media often provide shorter responses, therefore, limiting detail. According to Carter et al. (2021), the drawbacks of conducting research online can be mitigated through adapting research materials, including using other approaches, such as telephone interviews. To allow the researcher to explore the participants' responses further, semi-structured interviews were used in accordance with Carter et al. (2021). Various formats and technologies can be used for semi-structured interviews, according to Holt (2010) and Irvine et al. (2013). A researcher's ability to create a format that maximizes rapport with participants and generates mutually beneficial outcomes is more important than the medium, according to Bettez (2015) and Stewart (2016). All the interviews were conducted through an online learning platform which allowed for recordings to be made where this was agreed by the interviewee. Permission was sought from the participants for this to happen and notes were taken via Zoom cloud.

Documentary sources – reflective journals

Journals, which are reflection documents written by participants, are constituted as a narrative source of research (White, 2015). A journal which is completed by the participant can become an important part of documenting work-based learning. The journaling completed by the participants can provide a reflection on the improvement of the apprenticeship programme and the pedagogical experiences. The intended use of a reflective journal is a chance for me to hear the voices of the participants which offers an insight into the experience they had as part of their learning (Dunlap et al., 2006). The participants were asked to document any key points that they felt were not given time in the interviews or focus groups. This was also an opportunity for those participants who may not have felt comfortable to speak with me directly be given an opportunity to write their thoughts down and only share what they feel comfortable to discuss. Through reflection, the participants can become aware of their thoughts, positions, and feelings in relation to their learning and their learning community. It was the intention that the reflective journal could serve as an instrument for the research to develop.

The participants were asked to keep a record in a reflective journal (Appendix A6, Participant 1 excerpt) of their progress through their first year of study. This approach can show what occurs during the implementation of programmes, and the participants' perception of these occurrences. The participants were expected to document their experiences within their workplace, in class. In a reflective journal, participants engage in a metacognitive process where they actively and purposefully think about their feelings, reactions, thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, responses, and experiences (Dewey, 1993). There are two main purposes for this method: it can be used to investigate phenomena as they unfold over time, or it can be used to study specific, and sometimes rare, phenomena (Salazar, 2016).

In a qualitative study conducted by Janssens et al. (2018), 47 researchers from 12 different countries were interviewed to determine the most effective method for designing a diary for research purposes. The following recommendations are made by Janssens et al. (2018) when designing a reflective diary for research use: clear instructions, participant friendly language, a pilot study, addressing the participants' comments, using reliable items, good validity,

succinct questions, and using a diary that is electronic. In the same vein as Janssens et al. (2018), Alaszewski (2006) drew similar conclusions. However, he suggested that a discussion with the participants before recording any entries could help the individual better understand the purpose and instructions of the reflective diary. Research should typically use a diary method for no longer than four weeks, as recommended by Keleher and Verrinder (2003). I met with all of my participants online to discuss the reflective journals and how they would be a positive use of reflection. It was important for me to discuss what these reflective journals would be used for as some of them had never reflected in this way before.

Focus groups

Focus groups are sometimes seen as synonymous with interviews, linking more to semi-structured one to one and group interviews (Parker and Tritter, 2006). Similarities between the two relate to the tendency for both methods to be able to uncover people's perceptions and values (Nyumba et al., 2018). However, evidence exists on the role of the researcher and the relationship with the participants (Smithson, 2000). This implies that, with a focus group, the researcher can control the discussion, ask multiple questions, or even engage in a dialogue with one person at a given time. Unlike interviews, the researcher in the focus group takes more of a peripheral view, rather than being at the centre of the discussion (Nyumba et al., 2018).

Researchers who undertake qualitative research often decide if the use of a focus group can elicit certain opinions, experiences, and beliefs from participants. Sizes of a focus group can range from 6-12 participants and being able to capitalise on a group dynamic is seen as a positive approach to stimulate a discussion. Many researchers further the use of focus groups and mention that the interactive and interpersonal nature of a focus group may allow the researcher to get information that might not be gathered in an interview (Greenbaum, 2003; Kaplowitz and Hoehn, 2001). On the other hand, an interview involves a one-to-one interaction, where the discussion becomes in-depth. The researcher within this process becomes the investigator. This implies that the researcher asks questions, can control the situation and what is being discussed and can engage in a discussion with one person at a time. With a focus group the researcher is the moderator within the group of participants.

Unlike an interview the interviewer takes more of a step back rather than being in a central role within the focus group discussion (Hohenthal et al., 2015). The term 'focus group' refers to a group of individuals, selected to elicit their opinions about a research topic, according to Coe (2021). According to Coe (2021), focus groups are interactive, which means the group opinion is as important as any one individual's point of view; therefore, they are suitable for qualitative research. Kitzinger (1994) distinguished a focus group from an interview by using and analysing the group interaction as research data; this was in contrast to Morgan (2007), who defined a focus group as a group interview.

Focus groups have become popular in social research. However, despite this, there are many challenges for the researcher. Nevertheless, it is an opportunity for participants to share their insights, but it can also provide a range of perceptions (Krueger and Casey, 2000). The concept of triangulation is relevant when using focus groups as a method (Flick, 2009) and it supports the reflexive development of the research design, by helping the planning of the focus groups along with other methods. In this research, triangulation seeks to understand how the different social actors (the participants, the early years community) approach the issue of work-based early years pedagogy, and how they create to inform their practice.

The focus group questions (see Appendix A5) focused on answering all of the research questions. However, the questions were different to those within the interviews, mainly because all of the participants were together as a group. This allowed me as the researcher to focus on areas which were not identified in the interviews. It also gave me an opportunity to allow the participants to have an open discussion with each other about their experiences. This proved to be helpful, mainly since the participants were given dedicated time to discuss their reflections on their courses, their motivations and how they were supported by their colleagues (mentored) within the context of their early years practices.

Observation

Gorman and Clayton (2005) defined observation as ‘involving the systematic recording of observational phenomena or behaviour in a natural setting’ (2005, p.40). Many other researchers define observation, relating it to a much broader context. What brings many of these definitions together is the need to study and be able to show an understanding of people within their natural environments. Other researchers, such as Spradley (1980), have argued that observations of participants can lead to an ethnographic description. Observation, with its many different degrees of participation as a researcher, is clearly an important part of case study research (Wellington, 2015). Conducting observation with my participants allowed me to build a picture of the case being studied, thus enabling me to capture ‘the texture of reality’ (Stenhouse, 1999).

Whilst I had collaborated with the participants and their staff within the early years settings, which helped in designing the study, I wanted to adopt a detached role as an observer, believing that this would help to promote objectivity when collecting data. Observation has been described both as an overarching research approach as well as a method of data collection (Baker, 2006). Williamson and Carroll (2018) preferred to categorise observation as a data collection technique because it can be used in a variety of research approaches. Observation can be complex because it can require the researcher to play different roles and to use several techniques. Structured observations are defined by Rabinowitz and Glaser (1985) a ‘qualitative research method’ in which ‘pre-determined categories are used’ (1985, p.105), where recordings of activities are undertaken of people in their natural environments.

I took the decision to use observation as a method of data collection for my qualitative study. The observation became a tool to see how the participants were applying what they had stated in their interviews and focus groups regarding the work-based learning approaches of theory to practice. I did not want the timing of the observations to be prescribed by myself, so I asked the participants when they were available for me to go and visit. The main purpose of the observation was to allow me to understand more deeply the participants’ world, their setting, and their approach to the role of being an early years professional. I used an

observation schedule (Appendix A7) to guide the observations which was linked back to the research questions.

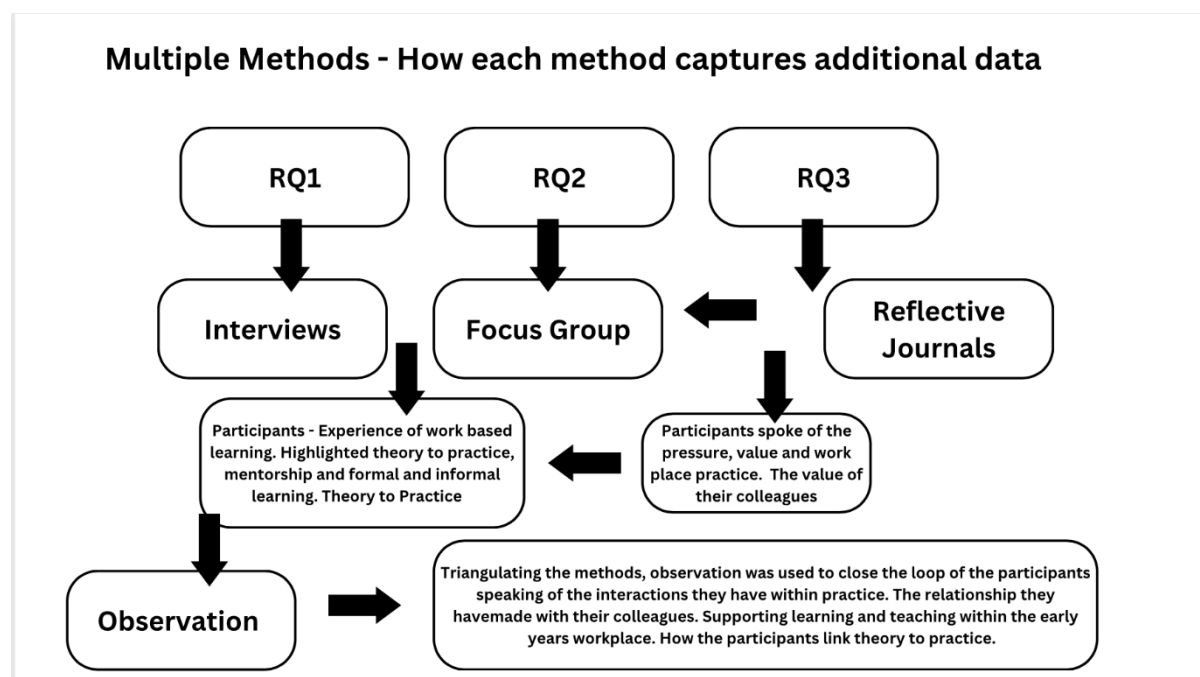


Figure 4.2: Using multiple methods and how each method captures additional data.

The aim of the research was to elicit findings and authenticate them (Atkinson, 2016) through being able to demonstrate a degree of accuracy, whilst at the same time minimising any bias (Edwards, 2005). A range of different issues were explored both within the interviews and focus group which meant that further investigation was warranted, through observations of practice. This allowed triangulation of the data which in turn enabled me to see if what was being discussed was a true reflection within early years practices. This could have been done in several ways but, for example, the descriptions of workplace learning gained in an interview were then informed by observing the participant within their workplace in the early years setting. Similarly, a discussion with the participants' colleagues provided further evidence that informed the interpretation of the data collected from the participants. The main sources of data as outlined in Table 4.2 overleaf, which demonstrates how the data collected have been triangulated (Bradley et al., 2007).

System	Person/Participant	Research Method
Micro system	Early Years Professional Colleagues in the environment	Interview, Focus Group, Observation
Meso System	Early Years Professional	Interviews, Focus Groups, Reflective Journals
Exo System	Early Years Professional	Focus Group
Macro System	Early Years Professional	Interview, Focus Group,

Table 4.2: Analysing each aspect of the system and choosing the most appropriate research method to address each part of the systems theory model.

Response to Covid 19

Given the issue of Covid-19, the study and the data collection proved problematic. Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) has given challenge within the research environment. Before Covid-19, the planned research was going to be face to face interviews and focus groups in participants' workplaces or learning institutions. To comply with social distancing rules, the data collection methods were adapted to enable focus groups and one to one interviews to be conducted online using an online video conferencing platform.

The benefits of online interviews are that they are non-intrusive and safe. Other benefits of online group interviews, like online focus groups, are that participants stated that they felt comfortable, which enabled them to share more sensitive information (Woodyatt et al., 2016). Research by Newman et al. (2017) found that online interviews counteracted the feelings of intimidation, being shy to speak up and a lack of trust of the interviewer. It could be argued that conducting research in this way versus face to face makes it easier to manage in terms of group dynamics and social anxieties. The study being conducted online allows the focus group sessions to be shorter and directed towards to the questions Bruggen and Willems (2009) highlighted this and stated that online focus groups and interviews allow the participants to give more depth to their answers. Participants also found the online focus groups and interviews to be engaging (Hutcheson and Longhurst, 2016). Indeed, logistically it was much easier to recruit participants for an online interview and focus group because of the restrictions in place. Converting the interviews to online alleviated the logistical limitations of face-to-face focus groups, which included time constraints and access (Farnsworth and Boon,

2010). One positive aspect that Covid-19 has had on the research methodology is the increased use and confidence in having to use video conferencing (Batat, 2020). This has also been supported as both the researcher and the participants have been using online platforms during lockdown, which has made it much easier to communicate online.

Ethical considerations

Introduction

Robert et al. (2020) described the increase of ethical regulation to protect human subjects, they focus on these events as a sufficient justification for the regulation of social science research. Wellington (2015) argued that all educational research should be ethical. Moreover, Dickson and Roethlisberger (2003) recognised that all research has an impact. Throughout this current research, every effort was made to ensure that any negative impact was kept to a minimum. Clough and Nutbrown (2012, p11) stated that participants need to be protected but doing this can be insufficient. There also needs to be a culture of vigilance, care, sensitivity, and fidelity, which should be adopted throughout a piece of research. My research has reflected a level of care and it was at the forefront of the research. As Denzin (1989) stated:

The lives and stories that we hear and study, are given to us under a promise, that promise being that we protect those who have shared them with us. (Denzin, 1989, p.89)

This chapter describes how the participants were provided the due consideration that was needed to ensure that they were protected throughout the process. Ethical approval for the study was obtained, following the University of Derby regulatory procedure prior to commencement of data collection. Attention was paid specifically to ethical issues and recognising that it was an essential and moral obligation of the researcher (Cannella and Lincoln, 2007). The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) guidelines were followed throughout the research process. This included considering the balance of harm and the effect that this could have on the participants, the need to gain informed consent, to maintain confidentiality, to be cognisant of issues related to power and to give the participants the right to withdraw.

According to the ethical principles outlined by the University, all research needs to ensure that the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, including the security of the research data during and after the research, are of central importance. The ethical principles form part of the research procedures by storing the data in an anonymised way. The data have been saved on digital files which are password protected and accessible to the researcher only. As an

addition to this no individual setting was named in any way within this research and it was agreed that the discussion of the findings were not to be shared without prior consent being given by the participants within the research. Saunders et al. (2015) explained that conducting ethical research:

refers to the standards of behaviour that guide your conduct in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work or are affected by it. (Saunders et al., 2015 p.726)

This means that the researcher must be aware of all the ethical aspects of their research (Saunders et al., 2015). It is imperative that the researcher ensures that the voluntary cooperation and consent of participants is paramount by considering issues of reliability, validity, and bias. Linking to the work of Saunders et al. (2015) within my own research has been a useful approach. Firstly, it has meant that the participants, have been informed of their rights within the research and how the research was being used. My conduct and how I have approached the research was continually reflected upon, and my behaviour needed to uphold the belief of protecting my participants from harm and to be clear of my expectations as the researcher.

Denscombe (2012) outlined that one way of doing this is to divide the research into many stages and consider how the ethical issue within each stage needs to demonstrate the key components to be addressed. However, this does include how the individual beliefs, values and experiences shape the understanding of the world. There are many differing ethical approaches across many sectors, for example, Husted and Allen (2008) discussed that there is a clear link here within nursing and health care, where a psychological contract exists between the parties and where the approach is based on an agreement by the practitioner and patient. A symphonological approach defined by Husted and Allen (2008) are the study of agreements and the elements necessary to forming an agreement.

Brooks et al. (2014) and Coe (2017) expanded on the reasons for being able to understand different approaches within different sectors, which in turn may provide a useful insight into my own practices within education, where many frameworks and guidelines operate. The understanding of relationships was identified by Koehn (1998) as a distinctive feature within

ethics. There is an aspiration to make the research a worthwhile contribution to knowledge. Dewey (1993) termed this meliorism, which is an intent to improve quality of life through human effort. Reflecting on this approach for my research proved to be worthwhile to ensure there was minimal discomfort and inconvenience to the participants. I was, however, continually aware of being a researcher within the setting and while interviewing online and I sought to be unobtrusive and to support participants online when it was necessary (Aubrey et al., 2000).

Fundamental to the success of this research was building and maintaining a supportive, friendly relationship, but being mindful that this could raise further ethical questions. A researcher can become integrated into a community, people will start to relax and forget that you are there. Whilst this will add an element of validity to the research, participants may behave in a way where the information is not noted or recorded. Furthering this point, the phenomenon as a researcher becoming native which occurs within ethnographic research. However, the participants may start to interpret the help and support which a researcher will need to give a commitment that could go further than a short-term relationship during the research (Rogers, 2003).

I ensured that every participant was able to make an informed decision to take part, which is based upon a substantial understanding of what the research is about and making an informed decision of whether they want to take part or not (Beauchamps and Childress, 2009). This can be seen on my first discussion online where I went through the written participant's information, outlined, and explained the study and answered any questions that the participants had. At this point of speaking to the participants I had asked all the participants to sign a consent form, which was followed by a verbal reminder that they could change their mind at any point of the research and withdraw from the process. The consent forms were stored electronically and in a separate folder to the data collection.

When undertaking the observations, I was going into the participants' settings, and therefore I needed to consider the potential ethical issues of the children's ages. The definition of a child is anyone under the age of eighteen. BERA Guidelines refer to the UNCRC Article 12, stating:

children who can form their own views should be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity. (BERA, 2011, p.60)

Clarification was sought that I was not going to be observing the children, but I would be observing the professionals within the workplace. However, it was important that I could see the children and their right to be seen, be able to express their views and airing with caution that I do not reveal any information about the children.

