

# **Learning to learn in supported parent and toddler groups: a sociocultural investigation.**

**Martin Needham**

Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education  
Faculty of Children and Learning

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## **Abstract**

Over the last 50 years research has consistently suggested that some types of adult guidance can improve upon ‘pure discovery learning’ (Mayer, 2004). In the pre-school age group studies have suggested that pedagogical strategies identified with Scaffolding, Sustained Shared Thinking, and Co-construction can be advantageous to children’s later educational success (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). This thesis examines the cultural practices of adults supporting children’s learning in ‘free play’ during practitioner facilitated ‘Parent and Toddler Group’ sessions to consider the extent to which these children are being guided towards participating in collaborative learning interactions (Rogoff 1998) by both practitioners and parents.

The investigative approach adopted is informed by Socio-cultural theory (Hedegaard & Fler, 2008, Rogoff, 1998) and develops the complementary use of affordance theory (Gibson, 1979) to investigate the learner as part of a system of mutually effective elements. The thesis draws on observations of 12 children’s interactions in two ethnographic case studies set in context by interview and survey data. The thesis identifies and describes a range of modes of interaction employed in the case study parent and toddler groups. The thesis shows how children’s experiences vary as a result of the balance of modes that they experience. It suggests strategies to broaden parents’ and practitioners’ awareness of promoting children’s learning through a range of modes of interaction.

The study findings echo those of international studies suggesting that early education contexts may encourage individual and peer-learning much more frequently than collaborative learning with adults (Pramling-Samuelsson & Fler, 2009, Rogoff, 1998).

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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## Table of Contents

Title Page	1
Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	4
Table of Contents	5
List of tables	9
List of Figures	10
List of Appendices	11
List of abbreviations	12

## Part I

### A review of learning in parent and toddler groups

#### Chapter 1

##### An overview and introduction to key concepts

1.0 Introduction: Learning in parent and toddler groups	13
1.1 Development of the research questions	16
1.2 A Sociocultural-Historical Approach	19
1.3 The development of state interest in parent and toddler groups	21
1.4 Competing pedagogic approaches to learning and play	25
1.5 A Pedagogy of play	33
1.6 A deficit model for parents?	37
1.7 A Summary of Chapter 1 and the structure of the thesis.	39

#### Chapter 2

Pedagogy and the importance of interaction	44
2.0 Introduction	44
2.1 Constructivist perspectives: two approaches to developing cognition.	46
2.1.1 <i>Piagetian constructivist influence on education practice.</i>	46
2.1.2 <i>Social constructivist perspectives on learning through interaction</i>	49
2.1.3 <i>Vygotskian and Neo-Vygotskian influences on education</i>	53
2.2 Research into effective interaction in early education settings	57
2.2.1 <i>Scaffolding</i>	59
2.2.2 <i>Co-construction</i>	63
2.2.3 <i>Shared Thinking</i>	66

2.2.4 <i>Metacognition</i>	69
2.2.5 <i>The influence of language and gesture</i>	72
2.3 An overview of adult interaction within collaborative learning	75
2.4 What does collaborative learning build upon?	77
2.4.1 <i>Affordances and the ecological frontier</i>	79
2.4.2 <i>Joint activity in the ZPD and affordances</i>	84
2.4.3 <i>Categories of affordance</i>	84
2.5 Chapter summary	86
 Chapter 3	
A cultural-historical perspective of parent and toddler groups	88
3.0 Introduction	88
3.1 The development of parent and toddler groups	90
3.2 Parent and toddler groups 1997 to 2010	93
3.3 Encouraging the take-up of provision	99
3.4 Examples of parenting provision in England	101
3.5 ‘Supported’ Parent and Toddler Groups	104
3.6 Barriers to communication between parents and practitioners	108
3.7 Comparing parents’ and practitioners’ perspectives on pedagogy	113
3.8 Summary of part one	115
 Part II	
Case Studies of interaction in two parent and toddler groups	
 Chapter 4	
Data collection and analysis	118
4.0 Epistemology and Socio-cultural Activity.	118
4.1 A methodological approach and appropriate research questions	121
4.2 Research Phase One: Questionnaires	122
4.2.1 <i>Rationale</i>	122
4.2.2 <i>Sampling Strategy</i>	124
4.2.3 <i>Analysis of questionnaires</i>	125
4.3 Research Phase Two: Case Studies	125

4.3.1 <i>Ethnographic Case Study</i>	125
4.3.2 <i>Phase 2 Sampling strategy</i>	127
4.3.3 <i>Principles of participant observation</i>	129
4.3.4 <i>Observing children's interests and adults' responses</i>	131
4.4.5 <i>Analysis of observations</i>	134
4.4 <b>Case Study Interviews</b>	138
4.4.1 <i>Conducting interviews</i>	138
4.4.2 <i>Analysis of interviews</i>	139
4.5 <b>Ethical Issues</b>	140
4.5.1 <i>Reporting the survey responses</i>	140
4.5.2 <i>Responsibilities to participants</i>	141
4.5.3 <i>Responsibilities to the research community</i>	143
4.6 <b>Changes from the Pilot phase to the main phase</b>	144
4.7 <b>Chapter summary</b>	146
 Chapter 5	
<b>Roles and purposes in parent and toddler groups</b>	147
5.0 <b>Introduction</b>	147
5.1 <b>Phase One Data; a survey of parent and toddler groups</b>	147
5.1.1 <i>The Questionnaire sample</i>	147
5.1.2 <i>Reliability and Validity of responses</i>	148
5.1.3 <i>Background information and qualifications</i>	150
5.1.4 <i>Describe briefly the services you offer.</i>	152
5.2 <b>The Phase Two case studies</b>	155
5.2.1 <i>Background information on the Case Studies</i>	155
5.2.2 <i>The services offered by the case study groups</i>	157
5.2.3 <i>The Case studies; some self evaluations</i>	159
5.3 <b>Promoting Interaction</b>	162
5.3.1 <i>Encouraging children to select, persist and reflect?</i>	164
5.3.2 <i>Developing an exchange of understanding during activities?</i>	167
5.3.3 <i>Offering clues and hints to encourage children's thinking?</i>	170
5.4 <b>Themes emerging from the survey findings.</b>	174
5.4.1 <i>Instruments</i>	175

5.4.2 <i>Purposes</i>	175
5.4.3 <i>Rules</i>	176
5.4.4 <i>Community</i>	176
5.4.5 <i>Division of labour</i>	177
5.4.6 <i>Subject</i>	177
5.5 Setting an agenda for analysing pedagogy and doxa in the case studies	178
 Chapter 6	
Patterns of interactions in the case study groups	180
6.0 Introduction to the sample of observation data	180
6.1 An overview of interaction	182
6.1.1 <i>Age of children</i>	185
6.1.2 <i>Gender</i>	187
6.1.3 <i>Education of carer</i>	188
6.1.4 <i>Ethnic Background</i>	189
6.2 Modes of adult-child interaction	191
6.2.1 <i>Controlling</i>	191
6.2.2 <i>Monitoring</i>	195
6.2.3 <i>Affirming</i>	197
6.2.4 <i>Directing learning</i>	199
6.2.5 <i>Sharing ideas</i>	203
6.2.6 <i>Playing</i>	206
6.3 Comparing patterns of interaction across the two case study groups	210
6.3.1 <i>Practitioners' Interactions with children</i>	214
6.3.2 <i>Parents' Modes of Interaction</i>	216
6.4 The Elements of Reflection from the analytical tool	219
6.5 Aspects of Affordance	221
 Chapter 7	
Three children's experience of learning at the case study sessions	226
7.0 Selecting three children for more detailed analysis	226
7.1 Afzal; 2 years 6 months (Outwell Group)	229
7.2 Jane; 2 years 2 months (Talktime Group)	235



<b>7.3 Jamie-Lee. 2 years 3 months (Talktime group)</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>7.4 Reflections on the children's experiences of the sessions</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>7.5 A pedagogy of activity, affordance and play</b>	<b>249</b>

## **Chapter 8**

<b>Concluding discussion</b>	<b>254</b>
<b>8.0 Introduction</b>	<b>254</b>
<b>8.1 Patterns of collaborative learning in the case study groups</b>	<b>255</b>
<b>8.2 Adults' interaction with children in the case study groups</b>	<b>258</b>
<b>8.3 Adults' roles in the case study groups</b>	<b>262</b>
<b>8.4 Training implications</b>	<b>266</b>
<b>8.5 Policy Implications</b>	<b>268</b>
<b>8.6 Pedagogic Research</b>	<b>270</b>
<b>8.7 Further Research</b>	<b>271</b>
<b>8.8 The next steps?</b>	<b>272</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>274</b>

## **List of Tables**

<b>Table 5.1 The location of survey settings</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>Table 5.2 The number of responses to qualitative questionnaire items</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>Table 5.3 Leaders' qualifications</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>Table 5.4 Activities for children</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Table 5.5 Opportunities for parent activities</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Table 5.6 Group leaders' familiar with terminology</b>	<b>173</b>

## **List of Figures**

<b>Figure 1.1 A Model for the analysis the interfaces of open, focused and reflective aspects in collaborative learning.</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Figure 1.2 Bernstein's (2003) model of Class modalities and regulation</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Figure 2.1 A Model for analysing the interfaces of open, focused and reflective aspects in mediation regulated by control and time.</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Figure 4.1 Carr's learning dispositions as an observation protocol</b>	<b>132</b>

<b>Figure 4.2 Elements of analysis for coding units of interaction.</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>Figure 4.3 A model of the coding tool for interactions.</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Figure 4.4 Coding Framework for the analysis of observed interactions</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Figure 4.5 Learning stories as part of the observation protocol</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>Figure 6.1 Comparing the frequency who is leading activity</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>Figure 6.2 Comparing category frequency by group</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>Figure 6.3 Comparing collaborative interaction coding frequencies by age</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>Figure 6.4 Comparing the frequency of reflective codes by age.</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>Figure 6.5 Comparing code frequencies by age</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>Figure 6.6 Comparing the allocation of codes by gender.</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>Figure 6.7 Comparing the coding frequencies by carers' education background</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>Figure 6.8 Comparing the frequency of codes by ethnicity</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>Figure 6.9 Elements in controlling interactions</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>Figure 6.10 Elements in monitoring interactions</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>Figure 6.11 Elements in affirming interactions</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>Figure 6.12 Directing learning 1</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>Figure 6.13 Directing learning 2</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>Figure 6.14 Elements in sharing ideas interactions</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>Figure 6.15 Elements in playful interactions</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>Figure 6.16 Comparing the frequency of modes of interaction by group attended</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>Figure 6.17 Comparing the frequency of the modes used by staff in the two case study groups</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>Figure 6.18 Comparing the frequency of the modes used by parents in the two case study groups</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>Figure 6.19 Comparing modes of interaction by ethnic group</b>	<b>218</b>
<b>Figure 6.20 Comparing the frequency of reflective elements in the two case study groups.</b>	<b>220</b>
<b>Figure 6.21 Comparing the frequency of reflective elements employed by the different adults</b>	<b>220</b>
<b>Figure 6.22 Comparing the frequency of affordances</b>	<b>222</b>
<b>Figure 7.1 Children grouped by features of their Parents' interaction</b>	<b>226</b>

<b>Figure 7.2 Selected children's modes of interaction with their mother during a session.</b>	<b>227</b>
<b>Figure 7.3 The selected children's experience of modes of interaction through a whole session.</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>Figure 7.4 Metacognitive elements of interaction experienced by the selected children</b>	<b>229</b>
<b>Figure 7.5 The continuum of support for learning</b>	<b>248</b>

## **List of Appendices**

<b>Appendix 1 Survey Questionnaire</b>	<b>284</b>
<b>Appendix 1a Telephone recruitment protocol</b>	<b>285</b>
<b>Appendix 1b Parent and Toddler Group Questionnaire. Coding summary report; activities offered</b>	<b>286</b>
<b>Appendix 1c How does your programme work to address parents' roles in encouraging children to select persist with and reflect on the activities they do?</b>	<b>291</b>
<b>Appendix 2 An example of an observation</b>	<b>293</b>
<b>Appendix 2a An example of a coded observation</b>	<b>296</b>
<b>Appendix 2b Interaction coding tool summary for all 12 observations</b>	<b>298</b>
<b>Appendix 2c An extract from a notebook observation</b>	<b>302</b>
<b>Appendix 3 Permissions letter for parents</b>	<b>303</b>
<b>Appendix 3a Sample parent interview</b>	<b>306</b>
<b>Appendix 3b The codes applied to the example interview</b>	<b>309</b>
<b>Appendix 3c Parents' purposes: Node summary report</b>	<b>310</b>
<b>Appendix 4 Sample practitioner interview</b>	<b>318</b>
<b>Appendix 4a The codes applied to the exemplar practitioner interview</b>	<b>325</b>
<b>Appendix 4b Practitioners' comments on community; Node summary report</b>	<b>326</b>
<b>Appendix 5 Ethical Approval Submission</b>	<b>328</b>

## List of Abbreviations

<b>BA</b>	<b>Bachelor of Arts</b>
<b>B.Ed.</b>	<b>Bachelor of Education</b>
<b>CAMH</b>	<b>Child and Adolescent Mental Health</b>
<b>CHAT</b>	<b>Cultural Historical Activity Theory</b>
<b>CIS</b>	<b>Children’s Information Service</b>
<b>CPD</b>	<b>Continuing Professional Development</b>
<b>DCSF</b>	<b>Department for Children, Schools and Families</b>
<b>DfES</b>	<b>Department for Education and Science</b>
<b>ECM</b>	<b>E very Child Matters</b>
<b>ECEERA</b>	<b>European Early Childhood Education Research Association</b>
<b>EPPE</b>	<b>Effective Provision of Preschool Education</b>
<b>EYQISP</b>	<b>Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme</b>
<b>EYFS</b>	<b>Early Years Foundation Stage</b>
<b>HLE</b>	<b>Home Learning Environment</b>
<b>IQ</b>	<b>Intelligence Quotient</b>
<b>LA</b>	<b>Local Authority</b>
<b>LASS</b>	<b>Language Acquisition Support System</b>
<b>LAD</b>	<b>Language Acquisition Device</b>
<b>KS</b>	<b>Key Stage</b>
<b>NNEB</b>	<b>Nursery Nurse Qualifications</b>
<b>NESS</b>	<b>National Evaluation of Sure Start</b>
<b>NLSY</b>	<b>National Longitudinal Survey of Youth</b>
<b>NVQ</b>	<b>National Vocational Qualification</b>
<b>ORIM</b>	<b>‘opportunities’, ‘recognising’, ‘interaction’ ‘modelling’</b>
<b>REPEY</b>	<b>Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years</b>
<b>PAFT</b>	<b>Parents as First Teachers</b>
<b>PEAL</b>	<b>Parents Early Years and Learning</b>
<b>PEEP</b>	<b>Peers Early Education Partnership</b>
<b>PGCE</b>	<b>Post Graduate Certificate in Education</b>
<b>PLA</b>	<b>Preschool Learning Alliance</b>
<b>PPEL</b>	<b>Parents as Partners in Early Learning</b>
<b>SSLP</b>	<b>Sure Start Local Programmes</b>
<b>SST</b>	<b>Sustained shared thinking</b>
<b>ZPD</b>	<b>Zone of Proximal Development</b>

## **Part I**

### **A review of learning in parent and toddler groups**

#### **Chapter 1**

##### **An overview and introduction to key concepts.**

##### **1.0 Introduction: Learning in parent and toddler groups**

Parent and toddler groups are organised play sessions involving parents and their children. Groups typically last for one or two hours offering an opportunity for parents to play together with their child, alongside other parents and children, often in a larger space than is available at home and with messier materials. Such groups have existed in England and internationally for more than 40 years (Pugh and De'Ath, 1995) and are intended to facilitate social learning opportunities for both parents and their children. In England from 1998 to 2010, government funding rapidly accelerated the number of groups facilitated by trained professional practitioners. This development occurred as a result of increasing understanding of the importance of early learning experiences. This increase was also linked to the growing expectation that such groups might influence the Home Learning Environment (Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart and Elliot, 2002) and improve social and educational outcomes for children. Parent and toddler groups, particularly when located in areas of disadvantage, have been seen as an early intervention with the potential to influence parents' and children's attitudes towards learning and to improve future educational outcomes for children. However there is as yet limited evidence that such groups can effect such a change.