Considerations for undertaking structured data collection

The participants in this research include those who are early years practitioners. It is important to note that these participants could feel an element of pressure to take part as being a researcher and the power which comes with this in the early years sector as professionals may feel being done to rather than being done with. It was not my intention to pressure the participants to participate. A letter of consent was provided in advance of any meetings, including the interview, and this clearly set out the facts related to the research, and highlighted the right of withdrawal from the process. Kvale (1996) reminded the researcher that it is essential within an interview to be sensitive and done by someone who is an expert in the subject matter and have an understanding of the early years professional role, but also someone who can communicate and interact effectively. As a researcher, it could be argued that previous experience of being able to develop communication and interaction as an early childhood lecturer and to develop these skills within the early years, has given me the tools and confidence to undertake this research. This has supported my own reflexivity which has been highlighted earlier within this chapter which I feel was needed when undertaking interviews. As many of the interviews took place on the telephone or internet calls, these can create many ethical challenges, including to maintain confidentiality and ensuring privacy and consent is given. I made sure that the participants were in a place where they were not going to be disturbed. Just like other interviews, it was made clear that colleagues' names and details were not shared. It was made clear that I alone needed to know their experiences.

Ethical considerations for data

Adults have a right to their privacy and confidentiality. BERA (2018) guidelines were applied and that there were no points within the research where the participants could be identified. This meant that the participants remained anonymous. Data protection rules were also adhered to and all data was stored on a cloud-based system which was password protected. To keep the participants anonymous, I automatically assigned the participants a pseudonym. This meant that from the outset they would be known by a pseudonym name. This was agreed at the information sharing session prior to the participants agreeing to take part in the research. Participants were also briefed on not sharing their setting names or names of any colleagues. I also made the decision right from the start not to identify where the settings were. However, the settings were chosen on the demographics from a sample from across England. There is no definitive way to keep the data fully anonymous, but by putting the above principles in place, it is hoped that this will give anonymity. However, it is acknowledged that, once data have been examined, they need to be kept for a 'reasonable period' (Creswell, 2009, p.91). Although no period was specified, this reasonable period is considered to be between five to ten years. The data will be kept for the minimum period which, as outlined above, is that of five years. This will be kept on the cloud database with a passcode for any further scrutiny when it is necessary.

All participants were given thanks for taking part, although Wendler et al., (2002) discussed that appreciation can be regarded as a form of payment for participation. Sundby et al., (2017) expanded on this notion that many researchers will hold different views as to what is deemed to be acceptable or harmful. Therefore, it is important to have discussions around ethics with all participants before the research starts. The discussions were conducted before any research was undertaken with every participant. There was no conflict of interest with any of the participants or any affiliation to the nursery settings. This meant that as a researcher it was important to take on board perspectives from an ethical viewpoint and reflect on the point of bias when deciding who should take part in the study.

Participants

There were originally twelve early years practitioners that had recently qualified in 2020 who agreed to take part in this study. Seven practitioners had chosen the apprenticeship route. They were all on a two-year apprenticeship and had taken the time to complete their studies. The other five early years diploma professionals had completed a two-year diploma college course. There were two participants that dropped out of the process halfway through the data collection who were two diploma professionals at the time. These were diploma participants but due to not wanting to continue in employment they decided to leave the profession. I had gathered some data from them and tried to contact them to see if they would be happy for me to include their data, but as they withdrew from the process I decided to use the data to support my decisions and cross exam them for the analysis. They had given me an interview which consisted of rich data, but due to Covid this prevented me from collecting more data and recruiting more participants at the time.

All the participants were working in an early years setting in England at the time of the data collection. I had recruited the early years participants with the purpose of being a well sourced sample and had chosen each one with the caveat that they must have completed a level 3 early years educator apprenticeship or full-time diploma course. The initial response was very low, but I had enough participants to make the research viable (Patton, 2002). The intent of the study was to establish a comprehensive thoughtful approach regarding early years professionals who were able to understand how learning had been experienced during the time of their course and how this now leads into their practice. All participants were either asked to participate through their place of study, or they had seen the advert on my website for participants to take part.

Participant	Qualification/Route	Other details
Juliette	Apprenticeship EYE Level 3	White, age 18 years, female
Charlotte	Apprenticeship EYE Level 3	Black, age 19 years, female
Ellie	Apprenticeship EYE Level 3	White, age 19 years, female
Fay	Apprenticeship EYE Level 3	White, age 18 years, female
Kayleigh	Diploma EYE Level 3	White, age 18 years, female
Hannah	Diploma EYE Level 3	White, age 18 years, female
Tamsin	Apprenticeship EYE Level 3	White, age 27 years, female
Alice	Apprenticeship EYE Level 3	White, age 19 years, female
Kate	Diploma EYE Level 3	White, age 18 years, female
Tilly	Diploma EYE Level 3	Mixed Heritage, age 18 years, female

Table 4.3: Explanation of who the participants were and what training they completed.

The participants were motivated by two key dimensions; a desire to work with young children and a desire to become a qualified professional. There was an inner knowing among many of the participants that they wanted to work with children, particularly within the early years phase. Participants used the words 'always knew' a lot, indicating that they had always wanted to work with children. Some of the participants had prior experience of working with young children or had family members who worked in the early years, which had influenced their career choice. A family member or educator encouraged many of the participants. There were many participants who discussed how rewarding it was emotionally and how satisfying it was. Previously, Brock (2013) and Henshall et al. (2018) conducted research with early childhood practitioners. Children's progress and development were explored as emotional rewards. As Moyles (2001) argued, professionals are motivated by their passion for working with children. It was discussed how children learn and develop, as well as how to prepare children for formal learning in school, as basic elements of professional practice. Participants explained that their placements and workplaces had helped develop their skills, such as planning and observing children and understanding children's learning and development.

To identify the participants, I consulted social media platforms (i.e., Twitter) and early years publications to promote the research project. Respondents indicated that they wished to volunteer to take part in the interviews, the focus group, observation, and reflective journals. The participants took part in the data collection outlined above and I selected a sample of those who were working within the early years. Covid-19 became an issue, and this meant that the sample size went from 12 participants to 8, including two that had withdrawn from the research as they left their job. However, I was able to use their interviews. I have introduced the participants through vignettes, exploring each participant's story and experiences. Next, I will provide a brief introduction to my participants, detailing their professional role, their educational background, and why they chose their qualification pathway. Each was given a pseudonym as described above.

Participant 1- Juliette

Juliette is an 18-year-old white woman. She has completed an apprenticeship level 3 in early childhood education. As an apprentice, she worked in a 60-place day nursery. The day nursery is located near local businesses and banks. Juliette works with two early childhood educators in the pre-school room. Juliette's workplace mentor has been based at the nursery for 10 years. Juliette couldn't achieve the GCSE grades she wanted at school, so she decided to pursue an apprenticeship. As a result, she was able to complete her English and math level 2 functional skills while completing her apprenticeship standard. Juliette earned £4 per hour during her apprenticeship and now earns £8.90 per hour above minimum wage. In her setting, she has key worker responsibilities. She received training from a local provider who offered the course on site, so she completed all of her learning on site, and an assessor regularly visited the nursery to set work, take completed work, and discuss it professionally. Juliette is now a room leader for the rising twos and fully qualified. Currently, she is not interested in progressing.

Participant 2 - Charlotte

Charlotte is a 19-year-old female who currently works at a pre-school as a qualified early educator. At 16, she enrolled in the apprenticeship after leaving school. Currently, she works in a family-run setting where her mother has worked for 16 years. As Charlotte left school with four GCSEs, including math and English, she decided to do an apprenticeship to earn some money. While she had also applied to her college sixth form to complete 2A levels, she knew that she wanted to work with children. Since her mother had advised her to consider doing an apprenticeship, she contacted her local apprenticeship provider, which helped her decide if it was a good idea. Charlotte completed her course in 24 months. While working, she found completing the course very challenging, but she knew this was the career for her. Charlotte took on key worker responsibilities during COVID and is now a fully qualified member of staff with key worker responsibilities within her role. In addition to her responsibilities within her role and the experiences she faced during her apprenticeship, Charlotte has not shared any other information. As she is aware of her next steps, she hopes to eventually become a teacher in early childhood in her setting over a long period of time.

Participant 3 - Ellie

With Ellie's early years professional qualification, she works in a school nursery with the rising twos into pre-school, and she serves as the early years lead for her chosen group. Over the course of two years, she completed her apprenticeship. Having taken into account the fact that she did not enrol on an apprenticeship straight away, Ellie qualified at the age of 19 after having begun her studies at a local college to become an early years professional. A test was conducted at the endpoint. When she started college, she was enrolled in an early childhood education course, but decided it was not for her. However, the college offered an apprenticeship programme, so she started on it and obtained employment at a nursery for two-year-olds at her local primary school. According to Ellie, she did not really enjoy formal education, but she knew that she wanted to work with children to pass on some of the skills and attributes that she had learned as a child and wanted to apply to others. A mixed multicultural community surrounds the primary school, which is in an area of deprivation.

Participant 4 - Fay

A two-year apprenticeship led to Fay's qualification as an early years educator at level 3. Fay is 18 years old. Since she has all her GCSEs, she didn't want to attend college or take A levels. Currently, she works in a day nursery setting with babies from 6 months of age. As a keyworker, she plans and implements learning opportunities for the three children in her care. As a nursery assistant, Fay has been at the setting since the beginning of her apprenticeship. She completed her training through a training provider after two years of study. As requested by the training provider, Fay went to the college setting once per week on a Friday afternoon. Once every six weeks, an assessor visited Fay's setting. Her parents had recently moved to the area, so Fay was new to the area. Located in the east midlands, the setting caters for up to 50 children within a housing estate. Fay is from the south. As her school knew she wanted to work with children, they passed on this apprenticeship to her. As a result of being able to earn some money and gain her qualification at the same time, Fay states that she was motivated to go to college each week.

Participant 5 - Kayleigh

Kayleigh, 18, has just completed her Early Years Educator diploma at her local college. Her college is located just outside a large city in the midlands. She is now a qualified early years educator working in a franchise nursery. While the pandemic was happening, Kayleigh had to take most of her college courses online. Despite not being able to complete her placement, she was able to return to college. During her secondary education, Kayleigh received career advice that led her to pursue a diploma in early childhood education. By completing this diploma and gaining some experience within practice, she believes she will be able to decide if this is what she wants to do. In addition to living in house share with her friends and colleagues from the nursery, Kayleigh does not live at home with her parents. Kayleigh stated that the diploma EYE was a clear choice for her because she was unable to sustain exams. Additionally, Kayleigh has seven GCSEs, including math and English.

Participant 6 – Hannah

Hannah is an 18-year-old early childhood educator who recently qualified. She completed her studies at a sixth form college. She attended the same school and didn't achieve enough GCSE

grades to qualify for A levels. Despite this, she was able to attain both her maths and English GCSEs while studying on her Level 3 EYE. Due to her other qualifications, she was offered the course at the school where she was studying. Hannah hasn't talked much about herself. Her mother and two older sisters have both worked in nurseries, so she has always wanted to do what they have done too.

Participant 7 - Tamsin

Tamsin is 27 years old and recently qualified as an early childhood educator. Tamsin completed her apprenticeships over the course of 38 months. She is also a mother to two children and has decided to change careers. In the past, she worked as a care home assistant and decided to complete a part-time apprenticeship after getting interested in the role during her children's nursery years. Currently, she is working at a job that she enjoys. As she is eager to progress within the setting, she will also work with the room leader. According to Tamsin, she was motivated by her children. In addition to working part-time at the care home, she still does some hours there as well. As an early years educator, she wants to settle into her new position and has no immediate plans to advance. In addition to studying for her course, she completed functional skills level 2 numeracy and literacy. According to her, her setting has been a great help and has supported her with the training. During her training, Tamsin was supported by a local training provider.

Participant 8 - Alice

Alice recently qualified as a key worker in the pre-school room. As a result of Covid 19's first lockdown, Alice now works at a different nursery than where she did her apprenticeship. After being unemployed for three months, she saw an advertisement for a nursery practitioner. As Alice explained, she didn't know what to do after school and found herself drawn to working with children. As college was a distance and she didn't want to travel, the apprenticeship was the only option. After applying for an advertisement at the setting where she did her training, she was hired. During her training, Alice needed to complete her functional skills math in addition to her English. Having earned this within the first 12 months of her apprenticeship, she is now counted in the ratios.

The two participants that had left employment at the time of collecting data. However they had completed their interviews before they decided to leave their roles. Due to having their interviews completed and they had given permission to use these I wanted to include them in the analysis of the research

Participant 9 – Kate

Kate has completed her diploma EYE and is working in the baby room at a small village nursery. Kate has her qualifications so can be counted in the ratio at the nursery. Kate didn't share too much of her background, other than she had stated that childcare was not her original plan but she does want to become a teacher. Kate left the nursery after I had conducted the interview with her. On returning to the nursery sometime later for a booked observation, I discovered that Kate had left three weeks earlier. Whilst I have been unable to contact Kate, her ex employer has confirmed that she has now progressed to University.

Participant 10 – Tilly

Tilly was a qualified early years professional working at a local play centre. The play centre is nursery but it is also open to the public where families can access soft play. The nursery caters for 2 year olds to 4 year olds. Tilly works in both areas and covers staff in the play centre and the nursery. Tilly had not completed her GCSE's when she enrolled onto her level 3 diploma, instead taking them again in her first year where she also took her level 2 Functional skills. Tilly is a shy individual, didn't choose childcare as an option for employment and had decided to leave after Covid as she wanted to undertake more of a role in the business admin side of the business. Tilly did stay at the nursery but did not want to continue with the research as she no longer worked in this section.

Population and sampling

Sampling in qualitative inquiry means that there needs to be an appropriateness of the sample and the size of participants, which includes participants who are able to relate to the questions being investigated within the research. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) argued that an important consideration is needed of the quality, evaluation, and trustworthiness of the research. The samples in qualitative research tend to be small, which supports the aim of achieving depth in case orientated analysis, which is fundamental to this mode of study (Sandelowski, 1996). Qualitative samples are purposive, which provides rich information of relevance to the phenomenon being investigated. As a result, purposive sampling, as opposed to probability sampling which can be seen in quantitative research, selects information-rich cases (Van Rijinsoever, 2017).

The development of the coding framework

As a result of an extensive analysis of the interviews, focus groups, observations, and reflective journals, I organised the findings into the themes as outlined in Table 4.3 and then cross-referenced back to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological framework. To be able to interpret the data, I started to define this by codes whilst considering the themes which were being discussed. The development of the coding was refined throughout the study. The steps that I followed to analyse the data are described in the Table 4.4 below.

Step 1	Conducted Interviews
Step 2	Transcribed Interviews
Step 3	Conducted Focus Group
Step 4	Transcribed Focus Group
Step 5	Read transcribed interviews several times to establish which codes occurred
Step 6	Read transcribed focus group and linked to the codes which occurred.
Step 7	Received Reflective Journals – Read and coded
Step 8	Conducted Observations – Linking back to the objectives of the research – Coded occurrences
Step 9	Put themes into thematic networks with the codes that informed the themes to gain an overall picture of the data collected.

Table 4.4: Structure of data analysis

Initial Main Theme	Likely Codes (sub groupings)
Work-based Learning	Delivery approach Theory to Practice Mentoring
Vocational Approaches	Formal and Informal Learning Workplace Institutional learning Early years professional experiences

Table 4.5: The initial coding template

The trustworthiness of the study

To triangulate the qualitative data collection process, several research methods were used, including semi structured interviews, focus groups, reflective journals, and observations. This research was conducted with a group of participants from within the same sector, from different educational institutions, and from different educational courses. In addition to providing a rich data set, this ensured that the data being collected from a variety of

participants. When using multiple qualitative methods to examine the same phenomenon, the triangulation process increases validity by cross-checking knowledge derived from different sources (Yin, 2009).

The trustworthiness of the research is of importance in applied fields such as education, where findings may influence practice (Merriam, 1998). The research was positioned upon established standards. These can be identified as reliability, careful control of variables, objectivity, validity and involving an element of measurement and low level of error.

Other scholars such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) have discussed methods to ensure the quality of a naturalistic enquiry which are then linked to those by which quantitative research is judged. Conversely, McInnes et al. (2017) explored how this concept is positioned within the reality. They both discuss the importance of clarifying the context of typical practices. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) principles have been explored and adopted within my study.

It is my role as the researcher to provide the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author's conclusions make sense (Merriam, 1998). The written accounts of a research study have an element of dependability and confirmability which are perceived to be internally coherent and plausible. I have to offer a rich account of the research process, including the data and my interpretation, which gives an element of confidence in this research. Understanding the role of the early years professional meant that there were a number of methods being used to understand the role more by conducting interviews, a focus group and reflective journaling, and observing the activities around pedagogy within their work setting (Travers, 2008). Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.4) suggested that the use of several methods "adds rigour, breadth and depth to any investigation", and they recommend this approach as supportive of a "quest for rich data".

In addition to using multiple data sources, there needed to be an element of credibility from doing these methods, and one of these were adopted by undertaking field observations (Mertens, 2005). Being able to spend time in fieldwork, collecting data and observing different patterns of behaviour over time has resulted in me being able to triangulate what was discussed in the interviews and focus groups. The data consisted of a total of four hours of

observations of informal practice supported by field notes, six hours of interviews, one hour of focus groups and eight reflective journals. These separate items of data were imported into a depositary (Bazeley and Jackson, 2015).

Positioning the research

... the processes of analysis, evaluation and interpretation are neither terminal nor mechanical. They are always ongoing, emergent, unpredictable, and unfinished. They are done through the process of writing, itself an interpretative, personal, and political act. They are like a dance.... (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p.275-6)

In the next part of this chapter, I present the process of analysis. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) described the analysis process as a means of moving texts and findings by understanding how the data explores certain issues which may arise. Dey (1993) argued that themes that are identified gives a clear focus for reflecting on the notes from the observations, interviews, journals, and focus groups, and in relation to this research by including the participants' interpretation of work-based learning and pedagogy. Table 4.6 and Figure 4.2 show a triangulation of each method, which responds to each question and how they have been answered. (Demonstrated on the next page).

Questions	Method/s	Topics Covered	Data
Question 1 – How do early years practitioners develop early years knowledge while undertaking their level 3 early years training course?	Interview Focus Group Reflective Journals Observations	Delivery Approach Formal and Informal learning	Juliette Kayleigh Hannah Fay Charlotte Tamsin
Question 2 – Can any differences be identified with regards to how early years trainees develop both formally and informally with early years settings?	Interviews Observations Focus Groups	Mentoring Formal and Informal learning	Juliette Ellie Hannah Kayleigh Charlotte
Question 3 – How do early years practitioners apply the theory to practice which supports the competence/expertise of becoming a qualified early years practitioner?	Interviews Focus Group Observation	Theory to practice Work environments post qualifying	Ellie Hannah Juliette Kayleigh Fay

Table 4.6: Exploration of data analysis of Early years educator practitioners' understanding of pedagogy – Work-based learning.

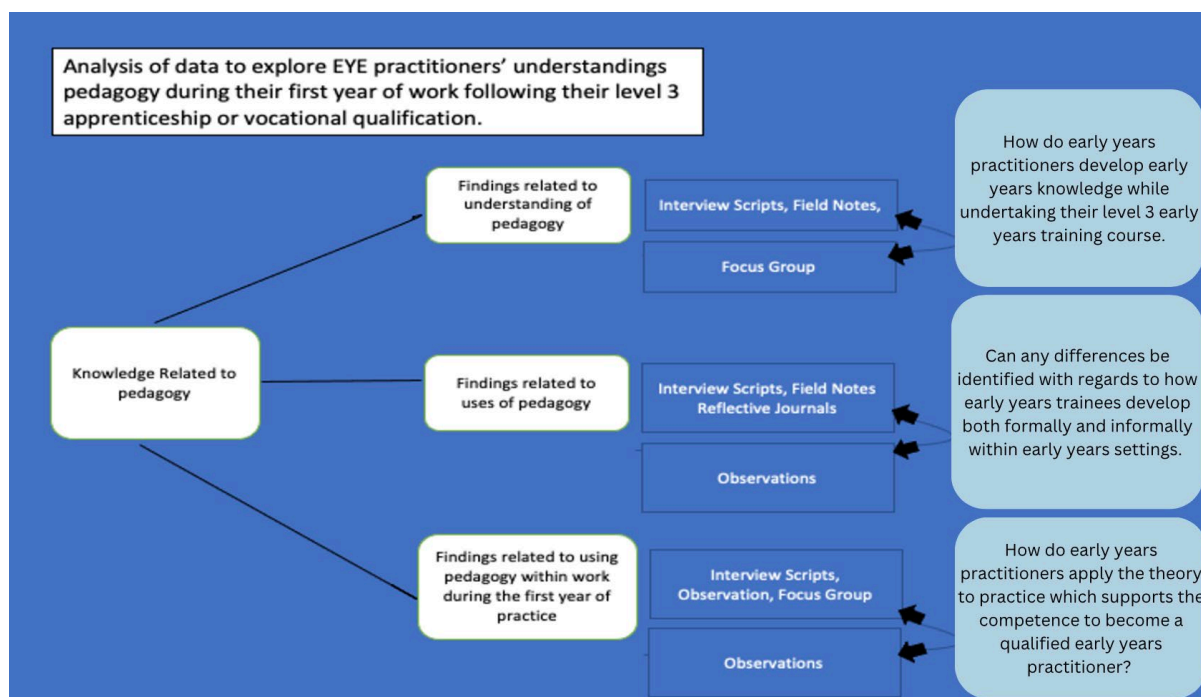


Figure 4.3 A visual of how the data analysis explores EYE practitioners understanding of pedagogy during their first year of work.

Figure 4.3 and Table 4.6 demonstrate the intercalation of the data collection and how each method has supported each other. To fully engage in the data, I wanted to know, how the participants' knowledge related to pedagogy within the workplace. It was clear that all the participants had some knowledge of pedagogy as they were in an education role and working within an education setting. However, I was intrigued to find out what knowledge they did have to engage further with the data. I divided the focus into three sub sections which gives a further insight. Figure 4.3 demonstrates how the data has been divided by showing the understanding of the participants into where the information is found and then breaks it down into each question. This was so that when I was looking for answers to each research question, it was much clearer as to where I could find the data. For each part of the research question the data were scrutinised, as illustrated in Figure 4.3 above. Looking at these in greater detail each aspect of findings links back to the participants' understanding of knowledge that they already hold about the wider context of pedagogy. All the participants will have some knowledge of what pedagogy is from a teaching and learning perspective as this is taught on their course. Each aspect links to a specific aspect of data collection and links more specifically to a question. Each one of the findings link between each other. This is shown by the arrows,

which explores the data linking with the question. It is not linear, and therefore there will be aspects within each of the findings which cross over to answer questions.

Knowledge related to pedagogy as an early years professional

Early years practitioners already have an element of knowledge when it comes to pedagogy as they are based within an early education setting. The context is different but the links to learning and the value it brings are very much the same. What constitutes effective pedagogy in the early years has received increased attention, due to acknowledgement in growing research, such as Heckman (2006). Heckman explored the meaning of investing in children and giving high quality early childhood education, which offers opportunities for all children regardless of their background, to develop, socially, emotionally, and cognitively for effective development.

Early Years pedagogy relates to the 'how', or practice of educating. It refers to:

that set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions within a particular social and material context. It refers to the interactive process between teacher and learner and to the learning environment. (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2004. p.4)

There is a clear link how Figure 4.2 above links with the extract of the interview below. Data below shows that gaining this knowledge is not linear but analysing the data to answer the questions was the right approach for this research.

The process of analysing the data

For the first stage of the analysis, I used a highlighter with assorted colours, which was a process where each of the documents were read through and in turn the text was coded, which generated three core themes. The themes were created in two ways, the themes which were generated as 'norms' and the ones which highlighted 'next steps'. This was decided prior to the coding process and thought of while undertaking the transcribing and re reading the interviews. This supports the aspects which arise from the words and phrases in data collection, which can capture repeated ideas from the participants' responses (Auerback and Silverstein, 2003).

These key concepts linked back to the literature review and focused on pedagogy, work-based learning, and links to competence/expertise within being an early years professional. The data were then cross examined for a second time to ensure that responses were given prevalence within the research. This approach is highlighted by the work of Kelle (1995) as signpost coding. Being able to look at each theme showed a breadth of the coding for all the themes (Gibbs, 2002). Examination of the data, which were coded and themed, then led to a reconsideration by looking at the themes and refining them further to link to the theoretical framework. The practices were also important, and these were put into categories which have given the themes below.

Themes	Description
Work-based Learning	Apprenticeships and placement learning within the context of becoming a qualified Early years educator.
Informal and Formal Learning	The learning which takes place within practice from non-formal teaching. Autonomous Learning

Table 4.7: List of themes with associated descriptions and examples to be able to establish a relationship between the text and coding, which is linked to the themes, the themes were moved and defined a connection between them.

Chapter summary

A methodological approach to my research is explained in this chapter, as well as methods of collecting data and conducting the research. As a result of participant observation, structured interviews, focus groups, and reflective journaling, evidence of participants' activities and ideas was gathered. This evidence, when analysed thematically, provided an insight into their experiences and processes as early years professionals. As a result of the discussions throughout this chapter, ethical considerations were thorough and rigorous within the research, and throughout the data analysis. It was a crucial point that participants were protected throughout the research process in the ways in which they were articulated in the chapter.

The next chapter will provide a thematic analysis of the data which will explain and present the analysis of data and key findings. Justifying my position and reason as to why I am using a case study approach and not that of an ethnographic approach is an important point to make. It is worth noting that there is much cross over from case study and ethnography. However, I wanted to look at a method which deeply observes the characteristics of an individual, and regarding this research that positioning it is done through the experience of the participants in their role as an early years professional. However, ethnography is a method which explores the nature of a certain social phenomenon and there are clear links which can be drawn upon through the interactions and the social positions of early years professionals. I can see the benefits of adopting both a case study and an ethnographic study. However, linking back to the theoretical framework, there is a clear link which focuses on the individual, how they are learning within the workplace and how they develop through the interactions within the work environment. Therefore, my research, which was undertaken using a case study approach, relates well to how the early years professional develops through an approach of work-based learning. This also links well to Yin's (1984) definition of an 'inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon which its real-life context' (1984,p.23). I have been clear about the position that early years professionals are in within the workforce and feel that his definition helps me define the approach I have taken for the method of this study.

Chapter 5

Data analysis and presentation of the findings

Introduction

In this chapter I outline the research findings. These findings are organised to answer the research questions. According to Merriam (1998), data analysis is the process of making sense of the data. The questions for this research were linked to the aim of the thesis. There were three questions to answer as follows:

- RQ1: How do early years practitioners develop early years knowledge while undertaking their level 3 early years training course.
- RQ2: Can any differences be identified with regards to how early years trainees develop both formally and informally within early years settings.
- RQ3: How do early years practitioners apply the work-place learning which supports the competence/expertise to become a qualified early years practitioner?

As mentioned in chapter 4, I made use of the thematic analysis for identifying, analysing, and reporting themes within the data and an exploration of each question will be linked to the data findings at the end of this chapter within the summary. This means that my findings were interpreted in terms of the experiences of my participants. The research questions were answered by making use of two categories as outlined in Table 4.4. In deciding what to include into the categories, I studied my initial themes in conjunction with my research questions. I had made sure that there was no overlap of information in the different categories. I will now describe each category in a narrative formation with direct quotes from the participants, and then an interpretive dialogue will follow. Overall, introducing an organisational perspective to the study, the work of this research has focused on the work environment of the early years and presents an important implication for vocational learning practices within the early years.

Thus, this has meant adopting an integrative approach to becoming an early years professional by applying formal and informal applications which has contributed to the participants' professional development.

As explored in chapter two, taking a perspective of situated learning gives an element of knowledge which the participant have become social actors within this research (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Nielsen and Pedersen, 2011). The study has a focus on work-based learning and how the environment has become a determinant of early years professional development. The concept of apprentices as being a full-time paid employee includes elements of on and off the job studying. This off the job links to theories which focus on the training being transferable (Baldwin et al., 2017; Cerasoli et al., 2018). These theories are pertinent to training, learning within the workplace, both in terms of apprenticeship professional development, and links well to vocational workplace learning. By doing this, the study has explored the factors which support apprentices and vocational learners by focusing on the knowledge that they learn, and the skills required for effectiveness in their role of employment.

Secondly, the study focuses on the pedagogy within the workplace and heavily links to apprenticeships. This study looks at categorising apprentices within the early years workforce and encompasses the job competence/expertise, technical knowledge, and work skills. It can be argued that there is representation about the association between formal and informal learning, with factors such as specific work-related competencies. The study has not focused solely on the interactions that the professional has detailed in their feedback, however the formal and informal aspects of learning which occurs between the learner and the colleagues within practice have been highlighted within the data, but there has been an association of the factors which surround the learning through the models of formal and informal learning, and links to the research already conducted on workplace learning as an outcome (i.e., Messman and Mulder, 2015; Raemdonck et al., 2014). The research not only looks at the investigation between the relationship of work colleagues and the learning conditions that work colleagues take on, identifying the formal and informal factors that are prominent with the research (Clarke, 2005; Janssens et al., 2017).

Delivery Approach

The two programmes which have been considered within this research, are the level 3 early years educator full time college-based diploma route and the level 3 early years educator apprenticeship. The participants discussed key points on their programme of study and how this applied to their workplace learning. There were arguments made by the participants which had an impact on the knowledge that they experienced during their course. Some of this was expected due to the lack of placement experience as outlined by those who are on both routes. The participants are now working full time and are qualified early years professionals, which means that they have had time to reflect on their experience and, in certain cases, have moved forwards and left the profession altogether.

Comments taken from the focus group are below:

My course was well structured, and I think it has really supported me into getting where I want to progress too. It has given me a good start for working with children. Doing an apprenticeship had given me some flexibility with what I was learning and what I was learning in my job. I do think there are many things I would say were good and areas that of course could have been improved. (Juliette, Ex-Apprentice)

I did a level 3 at college, and I would say that some of what Juliette has said rings true. For me I do not think I had enough hands-on experience. I know that this was due to COVID, but I have to say it has been hard. (Kayleigh, Ex-Diploma)

I think what I want to say is that I learnt a lot more from my friends at the nursery rather than kept on relying on the tutor from the training provider. (Charlotte, Ex-Apprentice)

Yes, most. I have to say that without placement you cannot do the job really. This is an important part of the course. I would go as far to say that the training needs to be an apprenticeship. You could say that more time being with the children is an important thing. I do not think I had enough time in placement to be honest. (Hannah, Ex-Diploma)

Mirror what both ladies have said. To be honest, I do not think it is the on-programme thing for me, it is the aftereffects. I have found what I have learnt to be useful but there is no consolidation of this, and I find myself continually thinking am I doing the right thing. (Fay, Ex-Apprentice)

These illustrative responses reflect many of the participants' articulations of the experiences while they were on their course. The focus of these responses is on meeting the needs of the participants when they were students at the time and comparing the pedagogical differences and experiences gained on both pathways. The responses are complex, defining that the learning which happened during their programme of study was not a linear thing to discuss. However, what their responses do highlight is that there are pedagogical differences in time, experience and being in the moment. The data above demonstrated a lack of involvement, which has played a significant part in whether the participants are competent with regards to gaining their expertise for their role. It was clear that all participants felt that the offer from their learning experiences was limited in scope, knowledge and most importantly the links being made for work-based learning. There were times when participants who were apprentices explained that their time was limited with regards to their written work, and the opposite was explored by participants who were on a full-time diploma course, who explained that their practice was limited and lacked the rigour needed to learn about being a level 3 professional, linking theory to practice and being ready to be competent as a level 3 early years educator.

To explore the feelings of the participants, a discussion emerged within the focus group. This was an aspect which did not transpire as much in the interviews. Nonetheless, it was important to show the context of how the discussion went and what the participants were happy to explore. I asked the question as shown in the quote below:

I am glad you mentioned this, as I am thinking when you qualified, this is something which has been flagged up by many of you. I am thinking of proposing that a consolidating year would be useful – having a mentor, continuing that work-based pedagogy, having someone to help with those feelings. My other note is do you feel that the level 3 was adequate for what it is you are doing now? (Aaron)

I think a year after qualifying and having someone with you would be a good idea. My own personal experience was not positive. I felt so alone. (Charlotte, (Ex Apprentice):

Does anyone else think this? (Aaron)

I do, and I do not. I guess it is about what support your manager gives to you. (Kayleigh, Ex-Diploma)

I have to say that I am finding it hard after the year we have had. Any extra support – work-based learning that can continue is a good thing. Fay, Ex Apprentice)

As a mother myself – I find that I have had to adapt as I am going along, it is a little bit like parenting. The apprenticeship was good, but it was fast, no time to take anything in and I also did not feel that I had enough time to learn, you know what I mean. (Tamsin, Ex Apprentice)

Can you explain what you mean? (Aaron)

the courses are good, but I found mine to be very demanding. Once I had finished one section, I was then asked to complete the next section. I also did not feel that there was enough time to discuss. I also know that my tutor was dealing with the pandemic just like we were, and the work-based [learning] just ceased and did not happen. We had to rely on videos. (Tamsin, Ex Apprentice)

As much as I loved my apprenticeship, I do feel that I can agree here. It was like it was rushed and listening to others who did a full-time programme it sounds like they did similar units but had much more time to be able to do them. (Juliette, Ex Apprentice)

Yes, I would say that units were taught at the same time, but we were given lectures every week which supported the unit and the assignment. (Hannah, Ex Diploma)

It became apparent throughout the conversations that there was a lack of agreement as to how the participants were to acquire the knowledge which they felt was not experienced during their course and they continued to feel like this in their workplace. There were aspects of the focus group where I had to support the participants to think through the issues and help the conversation. The proposals that I had put forwards were merely to support the times when there was no conversation and it was to support further discussion. Interestingly this was taken positively, and all participants thought that this would support their consolidation of learning through mentorship as a supportive model. There is no post qualifying year currently for early years practitioners. However, this does apply to roles such as teaching, social work, and nursing. It can be argued that this would support those participants where they explore the lack of skills needed to be able to do their role effectively. Two participants

are no longer in their role, mostly since they felt as if their knowledge and workplace pedagogy was continually in question, saying that they did not feel 'ready'.