This thesis presents a socio-cultural study of the nature of the interactions taking place during the free choice activities of parent and toddler groups. The broad aim of the study was to investigate how adults' support for children's learning varied between groups and the extent to which learning/teaching relationships varied. There is very little research of a similar nature set in the context of parent and toddler groups but there are similar investigations in other family contexts by Rogoff, Mosier, Mistry and Göncü (1998) who explored cultural variances in learning interactions across different

national cultures. There is also published work by Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009), who bring together a international collection of small scale studies exploring cultural practices related to play in Early Education (Pramling-Samuelsson & Fleer, 2009). The present study began from observations in a number of parent and toddler groups which raised concerns that echo the findings of Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009) from preschool contexts in USA, Australia and New Zealand, which suggested that practitioners sometimes adopted a “non-active role” with toddlers in particular. Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009) suggest that this may be in part due to

interpretations of Piaget’s work, where staff focus mostly on planning environments and not on interactions. The provision of materials which are seen as developmentally appropriate for children becomes the focus of attention. The focus on materials and the cultural belief that each child is going to become independent, and by doing so they are able to take initiatives and gain trust in their own competence, is foregrounded. (Pramling-Samuelsson et al 2009, p.178)

Similarly Rogoff (1998) draws on a range of studies to suggest that in relation to two-year-olds, mothers as well as early educators, may choose to “observe and support play without entering it” (Rogoff 1998, p.709).

This thesis stems from the identification of similar observations made during the evaluation of a parent and toddler group in the English West Midlands in 2004. This suggested that the interactions during particular sessions, like the examples outlined in Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009), seemed to offer more support to the child as an independent learner expected to learn through discovery and far fewer collaborative learning experiences. Although group collaboration occurred in singing and rhyme activities, at other times examples of dialogue between adults and children that mediated the children’s explorations seemed infrequent and to some extent discouraged by the culture of the group. The promotion of learning through discovery in early education is clearly supported by influential literature advocating the importance of children taking some responsibility for their own learning (Schweinhart, 2000, Sylva et al., 2004, Whalley & the Pen Green Team, 2001). However some of the balancing messages within the same literature about the importance of adult support and engagement, particularly with regard to developing language and thought, seemed less in evidence in the practice observed.

The investigation reported in this thesis first considers the attitudes to adults supporting learning in a sample of 33 parent and toddler group leaders, gathered through a survey questionnaire. Two detailed case studies are then used to explore adults' attitudes to their roles in practitioner led parent and toddler groups. Observations and interviews are used to analyse in more detail the nature of these attitudes and how they might vary between groups and individuals. As with the work of Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009), this topic is explored through a socio-cultural prism exploring the mediation strategies that adults employ in the support of children's activity. The approach draws heavily from methodologies outlined by Barbara Rogoff (1998, 2003) and tracks 12 children's interactions through a single session in two supported parent and toddler groups (six children in each group). It is different from the studies reported in Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009) in that it focuses on learning rather than specifically on play, but it will be demonstrated how these two ideas are closely intertwined in the parent and toddler groups; a detailed consideration regarding the use of the word 'play' in this context is developed through the course of the thesis.

The research reported in the thesis examines the nature of the guidance offered to children during their explorations of the resources available in two parent and toddler groups. The purpose of this is to consider the nature of the strategies and attitudes towards young children's learning in these socially constructed early learning spaces. The research seeks to describe in some detail the cultural attitudes towards how young children learn may influence parent and toddler groups because this forms a part of the framework for supporting children's emerging learning dispositions (Carr, 2000) as they make the transition from the private space of the home to the public sphere of early education (Vandenbroeck, 2008).

By drawing from sociocultural perspectives the thesis considers the possible implications of the shared and differing cultural orientations to learning presented by different adults in the case studies. Authors such as Rogoff (1998) argue that collaborative learning and shared thinking promote "the use of higher quality cognitive reasoning strategies and metacognitive approaches" (p.717). Rogoff argued that there was too little research that investigates how participation in activities with

others affords developmental opportunities to the individual a situation that many of the researchers referred to in this thesis seek to address. The analytical tools developed during the course of the doctoral study seek to capture and make more visible the practices and attitudes to learning present in particular groups. The purpose of the thesis is to describe and justify these analytical tools and consider, through analysis of the case study examples, how the tools might be helpful in influencing practitioners' and parents' views of the support they offer to children by making cultures of learning more visible.

It is important to identify that the focus of the research is upon parent and toddler groups that are 'supported' by trained practitioners as part of a nationally funded approach to developing support for families. The word 'supported' is adopted from the Australian term 'supported playgroups' (Jackson, 2006).

### **1.1 Development of the research questions**

The broad aim of the study was to explore the balance between adults standing back and facilitating children's learning, and engaging directly with children in learning, in two case study parent and toddler group settings. The study focuses on definitions and critiques of 'scaffolding', established by Wood et al. (1976), as a model of successful adult collaboration in supporting children's learning. The concept of 'scaffolding' has been extensively adopted by early education and considerable research has been carried out in preschool contexts to examine the value of scaffolding as metaphor for a more effective type of interaction between practitioners and children. Several of these studies qualify and extend the concept of scaffolding developing related concepts designed to help identify effective interactions where adults are collaborating with children's activity (Jordan, 2004, Rogoff, 1990, Rogoff, 1998, Siraj-Blatchford, 2003). Several practitioners that I had encountered prior to the thesis study outlined a less interactive conception of 'scaffolding' where they observed children's activity and then planned subsequent provocations, without necessarily engaging with children. I wanted to explore the extent to which such a view might exist in other groups and to consider what balance of adult interaction might be appropriate to this context. The intention of the thesis was to review the relevance and frequency of adults supporting children's learning through scaffolding, including their

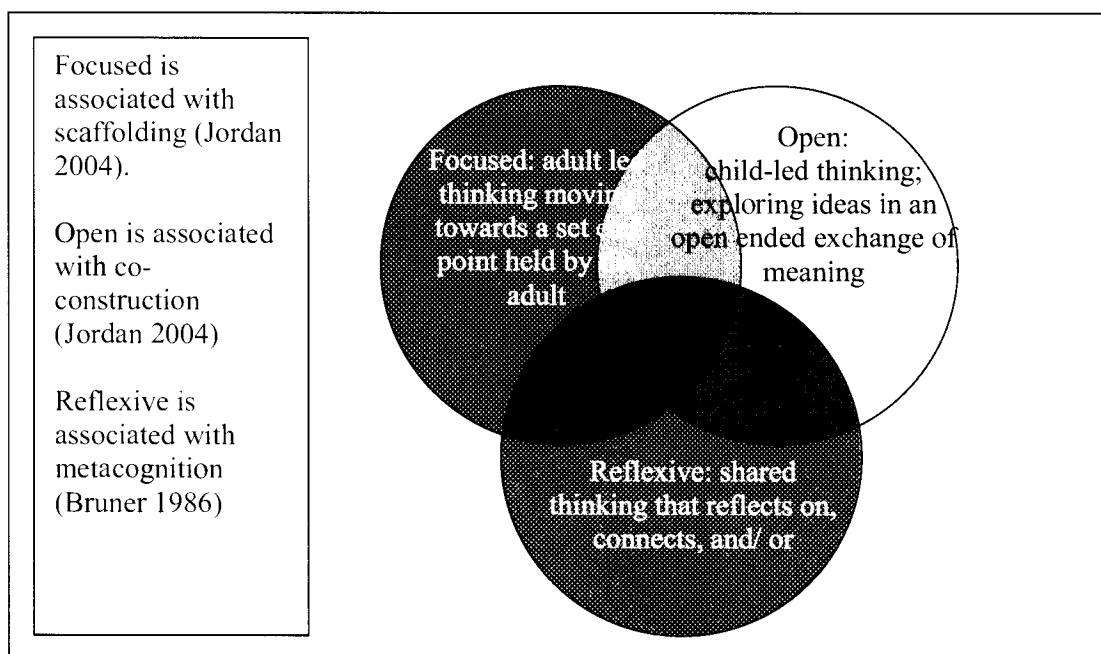


understanding of scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976, Wood, 1998,). This review was informed by more recently framed and influential descriptions of collaborative learning, Co-construction (Jordan, 2004), Sustained Shared Thinking (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004), Dialogic Teaching (Alexander, 2008) and Guided Participation (Rogoff, 2003). These authors critique and revise the metaphor and concept of scaffolding. Many authors (Wood, 1998, Jordan, 2004, Mercer & Littleton, 2007, Daniels, 2007,) also identify concerns about the overuse and over-generalisation of the term *scaffolding* originally developed by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976). Co-construction (Jordan 2004), sustained shared thinking (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007), dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2000, Mercer, 2000) and some types of guided participation (Rogoff, 2003) share some features in common with each other and with scaffolding as set out by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), as well as establishing some distinguishing features. This thesis considers the relevance of these perspectives to the parent and toddler group context and through analysis of the key points that they seek to address identifies a framework for analysing interactions in order to develop descriptions of the modes of interaction used in the case study groups.

Chapter Two of the thesis identifies in detail some of the common and distinguishing features of the models of effective pedagogic interaction identified in the previous paragraph. In particular the thesis focuses upon how adults seek to connect the child's immediate world view towards more sophisticated socialised concepts. A common starting point for each of the above authors is the work of Vygotsky and in particular the model of adult-supported learning referred to as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1986) suggests that children are capable of making certain adjustments to their existing concepts through their own reflections on new experiences, supporting the development of 'spontaneous concepts', but he suggests that this will only take them so far. Vygotsky suggests that adults can facilitate increased understanding in such situations leading children towards 'non-spontaneous concepts'. It is suggested that as a result of the strategies employed in this process of guiding the learner, adults promote greater self-awareness within the child of what Vygotsky called higher cognitive functions (Kozulin, 1986). This growing awareness of managing attention, reflection, selection, and categorising information is also a key consideration for the authors mentioned previously, who are interested in aspects of collaborative learning (Rogoff, 1998).

The elements identified in Chapter Two are set into a framework for coding the interactions between adults, parents and children in the case study parent and toddler groups. This framework of elements outlined in Figure 1.1 identifies three distinct areas requiring tactical consideration. First, strategies that are focused towards achieving a particular outcome. Second, strategies that are more open and respond to initiatives from the child to clarify meaning. Third, the value of developing greater awareness of reflecting on events. The interlinked nature of the model is intended to suggest that some adult guidance might incorporate all of the elements in the framework while other forms might emphasise particular strategies, and that interactions might involve changes of strategy with each new response. Equally some adult participation might deliberately or unintentionally avoid each of these strategies.

***Figure 1.1 A Model for the analysis the interfaces of open, focused and reflective aspects in collaborative learning.***



The research reported in Part Two of the thesis is concerned with identifying and reflecting upon the situated learning cultures (Lave & Wenger, 1991) present in the parent and toddler groups and the adults' comments on this. The thesis illustrates how these elements shape modes of interaction that regulate learning activities in parent

and toddler groups. The thesis compares the modal patterns experienced by different groups and considers how these patterns compare to other research on adult child interaction (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Such enquiry can make a valuable contribution to developing shared views of pedagogy in this rapidly developing and increasingly significant area of state and professional interest. The thesis therefore asks;

*How do the adults in parent and toddler groups interact with children's activities to promote learning?*

*What patterns of collaborative learning are present in the groups?*

*How do the parents and practitioners conceive of their roles with regard to supporting learning in the settings?*

## **1.2 A Sociocultural-Historical Approach**

Many critiques of teacher/ learner exchanges over the last 30 years (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, Wood, 1998, Alexander, 2000) employ neo-Vygotskian approaches to learning. Vygotsky's concepts of *mediation* and *activity* offer valuable points of critique for practical conceptions of interaction, such as scaffolding, through clarifying the interconnected nature of materials, learner and social contexts. A wave of recent publications building upon Vygotsky's work became increasingly influential and helpful as the thesis developed. Rogoff (2003), Hedegaard and Fleer (2008) and Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009) use the phrase *socio-cultural theories*; Wells and Claxton (2002) refer to *cultural historical activity theories*; Work by Daniels (2001, 2008), and Daniels, Cole and Wertsch (2007) refer to *activity theory*. Some of the fine distinctions of interpretations between these perspectives are discussed in Chapter Four but the central idea of these approaches is to suggest that the social level (interaction within groups and between individuals) acts as a bridge between "the cultural level: the collective historical development of knowledge" (Mercer, 2000, p.20) and the "psychological level: individual learning and cognitive development" (ibid). This group of approaches seek to study 'learning/ teaching' as a combined

system and it is interesting that ‘learning/ teaching’, are combined in a single word *obuchenie* in Russian (Mercer, 2002). Socio-cultural perspectives draw from a strand of Russian psychology founded in Vygotsky’s central insight that human artefacts are tools layered with generations of meaning and use, suggesting that actions are mediated by layers of experience not only within the individual but within the activity itself.

The methodology for this investigation draws upon more recent perspectives on Vygotsky’s work (Karpov, 2005, Daniels, 2008, Hedegaard & Fler, 2008). The socio-cultural approaches to Vygotsky’s ideas developed by Rogoff (1990, 1998, 2003) and Göncü (Göncü, 1998, Rogoff et al., 1998, Göncü, 1999,) were particularly helpful because of their frequent application to the study of toddlers with their parents. Rogoff proposed a wider model of mediated learning than that advocated by Vygotsky, who often focuses on teaching contexts. Rogoff and Göncü frequently focus on parents’ guidance of toddlers towards school readiness in a variety of contexts, but not those of the parent and toddler group. Rogoff consistently highlights how culture impacts upon the way adults guide children’s participation in activity, and argues that this process may shape general as well as specific learning attitudes. Rogoff also indicates a degree of reciprocity in this process that is rooted in culture and context (Rogoff, 2003). She acknowledges the importance of cultural practices embedded in tool use but also identifies the difficulties of holding up a focusing lens that foregrounds each element of an activity at once.

It is usually necessary to foreground some aspects of the phenomena and background others simply because no one can study everything at once. However, the distinctions between what is foreground and what is in the background lie in our analysis and are not assumed to be separate entities in reality (Rogoff, 2003, p.58).

Rogoff (2003) identifies three potential lenses that might be used in the *transformation of participation perspective*: an *individual* focus, an *interpersonal* focus, and a *cultural institutional* focus. In particular this thesis foregrounds what Rogoff identifies as the interpersonal focus of analysis for investigating the way the adults support and reinforce the children’s engagement within a particular social context in this case the activities offered during parent and toddler group in group sessions. Recent early education publications responding to Rogoff’s work (Hedegaard & Fler, 2008, Pramling-Samuelsson & Fler, 2009) have been

particularly helpful in refining the use of the concept of 'activity' in this perspective in relation to the early education of toddlers because there are relatively few studies applying an activity approach in a pedagogic context and even fewer focused on parent and toddler groups.

Research into play has tended to concentrate upon the play activities of 4-year-old children, with less research effort directed towards how babies and toddlers and 2-year olds play (Dockett and Fleer 1999). Similarly research into play has privileged contexts which have been constructed (e.g. laboratories), as opposed to research into more naturalistic settings, such as homes and early childhood centres. (Pramling-Samuelsson et al., 2009, p.1)

In relation to parent and toddler groups, theories examining *socio-cultural activity* seemed particularly relevant since parents and practitioners have the potential to influence each other's views about how children's interests and explorations of activities can be supported by adults.

Mercer (2000) highlights that

While socio-cultural psychologists have described the shared thinking of adults and children as they engage in dialogue and joint activity, they have done so in order to determine its influence on individual children's development. That is they have studied 'intermental' activity in order to understand the 'intramental', while I am suggesting that we should also try to explain children's development as interthinkers. To do so we need to understand how experienced members of communities act as discourse guides, guiding children or other novices into ways of using language collectively." (Mercer, 2000, p.170)

The study of interactions in parents and toddler groups offers the potential for insight into how young children are encouraged to think about early education activities. It offers the chance to see the extent to which children are encouraged to rely on their own responses to events and the extent to which they are encouraged to share their thinking with those around them or the extent to which others thinking is imposed upon them.

### **1.3 The development of state interest in parent and toddler groups**

The New Labour government 2007-2010 demonstrated a commitment to parent partnerships exemplified in the development of Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP) from 1998 focused in the most disadvantaged communities through to aspiration to

have a SureStart Children's Centre serving every community as described in the first Children's Plan from the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF, 2007). This development was supported by a steadily accumulating body of research linking later educational achievement to the Home Learning Environment (HLE) (Sammons et al., 2004). A key reason for the growth in attention to parent and toddler group provision, including the funding available for increasing provision, staffing and research evaluations, is the international interest in early intervention as a way of tackling social exclusion based on a range of research (Evangelou et al, 2007). It is useful to outline some of this evidence here because this has a key influence on the involvement of professionals in many groups and is therefore likely to be a key influence on their attitudes to their roles.

Feinstein et al (2004) offer an overview of evidence of the key ways in which parenting style, parent education and parents' "cultural background" may impact on children's educational achievement. They highlight data collected during the US National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) including a sample of 12,686 women's children sampled every two years from 1986 (Guo & Mullan-Harris, 2000). The broad findings of the study are that poverty, although clearly a significant risk factor leading to restricted intellectual development, is mediated by cognitive stimulation in the home, parenting style, physical environment of the home and poor child health at birth (Guo & Mullan-Harris, 2000). In other words it is not necessarily poverty itself that impacts negatively upon the child's intellectual development but that poverty contributes to increased likelihood of fewer positive opportunities being available to the child in regard to the four identified factors. The most significant factor highlighted by Guo and Harris is 'cognitive stimulation in the home' which related to the availability of books, magazines, mother reading to child, record or tape player being available and being taken on museum visits. This relates very closely to longitudinal research on a cohort of more than 2000 children studied in the UK as part of the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) (Sammons et al., 2002, Sammons et al., 2007) that identifies parental qualifications and HLE as far stronger influences on attainment than gender, socioeconomic status, English as an Additional Language or free school meals. The EPPE study concludes strongly that what parents do is more important than who they are (Sammons et al., 2002, Feinstein et al., 2004). Feinstein also draws attention to evidence from the EPPE project to conclude that

“educational behaviours are an important mediator of the effects of parents’ education on children’s outcomes” (Feinstein et al., 2004, p.35).

A similar longitudinal study of children’s progress through the education system in New Zealand (Biddulph et al., 2003) drew similar conclusions suggesting that a family’s influence on the child’s educational achievement is not as clearly predicted by parents’ socio-economic status as by family practices:

Family processes which encourage positive interactions with others, and also provide a range of quality experiences and activities within and beyond the home enhance children’s achievement. The influences of home processes are particularly evident in children’s achievement in mathematics and literacy. (Biddulph et al., 2003, p.140)

Large scale studies have been hugely influential in terms of making resources for early interventions available. However the scarcity of detail with regard to supporting parents’ interactions is clearly a reason for some of the tentative policy making in the 2007 Children’s Plan with regard to supporting parents through ‘outreach programmes’. Research by Galboda-Liyanage, Scott and Prince (2003) develops a picture of the time mothers perceived they spent in joint activity (identified as focused play, singing, puzzles, drawing, reading, discussion times) with their children on the previous day. This small sample of mothers recruited from parent and toddler groups and therefore perhaps more proactive mothers, spent on average 43 minutes in joint activity (p.280).

The sample of mothers on average identified joint activity as ‘play’ 15 minutes, ‘educational’ 21 and ‘other’ seven minutes (Galboda-Liyanage et al., 2003).

play took place predominantly outdoors (64%) whereas educational (67%) and other activities (81%) predominantly took place inside the home.; commonly cited locations included parks, friends’ or relatives’ homes, outings, mother and toddler groups and libraries (ibid p.277) .

Galboda-Liyanage et al’s research suggests that engagement in a parent and toddler group situation lasting 60-90 minutes could form a significant and potentially rich part of the interactions of a particular day and potentially have an important influence on longer term attitudes to learning.

Writing in 1975, Bruner (2006) drew together some of the available evidence that pointed to the home environment as a key factor in the reproduction of educational

success or failure. He drew on work by Bernstein (1961) Hess and Shipman (1965) and Bee (1969) that associates middle class mothers with more attention to:

- The continuous flow of goal directed action
- Letting children set the pace and make decisions
- Letting children problem solve for themselves
- Asking questions that help structure problem solving
- Keeping the overall task in mind rather than parts in isolation
- Reacting more to success than to errors.

The similarity of these findings ( Bernstein, 1971, Barnes et al., 1986) to those of the EPPE study (Sammons et al., 2007) highlights concerns about the mismatch between home learning and school learning cultures leading to the reproduction of educational failure and the achievement gap between less and more advantaged families. These large scale surveys suggest that early pedagogic intervention might help children to access educational discourses more quickly and effectively. However there is as yet relatively little research on what type of pedagogic interventions might be helpful, at what stage and to which groups (see Chapter Three). The EPPE projects findings illustrated that, while pre-school activities for children aged three to five did make a difference to later educational attainment, the HLE was statistically more influential. This suggests that opportunities for parents and practitioners to share their knowledge of pedagogy could be beneficial in improving children's attainment and possibly narrow the achievement gap between some groups. The Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) study of 14 good and outstanding preschool settings drew particular attention to the importance of interaction in the settings which added significant value to children's progress. This is characterised in the phrase 'sustained shared thinking' (SST) which has been particularly influential in revisions to the pedagogic guidance for practitioners that will be discussed shortly. *Sustained shared thinking* emphasises the importance of the sharing of ideas between adults and children in both adult-directed and child-led activities. The EPPE project drew particular attention to the potential to increase the amount of dialogic interaction between adults and children in preschools particularly in play a topic that is developed at length in Chapter Two.



## 1.4 Competing pedagogic approaches to learning and play

This thesis explores the framing of children's learning in interaction by both parents and practitioners; therefore it is important to consider how learning has been framed in the guidance offered to professionals operating in the parent and toddler group context.

Prior to 2002 there was no specified national curriculum guidance in England for those supporting children less than three years of age. Documentation produced by the Preschool Learning Alliance (PLA), a parent orientated voluntary sector organisation, that would have guided many parent and toddler groups prior to 2000, suggests children being encouraged to play with the resources that form the basis of pre-school activity. The Birth to Three Framework (DFES, 2002) offered more detailed guidance for supporting children's learning and was distributed to all those working with children under three years of age in an early education context. This document classifies the areas of learning for professionals working with children under three years of age into four categories of development: a strong child, a skilful communicator, a competent learner, and a healthy child. This suggests a holistic view of the child and a sense of raising the child to encourage these process skills and attitudes rather than tightly specified items of knowledge as with later Key Stages.

Whilst the framework pack does not itself constitute a curriculum, it nevertheless emphasises new thinking about the importance of children aged from birth to 3 and indicates a major shift in the ways in which this group should be viewed, since traditionally young children's welfare has been a private, rather than a public concern (Langston and Abbott, 2005, p.1).

Examination of the extensive documentation accompanying Birth to Three Matters (David et al., 2002) shows that it explicitly includes the Vygotskian perspective (p.32) as a clarification and extension of Piagetian ideas, insisting that there should be a role for adults in early education in stretching children's learning though engaging with them in dialogue as well as provoking their children's development though offering age- appropriate activity and material provocations. However, while the document clearly offers a social model of learning, it leaves clear space for those who wish to see children as independent explorers to continue to do, because the presentation of Vygotsky in this document can be read as merely advocating that adults should

‘scaffold’ children’s independent investigations. Edwards (2007b) draws attention to the shift in early education discourse from a “predominantly developmental-constructivist discourse to sociocultural discourse” (Edwards, 2007b, p.84), following on from the increased familiarity and interest in Vygotsky and his followers.

Edwards’ research is focused on the Australian context but she points to this as an international trend in early education embodied in texts such as Anning et al (2004) and MacNaughton (2002) that compare and contrast practice from the Vygotskian and Piagetian perspectives. However she notes that

despite such a high level textual presence the translation of sociocultural theory into practice has been hampered by the historical commitment the field holds to cognitive developmentalism. (Edwards, 2007, p.84)

These discourses are reflected in some of the key texts for professionals in the UK. Athey (2007), for example, is an influential text its own right and also cited by many others (Nutbrown, 1994, 2002., Whalley et al, 2007). It emphasises a Piagetian model of children learning by observing and doing.

To a constructivist teacher the process of learning consists of an active construction of knowledge. The teacher, therefore, must arrange things so that knowledge is actively constructed not just copied. (Athey, 2007, p.44)

Bruce and Meggit (2002) in a widely used introductory textbook for childcare professionals suggest a more Vygotskian model of children constructing knowledge through the mediation of other adult support for play, suggesting that when children are left without support, the play is low level (Bruce & Meggit, 2002). Nevertheless Bruce and Meggit are cautious about advancing Vygotsky in relation to Piaget. In *Birth to Three Matters* (Abbott & Langston, 2005), one of the first key text books for practitioners to focus on the under threes, Bruce presents a more observational and supportive role for the teacher, compared to Siraj-Blatchford’s chapter in the same book which advances the importance of sustained shared thinking for the under threes. These are sufficient examples, for now, to illustrate the range of possibilities offered in influential practitioner texts; the framing of pedagogical interactions is developed further in Chapters Two and Three. These examples suggest that there are mixed messages available to practitioners with regard to the interrelation between teaching and learning in the early years context. MacNaughton (2003) presents Piagetian and Vygotskian perspectives as exerting distinct influences on practice in an international early years’ context in which practitioners are encouraged to steer their

way through this question to establish their own practice. The issue considered by this thesis is how these professional educational discourses on framing children's learning resonate with children, parents and practitioners in the context of the parent and toddler group session.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) documentation (DCSF, 2008a) was broadly welcomed when it was introduced in 2007 as useful guidance for those working with under threes and was recommended as useful material to share with parents in order to illustrate a particular philosophy for working with under threes. While the outline of the framework has changed little from the Birth to Three documentation, the re-launch of the framework drew fresh attention to the importance of the adult role in supporting children's play highlighted in the EPPE study. The re-launch accompanied by revised quality assurance frameworks (DCSF, 2008b) and local authority training responsibilities to support early years provision included in the 2006 Childcare Act, draws attention to training for the workforce, establishing an appropriate balance of adult and child led play based learning supported by 'sustained shared thinking'. The inclusion of and attention given to, sustained shared thinking in the 2007 documentation highlights a perceived need for change at a strategic level in the framing of the adult role in interaction with children. This suggests that adults need to be more willing to engage children in discussion of their ideas.

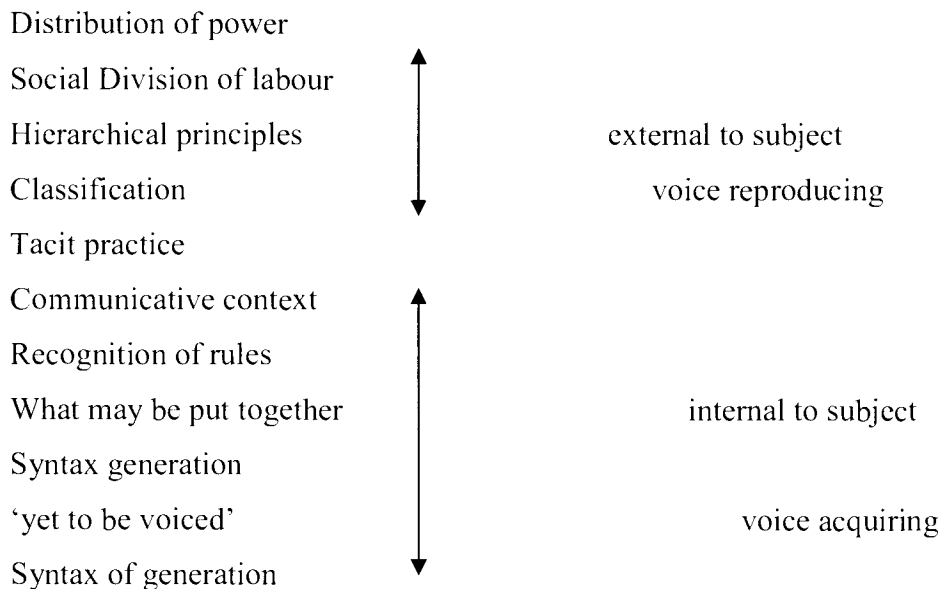
While The Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008c) incorporates SST into the framework, it still allows a strongly Piagetian view of learning to go relatively unchallenged if the reader chooses to see it that way. The bullet pointed ages and stages of the Foundation Stage Profile, the assessment materials that support the EYFS, although apparently neutral, facilitate those who see the child's skills and concepts as compartmentalised and sequentially developed. The document emphasises the uniqueness of individual children and yet presents ordered developmental milestones. While the document advocates 'positive relationships' and 'enabling environments', it could pursue more explicitly the role of adults as play partners. The EYFS may therefore be perceived by some as based on a set of pedagogic principles rather than what is known about child development (Potter, 2007).

It is particularly helpful to apply Bernstein's model of the 'pedagogic device' to the context of parent and toddler group sessions because it is a pedagogic context that is under studied and changing. Bernstein set out a widely acknowledged model of how education might contribute to the reproduction of inequality through class, codes and control (Bernstein, 2003). He draws attention to the way in which education institutions conserve boundaries and codes making knowledge more difficult to acquire for those with restricted access to these codes.

By identifying the mechanics of pedagogical transmission in a particular location this thesis aims to contribute to the EPPE findings which also highlight that the inequality gap begins to widen from the very beginnings of preschool, with those from families with more educational resources more frequently achieving higher grades by the age of seven (Sylva et al., 2010). The thesis examines how adults' approaches to interaction frame children's learning developing expectations about personal responsibility and reliance on others for learning. Bernstein (1996) draws attention to the importance of social structure in framing pedagogy: "paradoxically what is missing from theories of cultural reproduction is any internal analysis of the structure of the discourse itself," (Bernstein, 1996, p.18).

In his fourth volume on *Class, Codes and Control* Bernstein sets out a model of how social discourse identifies and attaches value to knowledge and shapes learning. There is some alignment in Bernstein's models of pedagogic and cultural codes (figure 1.2) with sociocultural approaches to activity. Both draw attention to the importance of rules and the social division of labour in framing interpersonal interaction in activity (Engeström, 1999) a point acknowledged by Bernstein himself (Bernstein & Brannen, 1996). Daniels (2001, 2008) highlights the value of Bernstein's model of pedagogic codes as an aid in supporting a sociocultural investigation of educational activity "particularly when the cultural artefact takes the form of a pedagogic discourse we should analyse its structure in the context of its production." (Daniels, 2008, p.153).

**Figure 1.2 Bernstein's (2003) model of Class modalities and regulation**



Bernstein argues that the value of knowledge is realised in the way that it is divided up into packages and transmitted to others. He argues that individuals acquire voice through immersion in activities where the value and nature of knowledge is qualified implicitly in the way discourse is conducted. Bernstein (2003) revisits his analysis of how such processes might disadvantage working class groups who might be less attuned to this implicit discourse. He draws particular attention to the infant school as a context where the markers of significant knowledge might be particularly weakly presented and therefore might need presenting more clearly to some groups (Bernstein, 1996).

The support of two-year-olds has, until the introduction of the Birth to Three Framework in 2002, fallen outside the institutionalised educational framework in the UK. The role of those caring for children under three is being perceived increasingly as an educational one. In Bernstein's terms, this area, which is at the beginning of lifelong education, is experiencing a process of recontextualisation, where 'lay' knowledge is being revised by national guidelines and professionalised voices.