Mentoring

The role of the early childhood practitioner in encouraging those in training to make progress towards becoming fully qualified members of staff was also discussed alongside discussions of pedagogy. During the initial exploratory study, participants expressed similar understandings, such as

sometimes we ask other colleagues questions, sometimes in the staffroom or in the moment when we are with the children. (Hannah, Ex Diploma)

Juliette describes:

The structure of the programme and the support given to me by my colleagues has allowed me to continually learn both on the job and while studying. (Juliette Ex -Apprentice)

Kate states:

The course was fine for me, I felt that at the time I had enough experience from placement, but now being qualified nothing prepares you for how intense the job is. (Kate, Ex Diploma)

This example gives the notion upon the participant demonstrating that they have become a 'competent learner' which reinforces the need for work-based learning "because I have been continually observing my colleagues." In the transition from being a student to professional, the newly qualified participants began to recognise that they had no responsibility as a student, but this changed when taking on the duties of becoming a qualified professional. The participants have recognised the benefits of the knowledge and experiences that they have gained through their qualification, but they are now responsible for putting them into practice. Practice in the workplace is important, but Esmond (2021) discusses boundary crossings between vocational teachers and workplace learning in his work. As teachers teach and adapt to the needs of employers, there is a continuous shift in what is being taught. On

the other hand, workplace learning may displace school-based vocational education as a result of the growth of workplace learning. There is a widening recognition of workplace learning and the inclusion of this within vocational programmes. There is an extensive range of literature which draws attention to the combining of learning in classroom-based pedagogy and that of the workplace (Aarkrog, 2005; Schaap et al., 2012).

Juliette (Ex-Apprentice) discusses the link between her work experience and studying links with the 'boundary crossing' explanation above on how the participant as the learner has been able to show her understanding of the need for work-based practice. This participant speaks very clearly about the learning, which is happening in the workplace; however, another piece of research focuses on the role of the teacher. Guile and Young (2003) discussed the theory of pedagogy and that it moves beyond notions of 'transfer' from theory to practice, by providing synergy between classroom-based learning and work domains. All participants discuss the fact that they have an element of autonomy when in the work settings. Esmond (2021) argues that the notion of autonomous learning within the workplace is in contrast with practices in schools or colleges. These have a structure around the central role of authoritative facilitation, the teacher. However, Juliette (Ex-Apprentice) has highlighted that the role of that authoritative facilitator has changed within the learners experiences.

The workplace includes professionals in the early years who become facilitators; these can be supervisors, experts and even fellow colleagues, students, and apprentices (Filliettaz et al., 2013). These professionals within the workplace are qualified as an early years educator and have demonstrated their knowledge and skills towards the participants while they are in placement or their workplace. However, there is no known evidence to suggest that they have a formal qualification to be able to teach these students, but in the context of education and teachers, I could be argued that they have the knowledge and skills to mentor new professionals entering the profession or undertaking training. In order to facilitate the creation of a professional learning community for new early childhood educators, well established professionals within practice can play an important role. These professionals can facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and peer support by arranging regular meetings or workshops. As a result of this sense of community, a culture of continuous learning and

professional development is fostered. Investing in the future of early childhood education by mentoring new early childhood educators is a valuable investment. New educators are empowered to develop their skills and positively impact children's lives when a mentor or 'friend' provides guidance, support, and opportunities for growth. Developing a strong and vibrant early childhood education community that continuously strives for excellence can be achieved through effective mentoring. This begins to link much of the discussion around mediating the third teacher, those professionals who have the knowledge and skills to become active mentors who may not take on the role of a mentor but do this alongside a more informal approach within the practice of the environment.

Pedagogy and progress within the practice of the participants following a mid-year review of my research highlighted any questions surrounding whether what was being discussed within the interviews was what was playing out within the practice. After considering the data, I decided that further triangulation was necessary and so I conducted observations within the participants' settings. This allowed the participants to show me first-hand how pedagogy works within their settings but also the competence/expertise of practice from what they had learnt from their course. Unfortunately, there were only three available for me to visit face to face due to constraints at the time caused by Covid-19. However, this generated sufficient data to develop my analysis further. On visiting the participants, it was clear from the observation how involved their colleagues were in both their daily practice and their involvement of the course. Juliette explores and the observation notices a snapshot of time:

is leading the phonics session, Jolly Phonics are being taught with the phonic and letter A. The children are singing A A Ants on my arm and Juliette is continually echoing the song. Her colleague M, is interjecting, saying to the children, Juliette has shown us A, what things do you know that begin with the letter 'A'. Juliette, says thank you M, yes this is a good idea, let us think. The children finish off this activity and Juliette asks M if the session was ok. An evaluation is happening, M is giving Juliette clear feedback, asking how she thought the session went. While attending to the children, both Juliette and M are discussing what they would do for the next letter and how maybe M could do that session. (Juliette Ex-Apprentice) (Field Notes)

After speaking to Juliette, I asked how she felt with M coming in and taking the lead with the phonics work. Juliette felt that she was capable but did reflect on how the session could have been done differently. Juliette felt that, due to the close nature of their work relationship, it became the norm for professionals within her workplace to support. The emergent skills are a strong feature within the practice, particularly for Juliette. M is clearly an experienced member of staff and being highly supportive to Juliette. Charlotte was the second observation, and even though the context was different there were some crossover points on how colleagues supporting them were there to help the newly qualified professionals.

Charlotte (C) Is preparing to get the children ready for going outside. Some of the children have asked when mummy is coming. C reassured one of the children that it is time to head outside and to put on the wetsuits as it is raining outside. C: Listen very carefully, you need to make sure that your wet suit is on before you go outside. Some of the children were listening and while C was helping one child, another two colleagues (J) and (F) came to support her getting the children ready. While all the staff were engaged getting children ready some of the children headed outside. C asked (J) about what had happened last night when she was in the room. She asked whether she did the right thing stating, "I don't know if I said the right thing to the parents about (O) but he needs to have clean clothes doesn't he". (F) interjected and said, yes of course, the parents have brought some in today so it must have worked. C then went outside with the children. (Field Notes)

On another visit to a nursery setting, Charlotte (Ex-Apprentice) as part of the observation was getting the children ready and prepared for outdoor play. On closer inspection there were 16 children all wanting to go outside. It was clear while the children were getting ready Charlotte was talking to her other two colleagues regarding an incident that had happened the day before. Charlotte talked about reassurance that what she said to the parents was right, as she was the last member of staff in the room on the evening with another colleague. Charlotte asked the other colleagues, an informal conversation started to happen, while at the same time interjecting to the children. It felt natural, discussing their work as they moved on with the day.

It was hypothesized that a strong pedagogical work-based approach would make apprentices feel part of a high-quality employment relationship within their organisation (Tsui et al., 1997), which demonstrates a belief around apprentices' development and well-being, and in

turn looking at how the apprentices' training or performance impact the organisation. It has been found that work-based pedagogy does not influence apprentices' competence/expertise development in terms of enhancing the positive effects of formal and informal learning. There are further considerations which are warranted. The analysis of this was based on a small sample of eight participants. Even though this was a small-scale piece of research, it has however highlighted the impact of colleagues and the learning which is happening within the early years workplace. Many of the participants spoke positively about how their learning opportunities within the work setting helped them develop further. Three of the participants within the interviews stated the following.

I think a lot of my learning has happened by doing, and also being seen as a key member of the staff team. (Ellie, Ex-Apprentice):

I really liked being able to be with the children and work alongside some families too. I am now working at the nursery where I did the majority of the training (Tilly, Ex Diploma)

I know that I would have got the opportunity to learn much more by being in practice. I could see much of this already on the days when I was in placement. (Hannah, Ex-Diploma)

Apprentices felt more appreciated than their counterparts who did a full-time EYE diploma course, since they were within practice and not seen as a student but as a member of staff. However, it also highlighted a new phenomenon, in which Kayleigh stated that she knew that if she had been given the opportunity to be in practice, she assumed that she would have also been given the opportunity to learn from within the workplace. However, a further opportunity is given here, around the identity of an early years professional within practice-based learning, rather than that of a student while on placement. Placement and professional identity in the early years is complex and not linear, according to literature. Nutbrown's (2012) review raised several important points about the training of professionals that included placements. Campbell-Barr et al. (2020) also highlighted similar themes to Nutbrown (2012) in recognising the value of high-quality placements. A student's placement plays a key role in developing his or her professional identity in the early years. The professional identity depends on external and internal components (Murray, 2013) such as

policy, in ways that students construct their viewpoints and beliefs through practice. However, according to Lightfoot and Frost (2015) there are several factors which skew the professional identity with issues of equality, with the lack of men in such roles and those from a range of diverse ethnicities at all levels (Pascal et al., 2020), and the range of qualifications and titles (Dyer, 2018). The Early Years Workforce Commission (2021) raised concerns about the impact and sustainability of the current and future workforce.

I just feel very tired, I don't think I was prepared for the long days. When I was in placement, which wasn't for very long, I don't feel that I was given many real life opportunities to learn about the job. (Kayleigh, Ex-Diploma) (Interview)

This opened a discussion about the identity of the learners. It was also clear that the apprentices were given adequate levels of responsibility in being able to carry out tasks which were deemed to be appropriate for the apprentice. However, the diploma participants, who were seen as students at the time, were given limited opportunities to take on responsibility. Apprentices discussed being valued members of the team, whereas the diploma learners felt that those relationships were not built upon. It is clear from the discussions that the apprentices were able to demonstrate the abilities of their role without having boundaries. This differed, from participant and course, but there was a consensus that the vocational learners were set amongst boundaries of time and being a student rather than an employee.

I had limited time, never really was seen as a professional and being branded as 'the student' didn't help. (Kayleigh, Ex-Diploma)

I think being an employee and learning on the job gave me an advantage of being seen as an equal and learning formed part of this. I was seen like this by all, parents, children, and other colleagues. (Charlotte, Ex-Apprentice)

It was interesting that the participants like Charlotte, who were on apprenticeship programmes before qualifying, did not use the same language as those students who were ex diploma students. It was made clear from the discussions that they had family groups, were key workers and worked closely with parents and their colleagues. On the other hand, the diploma participants stated that they were not allowed to speak to parents, were given tasks to complete and were completely led by the professionals in the setting.

who was an apprentice participant, strengthened this and said: The nursery teacher and the other nursery nurse have been so supportive and from day one I was treated like an equal to them. I had my own family group and worked as a nursery professional. (Ellie, Ex-Apprentice)

None of the participants who were apprentices even discussed that their practices of employment were not adequate or that they were not given the experience of being able to fulfil their course requirements. However, the participants who were diploma learners continually spoke of inadequate opportunities to really embed the theory to practice elements within their course. It could demonstrate that the apprentice participants are thinking very critically about the application at work whilst the diploma learners are not doing this so much. It could be argued that both are needed, but further investigation with the apprentice participants could have highlighted whether they know theory but just approach it within a different context. It is important to note that, due to the lack of practice for these participants between 2020 to 2021 because of the Covid pandemic, many only had one college term in practice. This resulted in one participant (Hannah) (Ex-Diploma) stating that this equated to only 10 full days in placement. The following excerpt explores this in more detail:

Hannah (Ex-Diploma) Kind of, I feel like we have missed lots of practice because of Covid and now it seems like it is never ending.

Hannah (Ex-Diploma) – I loved the placement in my first year.

Aaron – And in the second year?

Hannah (Ex-Diploma) – We did not go on placement after Christmas 2021 as we were not allowed.

Aaron – Due to Covid?

Charlotte (Ex-Apprentice): Yes.

Aaron – I bet that was hard.

Hannah (Ex-Diploma)– We had to mostly learn from the module, but I only had a primary school placement and that was it.

Aaron – Wow and you are now working in a Nursery. How did you find it when you got the job?

Hannah (Ex-Diploma)– I am struggling to be honest.

It is important to discuss the implications of the pandemic and why this is an important feature which comes out of much of the participants' discussion. Even for the apprentice participants there were a couple of months when their practice was halted. However, the ones it had

affected the most with regards to experience within practice are those participants who were on a full-time diploma programme.

Due to the limited access of work-based learning, there were two participants Kate and Juliette who had already explored moving onto either further study or going for another role completely. This resulted in these two participants not being able to continue their participation within the research. This showed that being resilient in the role of an early years professional and linking this to becoming a competent early years practitioner was an important factor to consider.

The findings suggest that having practice either as a student or apprentice varies dramatically despite the result of the qualification being the same. During the course there are various stages of transformation for participants and readiness at the end of their course. It can be argued that this may be because there are many variables in the participants' individual experiences. In consideration of the comments above, the backgrounds of the participants need to be explored. They all have different starting points in terms of backgrounds, life experience, educational attainment, personality, and the course they have chosen. This has been shown within the data; however, what is clear are the workplace pedagogies and how this differs depending on the experience received by the participants. The quality and the support that participants received in the workplace has had a significant impact on what they are currently able to do now as an early childhood professional. It could be argued that the experience from being in a national pandemic would or could impact on their time to practice. However, there is a question around whether the full-time route into becoming a qualified member of the early childhood workforce does in fact support and result in a competent individual to undertake the role.

The experience as a learner, which was best illustrated in the focus groups, suggests that there is a significant gap between apprenticeships and college-based courses. An emergent theme which has derived out of the data which had shown the participants did not anticipate the comprehensive demand of the course. A high proportion of the participants stated that they expected the course to have more workplace and practical placements in settings. This was

particularly the case for college-based participants who felt that they lacked clarity about how many days were expected to be completed within placement. However, every single participant explored the experiences that they gained from their colleagues within placement or their workplace.

Theory to practice

This research offers several practical implications for investing in early years professionals and employing work-based apprentices more generally. Firstly, early years settings need to be ready for new colleagues who may want to take up the baton and become work-based practitioner learners. In this respect, the findings align themselves between formal and informal training and work, reflecting current and perspective roles and responsibilities and this thesis rejects that notion, finding the apprenticeship model of training to be more effective. In the early years sector, many researchers advocated apprenticeships being embedded into the workforce, ensuring that training is tailored to the competence/expertise, knowledge, and skills necessary for the apprentice's role. In addition, the training provided should reflect the actual role of the early years professional, including current and future responsibilities.

Further critique of what should be included with the on-the-job training role should present practical examples of the role, through real life exposure to case studies, which allows the learner to understand and appreciate the knowledge that is needed within practice. Identifying transfer knowledge from theory to practice supports the technical knowledge, the actual doing, being with the children and the professional duties that come with the role. A training organisation should consider whether the training content is relevant for practice and whether it includes activities that facilitate the transfer of training to the workplace. This study helps to provide a gateway regarding the importance of potential trainees securing a good training provider, which needs to fully engage with a work-based approach, keep the content of the programme relevant for practice, and continue to work alongside the employers to make sure that each learner is given the necessary opportunities to learn. This is mirrored in the participants' explanations of what experiences they received both in terms of the

theoretical knowledge and the practical experiences. During the interviews, Ellie and Hannah explained the following:

Ellie:

I had a tutor which came into my setting, and I also went to college-based classes. However, I don't feel that I had the time to ask how what I was learning, the written work for my assignments, how this worked in my setting. I used to go back and ask my supervisor, (Ellie, Ex Apprentice):

Hannah:

There was a lot of assignments, and my tutors were aware that I was not in practice, so they had given me videos to watch so that I could see what it looked like. Hannah: (Ex-Diploma)

The data demonstrated that this was a mixed collection of evidence and not all the participants had stated how this occurred. On the one hand there was good support and practical experiences for some participants; on the other, there was the exception where some were not given enough work-based experience. It was clear that those participants who valued practice the most with regards to getting as much out of practice were the apprentices. However, there was not much practice application around the content and understandings that they learnt in classroom-based activities. There was not much in the way of transfer knowledge from the textbook-based assignments.

Furthermore, the theory-based work was investigated as this proved to be a key focus within some of the participants' discussions. The participants explored what experiences they had received on their programmes. It became apparent that there was a real difference between time and expectations of both pathways. Apprentices explored that they did not have enough time to embed what they had learnt from the units and the turnover of units was fast paced. They did explain that their tutor was available to speak with the participant if they needed this. The majority explained that they utilised their colleagues within their workplace if they needed any support with the written assignments. The diploma participants explained that they had a lot of time to explore their units more thoroughly and were given time to take on board the theoretical knowledge of becoming an early years professional.

We just had to discuss many aspects of what we had learnt in the workplace and then apply this to our modules, linking to key readings which we were given. Many of these were backed up with professional discussions with our assessor, who would then state if we had met the Knowledge aspects of the course. Sometimes these were done online but nearer the end they came to the nursery. (Ellie, Ex Apprentice)

Participants were supported to transfer knowledge acquired in formal training to the workplace by identifying competence/expertise development which is being supported by many early childhood settings in the sector. Developing job competence/expertise, team building, and effective participation skills is particularly dependent on the supportive nature of a work environment, explored by the participants, characterised by positive relationships amongst their colleagues, as well as the informal learning opportunities with a range of colleagues from across the setting. A new reality of problems was presented to the participants due to the Covid-19. Apprentices were able to gain self-management and creative thinking skills as a result. However, the diploma participants explained that they were not able to develop these skills as the structure of the learning programmes meant that they did not become empowered like the apprentice participants and were not able to develop the autonomy needed, in terms of being able to conduct their job and presenting a certain degree of independence within their role.

The allocation and structure of work-like practice needs to be considered equally in workplace learning. As a result, it is important to ensure that the quality and quantity of workplace learning are maintained (Eraut, 2007). In this study, there was a vast difference between the hours in practice, some were speaking of 200 hours and others were saying that they were in work five days per week over a period of their course. Obviously, this was dependent on the pathway that the participants had chosen, but even so, comparatively, the end qualification is the same. Therefore, the experiences of the participants were very much dependent on their colleagues, the workload given, being provided with challenges, autonomy, independence, and support. Becker and Bish (2017) contended that although workplace learning is a natural process, the structure of the experience ensures that trainees get the most out of formal education.