Bernstein highlights several important features about pedagogy that have resonance for this thesis. He describes pedagogy as a transforming process translating knowledge into forms for transmission. This serves to separate valued from less valued knowledge and it appeals to common sense that time, text and space are the

elements that can be controlled in this process. The instructional discourse as Bernstein states is the more clearly articulated visible manifestation of these elements. The regulatory discourse is the less tangible, less dense environmental context that encompasses the instructional discourse, consisting of the different rules that govern the roles and interactions between people.

Bernstein's model shares Vygotskian perspectives' social view of learning. This suggests that there are a wide number of actors constructing the discourse and perhaps that most visible influence is exerted over the instructional discourse. What both theorists draw attention to is the regulatory discourse and the unintended messages exchanged in this space during the course of pedagogic interactions (Daniels, 2008).

With regard to the key issues of control and framing Bernstein's key point is that power and ideology act upon the boundaries of classification often to suit the needs of those in power. He suggests that exposing the nature of these effects may serve to enable more equitable practices to be established and help those existing within pedagogic systems to be more aware of the rules of the game.

In the case of parent and child sessions previously strong classifications between state and parental responsibilities are in flux. Traditional boundary markers of activity such as learning, play, care, and socialisation are being revisited as professionals enter previously parental domains. The shared notions of these social markers between parent and practitioner roles are weak and shaped by experiences in other contexts rather than clear ideas about this particular context because it is relatively new there are few literary or social markers of this phenomenon. It is useful in these circumstances of change to consider how the change is benefiting the different stakeholders.

The development of the Foundation Stage represents what Bernstein termed the official recontextualising field where the agencies of the state are setting out their views on both the instructional and regulative discourses. Bernstein identifies the instructional discourses with the skills that are being transmitted, and the regulative framework with moral values. The instructional discourse, the content of what is being taught, is weakly defined in the EYFS, focusing on *learning and development*

in terms of broad skills. Children are expected to explore, discover and develop through play experiences, and extract knowledge for themselves through the planned environment. The regulative discourse is that children should come to accept the legitimacy of being in the institution, accept the presence of others, learn to share resources and accept the authority of adults. However, at the same time children should come to recognise that independence and individuality is valued. The focus is on skills and processes creating attitudes to the creation and interpretation of knowledge.

It is also interesting to look at the role advocated for adults to support children's activity in EYFS documentation. In the '*child development overview*' cards for the 16-26 months age range, children's learning through play with toys, problem solving and learning to get along with others particularly other children, is emphasised. Adults are identified as "an important source of security and comfort" (DCSF, 2008c). In the 22-36 month age range the role of the adult is to

encourage children in areas such as eating dressing and toileting. Praise for new achievements helps to build their self esteem. In this phase children's language is developing rapidly and many are beginning to put sentences together. Joining in with children is an important way for children to learn new things and to talk about past present and future. (DCSF, 2008c)

Under the heading '*Learning and development: active learning*' the EYFS suggests effective practice points for practitioners which emphasise the importance of fostering independent learning through observation and conversation, not necessarily joining in and extending play scenarios. The play and exploration briefing card in relation to adult involvement suggests that

- *"play comes naturally and spontaneously to most children, though some need adult support.*
- *Practitioners plan and resource a challenging environment where children's play can be supported and extended*
- *Practitioners can extend and develop children's language and communication in their play through sensitive observation and appropriate intervention*
- *Practitioners always intervene in play if it is racist, sexist or in anyway offensive, unsafe, violent or bullying "*

These are weakly defined objectives in Bernstein's analysis which leaves considerable control in the hands of the practitioner in terms of framing what is to be taught and how it is to be taught.

In the context of parent and toddler groups, attempts to draw attention to interaction through curriculum materials would also need to be combined with increased training for practitioners and an evaluation of their systems and values with regard to education (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). If there is a strong culture in English education of focusing on adults teaching and children playing (Maybin & Woodhead, 2003, Soler & Miller, 2003) then there may be a tendency for some of those receiving the document to be drawn to messages confirming existing values. Potter (2007) draws attention to the frequently documented concerns about the depth of understanding of learning and development across the breadth of the early education workforce. Potter supports this argument, saying that studies from around the world including the UK suggest that there should be greater understanding within the workforce "in the key area of language and communication development" (Potter, 2007, p.173). These concerns resonate with those mentioned earlier about the support for cognitive development in parent and child activities (Anning, 2005, *Parents as Partners in Early Learning*, 2007).

Several authors contrast the EYFS to the national early education curriculum in New Zealand, known as *Te Whaairiki*, (NZ MoE 1996) in order to help illustrate the difference framing the curriculum might make to interaction (Maybin and Woodhead, 2003 Soler and Miller, 2003). *Te Whaariki*'s framework for assessment clearly advocates a focus on five broad learning dispositions set within the context of learning stories that describe children's responses to activities (Carr, 2001a). Carr develops an argument that attitudes to learning are what we should be most concerned with in early education. She develops five key dispositions in the context of *Te Whaariki*; Taking an interest; Being involved; Persistence with difficulty or uncertainty; Expressing an idea or a feeling; Taking responsibility. Several authors contrast this model of assessment to the more compartmentalised EYFS *stepping stones* (Carr, 2001a, Maybin & Woodhead, 2003, Soler & Miller, 2003). These authors highlight the potential benefits of encouraging adults to record wider



communicative dialogues rather than checking development against a set of more specific skills.

It is again interesting to compare the EYFS statements on effective practitioner interaction being linked to supporting children's play to those in New Zealand, where attention is being drawn to defining high quality practice as including some interaction where adults become play partners. This analysis is drawn from a longitudinal study (Wylie 2003,) which acknowledges parallels to the findings to the EPPE (Sylva et al., 2004) and Highscope (Schweinhart et al., 2005) studies. All three studies advocate a balance of adult and child led activity, where adults spend some time supporting the children in developing and extending their ideas in play and activity.

### **1.5 A Pedagogy of Play**

The EYFS recommends adults involve themselves at times in children's play but "sensitive observation and appropriate intervention" implies focused, precise interaction where a need is perceived; however, practitioners' understanding of children's needs and the nature of play is something that has already been called into question. Chapter Two will explore perceptions of learning in some detail but play is also a term which should not be taken for granted. Wood (2010) questions the adoption of 'planned and purposeful play' as part of curricular frameworks without also reflecting on issues of equity. She argues that increasing adult interest and regulation of play in documents such as the EYFS are a significant change in the framing of learning and teaching in early education and may advantage some groups over others. She calls for a critical study of variations in culture and contexts to explore the implication of such shifts. In relation to two year olds for example it is possible that in the not too distant past some children might have had more access to play with a wider age range of peers subject to less adult scrutiny. The increase in preschool provision means that for many children there are relatively fewer older playmates available in the daytime and it should not be assumed that any increase in adult attention is automatically beneficial. Some children may make much better playmates than some adults.

Play is said to be at the heart of activities for young children in most societies (Moyles, 2005). It is emphasised throughout the EYFS documentation as the leading source of development in young children's lives. However, perhaps the term play is becoming overused and applied to activities with a strong educational bias that might previously have been called investigations or tasks. Moyles (2005) points to the difficulties of defining play and the wide range of uses and functions that it can hold in English. The notion of play that captures most writers' attention is play which creates an intense engagement in the child, which has no clearly defined 'closed' outcome so that it offers children the chance to negotiate play roles, rules and goals so that the end point is less important than the satisfaction gained from the process (Vygotsky, 1966, Goldschmied & Jackson, 1993, Broström, 1999, Moyles, 2005, Wood, 2010). Where the preceding criteria are present, play is seen to carry benefits in terms of communication and social skills as well as motivation becoming "the leading source of development in preschool years" (Vygotsky, 1966, p.1). However, play, in this sense, can still include both an individual investigation and practising an activity for personal betterment; it could also be something that is done with others. The first type of play might be identified with heuristic investigations (Goldschmied 1994), or Piagetian exploration (Hutt et al., 1989). The second type of play reflects more Vygotskian social learning theories. Hutt et al (1989) refer to the second category of play as ludic and for self amusement. This creates a false impression of frivolity. Many suggest that those supporting children in the context of organised sessions should also be committed to treating some activities as play (Hakkarainen, 1999, Wood, 2010), because developing as a skilful player requires opportunities to play with a variety of levels of supervision including none. Hakkarainen argues that

Play as an activity type aims at the mastery of mastering. Play does not produce any concrete knowledge of mastering. It produces general flexibility and a disposition to change one's approach when facing the concrete demands of the situation. (Hakkarainen, 1999, p.234.)

Van Oers (2010) uses the concept of activity to suggest that play is not an activity of itself but rather a socially developed *activity format* where rules are relaxed and there is more flexibility, and high level of engagement and personal involvement. This is a very helpful and significant suggestion which challenges the orthodoxy of play as used in everyday language. This proposal implies that playing is a format that

individuals can benefit from learning to exploit in the context of many activities as a tool to support learning and understanding.

Edmiston's (2008) analysis of *identity development through play* also draws heavily on the influence of Vygotsky and Bakhtin; pointing out that every *action* is a dialogue comprising responses between the individual and the socially constructed world (Edmiston, 2008). Edmiston suggests that 'self' emerges from the choices one makes between modes of being that have been presented to one. Edmiston like Wood (2010) argues that the variations in and exercise of power in relation to play is a significant formative experience for children, that adults should reflect upon more deeply (Edmiston & Taylor, 2010). The case study phase of this thesis explores the different dialogues that children are presented with during play episodes in two parent and toddler group contexts. It asks about the nature of tools children are being offered and the models of being a learner that they encounter.

Play is an activity which potentially offers children an opportunity to engage with objects and ideas, to learn about themselves and the wider world, free of some of the physical and social risks of real activity (Edmiston, 2008). Much human activity today is less visible than to previous generations of children who played in family workshops or in homes and fields alongside family members (Rogoff, 2003). Play in 'modern' society is an increasingly symbolic space, with many early toys being abstract objects of investigations (Goldschmied & Jackson, 1993) or toys which are designed for the re-enactment of visions from the TV screen. In such a situation access to meaning is compromised, because the tools require social interpretation to give them meaning beyond objects of investigation (Rogoff, 2003). We need to recognise a responsibility on society to adapt to changing circumstances and to recognise that changed circumstances may have adverse psychological consequences, with children being facilitated in increasingly individualised, abstracted worlds (Greenfield, 2008).

Children's early experiences identify society's definitions of what sort of 'play' is allowed where, and when and with whom. If parent and toddler groups promote only exploratory play in the sense of investigating in non-specific sensory ways (Hutt, Tyler, Hutt and Christopherson, 1989) rather than ludic (Hutt et al., 1989) play where ideas are tested, consolidated, employed and bounced between people in a sharing of

roles and ideas, then children may begin to frame their role in educational activity as more individual and less dialectic.

The collection of studies co-ordinated by Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009) uses a sociocultural approach to examine the cultural attitudes to play in small video samples of interaction in early education settings in Sweden, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Chile and Wisconsin in the USA. Although this is a small sample the experience of the team of investigators from each country lends more weight to its claims of wider cultural representativeness. The study highlights that in Australia and the USA, staff were identified as adopting a non-active observational role in relation to toddlers' play. This was attributed in part to the influence of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp and Copple 1997) set out in the USA drawn from a Piagetian model of stages.

This outcome is consistent with the interpretations of Piaget's work, where staff focus most closely on planning environments and not interactions. The provision of materials which are seen as developmentally appropriate for children becomes the focus of attention. The focus on materials and the cultural belief that each child is going to become independent, and by doing so they are able to gain trust in their own competence, is foregrounded. (Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer, 2009, p.178)

This finding is contrasted with case studies in Hong Kong and Japan where adults were perceived to be taking a lead in and supporting play. The New Zealand and Swedish case studies seemed to offer more attention to joint activity but in the context of planned activity not in child led play. The Chilean case studies were seen to place more emphasis on shared group and community activity. Chapter Three will examine some of these pedagogical outlooks in more detail and the second half of the thesis will develop a cultural analysis of attitudes to learning within a sample of settings in England.

Play is not only a contested term amongst practitioners but also holds a contested place between parents and practitioners. Following a study of parents' and practitioners' views of pedagogy Brooker (2000, 2002) identifies mutual misunderstanding of each other's perspectives on the barriers to some children being perceived as successful learners. She argues that school practitioners may need to do more to make their view of pedagogy more transparent to parents (Brooker, 2000)

Schools will only succeed in creating such a continuity of experience and information by being more creative in working with parents, siblings and other community members and above all opening their mind to a broader range of learning cultures. (Brooker, 2000, p.305)

By examining the types of interaction children experience from both parents and practitioners in the same setting, this thesis sheds light on the modes of interaction that adults use to regulate children's learning activity which facilitates analysis of both play and pedagogy. Through observations and interviews with these adults the thesis is able to comment on how parents' and practitioners' perspectives might differ and how they might learn from each other.

### **1.6 A deficit model for parents?**

There is clearly a danger when developing parenting interventions of framing some parents as being in a deficit in relation to interacting with children. A deficit model (Mcighan & Siraj-Blatchford, 2003) similar to a medical model, labels a group as inherently inferior to other groups in some regard. Such models are rightly considered problematic where they fail to question whether the deficit is with the individual or with the situation that they are expected to fit into: "society generates certain definitions of what the normal individual should be like, and those who fail to meet these definitions may become stigmatised" (Mcighan and Siraj-Blatchford 2003 p374). Deficit models are also problematic where they offer convenient labels that when applied to individuals lead to prejudiced stereotyped packages of support being offered. Thirdly, deficit models are problematic where they attribute problems to a single factor and ignore a range of other related contributing issues. Bernstein goes to some length to answer criticism that his theory of codes develops a deficit model of working class language. He points out that local codes are not inadequate but that what is required of educational systems is to make the codes more visible and accessible (Bernstein, 2000).

Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan identify the issue of deficit in regard to family literacy, suggesting that the term deficit approach is not helpful because people need to recognise and acknowledge an area where they need to learn (Nutbrown et al., 2005)

Problems arise if differences (e.g. in literacy practices) are uncritically viewed as deficits, if deficits are imputed to learners without their assent, if deficits are exaggerated or if deficits are seen as all that learners have (i.e. their cultural strengths are devalued). (p.27)

Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph (2003) identify difference theory as an alternative to a deficit approach which accepts that the need to address the issue does not locate the problem within the child or family but rather seeks to identify how institutionalised systems need to take more account of cultural heritage interacting with dominant discourses (Biddulph et al., 2003).

Difference theory begins to take into account the wider social contexts in which children are located. It recognizes cultural differences and the discontinuities that can occur when children move from the culture of their families to the predominantly middle-class, western culture of the schools. An extension of cultural difference as an explanation is *cultural domination* (Bereiter, 1985) which attributes education disadvantage to the subjugating processes (largely played out through the school) of a dominant culture imposed on minority children. (Biddulph et al., 2003, p.10)

This is consistent with the view advanced by sociocultural theorists (for example Bruner) who suggest that parenting programmes could be viewed as a vaccination against the families' lack of cultural capital. Consider the following extract from Bruner (2006) on poverty and childhood:

Such a culture of poverty gets to the young early - how they learn to set goals, mobilize means, or delay or fail to delay gratification. Very early too they learn in-group talk and thinking and just as their language use reflects less long range goal analysis, it also tends towards parochialism that makes it increasingly difficult to move or work outside the poverty neighbourhood and the group. Make no mistake about it: it is a rich culture, intensely personalised and full of immediate rather than remote concerns. The issue is certainly not cultural deprivation, to be handled like a vitaminosis with a massive dose of compensatory enrichment. (Bruner, 2006, p.194)

Bruner highlights a deficit that is not within the child or culture per se but that culture becomes part of the identity of the child very quickly. A potential deficit is created where the learning culture of schooling is not made equally transparent and accessible to those from different home learning cultures. This highlights that if certain educational outcomes remain as the cornerstone for the allocation of societal benefits then the nature of that system should be exposed in order to reduce inequality. Bruner also points to a range of contributing factors in society: language codes, neighbourhood cultures, systemic bias, and lack of material resources.