Overall, the role of the participants' colleagues emerged as being able to mould the trainee, including ensuring that the work environment delivers a positive learning experience in developing a competent early years professional. Consequently, three of the participants, all diploma learners, have now left their employed role. Many felt that the lack of work experience was the main factor in each of these participants feeling that they were not competent in their role.

Accordingly, all participants are now in their qualified roles, four ex apprenticeship and three ex diploma have gained full employment, and all are experiencing the support given by their colleagues in practice. Furthermore, it was clear from the interviews and observations which placed the value of early years settings which were investing in work-based routes to becoming an early years professional. The results show that participants need to consider both their individual positions and contextual factors including what influences their learning in their workplace. In selecting whether to begin an apprenticeship, participants should consider their own learning goals. Similarly, the early years settings should be placing emphasis on development and encouraging learning, even if these are from mistakes, which can be a prime indicator of goal orientation (Dragoni, 2005). What this means here is the learners reasons for engaging in various achievements within a particular situation. In this case it could be perceived that the learners are learning a mastery orientation, a performance approach orientation to avoid an element of failure, a performed avoidance orientation.

Formal and informal learning

The data suggest that the level 3 ex diploma participants value that they are qualified to this level. However, there does need to be a distinction between the term 'full and relevant' qualification in comparison to those who are undertaking the role with an assumption that further learning must take place after the formal training aspects of a course has happened. However, two participants felt that they needed to undertake further education and training and have left the profession. On closer inspection of this Kate and Juliette even though they had withdrawn, explained:

Even though I got a lot of support from my friends in the nursery, I did not feel that my assessors were able to support me fully. I had 3 assessors in a short space of time. (Juliette, Ex Apprentice) (Interview)

However, the language of 'friends' was also being used by another participant Juliette as she stated in the focus group:

I had my room leader who I would go to for things that needed to be signed off and discussions that had to happen. However, I had built up a friendship with a range of staff in the nursery and they would support me when I needed it. Sometimes this was in the staffroom or even when we were walking out the nursery together. (Juliette, Ex Apprentice)

Through the analysis of the data collected around the use of the term friends, a lens has been illuminated into how professionals are learning at their workplaces. From what the participants have stated, there appears to be a difference between who mentors them and supports them during their course to develop expertise and competency. There is, however, also a third person or group within the early childhood setting. As Juliette mentions, the participants are learning from those professionals they have made connections with, informally, at times when they have downtime, such as when they are taking breaks in the staffroom or at the end of the day. Also, it is useful to see how the participants have differentiated the learning that is taking place and who this is being done with. In some cases, informal support is provided by friends, whereas formal support is provided by mentors.

Moving on from this, to looking at the discussions with the participants about their next steps of their careers. On asking Juliette why higher education was her next progression, she had replied that it will give her another 3 years, further placement experience and an opportunity to develop her higher thinking skills, which she feels was not available on the apprenticeship. There was a dialogue during the interviews whereby the participants discussed the impact of the informal opportunities that arose within their practice. It became apparent that the participants' colleagues play a huge part in the learning taking place within the workplace.

If it wasn't for my friends at work, I don't know if I would be able to do what I am doing. It was so difficult not being able to do my full days on placement, so I am continually asking them for help on certain things. I always look for reassurance from them. (Kayleigh, Ex-Diploma)

The participants explored what their friends do for them daily. The term friends were being used interchangeably to demonstrate their colleagues with whom they had made connections with. The participants were not speaking about a friendship such as ones we may have developed as a child or socially, but they were instead speaking of their colleagues in this way. It became apparent that learning was continually taking place and not in the sense of classroom learning or CPD (Continuing Professional Development), but that of informal learning. The importance of the participants' colleagues within the development of pedagogy in practice and supporting their knowledge acquisition could not be underestimated. Participants discussed their relationship with their colleagues and stated:

Juliette explains that:

I am continually asking my colleagues if I am getting things right. They are always saying how well I am doing. Even in the staffroom I am asking questions about certain aspects of my role, for example, I ask about planning and observations'. (Juliette, Ex-Apprentice)

Hannah further discusses that:

I am constantly watching how my other colleagues are doing it and taking it all in, I mean I have never had any formal training on how to communicate with parents, deal with parents who might not be happy about things. If in doubt I am constantly going to ask questions to my mentor. (Hannah, Ex-Diploma)

This data which has enabled me to think and reflect about certain aspects of the role which they are currently doing in the early years. It must be remembered that these participants all trained during the Covid Pandemic of 2020 and continue to be affected by this in many ways. However, it has not stopped them thinking about using their workplace to continue their learning. It is apparent that the professionals that the participants are working with have several years of experience. Rooney and Boud (2019) argued that there is a common experience amongst professionals which is a capacity for informed decision making. Underpinning this capacity is the idea of 'noticing', which links with observing activities for different purposes. For example, nurses who are experienced know when changes are happening to patients and respond accordingly (Watson and Rebar, 2014). Rooney and Boud's (2019) research demonstrates that pedagogical attention to professionals noticing may contribute to work-based pedagogy.

I will ask my manager if I need to find something out or have questions (Alice, Ex Apprentice)

which demonstrates that even in the workplace there is a process of confirmation, dialogue, and reflection by interacting with other colleagues.

I think that having [name] really helps as she has been doing the job for years. I find that when I am unsure of something she can help me and make sense of situations. She is also my mentor which helps me a lot. (Kayleigh, Ex-Diploma)

This could be interpreted as a nurturing approach from the participants towards their colleagues. It has given a picture which allows opportunities to develop for peer learning in line with their own learning and philosophy. Within this scenario it looks like professionals are supporting each other and therefore my interpretation here is that it is believed to be a form of informal learning. Among the other themes identified, there is a clear interpretation of development opportunities, supportive learning environments and a level of responsibility which become highly relevant. With regards to the former, examining the quotes indicates that apprentices see challenges as developmental experiences, rather than that of the diploma learners who see this as a challenge as they should know the information to be able to fulfil their roles. This is seen in the following quote of an ex-diploma participant.

I do not feel that I can continue with the role. I am finding it difficult, and I find it hard to ask questions when I am meant to be seen as a qualified member of staff. I have decided that I am going to go to university as I need to progress. (Hannah, Ex-Diploma)

Can you explain what you mean by progress? (Aaron)

I need to get more experience. I feel that I have not gained enough of this. (Hannah, Ex-Diploma)

The quote above exemplifies the distinct link between challenges that are faced within the sector and continual learning that is needed. These challenges of not being ready to practice could be seen as a negative outlook. However, there is a clear distinction in terms of the participant wanting to push themselves in many ways which includes academically and performance at work. Factors which have an association with work and learning are defined as opportunities to develop new roles, by experiencing new things. When considering the viewpoints of the participants who are apprentices the quotes depict a positive experience which indicates that apprentices are enjoying their developmental opportunities. As shown by the following quotes, there is a level of challenge which is balanced by appropriate provision which supports a facilitation of learning experiences. However, it could be argued that by being work-based those participants are disconnected in some way to the classroom-based learning.

The role has given me more responsibility than I was expecting to get, even with all the challenges at times. (Charlotte, Ex-Apprentice)

The level of autonomy was reflected in the participant interviews. They examined being able to carry out their own tasks. The data explored that a critical emergence of sustainability of keeping apprentices through their engagement with informal learning was an important aspect of work-based learning. Conversely, support from their colleagues was crucial for ensuring a positive learning experience. This could also be seen in the thoughts with the diploma participants, where they talked of the loss of having these opportunities. Hannah explained that:

I was gaining so much support from my placement tutor, but it all stopped when the pandemic happened, I was able to stay behind and ask lots of questions. My placement mentor would also meet with me at lunch times between the morning and afternoon nursery. (Hannah, Ex Diploma)

More specifically, the participants were deliberating what makes for a learning environment. It was a discussion which was held during the focus group, as an aside to a dialogue around the experiences of support from their work colleagues, or placement mentor's, and where this informal learning took place. It was mentioned that both mentor's and fellow more established colleagues provided an element of support, which supported their development and was seen as enabling the participants. This was discussed heavily by the participants who were apprentices, and they were discussed further about being given those development opportunities as both enjoyable and challenging. This can be seen in the following quotes:

There are some placements which do not encourage us as trainees. However, it is clear how the experiences we have had on our programme is quite different from the people who undertook an apprenticeship. I think the fact that I do not feel ready to be qualified makes me think whether I had chosen the right pathway. (Kayleigh, Ex-Diploma)

Overall, I am pleased that I did an apprenticeship. I was given a family group, I had planning to do and some days I was the only person in the room that knew the children, I was not on my own but the people who came to cover did not know the children or their daily routines. I was able to do this as I was continually learning from my room leader but I do feel that I want to learn more now. (Juliette, Ex-Apprentice)

Whilst support from their supervisor at the time is important with development opportunities, the support from colleagues has emerged as a critical point to assist the participants at the time of their training and the continuation into their role as a qualified professional. The apprentices described that they felt welcome, looked after and comfortable to be able to ask questions. Additionally, to this, it was clear from the interviews that support for all participants from their colleagues was paramount, as this showed the participants an insight into their role. Participants discussed how other colleagues were giving them knowledge and supporting them with how to do the job, but at the same time allowing them to make mistakes when this was needed.

Framing the link between what the participants had discussed above and how their colleagues have supported their thinking and learning links back to much of the discussion around the notion of the third teacher. It was the framing of the workplace learning which really makes a stand in this research. The research has given an insight into an aspect of work-based pedagogy in the early years and the transfer of knowledge which is applied from an experienced colleague to the apprentice or student. However, the results of the research show that the training provided to the participants and their work environment have factors which contribute to different perspectives of apprentices and students on a vocational programme of study, the technical and theoretical knowledge acquired at college or training provision. For learning to be effective, it must be applied to the workplace, which results in better application of the knowledge gained at the college or training provider.

Through an investigation of factors related to the transfer of learning between the classroom and the workplace, this study identifies the mechanisms required to foster a link between vocational education and apprentice learning. Engaging with a substantive knowledge base is crucial for developing higher skills, as discussed by Brown and Duguid (2009). In the research, supervisors and colleagues are important in supporting apprentices' transfer of knowledge and skills within the workplace, playing a critical role in helping apprentices succeed. The study contributes to the growing research on the relationship between classroom learning and work-based learning (Pineda-Herrero et al., 2015; Messman and Mulder, 2015; Renta Davids et al., 2017). To be able to support the development of valuable knowledge, learning across different sites should be purposefully connected and integrated (Sappa et al., 2016).

Overall, the findings support a model of demand and control (Karasek and Theorell, 1990) which reveals that the participants are given many different developmental opportunities, and then they are granted further responsibility, which gives an element of control. This is done within a supportive learning environment, where participants can learn and develop many skills. However, the participants explained that being able to gain a breadth of knowledge and learn those invaluable skills to be an early years professional supports their confidence and experience. Therefore, for the participants it is becoming apparent that the work environment is playing a key factor in their learning. The data suggests this adds further knowledge

regarding factors supporting the professional development that builds on from their theoretical studies and considers the influence of being on the job within a workplace and the learning which comes from this.

Work environments post qualifying

The diploma participants in this research explored and placed the same value within their practice as those who were apprentice participants. However, there was a considerable difference and expectations conveyed to vocational learners, in terms of placement time. There is a limit on hours for early years work-like experience and this is also limited in scope, but comparing to other vocational courses in the sector, it is important to recognise that what early years students do get is a lot more work-based opportunity, which links to the requirements of the DfE. The participants explained that they would not have been able to develop a partnership with parents or even deal with problem solving when it arises. It became apparent that the workplaces and the placement supervisors saw these learners as students rather than as colleagues. The diploma participants felt that they were not able to make those meaningful relationships and connections within their placements. This resulted from daily placements rather than the long-standing experience enjoyed by the apprentices. The participants stated in the focus group that it was apparent that the apprenticeship participants were given a lot more autonomy and felt that this was an imbalance of learning and work-based experience. Therefore, the diploma participants felt that the learning was very formal and that learning from an informal basis did not occur, due to them not being able to access certain staff rooms. The study also shows the need for meaningful relationships. On this matter it became apparent that there was not enough time to make these. The diploma participants talked about opportunities that they would have liked to have gained, such as planning and implementation of doing this on-the-job respect, and autonomy, being able to learn from mistakes and most importantly they spoke of using their own initiative. It could be argued that the vocational learners miss the whole aspect of making those meaningful relationships and the comprehensive approach to being competent as a learner. However, it is important to note that the diploma participants spoke very highly regarding the theoretical applications of their learning, the quality of how these linked to the work environment and

were able to make links to working with the children and their colleagues. They were very explicit about wanting more, or even comparable opportunities to those on the apprenticeship route.

Experiences of early years professionals

The transition from student to professional was a factor which many participants spoke about within their interview. Many of the participants discussed the transition from the formal aspect of learning on their programme and the informal learning within their settings. Recently qualified participants had been able to recognise the benefits of experience and knowledge which is gained while completing their qualification, but some felt that they had not been able to put this into practice effectively. Kayleigh (Ex-Diploma) explored many aspects of this in her interview that she was not able to stay in her placement classroom and was treated more like a parent helper than a member of the team, stating that:

It is more about the setting seeing your worth. I was never treated like a member of staff, there was caution, I was given menial tasks and I do not feel truly ready to do my job now. (Kayleigh, Ex-Diploma)

Kayleigh talked about how as a student she only focused on one module at a time, rather than looking holistically at the role and the practice which was needed to look at this.

Charlotte explains in her interview that:

There were a lot of modules at one time, doing 3 of these on the go and then having to do your job at the same time was hard. I do think that erm, I did learn a lot by doing the modules alongside my job though. (Charlotte, Ex-Apprentice)

Juliette explains in her interview that:

I had to continually link everything back to the EYFS (Juliette, Ex Apprentice)

This explains that understanding the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2021) was one of the main aspects of their role and being in the job meant that they had to use this continually. Conversely, this was also explored by one of the diploma participants taken from her interview:

Understanding the EYFS in practice, linking to how this looks with the children as I am not in practice. In fact, I have only been in practice for a few weeks and that is it. I have not been able to plan effectively and see how this would work. Now I am in a nursery I am using this every day. (Hannah, Ex-Diploma)

Juliette explored her apprenticeship since qualifying and felt that their time studying was limited due to the strain on the role:

The role is very demanding, both in the fact that I am employed now and qualified but felt similar when I was training as an apprentice. I did not feel like I had the time to do my knowledge-based work as I was struggling through the pandemic. (Juliette, Ex Apprentice)

Juliette is in employment following on from her apprenticeship but has made it clear that she is going to leave soon to go on and do further studies. Juliette explained further that the role is not much different now she is qualified. Her response conveys the idea that change with regards to the pace of being a student and being an employee is that the job is continual. Kayleigh explores this in her interview and explains that the time that they are given on a vocational course saying:

I was on placement once per week, had college on 3 days and then had a study day, even though the course was full time, I had time to sit and do my course work. (Kayleigh, Ex-Diploma)

Kayleigh's reference to being able to do the course work contrasted with those who were apprentices. This was a stark difference, even though there is a picture being built of how learning within the workplace is transforming practice, this comes hand in hand with gaining the theoretical knowledge too. All the participants said that they were still working around what the boundaries are for being qualified. It was clear that the apprentices all felt that they knew what the expectation was; however, two of the diploma participants felt that the boundaries of being qualified were not quite met yet and felt that they needed more time to be able to learn. Within their interview they also expanded on this and discussed that they have not realised that they were in control of all the boundaries as outlined within the qualification. What was clear from the discussions is that they are continually learning, both in a formal and informal way as current professionals.

What was interesting from the discussion with the participants was when they did their course, they would have had to complete planning, observations, risk assessments and children's individual learning plans. The connection did not seem to have been made that what they learnt on their course was what was expected from them within practice. However, it was clear that there was a considerable gap in gaining the knowledge and skill to be able to do this effectively, due to the time constraints and experience of being able to do the role. This would normally be covered heavily within their knowledge or lectures that the students at the time would have had. It can be defined that many factors including the course structure, the work experience that was available to them and the workplace experience demonstrates the understanding of the participants' accountability and responsibility of being a qualified professional being acknowledged as a form of learning within practice.

The journals were an important aspect of data collection as they provided an opportunity for the participants to say anything about their learning experiences or even the things that they did not feel comfortable saying in the interview or focus group. There were three reflective journals that were sent to me. Even though much of the data on these were not very in depth. There was a common thread running through them and sentences which allowed me to link them all together.

Juliette stated in her reflective journal that:

Today I am just very tired. Today we are short staffed and I have had to have agency staff in. Looking back at some of the questions you asked me in the focus group when we were training. I don't think, I don't know how I did it.

Charlotte explains that:

I was thinking of doing another apprenticeship. I did like how I was supported but I am just not feeling it at the moment. Today has been exhausting.

Ellie stated that:

I don't really know what I am meant to be writing in these but I started work at 7am this morning and left at 6:30pm. I have also had to cover key staff today too.

The reflective journals did not have much on them. I found that when I had met with some of them at the focus group they also felt that they didn't know what to put on them or have the time to sit and write up a reflective log of their thoughts. Instead they did write a couple of sentences which allowed them to have a space in which had given me an insight into their day, their lives, and their practices. The data does suggest that they are finding the demands of the role overwhelming and there does seem to be a void now of other colleagues supporting them which they have become used to due to them being short staffed. No reasons were given to the short, staffed responses but it does allow the thesis to be a snapshot of evidence in time around the nature and impact of both the pandemic and the recruitment and retention issues currently in the early years. The data does also give the indication that previously what was stated in the interviews with regards to not being ready to practice by Charlotte does show how demanding the role of an early years professional is and how much we ask of them as soon as they have qualified.

The data has shown how the apprentices are fully immersed in their training, dedicating themselves to acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge in their chosen field. This period of time during the apprenticeship has served as served as a foundation for their future careers, providing them with hands-on experience and mentorship.

Juliette explains that:

I had been supported right throughout my apprenticeship. However, we all know that covid was hard, but I had my friends and colleagues all the way through my training. (Juliette, Ex Apprentice)

During their training, apprentices had the opportunity to work closely with experienced early years professionals who had given guidance and supported them in honing the skills and expertise needed to be becoming an early years professional.

Impact of Covid-19

It was necessary to explain the impact that Covid-19 has had on the research. It was a particular focus at the time of collecting the data from the participants and for them as trainee practitioners in the early years as it meant that many of the participants felt that it had a life changing experience for them. Covid-19 and the implications had a huge effect not just on the role that the participants had, but also on their learning experiences and the environments they were working in. Many participants explained that opportunities for work-based learning were not possible due to closures of the early years settings. However, since the apprentices were employed, it meant that they gained experience whereas the diploma learners were not able to attend settings since they were not key members of staff. One participant explained that their course was a full-time college course. They had 10 days in practice, Covid occurred and, due to the announcement by the government, all their teaching went online. Unfortunately, three participants feel that this had led them to resign from the professional posts they moved to after completion of their qualifications. One participant felt that she was not physically ready and had decided to go onto further study.

Hannah stated in her interview:

I love my job, but it's just hard when you have just been panicked, not had time to think or even learn effectively. I just need time to think about me now and I have decided to leave at the end of the year. I am going to University as I still don't feel ready to practice yet and I want to be with others to learn a bit more.
(Hannah, Ex Apprentice)

Another participant Ellie stated in her reflective journal:

I just don't feel prepared to be qualified in the current times (Ellie, Ex Apprentice)

This information which was investigated within the study allows for further research on the impact of all trainees' early years professionals at this time, and whether they felt they would be prepared to qualify at another time when there was not a pandemic happening.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an insight into how the participants have experienced their training and how they have been supported at work. As a result of the thematic analysis of the data presented in the chapter, clear messages have emerged from the data because of discussions with the participants. The detailed analysis presented in this chapter, including the methods used to collect the data, has proven to be insightful. According to the data, newly qualified early childhood professionals are capable of contextualizing and interpreting their own work-based learning experiences. The fact that no two approaches to work-based learning are the same, regardless of whether you are enrolled in the same course. By analysing the evidence thematically, the chapter has been able to provide insight into their experiences and processes as early childhood professionals.

I will now explore each research question and how the data findings have contributed to answering each one.

RQ1: How do early years practitioners develop early years knowledge while undertaking their level 3 early years training course.

As a result of the data, it has been demonstrated that practitioners have developed their early childhood knowledge during their level 3 training course. Depending on the programme of study they have chosen, there is a difference. This data shows that apprentices are fully immersed in their training, dedicating themselves to the acquisition of the necessary skills and knowledge in their chosen field. In addition to providing them with hands-on experience and mentorship, this period of time has served as a foundation for their future careers. As a result of the mentoring and support they received from the training, the participants have discussed varying levels of knowledge. There is no doubt that all of the participants have qualified, which indicates that they have acquired the expertise of being early childhood professionals. All participants, however, stated that Covid was a real challenge to learning, both in terms of how to develop in the workplace and how to develop a portfolio of evidence.

RQ2: Can any differences be identified with regards to how early years trainees develop both formally and informally within early years settings.

As a result of the data, it has begun to become clear that both the formal institutional learning and the learning that occurs in the work environment are beneficial. As far as knowledge building goes, there is no correlation between work-based learning and portfolio building, but there was a discussion regarding the time required to do both. Both were considered equally important. According to the data, however, the support of their friends and colleagues within the workplace played a positive role in developing their knowledge. Both formal and informal learning occurs in the workplace. Assurances from their colleagues that they have access to a space where they can ask questions and learn from their colleagues.

RQ3: How do early years practitioners apply the work-place learning which supports the competence/expertise to become a qualified early years practitioner?

As a result of the data collection, the chapter has been able to position each participant in terms of how they engaged with the process. It has been demonstrated that the data has been collected through the Process, Person Context and Time of Bronfenbrenner (1992) PPCT model, which illustrates the impact of the currency of time and the expertise of the participants in work-based learning within the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner (1992). There has been a clarification of the social practices in which early childhood expertise and competence have been complex. As a result of certain factors, including Covid 19 and staffing shortages, the participants have had to evolve their practices. This has allowed me as the researcher to gain a nuanced understanding of how these social practices are enacted and how they have been altered to support the professionals' experience (Fenwick, 2015). The experience has also given me the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of how early childhood practice is currently shaped, which has provided participants with an opportunity to express their concerns and discuss their experiences, as well as their recommendations for the position

Chapter 6

Summary and Interpretation of the findings

Introduction

This research study has explored how work-based learning and pedagogy are differently experienced by early years trainees pursuing a level 3 early years apprenticeship or a full-time diploma early childhood programme. Much of the evidence within this research has demonstrated that there is a significant difference between work-based learning and how you apply theory to practice depending on the programme of study the learners choose. This chapter will explore the research findings and construct a summary evaluating the concepts that have been identified within this research. It will focus heavily on a new concept, which investigates the role of experienced early years colleagues and how they play an important formal and informal mentoring role in regard to being what this research would define as the 'third teacher'. Further investigation into the concept of the 'third teacher' has demonstrated through this research that there are three concepts to consider. First, the teacher or the tutor who instructs and gives knowledge to the learner from their institution. Second, the environment which considers the day-to-day practice and the interactions, and the resources used. Third, the role which colleagues play when supporting work-based learning with the learner, and which could be deemed through exploration of this research as 'the third teacher'. Finally, the chapter will make recommendations as to how the research could have longevity, how it has gained new knowledge within work-based learning and most importantly how I, as the researcher, will have contributed to new knowledge.

Research findings and the theoretical framework

The theory of Bronfenbrenner, as discussed in chapter 2, uses the PPCT model to explain the developing person in the context of being an early years professional. I used the PPCT model as the theoretical framework in which to discuss the findings relevant to my study and to answer the three research questions:

- RQ1: How do early years practitioners develop early years knowledge while undertaking their level 3 early years training course.
- RQ2: Can any differences be identified with regards to how early years trainees develop both formally and informally within early years settings.
- RQ3: How do early years practitioners apply the work-place learning which supports the competence/expertise to become a qualified early years practitioner?

The table below (Table 6.1) outlines how the PPCT has been explored within this research and discusses the context of being able to answer each research question. (Demonstrated on the next page).

Aspects of PPCT Model	Research Question	Relevance to this research study
Process	RQ1 RQ2	The proximal process that I focused on was the early years professional within their role and the interactions that they have both formally and informally while training. The early years professionals perceived their role as not clearly defined, which lead to their proximal interactions with other colleagues within their settings, which supported them to fulfil their role. This interaction was not regular for some participants as explained in the data analysis, but it does coincide with the apprentice learners which links to Bronfenbrenner’s first proposition. The participants (early years practitioners) felt that they were there to do a job and serve the children, but certain power issues from government hindered this. Most of the issues raised by the participants was that they did not feel supported. The experience from the diploma students indicated that they were not able to practice, and the apprentice learners said that they did not get enough interactions with the tutor.
Person	RQ1 RQ2	The focus was on the early years professional within practice, especially those that had recently qualified by either completing a full time diploma or apprenticeship, qualifying them as an Early Years Educator level 3. The interactions of the role with other colleagues helped the participants to consider their needs with regards to learning within the workplace. The experience as a learner, which was best illustrated in the focus groups, suggested that there is a significant gap between apprenticeships and college-based courses. Discussions and an emergent theme is how the participants did not anticipate the comprehensive demands of the course. A high proportion of the participants stated that they expected the course to have more workplace and practical placements in settings. This was particularly the case for college-based participants who felt that they lacked clarity regarding how many days were expected to be completed within placement. However, every single participant explored the experiences that they gained from their colleagues within placement or their workplace. This leads to an exploration of the concept of a third teacher. Within the literature review, it has been hypothesised that the third teacher can be seen as the environment within a classroom context.
Context	RQ2	Both early years professionals and their colleagues within the settings are challenged by regulations and policies, according to

	RQ3	the findings of this study. The pedagogy within the workplace can be significantly improved through an understanding of the complexities. By having an understanding of work-based learning early years professionals can make accurate judgements about pedagogies within their practice. The results of this study indicate that apprentices benefit from receiving support from supervisors or colleagues during their on-the-job training. This is linked to the work of (Holton iii et al., 2000) and for career development outlined by (Yarnall, 1998). It was also apparent that the professionals who support these apprentices need to have key competencies for supporting apprentices' development in order to maximise training and becoming competent as an early years professional.
Time	RQ1,2,3	The study is placed within this moment in this context of change.

Table 6.1: Research data linked to PPCT model.

As Bronfenbrenner explained, a positive relationship is crucial to overcoming the potential damage caused by an ineffective and gloomy environment. It is not possible to foster emotionally positive development even in a very constructive environment without a warm and caring relationship. Both parties within this research, that is the participants and their colleagues, can alter the nature of a relationship by changing their behaviour (Shelton 2019). When a developmental individual develops a relationship with another (e.g., a teacher or peer), a dyad is formed. Individual development depends on this dyad. As a fundamental element of the microsystem, dyadic relationships help individuals develop broader interpersonal relationships with multiple people, known as triads and tetrads (Shelton 2019). As proposed by Bronfenbrenner, there are many factors which impact on the learning within the workplace and his theoretical model has supported my own thinking when undertaking the research. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model, resonated with much of the outcomes of this research, moreover, linking what work-based learning looks like specifically in an educational work setting inside the early years workplace. This links to question 3, and the data has explored that there is a clear sense of belonging when the participants have someone to work with, guide and mentor within practice, and support reflection to enhance the professionals' work-based learning opportunities.

Interpretation of the findings

The case study approach taken in this research has limited generalisability but is consistent with Wellington (2000, p.14 citing Lincoln and Guba, 1985). criteria for educational research. This states that the research must be:

systematic, credible, verifiable, justifiable, valuable and 'trustworthy'

(Wellington, 2000, p.14 citing Lincoln and Guba, 1985)

Wellington states that often educational research, as well as research in other social sciences and the humanities, is criticised by those who favour a quantitative or scientific model for being 'too subjective' or relying too heavily on feelings and personal responses. Wellington (2000) argues against this viewpoint by confirming that there is specific relevance of the above criteria within educational settings, as studies within this arena are useful for all practitioners and reflective of the viewpoints and findings. This allows for representation of early years educators and increased relatability of the research outcomes.

However, case studies do provide indications of more general patterns which could be explored in larger studies—though broader, these may not have the depth and richness of detail of a case study. Essentially the qualitative approach can build a theory or hypothesis that can then tested in a bigger study. The data has revealed many key outcomes regarding what early years trainees thought of their experiences within the context of learning and work-based pedagogy for early years professionals while training on a level 3 early years programme. Newly qualified early years practitioners may be able to contextualise and interpret their pedagogy, including their understanding of work-based learning, though more extensive studies would be required to support this generalisation.

To interpret the findings of this research, Wellington (2000) criteria have served as a reference point. I have linked to these claims so that my research has validity by examining a phenomenon of early years pedagogy within practice through qualifications that embed work-based learning. I have been able to demonstrate the credibility and application to practice of

the findings through Wellington's (2000) criteria. Since the research is based on a case study, it is a conceptual model at the current stage of early years practice. This research has focused on the multiple methods used which draws heavily on the participants' viewpoints and responses directly. The observations were designed to triangulate the findings of the interviews and documentary research, thereby providing scope to cross-check knowledge that had been obtained from various sources. This process increased the validity of the research (Yin, 2009) by drawing upon extensive data that explored the voices of early years professionals through a robust methodology. The thematic analysis used within the research process ensured that there was evidence to support the findings, which in turn answered the research questions clearly and in a well-defined manner (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

Although the methodology warrants the validity of the study, there are limits to the generalisability of any small-scale study. Identifying formal and informal approaches of the third teacher's model upon student's competencies and expertise would require a further investigation to ascertain the application of this research outcome across the sector. The purpose of this study is not to establish that the third teacher approach is a fundamental component of all early years educational organisations, due to the constraints of the sample size. However, the data analysed has demonstrated that the third teacher approach for this case study has had a positive impact on the competence and expertise of the early years trainees.

Mentoring

All participants within this research but one has been able to demonstrate through the data analysis that they have recognised the value of support they have been getting from their colleagues or placement mentor's. This evidence differed with regards to how much of this support they were given within practice and a further gap was highlighted between both the apprentice and diploma learners, in terms of what types of support or lack of support and guidance they were given. However, most of the participants did state that they got some or even more support than they expected. The data does highlight that for some of the participants, more so the diploma learners, that their time in placement was limited so they would not have been given more support than those who were apprentices. Moreover, the data suggests that the participants have been able to start to make a link to what they are doing in practice and how this corresponded to the work completed on their training course, where they have even spoken about the links from their course instruction to what they are doing in the classroom or setting.

This research has given a greater emphasis to the apprentices benefitting from both immediate supervisor and colleague support, which enforces many aspects of the notion of 'training on the job' and begins to look at further support for career development on behalf of early years professionals. However, I would agree with this notion of continual career development for early years professionals and state that all vocational learners, including those who are on diploma and apprenticeship courses could benefit from more hours based within practice and learning on the job, with support from their colleagues alongside their teacher or tutor. By having such an approach, early years professionals can make accurate judgements about pedagogies within their practice. The results of this study indicate that apprentices benefit from receiving support from supervisors or colleagues during their on-the-job training (Holton et al., 2000) and for career development (Yarnall, 1998). Both early years professionals and their colleagues within the settings are challenged by regulations and policies, according to the findings of this study. These vary but the main points are that they need to adhere to law within the early years and the staff to child ratio, which has its own difficulties when you are also completing a qualification alongside the early years training

role. However, there has been a real resilience shown within the participants in undertaking the role through difficult times including Covid-19 and a recruitment and retention crisis. Nevertheless, the data shows that the mentor within the setting plays an important part in learning for all of the participants. The pedagogy demonstrated within the workplace can be significantly improved through an understanding of the complexities and by having a robust support from other colleagues.

The findings explored the concept which has been defined within this research as the 'third teacher', which means a colleague within practice who is not necessarily the mentor supporting the early years practitioner to gain their qualification, knowledge, and competence/expertise of being a qualified early years professional. Wilson and Ellis (2007) suggested that the 'third teacher' can be seen as the early years environment within a classroom or learning context. Nevertheless, the research has explored a new concept, derived from the data, and triangulated from the literature, whereby the third teacher refers to the informal relationships in which knowledge is shared organically among professionals within the early years setting. It has been mentioned by the participants that they have learned from their colleagues at work. Close relationships have developed as a result, and discussions and learning are taking place as a result of this. According to Le Clus (2011), informal workplace learning is not always aligned with organisational strategies or a prescribed curriculum. In addition to self-directed learning, networking, mentoring, and trial and error, Marsick and Watkins (1999) suggest that informal learning may include a wide range of other modes of learning. This research indicates that the participants talk to their "friends" within practice to confirm what they are doing may or may not be in accordance with what is expected of them within their training and practice. Billett (2002) proposes that reciprocal processes play a significant role in workplace learning. There is an unqualified use of the term "informal learning" within the context of his argument. It is for this reason that I have used the term third teacher in order to describe this process to our participants. Through this method, the researcher is able to provide an account of how learning is occurring in the early childhood setting and how they are acquiring this knowledge informally through their collaboration with colleagues. It has been suggested by Billett (2002) that there is a formal or informal process of learning, suggesting that there is a relationship between the

circumstances in which learning occurs and changes in individuals, as well as suggesting that learners engage in qualitatively different ways in different kinds of learning that take place. As a result, I have redefined the third teacher as a relationship in which knowledge is shared organically rather than a formal mentoring relationship with specific goals. Taking this on board, there is an ongoing process where all three concepts support each other and there is a continual cycle of learning for work-based learning. As outlined in Figure 6.1 below, the diagram explores the concept of the third teacher, and reinforces the three key components; institution, where the teacher instructs and teaches the knowledge; the work environment, where the learner is able to learn by doing with their mentor, and the 'the third teacher', where the learner is able to gain an insight through informal opportunities to learn from their colleagues and friend relationships they have developed, for workplace learning in the early years. (Figure 6.1 is demonstrated on the next page)

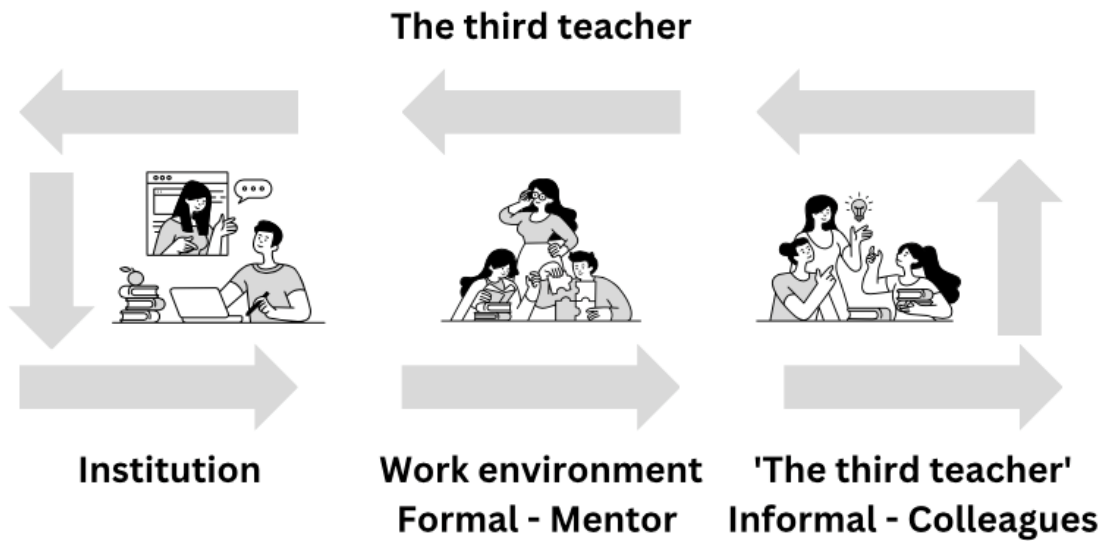


Figure: 6.1 – Exploring the concept of the ‘third teacher’. A continual cycle for work-based learning
Developed by author

Theory to practice

Developing job competence/expertise, team building, and effective participation skills is particularly dependent on the supportive nature of a work environment, explored by the participants, characterised by positive relationships amongst them and their colleagues, as well as informal learning which took place through daily interactions. A new reality of problems was presented to the participants due to Covid-19, as well as the experiences they had to overcome. The apprentices were able to gain self-management and creative thinking skills as a result. However, the diploma participants explained that they were not able to develop these skills as such as the structure of the learning programmes meant that they did not become empowered like the apprentice participants and were not able to develop the autonomy needed, in terms of them conducting their job and presenting a certain degree of independence within their role. During the two observations conducted in practice the participants were asked how they were applying the theory they had learnt from their course and how this links to their practice. While undertaking the observation there was a discussion which I reflected on from the interviews and focus group about some of the participants using the term ‘theory to practice’, but further investigation from the observation had shown that they were applying theory unconsciously when they were learning. While talking to the

participants within the focus group, it appeared that they could relate the theory to practice; even though they did not say this directly, I was able to interpret this from their responses, but they would not necessarily know that they were doing this by specifically stating theory to practice.