Such a view of the reproduction of inequality is consistent with sociocultural perspectives such as the work of Rogoff (1990). She draws attention to how children are inducted into the ways in which society views activities as more and less valuable through apprenticeship and guided participation, which regulate emotional as well as factual knowledge. It is important that the increasing number of professionals working with family activities seek to avoid creating a sense of deficit within groups since experience suggests this is the way to sustain parent participation in groups (Weinberger et al., 2005, Parents as Partners in Early Learning, 2007, Whalley & the Pen Green Team, 2007).

It is important that parenting programmes are not perceived to be for only one group. The interactional processes identified cut across social and cultural groups; informed reflection on child rearing practices should benefit all. Indeed the concern of this thesis is that as with other early interventions (Sylva et al., 2004) it is likely to emerge that middle class families benefit proportionally at least as much as those living in poverty and may be more likely to access such services. Chapter Three explores further the potential barriers to parents' participation in such groups.

### **1.7 A Summary of Chapter One and the structure of the thesis.**

Chapter One has argued that there is an absence of information about the nature of pedagogy in the parent and toddler group context and identified the potential value of studying the nature and balance of interactions of children with both parents and practitioners in order to consider how children's attitudes towards learning might be shaped. Attention has been focused on collaboration in learning including models of learning interactions scaffolding, co-construction and SST because these have been associated with positive learning outcomes for preschool children.

Chapter Two considers theory, research and thinking on the nature of young children's learning and cognitive development, and in particular the role of adults in facilitating this. It explores the relevance of the metaphors of *scaffolding* and *co-construction* for studying adult interactions with children aged three and under

because these models were originally framed to describe particularly effective pedagogic styles of interaction with preschool age children. Following the logic of Rogoff's thinking, it is argued that these descriptions of interaction in joint activity are relevant to the learning of the younger age group, because these children are developing through their exposure to activities that will lead to the emergence of growing confidence in these cultural practices. Rogoff's work on guided participation and shared thinking is explored as a socio-cultural critique of the 'scaffolding' metaphor. Key elements or components of these interactive practices are identified throughout the review with regard to their relevance for shaping the learning and metacognition of young children. Chapter Two extends the portrait of the child aged one and two as a learner by focusing on how socially mediated ideas might begin to be able to resist and control the domination of perceptual stimuli. These issues related to the nature and formation of mind are considered because this forms an important theoretical underpinning for the research phase described in part two of the thesis. It is argued that for interactions to develop a joint focus, adults and children need suitable opportunities to establish these. The theory of affordances (Gibson, 1979) is explored as a useful theoretical and practical idea for helping to identify the basis of joint attention. This discussion highlights issues around how a joint focus of attention between adult and child might be achieved. The concept of affordances developed by Gibson (1979) and often referred to by socio-cultural theorists (Rogoff, 1990, 2003, Wertsch, 1998, Carr, 2001, Del Rio and Alvarez, 2007) is employed to identify the nature of the starting points in the child's world. Chapter Two develops an analytical framework of potential behavioural markers from descriptions of scaffolding, co-construction, shared thinking, guided participation and metacognition. It is argued that this analytical framework, comprised of key aspects and elements, is useful for analysing how adults engage with children's play to shape styles of learning through supporting the bridging of children's existing spontaneous concepts towards more socialised concepts (Rogoff, 2003).

Chapter Three examines the cultural-historical context of learning in parent and toddler groups. Chapter Three therefore asks what a parent and toddler group is, why parents might choose to attend one, and why there is increasing interest in activities in this sphere. It also explores the societal context of parent and toddler groups and the factors that may affect the roles of parents and practitioners with regard to their role



as pedagogues. This is developed by exploring research literature examining the influence of parents on cognitive development and educational achievement with a view to identifying current thinking about the importance of parent-child interactions. Chapter Three also explores the nature of current parenting programmes aimed at supporting parent-child interactions and considers the models of teaching and learning engendered in current practices, to consider how cultural expectations of learning and teaching frame this practice. It is argued that Piagetian models of learning which view the child as an individual explorer and creator of personalised knowledge may resonate with many parents, practitioners and policy makers, and that models of mediated or collaborative learning are, at present, less resonant with these stakeholders

Chapter Four describes the theory and methods employed for gathering the empirical data presented in the thesis; questionnaires, observations and interviews. The chapter discusses sampling, data collection, reliability and ethical decisions taken in the different aspects of the data collection process.

Chapter Five discusses findings from a survey of parent and toddler groups in an area of the West Midlands in order to identify some aspects of the range of parent and toddler group provision and to locate the case studies within that context. In addition this chapter offers some insights into how group leaders perceive the role of parent and toddler groups in promoting learning interactions between parent and child. Through this data the chapter begins to investigate the possible cultural attitudes, beliefs and expectations operating in parent and toddler groups. The chapter argues that while all groups acknowledge their potential to promote high quality interactions in parent child dyads, there were potential conflicts regarding the mutual understandings and expectations of the parents and practitioners. Chapter Five explores the features shared by the two case study 'supported' parent and toddler groups, each operated by a different children's centre. Points of common purpose and approach are discussed, identifying some of the possible consequences of the learning environment and staffing. The main area for reflection in the chapter is the identification of points of tension between the purposes and expectations of those involved in the groups. The strong wish to see children becoming increasingly

independent is shown to compete with some parents' desire to push the children's engagement with activities forward towards a traditional curriculum agenda.

Chapter Six explores the modes of interaction employed in the case study parent and toddler groups in more depth. A classification of modes of interaction is developed which is used to compare the balance of interaction offered to children in different groups and from different backgrounds. The chapter considers how the different strategies might influence the activity systems of parent and toddler groups and thereby shape the learning dispositions of the children participating in such groups. The case studies show that within a similarly well informed group of parents from varying social backgrounds children may experience different patterns of modes of mediation during parent and toddler group sessions.

Chapter Seven examines three examples of children's experiences of a whole morning in each of the case study groups. The chapter develops and exemplifies how three children's experiences vary and considers how their experience may shape their attitudes to participating in early education environments. The first two case study children selected present particular biases in the frequency of certain modes of interaction that are not necessarily problematic in themselves, but that might lead to an unbalanced outlook on learning if sustained over time. The third example offers a more evenly balanced range of interactive modes, and the chapter considers the potential benefits of this in preparing for early education. The observed experiences of the children are compared to the parents' and practitioners' reflections on their learning activity, in order to identify insights into potentially helpful dialogues for change.

Chapter Eight reflects on the findings of the study. It identifies how the study adds to the existing literature on interactions by developing a tool for analysing interactions that can help practitioners and parents to perceive a broader range of roles in support of children's learning. The chapter affirms the need to be more precise in distinguishing different adult responses to play with two-year-olds. It is suggested that by identifying a variety of different role, rules and purposes in interactions more explicitly, adult stakeholders will be able to broaden the range of experiences for some children. The study also highlights the importance of reflecting on the types of

interactions that the different materials on offer are likely to engender, suggesting that creative and investigative materials may be developmentally helpful activities but that these may lead to child-like explorations or adult-controlled activities, and less frequently to more dialogic exchanges. It is suggested that other types of play should also receive greater attention, particularly more role play based activity. The thesis concludes with recommendations for the organisation and delivery of supported parent and toddler groups, with regard to the factors to consider when framing the learning environment for each of the stakeholders (parents, children and practitioners). The identification of purposes shared by both parents and practitioners may then enable groups to evolve more explicitly by discussing these objectives more openly.

## Chapter 2

### Pedagogy and the importance of interaction

#### 2.0 Introduction

Chapter One highlighted that discussion of the balance between exploratory and dialogic learning is a recurring issue within Early Years education. Sociocultural studies of early education settings, such as Sylva et al. (2004), Brooker (2002) and Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009) all draw attention to significant variations in the degree of independent versus joint activity and the nature of the accompanying discourse, whether open or closed. Very similar debates arise from the studies of parent and child interactions in non-educational contexts (Rogoff et al., 1998, Göncü, 1999, Rogoff, 2003). The starting point for this thesis was a series of observations recorded as part of an evaluation of a particular parent and toddler group which suggested that it supported an orientation towards an individual exploratory pedagogy rather than a pedagogy of ‘dialogic enquiry’ (Alexander, 2000, Mercer, 2009). This thesis explores how common such a framing of interaction might be within parent and toddler groups, how important this tendency is and how any possible change in balance might be engendered.

Rogoff’s and Göncü’s sociocultural studies highlight similar discussions regarding the style of interaction with young learners in different cultural practices around the globe. Rogoff et al. (1998) identify cultural variances related to both the engagement of mothers in play and children in work in the home, and the prevalence of focused teaching conversations and open conversations. In addition they identified that “one third of the toddlers clearly negotiated shifts in responsibility for handling the objects seeking greater involvement or greater assistance,” (Rogoff et al., 1998, p.232) and observed cultural differences related to “variations in the explicitness and intensity of verbal communication and the interactional status of children and adults,” (Rogoff et al., 1998, p.23).

Sociocultural researchers suggest that by focusing on the child in the context of activity with others (Rogoff, 2003, Pramling-Samuelsson et al, 2009, Hedegaard et al, 2008), we may gain a greater insight into how the individual develops.

The question from a participation point of view is to understand the transformations that occur in children's participation in particular kinds of activities, which themselves transform-how do children change from this kind of participation to that kind of participation, and how do the activities in which they participate change with children's and other's involvement? (Rogoff, 1998, p.692)

Authors such as Tharp and Gallimore (1988), Alexander (2000, 2008) and Mercer (2000, 2009) draw attention to the potential significance of the variance in the style and quantity of dialogic discourse employed in different classrooms, not just in early years but throughout primary education and beyond. Alexander (2000) uses Bruner's four dominant models of learners;

- 1) seeing children as imitative learners
- 2) seeing children as learning from didactic exposure
- 3) seeing children as thinkers
- 4) seeing children as knowledgeable (Alexander, 2000, p.561)

Alexander argues that discourses which develop each of these models are important in primary classrooms but that in English pedagogy the third and fourth models are less fully developed in everyday practice as compared to a sample of other nations. This thesis seeks to record the patterns of discourse employed in particular settings to consider how children are being introduced to these models.

Fleer (2003) argues that early childhood practice has developed a professional language and values. She asks "have we locked ourselves into a self perpetuating set of values and practices that make it difficult to move thinking forward," (p.64). She identifies four taken for granted assumptions, two of which are focused upon in the empirical study included within this thesis. First, Fleer considers the orientation of the child towards learning which she argues is too often towards adults talking to children while the children manipulate educational materials, neglecting children's learning from adults' use of materials. Second the too frequent focus on the individual child learning independently rather than with others. Authors are increasingly pointing to the tension between Piagetian and Vygotskian traditions in early education settings restricting the development of practice (Edwards, 2007b, Pramling-

Samuelsson & Fleer, 2009, Rogoff, 1998). They suggest that the powerful cultural-historical influence on pedagogy of the first may inhibit the understanding and implementation of the second. This chapter will begin by outlining Piagetian and Vygotskian approaches to learning and will proceed to examine critically some of the descriptors of effective adult-child interactions which are influential for early education practitioners. The chapter will consider how different cultural interpretations may accommodate and assimilate these ideas into practice.

## **2.1 Constructivist perspectives: two approaches to developing cognition.**

Many authors cite Piaget and Vygotsky as the key theorists underpinning current models for supporting young children's learning (Anning et al., 2004, Athey, 2007, MacNaughton, 2003). Rogoff (1998) describes the work of Piaget and Vygotsky as setting out two "historically central theoretical approaches to the study of cognition as a collaborative process" (p.680). She argues that both approaches share a view of the learner actively constructing meaning from his or her experiences and also "an emphasis on achievement of shared thinking" (Rogoff, 1998, p.681). In Piagetian approaches the development occurs as the individual realises differences between their view and that of others, whereas in Vygotskian approaches the individual develops through increasingly sophisticated joint participation in cultural historical activity (Rogoff, 1998). Rogoff (1998) points to Piaget's insistence that learning take place where there is the capacity to share and debate in similar language and ideas, which is why learning of some items of knowledge is not considered to be able to occur until children reach a certain stage of understanding and maturity: "for Piaget the meeting of minds involves two separate individuals, each operating on each other's ideas" (Rogoff, 1998, p.685). This is the main point of departure for sociocultural approaches which see individuals as able to participate jointly in activity through the partial perception of purpose and action and a partial understanding of mind.

### ***2.1.1 Piagetian constructivist influence on education practice.***

Constructivist perspectives develop from a belief that the knowledge an individual holds in their mind is built up or constructed by them through their engagement with

experience. It is contrasted with the idea that knowledge is something that is inculcated or placed in learners' minds by rote or didactic learning. The distinction is made that rote learned facts do not become true knowledge until the individual has developed a system by which knowledge may be effectively applied (Noddings, 2007). This was the predominant debate in pedagogy in 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, that featured Piaget's model of children developing through the assimilation and accommodation of new experiences which create disequilibrium with previous experiences. This model contrasted with traditional behaviourist perspectives that sought to break down learning into manageable memorisable steps that might be reinforced in a learning process. Piaget is often viewed as the founder of constructivism (MacNaughton, 2003, Perret-Clermont et al., 2004) although as MacNaughton (2003) points out, philosophical references date back further, to Vico and Kant. Nevertheless, Piaget is seen as instrumental in institutionalising the principle that children construct their own meanings from experiences. This construction of knowledge takes place through a process of assimilation and accommodation rather than simply receiving unfiltered the knowledge that is transmitted to them through experience and by society. Piaget's studies of children's conceptions of language, number and physical concepts show that their ideas are based on their own interpretations of what they have seen and heard. Nevertheless Piaget illustrated that similar patterns in concept formation emerged in the cultures that were studied (Piaget, 1977).

Piaget's theory, as we shall see, places action and self-directed problem solving at the heart of learning and development. By acting on the world, the learner comes to discover how to control it. (Wood, 1998, p.5)

Wood explains how, in Piagetian theory, objects are embedded in the context of actions that serve to assimilate them to the fulfilment of intentions.

So, for example, a bottle may be known and perceived in terms of activities like grasping, bringing it to the mouth, sucking and swallowing. To the extent that any new 'container' can be assimilated successfully to these *schemes* in order to fulfil the desire to drink, then it too will be 'known' in terms of 'bottle-related' actions. (ibid p.53).

Accommodation is the extent to which the schemes of organisation become adapted to the new experience, thus forming knowledge new to the individual. Piaget's own descriptions of progressive equilibration are helpful. They suggest schemes in the

child's mind being nudged gradually closer to more 'correct' conceptions of experience by disturbances to the existing equilibrium of the child (Piaget, 1977). He cites work by Inhelder et al. suggesting that "the most fruitful factors in the acquisition of understanding were the results of disturbance producing conflicting situations" (Piaget, 1977, pg. 39). Piaget focuses his conclusions on individuals' study of the natural environment and proposes that human learning progresses through situations which challenge our existing conceptions of the world, and that rewards and punishments are only secondary influences, which help to draw attention to the inadequacies of our present concept of equilibrium. There is no apparent reason why social influences should not point out or present these disturbances as well as exploration of the physical nature of a phenomenon. Thus, while it is Vygotsky's view that social interaction is a key driver of cognitive development, several authors point out that Piaget also argued that adult-child and peer relations influence every aspect of development (Rogoff, 1998, Siraj-Blatchford, 2004).

Wood (1998) shows how more recent theories such as Karmiloff-Smith's notions of a 'modular' view of mind retain a strong resemblance to Piaget's theory of learning, with children actively interpreting their experiences and progressing developmentally (Karmiloff-Smith, 1992). In this neo-Piagetian perspective however, greater emphasis is given to different aspects of activity being processed in different ways, influenced by genetic maps, and to maturation perhaps taking place at different rates so that developmental stages become more blurred than those presented by Piaget initially. As many authors point out, much of Piaget's work focused on individuals learning through their own actions and on how children's thinking differed with development, hence it is more relevant to this type of self reflective situation (Wood, 1998, Perret-Clermont et al., 2004,) and to learning between two more cognitively matched partners as in children's play (Rogoff, 1998).