Work environment post qualifying

All eight of the participants are now in the work environment and turning the research focus onto this is an important concept to consider. This is because this aspect of the design of the study has provided evidence of the impact of the different training programmes and the participants' experience of these. Work environment research considers a variety of variables that capture the effects that may exist or transfer (Burke and Hutchins, 2007). This research has demonstrated that colleague or supervisor support allows for further knowledge and skills to be acquired, both in support of apprentice and diploma learners. The participants have stated that this is a positive outcome for support to them while training. The data has shown that there is a considerable emphasis for those participants who are now in the workplace receiving ongoing support which has increased their performance and continually gained further knowledge to practice as an early years professional.

The apprentice participants have been given much more of an opportunity to learn within the workplace than those who are on the diploma pathway, mainly due to the time differentials involved at the time of collecting the data. There is not a consistent approach to teaching methods for all the participants across their training programmes and some went to an institution (diploma) and some were taught at the setting where a tutor or assessor (apprentice) provides the knowledge. Even though the diploma courses are deemed to be giving real practice opportunities and this has not been contested within this research, the participants did state that they were not given enough time to be able to establish suitable relationships with colleagues; they discussed aspects of not being given the autonomy to be able to undertake specific tasks as they were seen as students and not key members of staff. This was in stark contrast to the participants who were the apprentices where they took on a role which embedded them into the team. It was clear that the relationships that were built

upon within the workplace were a crucial factor in the early years work-based pedagogy and gaining this from their peers was an opportunity to achieve autonomy, which was seen as important by the participants.

As an alternative to traditional vocational programmes, apprenticeships offer a few advantages. Apprenticeships combine skills development with employment opportunities, addressing issues related to employability by developing transferrable skills and professional competence/expertise (Kaiser et al., 2017). The review of the literature, however, revealed that approaches to apprentice development can become restrictive when considering these lower-level apprenticeships. As a result, lower-level apprenticeships are typically of low quality and a restrictive nature (Fuller and Unwin, 2003), but do offer a wide variety of opportunities for career and educational advancement.

When trainees are in the workplace, they should be able to approach any challenges within their practice linked to their role as a positive developmental opportunity. The data suggested that participants within this research explained the difficulties associated with Covid-19. Some even explored that even the pandemic provided them with a learning opportunity to gain resilience rather than an issue which could have stopped them from learning. However, the contrast from the diploma participants was that they had to work at home and could not attend placement, due to them being classed as full-time students and not employees. The data suggested that a perception from the participants could be seen as unfair advantage that apprentices had work-based learning opportunities that were denied to those diploma learners due to constraints at the time. This opens more of a debate and raises the question of the processes and equitable opportunities for these learners. The participants who were employed (the apprentices) documented that the skills they were able to develop of problem solving during this time have become invaluable and central to the role of being an early years professional. Additionally the apprentices and diploma students should have the same opportunities to learn from colleagues daily within their early years settings to strengthen core skills such as communication, problem solving, and pedagogical leadership which can be supported by the colleagues in their settings and their line managers, as well as extricate

knowledge from informal daily interactions; it is imperative that early years student learners develop their critical competencies which enable them to fully develop professionally.

Many of the participants discussed the social aspects of learning which took place within the work environment. The social aspects which were experienced by the participants applied more to the apprentices where they gained opportunities which included guidance and knowledge. This was not mirrored by those participants who were on placement (diploma participants) and they felt that the aspects of connection with their supervisors were not built upon positively, and therefore little social learning opportunities were happening. The importance of social learning in the workplace has become a major concern for some of the participants and the data suggested that learning from their colleagues was an important aspect of their training. This became apparent during the discussions within the interview where there was a difference being explored with the participants around the social learning needs of early years professionals within the work environment. It was the apprentice learners who spoke of their colleagues highly, even though the diploma learners spoke of the time they had with their mentor and did not explain what the impact of this was for them. There was not enough data to suggest that there would have been a difference. On further analysis, the apprentices did speak of learning more coherently with their colleagues, suggesting that this could be seen as a positive indication of social learning. As outlined in the literature review and certain aspects of the data, it is, therefore, important to make a link to the current challenges facing the early years sector. However, this research does not look at this in detail. The main challenges facing the sector are as follows:

- Burnout and workload
- Difficulty retaining staff
- Poor pay and conditions
- Confusion with regards to qualifications

Sutton Trust (2021)

It was clear from the evidence from the participants that some of them had chosen to leave the sector and look for better paid work in retail, or even think about higher education as their

next step. There were many reasons the participants had given to withdraw from this research and their reasoning for leaving the sector, including the well-known challenges faced by the sector, such as low pay and workload. However, it was clear that they did not see this profession as a long-standing career in the current climate. The participants did discuss their joy of working within the sector, which could be linked to the attributes of the vocational nature of the role they are doing.

On reflection on the above there are ways in which the sector could support the recruitment and retention issues, by looking closely at the training which is provided in the first place. The data does suggest that there could be a reason around being prepared to undertake the role at such an early age and developing oneself. Conversely, by taking on board aspects from the data of this research, there could be many improvements to the training landscape which could support early years learners further. This could include:

- Increased funding for training and professional development.
- A mentorship programme which supports qualified colleagues within the early years to support all trainees in the sector. I believe that a national mentoring programme by the government will support recruitment and retention for the sector.
- A clear and updated workforce strategy which maps out a clear pathway for training which includes progression.
- Greater professionalism for the workforce, including higher pay and progression.
- Improving the perception of what Early Years Education is and the value of investing in early years professionals.
- Diversifying training. We have seen a work-based model of apprenticeships but allowing more flexible approaches to college-based courses.

It has been argued by many researchers that high quality early childhood settings can positively impact children's outcomes (Sylva et al., 2004), which has wider economic benefits in both the short and long term. Policies and guidance surrounding early years practice in England has been shaped by an early study on effective pedagogy. As part of the SPEEL project in 2000 and 2001, the government sought to identify practitioners' understanding of effective

pedagogy to develop a framework for good practice (Moyles, 2002). Through interviews and observations, the participants demonstrated an understanding of what good practice is. However, it is important to note that this was not a direct outcome of the research, but it could have been indicated in many aspects and demonstrated through the data as it currently stands. It is essential to understand the environments of an early years setting and how different they are. It is important to note that no settings are identical and many have different early childhood approaches when it comes to early years pedagogy and practices. However, workplaces have begun to be recognised as sites of learning. Research is providing insight into how theories and concepts are incorporated into work practices, resulting in new knowledge (Evans et al., 2010; Beckett and Hager, 2002; Fuller and Unwin, 2009).

In contrast to Vincent and Braun's (2011) research, the participants started to think about the broader concept of them developing their own professionalism and their professional behaviours. Participants discussed the need to gain an element of confidence during their time as a trainee practitioner. However, after a deeper discussion within the focus group it emerged that many of them did not quite understand their role and expressed the need for these attributes to have been discussed on entry to their programme of study.

Formal and informal learning

Analysis of the data has helped me develop the concept of the third teacher to explain how the informal and formal support from colleagues within the setting sits within the framework of the research findings. I have developed this concept from the data, the literature, and my own experience to explore this concept in more detail. I have stated this due to the evidence from the data which explores the role of the colleague 'third teacher' within practice. The diagram Figure 6.2 illuminates the different aspects: the institution-based learning, the environment and those within the workplace. It also takes a new conceptual approach which is that of the colleagues within the early years settings and the role they play in developing, providing pedagogy and learning opportunities to early years trainees. Demonstrating the part these colleagues play with the teaching and learning aspects of their role, both formally and

informally for trainee practitioners was an important aspect of this research and an area which needed highlighting.

Conversely, the initial focus of this research was looking at the experiences of the participants, but, taking cognisance of what the participants were discussing, there was much more of wider exploration of the colleagues on how they supported learners, in terms of both formal and informal learning opportunities. Explored in the data, it had become apparent that their skills, knowledge and how they transferred this to the learner, somehow allowed them to take on a teacher role within the workplace. However, further on from being the teacher, trainer or mentor, these colleagues provided a significant element of support, mentoring and sharing of knowledge. Therefore, in the context of this research, it has demonstrated a shift from institutional, environmental work-based learning to that in which colleagues within the workplace could be seen as the third teacher and plays an important part of developing early years professional pedagogy alongside the teacher and trainer, and the practice through the early years environment. It is, therefore, a necessity that early years trainees have the institutional class-based learning, which is led by a teacher or trainer, the practical experiences of being in a work-place setting, but the third aspect alongside these two points needs to be a person who is knowledgeable to support early years trainees and can link all the aspects of the learning outcomes together. This has been determined to be the third teacher, which I am proposing are the experienced early years practitioners who have been in their role over a significant period of time to support trainees within the sector. The third teacher is then defined by the informal relationships which are developed organically, and developed into friendships where learners feel that informal learning can take place.

Putting the participant at the centre of this research was an important aspect that is facilitated by the theoretical framework. I have been able to demonstrate my approach very clearly in using Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1992), Ecological Systems Model to fit the aim of the research. It was a positive addition as it helped me to bind the participants and the theoretical nature of the study together. Work-based pedagogy does not happen in isolation. For the participants, there were many predisposing factors which were at play, including their history, their economic situation and the policies which affected them during their education. The

immediate impact of the learners with regards to their work-based learning was of main importance. The model below, Figure 6.2, will support the sector in several ways. The main way is to include opportunity for vocational learners to have more hours within practice as this research shows the benefits to the learner when this happens. It shows the importance of the formal and informal learning needed to be able to learn theory to practice which is embedded within work-based learning. Overwhelmingly, the colleagues that they work with have provided another layer of learning, support, and guidance, and by doing this I have used the data to suggest that they are in fact the third teacher, in support of work-based learning within the early years sector. Exploring the concept of the third teacher, the Figure 6.1 above allows a visual depiction of where the mentor within practice sits alongside the other two aspects of learning within the workplace, and positions itself as a continuum, where learning within the workplace cannot be achieved in isolation.

The link between the experiences of the participants and how they were being supported by their 'friends' in practice was robust, in that they were a positive approach to supporting the participants' pedagogy and understanding of the role. There is not enough evidence to suggest that this can only be applied to the early years context as there could be similar experiences in other sectors. However, the exploration of the contribution that colleagues make to WBL is largely absent from the literature, which tends to be heavily focussed on the technical skills gained. The participants had started to make the connection between their colleagues within their current practice and how they support them in making further enhancements of learning for their role. They all spoke of reflective practice and having time to be able to do this effectively. They had noticed that this is a task which does not always happen, but a question was raised by me about the informal opportunities for reflective practice. The participants' reflective practice resonates with Schon's (1983) reflection on action, in which they consider this systemically by 'proper thinking' of the day of events. Research has shown that reflective practice is a core element of practice, one which a professional can develop, with support and space needed to be able to do so (Goouch and Powell, 2012). Throughout the interviews the participants had examples of reflective practice, mostly being done informally and not really seeing it as an important aspect of their role (Rose and Rogers, 2012). I asked the participants if this was done more formally; however there appeared to be nothing for this practice to

occur within the settings which could therefore limit the further learning opportunities for the participants.

The research presents a real time implication for policy, both in terms of its currency and how it connects to the Macrosystem. There needs to be a continued dialogue between those policy makers, education programme writers and employers (Lee, 2012). In contrast to Lee, those training providers need to promote the transfer of knowledge from the classroom to the workplace in order to explore further connections as to how they can develop work-based learning pedagogies for these programmes. Therefore, this approach should become a mandatory criterion within the learning documents of the Early years educator level 3 qualification. Employers and training providers should work together and agree training to link with workplace and sector strategies to ensure that the delivery is aligned with the expectations of the job. By considering the points taken from this research, this should be done every two years as a minimum strategy, so that there is a continual association to currency and real-life expectations of being a competent early years professional. As part of this strategy, there needs to be clear links to a training plan which would align to the job and activities on how theory relates to practice.

According to Smith (2015), the process plays an important role in individual development as well.

The right environment and support can enable young people to overcome obstacles that arise as they develop. (Smith, 2015, p. 69)

As a result, these findings should be considered when choosing training and developing competency-based programmes in the early years. Colleague support emerged strongly from the data as a potentially significant predictor of knowledge and skills acquired. As discussed in prior research (Bates et al., 2000), colleagues, supervisors, and a positive source of support can influence training transfer. Interpreting and analysing the overarching discussions that participants have given produces credibility to their colleagues' feedback about their experiences as early years professionals. This is an important 'eureka' moment in the research since it supports the questions around pedagogy and how it is applied in the workplace. Those colleagues with experience should support their less experienced colleagues by passing on

their knowledge. Professional mentoring also plays a significant role here, where early years professionals discuss the professional competence/expertise needed to become fully qualified.

Experience of early years professionals

Early years settings who recruit apprentices should invest in capacity to building the support needed to deliver quality and expectations of the apprenticeship. There needs to be value put into those informal learning opportunities which are taking place within the workplace, both in terms of being with the children, being able to ask questions and training provided to those within the settings to support the apprentice's wellbeing. However, Continual Professional Development must be placed at the centre of development for early years professionals and an acknowledgment of the importance of theory to practice, inductions and fostering an approach to learn and support training transfer is important. Ensuring that those settings employing an apprentice have a manager or supervisor undergoing a mandatory training requirement, such as that of an assessor/trainer qualification which is largely work-based, is important. These roles are common in other professions such as work-based assessors in social work and nursing.

This study offers practical implications for investing in early years professionals and employing work-based apprentices more generally. Firstly, early years settings need to be ready for new colleagues who may want to do learning within practice. Currently there is a two-tiered system where apprenticeships are seen as the lower standard of qualifications when it comes to qualifying as an EYE professional. In this respect, the findings align themselves between formal and informal training and work, reflecting current and perspective roles and responsibilities and this thesis rejects that notion, finding an apprenticeship model of training to be more effective. In the early years, many researchers advocated apprenticeships being embedded into the workforce, ensuring that training is tailored to the competence/expertise, knowledge, and skills necessary for the apprentice's role. In addition, the training provided should reflect the actual role of the early years professional, including current and future responsibilities.

Consistent with other research (e.g. Lim and Johnson, 2002), my study provides an argument that the opportunities given to participants within the study enhances their training, resulting in a positive outcome to become competent and qualified members of the early years sector. In finding a positive link between training and on the job transfer of knowledge, this study provides evidence that supports these positive outcomes. It also confirms that there is on the job learning taking place (Diamantidis and Chatzoglou, 2014). This is an important finding in the context of work-based pedagogy and highlights the need for informal learning to be a key component of supporting improved performance. By finding an association between application in the classroom and the context of workplace learning, the research draws attention to the importance of the work environment for training and transfer of knowledge.

Limitations and direction for future research

Firstly, the design of the research included a robust data collection, using several methods, and it was considered that the sample size was adequate for a case study. The sample size enabled me to explore what each participant wanted to discuss and allowed me to further understand what work-based learning looked like within early years settings for trainees and professionals within the sector. An important aspect of this was highlighted by the relationships that the participants had developed with their work colleagues, which has meant that I could gain insights into work-based learning. I do not believe that a larger sample size would have afforded the same in-depth exploration which enabled me to investigate the complexities related to the role of the informal relationships that professionals have within practice. Further observations of all participants may have provided further insight into the understanding of how and why there are numerous factors which support linking classroom-based learning to that of the workplace. However, due to the lack of time and opportunities with the participants, this could not go ahead, meaning that only two observations were achieved.

Ideally a larger number of interviews would have been preferable; however, I was constrained but the number of participants willing to take part and the need that the participants felt to be in practice. Nevertheless, through the journals provided by participants and the

observations I had undertaken, this allowed me to explore the impact of learning within their practice. Having a small number of participants enabled me to capture their emotional responses as newly qualified professionals. For example, discussing feelings of being overwhelmed with the responsibility and being left alone to be in charge. The diploma participants felt they had not been given the full opportunity to practice during their time within their course, due to settings closing and them not being allowed to go into practice for health and safety reasons around Covid-19.

Secondly, the original data were initially going to be collected over a six-month period, but this was changed considering the pressures and withdrawals of the participants. I needed to collect data in the shortest possible time so the data collection period was reduced to a 3-month period. I. Further, with the closure of settings and a reluctance for engagement at the time of the height of Covid-19, four participants dropped out of the study. However, I was able to use what data they had given me and include this within the study. With time constraints and not having real time access to the participants, I carried on with the focus group and interviews. The research has been guided by the aspects of informal learning and how this has been applied by the participants. Indeed, the impact that the informal approaches outlined by the participants was of high importance, and I would suggest a further study of the informal skills being learnt within practice would be another step for me to enhance the research further. The study could focus on examining whether informal learning activities are mediating the effects of early years competencies at level 3. Knowledge sharing with colleagues could make a difference in how theory and practice relate (Bednall et al., 2014). Similarly, allowing the day-to-day role of early years trainees to embed reflection within their daily activities through a journal-based assignment could be a new way of professionals making the link between theory and practice (Bednall and Sanders, 2016). Further research is needed to identify connections between individual factors that allow learners to interact more closely with how they learn both informally and formally. This could be focused on their cognitive ability to be able to relate theory to practice (Burke and Hutchins, 2007).

At a contextual level, this study investigated the learning pedagogy within an early years professional learning workplace. This is embedded with the employment relationship and

varied depending on the participants' training pathway. Researchers have not examined attributes of learners in relation to how they respond differently to learning opportunities in the workplace. The findings of this study support the emerging apprenticeship route, which is crucial for development in the training sector, despite focusing on work-based pedagogy. Since apprenticeship development draws on theories of training as a transfer to the workplace (Eraut, 2007; Raemdonck et al., 2014; Skule, 2004), these findings can be taken and replicated in other contexts for workforce development and training in early childhood.

My contribution to knowledge

The following summarises my unique contribution to the field of Early Childhood and work-based learning:

In this thesis, I present an empirical account, comparing the work-based learning of apprentices and diploma learners in early childhood education. This extends to the concept of the third teacher, the experienced professionals within the early years settings that support our training early years professionals both formally and informally to gain expertise for their qualification. Within an environment that plays a significant role in learning, to considering experience, knowledge, and the expertise of early years professionals within environments that are themselves spaces of educational practice further demonstrates those knowledgeable educators within early childhood settings have become the third teacher within the early years trainees development journey. This demonstrates the coherence of the apprenticeship experience, whilst students on diploma courses experience some disruption in their iterations between work and institution-based educational settings.

Conclusion

This research provides an insight into the learning experiences of an early years trainee professional. The development of these professionals is enhanced by work-based programmes which gives priority to a set of work-based learning outcomes. These outcomes need to be based around valuing the informal aspects of development which supports the professionalisation of the early years practitioner. This study goes on to provide a further insight into the interconnections between different levels of the environment by applying Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1992) ecological theoretical framework. The findings of this study could provide TVET researchers and early childhood policy makers with a valuable tool for understanding the challenges of teaching and learning in the early years sector. Prospective early years students could also gain an insight into their upcoming experiences and their motivations to pursue the courses they choose.

The third teacher concept is an important aspect of this research and explores the key role of those well established and experienced early years professionals acting as a person to build a connection with for early years trainee professionals. However, this research has given a new insight into work-based learning, more specifically within the early years and discusses the role of the 'third teacher' within work-based learning practices but suggests that, for trainees in the early years, learning is not provided in isolation. Considering the findings, a work-based learning intervention should be adopted by early years settings. A positive learning environment is conducive to professional development when learners receive regular support and challenging opportunities that support their autonomy. While investing in apprenticeships is a key factor of this research, so is the investment of work-based programmes which have placement opportunities. From the research, it is recommended that early years qualifications should be work-based as it is an important part of building and sustaining a high-quality employment relationship. Conversely, early childhood providers need to see them as a strategy that builds on child-centred outcomes that result in competent and resilient workers and support the ongoing need for knowledgeable professionals to sustain the sector and provide high quality care and early education. It is important that work-based learning, more specifically in the early years, is given a clear remit of work-based learning within training. This

is given credibility within this research where it demonstrates that the informal learning aspects of the job role focus strongly on becoming a competent and resilient early childhood professional.

A final reflection of this research is that it has come with many challenges. To complete the research during the Covid 19 pandemic was one of these challenges; the pandemic will be one of the main challenges to our society in modern time. In thinking about what this meant for me as a researcher, as well as what it meant to the participants, I recall the time when I collected the data. On that day, everything stopped. A lockdown was imposed on the entire country, and we did not know where we would be in months to come. I did not hear from many of the participants for a while and communication had stopped. For some they did not know what their next steps were going to be. A small number of participants started going back to their roles in nurseries. As apprentices, these participants were employed by the settings to support the children to maintain the few semblances of normality that were left. How the participants managed to still become qualified early years professionals and meet the expected requirements expected by the government during a time of real change to society has shown that early years professionals are dedicated to their profession. They would not have been able to accomplish this without the support of their colleagues within practice. This is more of a reflection than a conclusion, but it is important to mention it, since all the professionals supporting the children at the time, regardless of their role, still got up every day and wondered what would happen with the Covid 19 virus. I am grateful that they continued to show their capabilities whilst engaging in this research.

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Appendices

Appendix A1

Ethical Approval:

I can confirm that this research was given full ethical approval by the University of Derby.
The full reference to this ethical approval is detailed below:

ETH2021-1542

13 Nov 2020

11 Mar 2021

Approved

Appendix A2

Participant letter - Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(University of Derby)

Title of Project:

Reconceptualising the Third Teacher:

A study of trainee experiences of work-based learning on Level 3 Early Years programmes

This study is being undertaken at the University of Derby as part of my Educational Doctorate. Full details may be found on the Participant Information Sheet. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Aaron Bradbury at aaron.bradbury@ntu.ac.uk

Name:

I agree to participate in the following activities for the purpose of the research project:

Interviews Yes/No

Reflective Journals Yes/No

Focus Groups Yes/No

Observations. Yes/No

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time up to one month after the data collection, and this will not impact on you in anyway. I understand that, although the university might be identifiable, other organisations and individuals will be anonymised in any of the analysis or publications arising from the study, and that my personal details will be always kept confidential.

Principal Investigator: *(Aaron Bradbury)*

I understand that the information collected about me will be held and processed used for the following purpose:

Research Project, research reports and research publications

I agree to Aaron Bradbury recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purposes set out within the information sheet supplied to me. I consent upon Aaron Bradbury complying with the duties and obligations under the GDPR regulations. The data will be destroyed after a period of seven years from the end of the project.

Participant's Printed Name: _____

Signature _____ Date:

Appendix A3

Information sheet and participation letter

Participant Briefing Letter

Research Project

Reconceptualising the Third Teacher:

A study of trainee experiences of work-based learning on Level 3 Early Years programmes

Dear

Thank you for taking an interest in my research and putting yourself forward.

Attached to this letter is a participant information sheet which outlines the study of my research:

An exploration between pedagogy and learning through a lens of student led approaches within an Early Childhood Apprenticeship

Please read the information provided (participant briefing letter) and fill in the consent form, if you wish to take part.

If you have any further information or any questions, then please do not hesitate to contact me via email aaron.bradbury@ntu.ac.uk

Kind Regards

Aaron Bradbury

Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title

Reconceptualising the Third Teacher:

A study of trainee experiences of work-based learning on Level 3 Early Years programmes

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide to do so, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with other colleagues if you so wish. Please do ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you require more information. Take time to decide whether you want to take part or not. Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

What is the project's purpose?

This research project aims to investigate an exploration between pedagogy and learning through a lens of student led approaches within an Early Childhood Apprenticeship. It will allow a comparison within my findings of your programme of study and comparing this between an apprenticeship programme and degree programme of study.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are undertaking an apprenticeship or non-apprenticeship programme in Early Childhood. The programme you are on has similar characteristics of modules, teaching, and practice. Therefore, I am keen to learn about the learning taking place within your course and to gain an in depth look at whether there is a difference between the two.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be able to keep a copy of this information and you should indicate your agreement by filling in the informed consent form.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be required to do the following within a full academic year (12 months)

A focus group at the beginning of the study and one at the end (12 months a part) This will include two key questions which can be found on the Topic Forms attached to this information sheet. (A2)

Two Interviews – 30 minutes of your time with me. You will have 2 key questions to ascertain the research question. The questions for the interview are attached to this information sheet. (A1)

Reflective Journal - A journal which you will write down your thoughts – This will be electronic, and I will have access to your writing. There is a proforma to follow which will help you with what to write in your journal, and this is attached to the information sheet. (A3) This will be different to the other

two methods. I am keen to research through what you write down and I believe the advantages of using the reflective journals is that it will provide an opportunity for me to hear the voice of the learner through the chance of giving them a way to express their thoughts and changes that they experience as part of their learning experience. The reflective journal inserts will have a one drive account where you can deposit what you have written at 6 intervals throughout the process. It is up to you when you write them, but it must be spread out so that it is not all done at once. My suggestion would be to do one every 2 months.

Your Interviews and Focus groups will be completed online Via Zoom. You will be invited with dates planned in advance of when you are required to attend the sessions.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks taking part?

Taking part in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantage or discomfort. The potential physical or psychological harm or distress will be the same as any experienced within everyday life.

What are the benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those of you participating in the research, it is hoped that this work will have a real benefit to the impact on future apprenticeships in the future. Results will be shared with participants in order to inform their professional work.

What happens in the research study stops earlier than expected?

Should the research stop earlier than planned and you are affected in any way I will tell you and explain why.

What if something goes wrong?

If you have any complaints about the project in the first instance you can contact any member of the research team by emailing aaron.bradbury@ntu.ac.uk. If you are not entirely satisfied you can contact Aaron's director of studies, Liz Atkins by email on L.Atkins@derby.ac.uk

Will taking part in this research be kept confidential?

The data you provide will only be used for the study, will be stored securely as the data you provide will be secured using the One drive platform which has been set up with two factor authentications with double passwords and mobile phone coding which needs access every time you need to use one drive, will comply with GDPR and will be confidential. It will not be disclosed to any third party, except as part of the thesis findings, as part of the supervisory or assessment processes of the University of Derby or as part of any published works which derive from the study. All data will be anonymized with all student details being removed and will also be aggregated so that no individual will be identifiable. The data will be kept until August 31st, 2027, so that it is available for scrutiny by the University of Derby as part of the assessment process.

What will happen to the results of the research?

Results of the research will be published and will form a final draft of my thesis. You will not be identified in any report or publication. Your institution will not be identified in any report or

publication, and I will use coding for each participant rather than your name. If you wish to be given a copy of any reports resulting from the research, please ask me to put you on the publication lists.

Who has ethically reviewed the research?

This project has been ethically approved by the Information School's ethics review procedure and subsequently endorsed by the ethics procedures of the University of Derby Ethics panel.

Contacts for further information

Aaron Bradbury – Researcher - aaron.bradbury@ntu.ac.uk.

Liz Atkins – Director of Studies – L.Atkins@derby.ac.uk

Appendix A4

Interviews

Indicative Interview Questions

Reconceptualising the Third Teacher:

A study of trainee experiences of work-based learning on Level 3 Early Years programmes

Mode of Interview – Virtual Recording using Zoom or telephone conversation, all discussions will be transcribed onto the below form.

Unique Code (Participant Number)

Interview 1

Research Question	Comments from Participant
RQ1: What are the early years professionals understanding of work-based pedagogy?	
RQ2: How do early years professionals' prior experiences of learning from their level three early years course apply to the uses of pedagogy in their practices?	
RQ3: What does work-based pedagogy look like within the early years workplace?	
What programme of study did you complete?	

What motivated you to choose this course?

Do you know what pedagogy is? Do you know what work-based pedagogy is?

Can you tell me what strategies you have gained in practice?

How much time did you get to write your assessments? Did you feel that you were able to take what you had read from your assignments and apply this directly to your practice?

Within a normal week, how much teaching face-to-face time do you get for your modules.

Are there aspects of learning that have occurred on your programme which have not been in the classroom or in the workplace?

How much practice within an Early Years setting did you have?

Do you think that more time dedicated to either practice or teaching on your modules is important?

<p>Thinking about your course, do you feel that this has prepared you for the role of an early years professional?</p> <p>Now you are qualified, what would you like to have known on our training that you know now?</p> <p>How approachable were your mentor's and colleagues within your setting?</p> <p>Are you aware of next steps. Thinking about progression?</p>	
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Appendix A5

Focus Group

Reconceptualising the Third Teacher:

A study of trainee experiences of work-based learning on Level 3 Early Years programmes

Mode of Focus Group – Virtual Recording using Zoom, all discussions will be transcribed onto the below form. These sessions will include 6 learners in total. 3 learners from apprenticeship pathway and 3 learners from degree pathway.

Unique Code (Participant Names: Juliette, -03, -04, 05, 06, 07, 08)

Teams Call. However, some participants did not want the session to be recorded so I had to make notes as we went along

Apologies received from Charlotte

Date 20th November 2020

Focus Group

Focus Group Question	Comments from Participants
1. How was your course inclusive of work-based pedagogy, including key aspects that you enjoyed and good practices. Are there any parts that you think could have been improved?	Juliette – I Will go first, my course was well structured and I think it has really supported me into getting where I want to progress too. It has given me a good basis for working with children. Doing an apprenticeship had given me some flexibility with what I was learning and also what I was learning in my job. I do think there are many things I would say were good and areas that of course could have been improved. [Redacted] Ellie – I did a level 3 at college, and I would say that some of what Juliette has said rings true. For me I don't think I had enough hands-on experience. I know that this was due to COVID but I have to say it's been hard. Juliette – I think what I want to say is that I learnt a lot more from my friends at the nursery rather than kept on relying on the tutor from the training provider.
2. How have what you	

<p>learnt been supported within your practices as a qualified professional</p>	<p>Aaron – Is it ok for me to track back to something you said in your interview, you did say this – has anyone else felt that their placement or workplace has supported them with their learning? I call this pedagogy.</p> <p>Fay – yes most definitely. I have to say that without placement you can't do the job really. I think this is an important part of the course. I would go as far to say that the job needs to be an apprenticeship. You could say that more time being with the children is an important thing. I don't think I had enough time in placement to be honest.</p> <p>Juliette – That is funny as I felt that I needed more time being able to speak and discuss my units, it always felt so rushed.</p> <p>[Redacted]</p> <p>Aaron – That is two different perspectives here, do we feel that this could be down to our own personal experiences?</p> <p>Kayleigh – I mirror what both ladies have said. To be honest, I don't think it's the on-programme thing for me, it's the aftereffects. I have found what I have learnt to be useful but there is no consolidation of this, and I find myself continually thinking am I doing the right thing.</p> <p>Aaron I am glad you mentioned this, as I am thinking when you qualify, this is something which has been flagged up by many of you. I was proposing that maybe a consolidating year would be useful – maybe having a mentor, continuing that work-based pedagogy, having someone to help with those feelings. My other note is do you feel that the level 3 is adequate for what it is you are doing?</p> <p>Charlotte – I think a year after qualifying and having someone with you would be a good idea. My own personal experience wasn't positive. I felt so alone.</p> <p>Aaron – Does anyone else think this? PO5 – I do and I don't. I guess it's about what support your manager gives to you.</p> <p>Fay – I have to say that I am finding it hard after the year we have had. Any extra support – work-based learning that can continue is a good thing.</p> <p>[Redacted]</p> <p>Tamsin – As a mother myself – I find that I have had to adapt as I am going along, it's a little bit like parenting. The apprenticeship was good but it was fast, no time to take anything in and I also didn't feel that I had enough time to learn, you know what I mean.</p>
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	<p>Aaron can you explain what you mean</p> <p>Tamsin – I think the courses are good but I found mine to be very demanding. Once I had finished one section I was then asked to complete the next section. I also didn't feel that there was enough time to discuss. I also know that my tutor was dealing with the pandemic just like we were and the work-based practice just ceased and didn't happen. We had to rely on videos.</p> <p>JULIETTE – As much as I loved my apprenticeship, I do feel that I can agree here. It was like it was rushed and listening to others who did a full time programme It sounds like they did similar units but had much more time to be able to do them.</p> <p>Fay – Yes I would say that units were taught at the same time but we were given lectures every week which supported the unit and the assignment.</p> <p>Aaron – What was the learning (pedagogy) like on programme.</p> <p>Juliette – I had 3 assessors that taught me. They used to start and then move on. Kayleigh – I had 3 lecturers that taught me on my programme.</p> <p>Tamsin – I had just one lecturer that taught me all the units.</p> <p>Juliette – I just want to say though, having people who have taught and been in Early Years did help me and I also think it supported my trust in their knowledge. At times they understood the jargon that I was using and it felt natural when learning was taking place.</p> <p>Tamsin: I think the knowledge is important</p> <p>[Redacted]</p>
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Appendix A7

Observation Field Notes

Research -

Reconceptualising the Third Teacher:

A study of trainee experiences of work-based learning on Level 3 Early Years programmes

Focus on Question 3:

Key Components to observe:

Theory	Practice	Interactionism	Questioning
Linking child development	Informal Connections	Formal Connections	Role within the setting

Narrative – Observation notes

Focus on what work-based pedagogy looks like within the early years workplace?

Linking back to the comments that the participants made within the interviews