Chapter One has already identified how interpretations of Piaget's work have been used to justify particular common practices (Edwards, 2007b, Pramling-Samuelsson & Fler, 2009, Rogoff, 1998). Piaget's vast range of observations identifies patterns of development in children's thinking that are often repeated and clearly visible to practitioners. The simplifications of Piaget's arguments with regard to individual development through engagement with experiences that cause disturbance to the equilibrium of existing models of the world, may also chime with our own conscious



experience of learning as adults. This interpretation may lead to the creation of environments where children are encouraged to learn through their own endeavours and play with peers, because they are theorised to be less able to learn from the mental models of adults. In such a model, learning can be broken down into the acquisition of concepts where the child does not perceive the end purpose of that knowledge but will one day be able to assemble skilled performance through mastery of the constituent parts.

This is the point at which sociocultural perspectives call into question the dominance of such tools and metaphors underpinning practice because, they argue, by focussing on the individual, Piagetian inspired models may underplay the social forces that surround an activity that may motivate and direct children's investigations (Rogoff, 1990,1998). Materials and contexts transmit historical-cultural messages that speak to us of action and purpose. We can appreciate and pursue these activities with others without fully understanding each element of the process. Learning, therefore, may involve participation in existing activities with increasing competence and the potential to modify and improve the activity according to circumstances. Thus Piaget's theory is seen as helpful but not complete. If early education contexts substantially offer materials that afford individualised learning opportunities because of their perceived developmental appropriateness, then this is likely to lead to a reinforcement of practitioners' perceptions that this is predominantly how children learn. It could be argued that if we create home and educational environments that offer children predominantly experiential resources and toys, whilst shielding children from more meaningful real world activities, then we may distort our view of how children learn (Rogoff, 2003).

### ***2.1.2 Social constructivist perspectives on establishing learning through interaction***

Socio-cultural research following Vygotsky's lead explores learning across a broad range of human activity developing a social constructivist perspective. Karpov (2005), who summarises neo-Vygotskian research, suggests that it is directed at object-focused joint activity with adults as the leading form of developmental activity in the second and third years of life:

This analysis has shown that according to the neo-Vygotskian adult mediation is the major determinant of children's transition from object-centred

manipulations in the beginning of the second year to role play at the end of the third year (Karpov, 2005, p.114).

He points to work by O'Reilly and Bornstein (1993), Haight and Miller (1993) Elagina (1977) and Elkonin (1978), each illustrating how mothers' participations in object focused play lengthens and socialises the function of objects leading to the increasing sophistication of imaginative play in the third year of life. Karpov proceeds to draw on ethnographic studies, suggesting that role play is more evident in societies where practical roles or activities are less accessible to children, and that an advantage of role play with adults is the sophistication that it brings to the manipulation of language, thought and objects: "thought as separated from objects and actions arises from ideas rather than from things" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.97).

Rogoff asserts that from birth, children's development occurs in a biologically given social matrix characteristic of our species (Rogoff, 1990). The availability of intellectual tools and practices deriving from socio-cultural history is a phylogenetic feature of the human species suggesting that supporting others in the use of tools, is a particularly human trait. Different communities produce variations in the specific genetic and social resources of new individual members, and these variations are as essential to understanding human development as are the genetic and social resources that humans have in common (Dawkins, 2004). This enables humans to think together in complex social interactions. The question is how does the ability to work together on ideas develop in individuals?

Reddy (2001) argues that there is a reluctance to use the terms social cognition and mind in relation to young children in their first year.

Western psychology generally assumes a mind behaviour dualism in which minds are seen as internal, invisible, non material entities which guide and influence outward behaviour and can only be inferred, never directly known. (p.241).

Reddy cites work by Baron Cohen (1995, 1997) suggesting that an early perceptory disposition focuses the infant's attention on eyes and eye direction, thus facilitating an early preoccupation with dyadic interactions that establishes an awareness of gaze and attention by six months. However she suggests that it is not until 12 months of age that infants can use adult gaze for a precise location of a target. Reddy (2001) also notes that by six weeks, infants seek to re-establish eye contact when deprived of

adult responsiveness. Reddy also discusses research that indicates establishing dyadic interactions with adults towards objects by 10 months. Camaioni notes these as triadic interactions between adult, child and object, and again indicates the child's ability to direct adult attention by the third quarter of the first year (Camaioni, 2001). Joint attention is clearly a basic building block of social learning leading to, and accompanying a growing understanding of intentions. These are based initially on movement but become increasingly sophisticated, so that by 18 months toddlers are different to infants, reacting with increased anxiety and thoughtfulness when approached by adults. (Lock, 2001).

Universally, mothers establish, or are expected to establish with their infants successful routine interactions, clear patterns of communication, dependable emotional attachments, and to guide their infants through the first year of life. (Bornstein, 2001, p.270)

Bornstein and Tamis-Lemonda identify four particularly significant functions in this dyadic relationship among many others: promotion of social understanding, development of attachment, acquisition and emotional regulation (Bornstein & Tamis-Lemonda, 2001). Each of these is clearly important and interconnected; however, we will maintain a focus upon social understanding and language learning.

From birth babies appear both ready and motivated (albeit in rudimentary form) to communicate and share meaning with others. By two months of age infants engage in complex, highly responsive interactions with their mothers termed "protoconversations" (Bornstein and Tamis-Lemonda, 2001, p.270).

They suggest that:

By nine months infants demonstrate "secondary intersubjectivity" as they monitor and co-ordinate their own perspectives and attention with the perspectives and attention of others (Bornstein and Tamis-Lemonda, 2001, p.270)

Bornstein and Tamis-Lemonda also suggest four types of care giving: nurturant (supporting the immediate physical and emotional needs of the child), social (developing the emotional, physical and intellectual skills to facilitate social interaction), material (controlling the physical environment of the child) and didactic care giving

Stimulating the infant to engage and understand the environment outside the dyad, and includes focusing, introducing, mediating and interpreting the external world" (Bornstein and Tamis-Lemonda, 2001, p.272)

Mothers from some communities regulate joint attention in the first year, often following infants direction of gaze, by touching or shaking an indicated object, or introducing it between themselves and the infant. They often provide verbal and non verbal interpretation for babies' actions, their own actions and events in the environment. (Rogoff, 1998, p.705)

Rogoff (1998) goes on to give examples of infant games such as *peek-a-boo* and *All Gone*, and through playing with communication involving missing actions, sounds or words in the course of everyday routines through which children develop the social communicative constructs required to participate in scaffolding. Rogoff indicates a number of studies that show children are actively influencing their interactions with adults by eye contact, smiling and cooperating, sustaining or not sustaining interest.

From a social cultural perspective the question is not when intersubjectivity is acquired, but rather how it transforms as children and their social partners change. (Rogoff, 1998, p.707)

Intersubjectivity, the ability for two partners to have some insight into what the other is thinking, is an important concept and is explored in more detail later in this chapter. Rogoff sees these interactions as consistent with Vygotsky's model that cognitive development is shaped by social exchanges from birth and that this becomes vastly more sophisticated with developing speech.

Reddy (2001) identifies the debate between those who suggested this to be an emerging theory of mind around the age of 8 to 14 months, and those who are reluctant to accept this idea suggesting instead that young children predict the outcome of events rather than inferring the goal of the adult's actions. She goes on to comment;

A surprising number of skills seem to emerge at 9 months, leading theorists to argue for a revolution in understanding others as intentional agents at this age. (Reddy, 2001, p.256)

How these abilities are structured as they emerge, and what they are put to work on, is crucially dependent on the raw material they both work on and are forged through. That is, it is not just the case that infants act on the world, but that the world is transacted to them in the way others present it (Reddy, 2001).

In summary; research on the first year of learning (Lock, 2001), suggests that through the development of gestures, by around nine months, children are in position to have some idea of what others intend to do with objects and to modify their own actions to interact with this.

- Execute intentions alone and in harness with others
- Coordinate objects and people together in pursuit of these intentions
- Use gestures to partly specify these intentions
- Subordinate his or her own actions to the regulatory control of a limited number of another's words
- Voluntarily give, take and request objects in interaction with others, and who has "fined down" some control of his or her own repertoire of sound production. (Lock, 2001, p.391)

Lock goes on to note how during the second year of life these skills are applied to a realisation that words name or refer to things; however, he suggests that there is not a universal sequence of stages that children naturally mature through. Instead he supports the idea that language emerges from a system of underlying competencies. Meaning is constructed from the discernment of pattern in the environment but urges us to remember that the children's view of the environment is not the same as adults' because children's experience of the world is different to ours (Lock, 2001). This view is similar to that of the gestalt school (Lewin, 1935) which influenced Vygotsky's thinking suggesting that children might see activities holistically and develop perceptions of detail and meaning filtered through their own experience. This idea is discussed in more detail later in this chapter after some of the key insights into social learning expressed by Vygotsky have been outlined.

### ***2.1.3 Vygotskian and Neo-Vygotskian influences on education.***

Researchers influenced by Vygotskian theory, (Hedegaard, 2001, Lave & Wenger, 1991, Rogoff, 2003) focus on learning in a context where children are interacting with others, and upon the role of cultural tools such as language in mediating these interactions. Vygotsky (1978) identifies three perspectives on learning and development:

1. that the processes of child development are independent of learning
2. that learning is development
3. the gestalt position that some elements of learning are dependent on development and some aspects of development are dependent on learning.

Vygotsky then rejects all three of these perspectives.

The most essential feature of our hypothesis is the notion that developmental processes do not coincide with learning processes. Rather, the developmental process lags behind the learning process; this sequence then results in zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978, p.90).

Vygotsky proposes that children learn to perform tasks through interaction with more competent others and that these actions require mastery and a process of accommodation for the “subsequent development of a variety of highly complex internal processes in children’s thinking.” (ibid, p.90). The notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1987) is a key element in the pedagogical approaches to supporting learning that will be discussed later and it is important to reflect on this a little before proceeding. Vygotsky illustrates the ZPD with reference to the observation that different children of the same age will be able to achieve tasks of different complexity when tutored by the same adult.

This difference between the child’s actual level of development and actual level of performance that he achieves in collaboration with others, defines the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1987, p.209).

Vygotsky describes the linking of the zone of proximal development with the individual’s actual development, as the manifestation of cultural construction in the domain created of conscious awareness. This is achieved by the tutor bridging the individual’s position in the domain of Piagetian concrete understandings and a culturally legitimised knowledge.

Lave and Wenger (1991) identify three senses in which the ZPD has been interpreted. First it is seen simply as the difference between the tutored and untutored abilities of the learner and they suggest this links most directly to the term “scaffolding” as developed by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976). Secondly there are accounts that emphasise the cultural constructions manifested by the tutors’ role: Thirdly there is a perspective emanating from activity theory, where the ZPD is also mediated by societal expectations relating to the materials, social roles and wider social influences upon the learner, tutor and context.

Under such societal interpretations of the concept of the zone of proximal development researchers tend to concentrate on the processes of social transformation (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.49).

A number of Northern European scholars emphasise the underdeveloped nature of this aspect of Vygotskian theory and explain how this has been extended by Vygotsky's colleagues such as Luria and Leont'ev (Elkonin, 1971, Engeström, 1999, Hedegaard, 2001, Karpov, 2005)

According to Vygotsky and his Russian followers, social environment is not just the context in which children develop and to which they struggle to adapt. Rather than that, adults as representatives of children's social environments, supply them with so called psychological tools, which being acquired and internalised, come to mediate children's mental processes. From this perspective, human mental processes are not independently "constructed" by children (as constructivists would say), nor do they unfold as a result of children's maturation (as nativists would hold), nor are they inculcated into children as behaviourists would hold. Rather that, the development of mental processes is mediated by adults in the context of social interactions with children. Thus Vygotsky and his followers consider mediation in the context of social interactions to be the major determinant of children's development (Karpov, 2005, p.11)

This fourth perspective will be developed in most detail for purposes of analysis in this thesis. However, each of these forms of interpretation is relevant, since it is parents' and practitioners' views of supporting learning that are studied in the research phase of the thesis particularly in relation to the notion of the ZPD.

Bruner (1986) is enormously influential in the discourse underpinning contemporary pedagogical practice; however Rogoff (1998) points to some of the problems arising from the metaphors that he offers us. Bruner clearly acknowledges and celebrates the inspiration of Vygotsky but raises the question of how in Vygotsky's model the child can identify and focus upon what is to be learned in order to process information. Likewise Wertsch (1985) acknowledges Vygotsky's contribution, but shows how Vygotsky is unclear about what he means by 'development'. Wertsch also indicates how later work by Piaget suggests that developmental maturation of brain functions are a stronger influence than Vygotsky identified. Bruner is critical not of Piaget's theory per se but of a prevailing view that sees children as egocentric, individualistic, learning through direct unmediated experiences with cognition separated from action and affect (Bruner, 1986). He argues that these premises are "arbitrary, partial and deeply rooted in the morality of our own culture" (Bruner, 1986, p.61). Citing Donaldson's work Bruner highlights that it is often lack of experiences of the social situations that cause children to fail in Piagetian tasks exploring their reasoning

powers. Bruner identifies the ways in which the child may be perceived in the “standard perspective” (Bruner, 1986, p.61) to be egocentric (incapable of taking on the perspective of others) and private. He also claims that society views children as having an individual self that requires development beyond culture, a self that can learn through unmediated conceptualism (the child learns by direct encounters unmediated by language). He suggests that learning is viewed as tripartite (that cognition, affect and action are separated in the child’s mind). Bruner challenges each of these notions with regard to their universal applicability. The Scaffolding metaphor that Bruner offers us reaffirms the role of the adult in supporting the child’s learning. Scaffolding suggests an integration of Vygotskian and Piagetian perspectives showing how the adult can facilitate the child’s learning by supporting the child’s investigation.

Equating scaffolding and working in the Zone of proximal development is a frequent occurrence in the literature which seems to be an assimilation of Vygotsky’s ideas into a more familiar approach (Rogoff, 1998a, p.699).

Scaffolding will be considered in more detail later in this chapter but for now the point I wish to make relates to the impact of this integrated interpretation on practice. Viewing learning in this way logically leads to the adult facilitating the child’s investigation and development through providing nudges and prompts at just the right time to meet with the child’s maturing mind. This continues to underpin play-based practice where abstracted concepts are developed through abstracted educational materials: “research on the Zone of Proximal development involves a more broadly dialogic analysis of the novice’s contributions to the shared endeavour than does work on the original concept of Scaffolding” (Rogoff, 1998, p.699). This leads us towards the idea of co-construction (Jordan, 2004) where adults engage in an exchange of ideas with children sharing a more open agenda, exploring each other’s perceptions. But the potential danger with this mode of learning interaction is that if it continues to be set in the same preschool activity context, it may modify existing practices by encouraging a more exploratory two way dialogue, but may still be closely related to a Piagetian influenced model of presenting the child with challenges to existing thinking related to developmental stages. Neo-Vygotskian perspectives point towards more collaborative dialogues.



In this section I have tried to set out in more detail some of the theoretical background to learning and development considered in this thesis. The following sections continue to develop the sociocultural critique of some of the key concepts of early educational practice. The purpose of the following sections is to review recent research into effective pre-school pedagogy (3-5 year-olds) with a view to identifying key themes which will then be considered with regard to their relevance to the younger age group.

## **2.2 Research into effective interaction in early education settings.**

There is a growing body of empirical research evidence indicating that in relation to the interactions between early years practitioners and children, there are advantageous outcomes for children where practitioners adopt a constructivist approach that facilitates some opportunities for children to be involved in developing and applying knowledge for themselves (Athey, 2007, MacNaughton, 2003, Schweinhart et al., 2005).

The Ypsilanti Preschool Curriculum Demonstration Project from the USA has frequently been used to argue the case that those children who experience a play based curriculum (Weikart et al., 1978) develop a more independent self managing outlook. The study began in 1962 with 123 children from low income African-American families who scored less than 85 on I.Q. tests, with no indication of organic causes influencing abilities, attitudes, and types of performance. These children were monitored annually from age three to age 11, and at 14/15, 19, 27, 35 and 40. The study examined the progress of 55 children who received no preschool programme, 22 who were exposed to the Highscope programme (including a mixture of play based and adult led activities) for 12.5 hours of active learning preschool per week for two years before starting school. Their parents were also encouraged to support the school programme through 1.5-hour home visits each week. 23 were allocated to the Distar programme offering formal 'classroom' oriented activities as a preparation for school and 23 were allocated to a setting that offered a more free play environment. The findings showed increased Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores for all those in the pre-school groups; however, while the IQ gains for all three groups were lost over time, the socialisation outcomes for the Highscope group were seen to have a significant

effect at age 15, 27 and 35 (Schweinhart et al., 1993, Schweinhart et al., 2005). The Highscope programme claims to focus particular attention on 'active learning' and 'independence' by encouraging children to reflect verbally on experience, feelings and activities including an emphasis on planning and reviewing activity.

More recent and more extensively sampled studies in New Zealand (Wylie, 2003) and the UK (Sylva et al., 2004) suggest similar initial findings: that more positive social and intellectual benefits accrue for children in programmes that adopt the type of pedagogy outlined above: one that affirms children as active learners with opportunities to lead some of their own activities. Siraj-Blatchford (2004) also indicates the powerful influence that theoretical perspectives, labelled as Piagetian and Vygotskian, have had upon early years' pedagogy.

In western societies a consensus has emerged that early childhood provision should be individualised and that adults should be non-directive and facilitate learning rather than teach (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004, p.142)

Siraj-Blatchford clearly expresses concern that this may have been misinterpreted in some pedagogy as placing an emphasis on a notion of the child as a lone scientist passing through clearly defined developmental stages. She draws attention to research into effective preschool pedagogy that has consistently found that children seem to acquire more effective learning outcomes when they spend sometime learning with adults rather than through 'pure discovery learning' (Mayer, 2004). Siraj-Blatchford also draws on the sociocultural theories outlined earlier in the chapter to highlight the importance of social interaction and sustained shared thinking (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004).

If we consider learning to be the result of a process of cognitive construction that is only achieved when the child is interested and or involved, it is entirely consistent to treat the part played by the effective educator in exactly the same way. The cognitive construction in this case is mutual, where each party engages with the understanding of the other and learning is achieved through a process of 'reflexive co-construction' (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004, p.143)

Siraj-Blatchford draws on four longitudinal studies to argue that effective pedagogy includes adult-child involvement, cognitive co-construction, engagement and the use of instruction techniques such as modelling and demonstrating, explanation and question.

Rogoff (1990, 1998a) argues that collaborative learning is frequently the mode of learning in ‘real life’ situations where children learn through watching and participating in activities with others whether peers or adults. I will return to these ‘real life activities’ later in this chapter but the early education research outlined above has identified several interactive strategies as features of outstanding and effective practice in collaborative learning: scaffolding, co-construction and SST (Sylva et al., 2004, Wylie & Thompson, 2003).

The following section of this chapter explores each of these recommended pedagogical styles in some depth. It has already been argued that the tools and metaphors used in early education should not be taken for granted (Rogoff, 1998, Jordan, 2004). Careful consideration should be given as to whether these pedagogic models often developed to describe interactions with children aged four and five are relevant to the those aged three and under in the parent and toddler group context. It is also worthwhile considering how the participation in parent and toddler group activity might foster the development of children’s participation in the types of interaction which are described as beneficial. Much of the literature related to scaffolding in educational contexts and guided participation in home contexts speculates about the potential for cultural patterns of interaction to impact on children’s thinking and their ability to reflect on thinking (metacognition):

Such differences may lead to variation in children’s skill in managing their own attention and observation, and in managing verbal interactions with adults as conversational peers. These skills and interactional practices are differently useful for participation in varying institutional contexts such as formal schooling and economic activities. (Rogoff et al., 1998, p.245).

### ***2.2.1 Scaffolding***

Wood (1996), who worked with Bruner in the 1970s developing research into parents’ tutoring in problem solving tasks, identified a tighter description of ‘scaffolding’ as compared to Bruner’s account of ‘tutoring’ (Bruner, 1986). The term scaffolding relates to helping the child to solve problems by drawing attention to significant aspects of the problem. Wood (1996) asserts a set of common principles that govern individualised tutoring. These include:

- a) *recruiting the child's interest* to the task,
- b) establishing and maintaining an *orientation towards task* relevant goals
- c) *highlighting critical features* of the task that the child might overlook., demonstrating how to achieve goals
- d) helping to *control frustration* so that throughout this process was not left to struggle too long or not given enough to sustain a sense of continuing involvement.
- e) *'Fading'* is used to suggest that the tutor should be looking at all times to hand responsibility over to the learner. (Wood & Wood, 1996)

The process of scaffolding is perceived to have advantages over the direct transmission of knowledge in that it affirms responsibility for learning to be with the individual learner rather than the 'teacher', it offers greater sense of ownership of knowledge and suggests to the learner that the creation of knowledge is an ongoing active process (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002). A key feature of scaffolding, as compared to notions of shaping behaviours, is the role of the tutor in simplifying the learner's role in the task rather than simplifying the overall goal of the task (Greenfield, 1984). There are strong connections between Wood's list of features for effective tutoring and Rogoff (1990), who adds in subtle ways to the concept as she describes 'apprenticeship thinking'. In relation to recruiting the child's attention ('a' above) Rogoff suggests that the tutor helps makes bridges or connections for the learner. She also points out that such support may also occur where the adult does not have a deliberate intention to teach but a bridge is created by the relationships established in the context of the activity they are engaged in (Rogoff, 1990). Rogoff also distinguishes scaffolding from tutoring: she critiques Wood's criteria for distinguishing scaffolding and suggests that tutoring involves a more sophisticated interactional process focusing on errors that will lead to learning while simply correcting other errors (Rogoff, 1998). Rogoff's model of tutoring thus places a focus

on the situations which prompt accommodation and involve the adult helping the child to reflect on these.

Jordan (2004) points out that a variety of interpretation has developed in relation to the term scaffolding: some people interpret scaffolding as being support to get children into the zone in which learning occurs, whereas others see it as being more in line with the model described by Wood (1998). Jordan associated the following interactions with scaffolding;

- Questioning techniques with particular knowledge outcomes in the teacher's head.
- "Providing feedback on cognitive skills noticing children's small achievements and voicing this
- Demonstrating modelling skills
- Identifying children's schema
- Supporting children's problem solving and experimentation, with a predetermined outcome or task in the teachers mind
- Telling children specific knowledge facts, in the context of their interests, developing limited intersubjectivity with the children." (Jordan, 2004, p.40)

Jordan's distinguishing of co-construction from scaffolding, is particularly helpful. Her argument is that scaffolding can be more tightly or less tightly controlled by the adult but she retains the term scaffolding for tighter control and uses co-construction for the less controlling. Nevertheless, in both forms of scaffolding, a degree of child sensitivity must remain for it to continue to be recognised as effective scaffolding. In the elaboration of the term 'scaffolding' by Wood, Bruner and Ross's (Wood et al., 1976) their definition can be seen to work at both ends of Jordan's continuum:

How can the competent adult "lend" consciousness to a child who does not "have" it on his own? What is it that makes possible this implanting of vicarious consciousness in the child by his adult tutor? It is as if there were a kind of scaffolding erected for the learner by the tutor. But how? (Bruner, 1986, p.74)

Bruner (1986) sets out a model of effective tutoring where the adult becomes the “consciousness for two” for three and five-year-olds. The adult controls the focus of attention, demonstrating the direction of the outcome of the task, breaking down the task into achievable segments matched to the child’s understanding, managing the situation so that the child can recognise achievements and repeat them. The adult then gradually hands over control of individual elements as the child gains mastery over them. Bruner points to the regularity with which parents in studies conducted during his time at Oxford University demonstrated similar patterns of scaffolding when supporting the children reading a book

(1) vocative, (2) query, (3) label, (4) confirmation. Or (1) Oh look, Richard!  
(2) What’s that? (3) It’s a fishy. (4) That’s right (Bruner, 1986, p.77).

Bruner suggests that there is a

Language Acquisition Support System, LASS, provided by the social world that is matched to LAD in some regular way. It is LASS that helps the child navigate across the Zone of Proximal Development to full and conscious control of language use.(Bruner, 1986, p.77)

There is no discussion of class, background or education here. In this context the scaffold is less specific than in the context described by Wood (1998). It guides the child’s attention and establishes a pattern of response to a stimulus or experience of  
(1) focus attention (2) analyse (3) identify (4) confirm.

Bruner put forward the notion of a ‘language acquisition support system’ (LASS) as a counterpoint to the suggestion of an innate disposition in the child to make sense of language, a position receiving increasing support from perceptual psychology. This is tied into a Vygotskian perspective that Bruner (1986) describes as the transmission of mind across history. Taking recent understandings of the neurological development of perception (Ramachandran, 2003 , Mareschal et al., 2004, Gregory & Calvert, 2005, Greenfield, 2008) it is possible to read new meaning into both Vygotsky’s and Bruner’s conceptions of the development of mind. That the human brain is pre-programmed to focus on key elements of experience, emphasising patterns of visual and auditory development, is suggestive of Chomsky’s proposed Language Acquisition Device (Bruner & Garton, 1976). This is developed further in 2.4 but first we will proceed to explore further the ways in which parents are conscious of supporting their children into and across the ZPD and whether making parents more

conscious of scaffolding and co-construction as techniques might be helpful in this process.

Rogoff (1998) draws attention to the potential danger posed by the concept of *internalisation* with regard to scaffolding, pointing out that scaffolding implies an external structure or mould applied to the building whereas her writing suggests that external agents or adults guide the building of the structures of the child's mind in a more proactive way. She points out that scaffolding does not draw attention to the institutional and cultural context in which it occurs.

It has missed the routine and tacit engagements and arrangements involving children and their caregivers and companions in varying cultural communities (Rogoff, 1998, p.700)

It would seem here that Rogoff means that not enough attention has been given to examining how scaffolding may vary in nature between different groups and particularly in relation to the type of definition offered by Wood (1998).

Rogoff (1998) also draws attention to a number of studies involving different age groups, including 7-month-olds, illustrating that the notion of contingent scaffolding, which is matched to the level of the child and faded out as the child assumes greater control, appears to be a common phenomenon across middle class European – American mothers.

### **2.2.2 Co-construction**

Co-construction is also a teaching/learning process rooted in constructivist theory but it is a process of negotiating shared meanings rather than passively acquiring existing knowledge. New Zealand authors Jordan (2004) and Farquhar (2004) distinguish co-construction from scaffolding suggesting that co-construction is a more interactive process (Farquhar, 2003):

Co-construction thus places emphasis on teachers and children together studying meanings in favour of acquiring facts. Studying meaning requires teachers and children to make sense of the world, interpreting and understanding activities and observations as they interact with each other. (Jordan, 2004, p.33)

Bruner is, once again, an important reference point for those developing the idea of co-construction. He identifies, in his description of the transactional self, emerging evidence that even at two years of age young children demonstrate

a drive to explore and overcome ambiguities in the meaning of utterances. The young child seems not only to negotiate sense in his exchanges with others but to carry the problems raised by such ambiguities back into the privacy of his own monologues (Bruner, 1986, p.64)

Bruner does not use the term 'co-construction'; however, he clearly states:

in the main we do not construct a reality solely on the basis of private encounters with exemplars of natural states. Most of our approaches to the world are mediated through negotiation with others (Bruner, 1986, p.64)

Jordan (2004) when studying teachers involved in co-constructing with children identified the following interaction features:

- Co-constructing meaning, including hearing children and getting to know what they think;
- Questioning techniques with no particular knowledge out there in the teacher's head, aware of their interests, not interrupting them, allowing silences, following children's leads;
- Making links in thinking across time and activities through visiting children's ideas and interests, making links between sources of ideas, knowing children really well;
- Developing full, two way intersubjectivity with children, through sharing their own ideas with children to extend their current interests, often as an in depth project, entering the child's fantasy play, valuing and giving voice to children's activities, respectfully checking that a child would like the offered assistance. (Jordan, 2004, p.40/41)

As part of the EPPE project, Siraj-Blatchford (2003) observed professional preschool practitioners, in a selected sample of 14 good to excellent settings, focussing on their interaction with children. In this context examples of co-construction were not observed as a matter of course, raising questions as to what barriers might arise from



cultural context, perceived roles and understandings of play in the application of this concept. It has already been pointed out that Siraj-Blatchford (2004) highlights issues of workplace culture and culturally based expectations as possible reasons for a lower level of adult engagement in collaboration with children's activity.

In relation to collaborative learning and the co-construction of meaning, it is interesting to note that research found a relation between the child's vocabulary and the time invested in joint attentions (Camaioni, 2001). This was also the case where the mother adapted to the child's direction of attention, as opposed to the mother's directing a child's attention to an object, which did not show an association with vocabulary size (Camaioni, 2001). Trevarthen (1998) also draws attention to the work of Tomasello in support of his own elaboration of the concept of *intersubjectivity*, a term often employed in relation to mediation (Rogoff, 1990, Jordan, 2004, Wertsch, 2007). Intersubjectivity is identified with adult mediation and co-construction of meaning, that sees the adult attuned to the child's intentions not only through language but also through gesture, posture, tone and context (Göncü, 1998). Trevarthen develops a very helpful description of the learning behaviours of children through to the age of four based on a career of observation of children in this age range (Trevarthen, 1998). Of the 18 month old child Trevarthen notes a great deal of familiar household objects being treated as what they are i.e. signifying the child's at least partial grasp of the social functions of objects. He also notes;

the toddlers play may seem egocentric, because the child characteristically turns his back to the mother most of the time and may shrug off any recommendation she may have to offer as to what should be done with the toys and may say 'No!' to her. However, what the mother shows or says is picked up and does influence what the toddler attends to and plays with. (ibid p.96)

These types of observation once again illustrate a tension in interpreting children's learning, does the child learn through personal exploration or through social mediation? Trevarthen proceeds to outline how the toddler's ability to share experiences with others is influenced by the richness of previous shared experiences. He points to language limitations in children as old as three leading to episodes of shared imitation in play. He highlights the ability of the toddler to imitate play and speech but stresses:

Getting beyond this mimicry of speech sounds to using language to think and plan needs the backing of other people who are willing to join in games of give and take with words. Objects and actions, and feelings about them, come

to life as genuine topics of joint interest (Tomasello, 1988). The adult speaker who wants to teach has to be a willing listener” (Trevvarthen, 1998, p.96)

Camaioni and Trevvarthen both emphasise the importance of language and communication, and the need to move beyond Piaget’s and Freud’s model of the egocentric child to a more socially orientated view of children’s learning (Trevvarthen, 1998).

Rogoff (1990) identifies Trevvarthen’s conception of intersubjectivity as a central component in the process of the development of shared thinking through guided participation. Rogoff’s studies suggest that intersubjectivity is a focus of activity in children under one that develops as children grow in their ability to approach a goal that is shared with others: “I see deliberateness developing over infancy, one of the transformations of intersubjectivity that exists from the start.” (Rogoff, 1990, p.82)

### ***2.2.3 Shared Thinking***

Rogoff (1990) emphasises that young children by the age of two are already deeply embedded in cultures of shared understanding and that shared thinking need not be verbalised; however, where language is part of the clarification of intentions and understandings “such interaction may provide both the impetus and resources for children to go beyond their current level of understanding” (Rogoff, 1990, p.204). Nevertheless Rogoff suggests that too frequently research focuses on face to face interactions and pays insufficient attention to contextual guidance offered to children. As part of the EPPE Study (Sylva et al., 2004) a sample of settings with the most positive outcomes for children (controlled for starting points and social background) were investigated in more detail by the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) project (Siraj-Blatchford, 2003).

The qualitative analysis of our teacher observations appears to show a very clear association between curriculum differentiation and matching, the terms of cognitive challenge, and sustained shared thinking. The qualitative evidence suggests that the better the setting does on each of these dimensions of good pedagogical practice, the more cognitively effective it will be (Siraj-Blatchford, 2003, p.127)

The REPEY view of high quality interactions is illustrated in the following extract.

The staff clearly enjoyed being with the children and engaged with them in a respectful caring way, without criticism or harshness. They encouraged the children to try new experiences and were very enthusiastic about their efforts. The staff appeared to be constantly aware of looking out for opportunities to scaffold children's learning by inviting children to say what they thought in order to assess their levels of knowledge and understanding. They intervened when they thought it was appropriate but also allowed the children time to explore for themselves. The Adult interventions were most often in the form of questions that provoke speculation and extend the imagination. (Siraj-Blatchford, 2003, p.127)

Siraj-Blatchford (2004) concludes by defining 'shared sustained thinking' in more detail;

episodes, in which two or more individuals worked together in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities or extend narratives etc. During periods of sustained shared thinking both parties contributed to the thinking and developed and extended the discourse. (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004, p.147)

It is easy to see similarities between Jordan's articulation of co-construction, and sustained shared thinking; however, the quotations above suggest that SST might encompass both scaffolding and co-construction. What should be emphasised is that both parties contribute to the thinking. Similarly Rogoff (1998) uses the phrase 'shared thinking' to draw attention not just to meaning but to intersubjective reasoning arguing that "co-operative learning arrangements promote the use of higher quality cognitive reasoning strategies and metacognitive approaches than in individual arrangements." (Rogoff, 1998, p.717). Rogoff uses this phrase flexibly across a range of interactive styles that might include scaffolding and co-construction.

Thus collaboration is a process that can take many forms, whether intended or accidental, mutual or one-sided, face to face, shoulder to shoulder, or distant, congenial or contested: the key feature is that in collaboration people are involved in others' thinking processes through shared endeavours. Many of these forms of collaboration have not yet received much research attention. It will be important to investigate the ways that the individual, interpersonal and community aspects of shared thinking function in the rich variety of sociocultural activities in which children participate. (Rogoff, 1998, p.728)

A focus on thinking, not just shared meaning, is more apparent in Siraj-Blatchford's more recent papers exploring the relevance of 'sustained shared thinking' where she explores its relevance to children under the age of three (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007).

In a conference presentation Siraj-Blatchford explained how shared thinking might be supported where language exchange was less developed. She identified the following as being potential roles for the practitioners in promoting SST.

- *Tuning in*
- *Showing genuine interest*
- *Respecting children's own decisions and choices*
- *inviting children to elaborate*
- *Re-capping*
- *Offering your own experience*
- *Clarifying ideas*
- *Waiting for a response*
- *Not hurrying children*
- *Suggesting*
- *Reminding*
- *Reflecting*
- *Using encouragement to further thinking*
- *Offering an alternative viewpoint*
- *Speculating*
- *Reciprocating*
- *Asking a balance of closed and open-ended questions*
- *Modeling and demonstrating thinking*

*(Siraj-Blatchford, 2008)*

Some of these suggestions clearly align themselves with the features of scaffolding identified earlier; 'tuning in, revise, recap, remind' suggest that the adult helps to focus the child's thinking towards a particular endpoint. Other of Siraj-Blatchford's suggestions resonate more closely with descriptions of co-construction: 'not hurrying, offering an alternative viewpoint, reciprocating, clarifying ideas'. These suggest a more open ended clarification of perspectives emphasising the cognitive processes involved in interaction and the potential benefit they might have in shaping the child's thinking strategies. This is further emphasised by the last item, 'modelling and demonstrating thinking', which is similar to the point stressed by Rogoff, that

collaborative activity has the potential to help children to share not just meanings but ways of thinking about activities. Dialogic teaching and learning are not discussed in this chapter because those employing this term have not written extensively about children under five. However there are a number of useful philosophical clarifications to be drawn by comparing the definitions of scaffolding, co-construction and SST to dialogic teaching and learning (Alexander, 2008). Alexander (2008) distinguishes between conversation and dialogue arguing that conversation does not imply as much control on the shape of the thinking as the word dialogue. He also asserts that dialogue ought to be more chained and sustained. The term scaffolding does not necessarily imply conversation or dialogue but nor does it exclude either. Co-construction as set out by Jordan (2004) implies conversation more strongly than sustained shared thinking (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010) which suggests both conversation and dialogue when it is defined as “any episode in which two or more individuals ‘worked together’ in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative, etc.” (Siraj-Blatchford 2010). It is interesting that while Siraj- Blatchford (2010) suggests that the more qualified staff studied in the REPEY project, mostly teachers, were more likely to provide cognitive challenge in interactions and raises concerns about the general frequency of this type of interaction. Alexander (2008) also raises concerns based on observations of interactions in English primary schools which suggested relatively low occurrences of both conversation and dialogue. Both authors draw attention to the potential limits this situation places on children’s metacognitive awareness.

#### ***2.2.4 Metacognition***

Metacognition refers to the mental processes that control learning. It is suggested that it is important to help children reflect on their learning as it occurs or in review sessions because in doing so children are more able to direct their engagement with activities and set increasingly focused directions for their learning.

“The proper exercise of human intelligence is not simply on possessing certain mental tools, but knowing enough about those tools to be able to deploy them effectively and deliberately,” (Thornton, 2002, p.81).

Thornton also draws attention to memory strategies and cites work by DeLoache, Cassidy and Brown (1985) showing that children as young as two rehearse the

location of hidden objects that they will be asked to retrieve later by repeatedly looking at and pointing to the hiding places of the objects (Thornton, 2002). She proceeds to suggest that metacognition develops slowly and in gradual stages with new problem-solving experiences offering the child fresh insight, new awareness and strategies for an iterative learning process.

In relation to metacognition, there is some evidence of children's attempt at mental reference, coming in the first half of the third year (Camaioni, 2001):

Know and think were the most frequent words comprising 48% and 27% respectively, of all mental verbs used. Other verbs used appeared only sporadically (e.g. figure, understand), ... However these earliest uses of mental reference for conversational functions rather than for mental reference may involve mental reference and may involve rote-learned expressions such as "Know what?" Or "I don't know. (p.414)

Camaioni cites research by Bartsch and Wellman showing that while psychological desires were established before the second birthday, references to beliefs using 'think' and 'know' begin much later, just before the third birthday. One explanation offered for this is that children's theory of mind begins to shift from viewing people as acting on the basis of immediate goals to acting as 'epistemic subjects' on the basis of beliefs.

Geoghiades traces the development of the term metacognition to J.H. Flavell (Flavell & Miller, 1998) and points to a number of defining features of the term (Geoghiades, 2004).

Metacognitive knowledge is that part of one's knowledge that refers to cognitive matters.... Metacognitive experience on the contrary, comprises conscious experiences that can be either cognitive or affective and pertain to an ongoing situation or endeavour. (ibid p.372)

For example, if one has the anxious feeling that he/she is not understanding something and wants and needs to understand it that would be a metacognitive experience. (ibid p.373)

Young children may have such conscious experiences, but may not know how to interpret them very well. (ibid p.370)

Thus Geoghiades highlights a debate regarding the possibility of coaching young children in metacognition. He contrasts beliefs that metacognitive tutoring requires formal operational thought with the view that all learners have metacognitive ideas and beliefs in some form. As with co-construction and scaffolding, this discussion still

tends to focus on five year-olds who have language skills, with far less attention being given to younger children as with the lower examples of metacognitive actions.

Flavell (1998) states:

Metacognition can encompass people's knowledge about the nature of people as cognizers, about the nature of different cognitive tasks, and about possible strategies for coping with different tasks. It can also include executive skills for monitoring and regulating one's cognitive activities. (p.853)

Whilst reflecting upon the changing and emerging themes in the study of cognitive development, Thornton (2002) poses a series of interesting questions in relation to metacognition indicating how much there is to explore in this area.

Does metacognitive awareness develop from the individual child's own spontaneous reflections, or is it stimulated by social processes: invocations to 'make up your mind' for instance. (p.217)

Bruner comments that metacognition appears to vary according to cultural background and can be taught.

Available research on linguistic repairs, self-corrections in utterances either to bring one's utterances into line with one's intent or to make them comprehensible to an interlocutor suggests that an *Anlage* of metacognition is present as early as the eighteenth month of life. How much and in what form it develops, will it seems reasonable to suppose, depend on the demands of the culture in which one lives. (Bruner, 1986, p.67)

Geoghiades argues "metacognitive skills are thinking skills requiring appropriate stimuli for their awakening and gradual development" (Geoghiades p369). There is however a lack of hard confirming evidence for such a position, only circumstantial evidence pointing in this direction as Siraj-Blatchford et al (2002) argue:

In the context of the child: engagement leads to metacognition in the sense often considered in discussions of problems of transfer where it is assumed that in gaining knowledge 'about' one's learning, children have greater control over it and may be empowered to apply it in different contexts. (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002, p.212)

In the context of the research undertaken as part of this thesis it was difficult to assess children's thinking, however the opportunities the adults created which prompted children to reflect and connect events were studied as the basis upon which children might begin to acquire greater awareness of thinking.

### ***2.2.5 The influence of language and gesture in shaping metacognitive development.***

There is clearly significant support for the view that interactions with parents are an important element of cognitive development and that perceptual predispositions and ‘attention direction’ are important mechanisms in this development. If this is the case some of the features identified with collaborative learning, co-construction and scaffolding with pre-school children would also seem to be relevant to the first three years, except that perhaps gesture and situation initially would lead interactions with language playing an increasingly significant role as children develop. Siraj-Blatchford (2007) draws on Mead (1934) and Vygotsky (2004) to highlight the importance of “significant gestures” in early interactions in “scaffolding sustained shared thinking” (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007, p.6). She argues that early interactions linking real and imaginary worlds begin to set the tone for abstract thinking, reflection and creativity.

Many of the authors cited in this chapter, (Bruner, 1986, Rogoff, 1998, Camaioni, 2001, Lock, 2001, Thornton, 2002) draw particular attention to the problem that theories of child development are based upon data collected mostly from middle class European and European American families and often in controlled conditions; they express concern that age guides to development vary considerably. Similarly, they all wish to see more information gathered in relation to different cultures’ and subcultures’ approaches to interactions.

Clearly as Bruner (1986) points out “not everybody is a genius in serving as a vicarious consciousness for others.” (p76). However what Wood’s work demonstrates is that tutoring can be taught, and that work by Tizard (1984) suggests that there “may even be little micro-cultures, sometimes as small as families or pairs, that aid or destroy the skill involved.” (ibid p.76)

Rogoff’s work argues that by looking at cultural comparisons of activity these debated issues regarding the application of cognition to younger children become much clearer. Rogoff traces wide variations in the degree to which adults join in with and agree roles with children in play.

In some communities, play is considered a child’s domain (Rogoff et al., 1993), but even in middle-class communities where adults often act as playmates with young children, adults are likely to take differing roles than child companions in play. Dunn and Dale (1984) found that the play of two year-olds with their older siblings commonly involved the close meshing of



the partners in complementary pretend roles, whereas mothers generally observed and supported the play without entering it by performing pretend roles and actions (Rogoff, 1998, p.709)

This illustrates how culture becomes reflected in variations in children's strategies for involving adults in play and in their play with peers. Rogoff highlights the concept of proleptic instruction where novices carry out simple tasks under the direction of an expert and contrasts this with explanation where the adult talks about a task rather than guiding participation in it (Rogoff & Gardener, 1984). Rogoff's central point of critique is of perspectives that only view cognition as lying within the child.

Cognition is not conceptualized as separate from social, motivational, emotional and identity processes, people's thinking is conceived as involved in social relations, with purpose and feelings central to their involvement in activities and transformation of their roles as a function of participation. (Rogoff, 1998, p.729)

The development of metacognitive tools occurs in a social context. Behaviours are governed by cultural expectations and resources as well as individual dispositions. Different situations will therefore afford greater and fewer opportunities for development in relation to these aspects. The final sections of this chapter explore this frontier between self and society in more detail. The question becomes, how are children being prepared to take an increasing role in collaborative learning and how might these roles influence their thinking leading to greater self awareness and reflection? Several authors present additional insights into how cultural communication patterns may differentially support thinking. Hasan (2002) presents a well argued and illustrated case suggesting that there are two poles of parent child cultural exchange, monochronic and polychronic (Hasan, 2002). These terms, discussed by Edward Hall (1959) are similar to Bernstein's description of restricted and elaborated codes (Bernstein, 1996). Monochronic cultures relate to the here and now, to direct shared experiences without elaboration of meanings, personal positions, clarifications or networking of events. Monochronic partnerships are portrayed as tight, focused on functionality and an expression of power by closing down negotiation. Hasan describes polychronic partnerships where elaboration of the situation takes place not only in terms of the here and now but opening emotional perspectives, wider cultural perspectives, and widening linkages to shared experiences.

There is thus consistent and strong evidence that, at this early stage of 3-and-half-to-four- years, the children belonging to these two groups have had a massive experience of specific ways of saying and meaning that, orienting them to certain ways of being, doing and saying as legitimate and reasonable in their communities, has established different ways of learning, different ways of solving problems, different forms of mental disposition. (Hasan, 2002, p.120)

Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, (2001) also explore how patterns of language use in families may influence later engagement with schooling. They present a helpful qualitative longitudinal study of a small sample of girls from the age of four through to age 21. They accept the central argument put forward by Tizard and Hughes (1984) that the types of language used with young children in middle and working class homes do not differ greatly. However, Walkerdine et al do not agree with the notion of the sensitivity or insensitivity of mothers towards daughters' communication correlating with educational success (Tizard & Hughes, 1984), because in Walkerdine et al's sample it was suggested that where there was less sensitivity in working class families, this seemed to result in higher educational achievements than for other working class families. Instead they suggest that the activities offered by middle class mothers to their daughters featured greater emphasis on rationality and the rationalisation of emotion (Walkerdine et al., 2001). They also argue that expectations of academic achievement were more tangible throughout in the middle class homes, with working class mothers being content with less in terms of their daughters' attainment and adopting a variety of strategies to try to help minimise the feeling of educational failure.

The emphasis of the present thesis was upon institutional comparison and so the case study samples were selected on the basis of practice. However information on age, gender, ethnicity and education were monitored as potentially important. Data collection was approached with an open mind, with a view to capture patterns of interaction and to seek possible cultural influences retrospectively rather than proactively.

### **2.3 An overview of adult interaction within collaborative learning.**

I have tried to set out an argument that metacognition, co-construction and scaffolding are important concepts in helping to analyse the framing of the social context of interactions that children experience, and that the framing of interactions in respect of these concepts indicates something about the framework shaping children's emerging theory of mind. At the heart of these pedagogical approaches, authors have sought to challenge a perceived cultural view of children as passive and neutral receptors of knowledge. Those developing the notions of scaffolding, co-construction, SST and metacognition remind us that for the child to be a more critical pro-active constructor of meaning they need to develop the skills to engage in learning with others as well as through individual investigation. The social framework of a learning context may include both scaffolding and co-construction as important tools in shaping metacognitive experience. It may therefore be helpful to keep metacognitive experience in mind when supporting young children, rather than focusing solely on the content of the learning. These concepts remind us that we need to plan beyond the immediate cognitive learning and keep the longer-term metacognitive experience in mind. For example, interrupting a child who is trying to hold a plastic duck to the bottom of the bath and explaining that it floats may close down a wider seeking of knowledge, whereas offering the child other similar objects encourages the child to reflect and draw comparisons. A useful comparison is to the notion of a 'hidden curriculum'. The overt curriculum of a great deal of adult child interaction in the early years is around concept formation, but the sub-text is about the nature of knowledge and how it is constructed, who accredits knowledge and the child's role in accumulating knowledge.

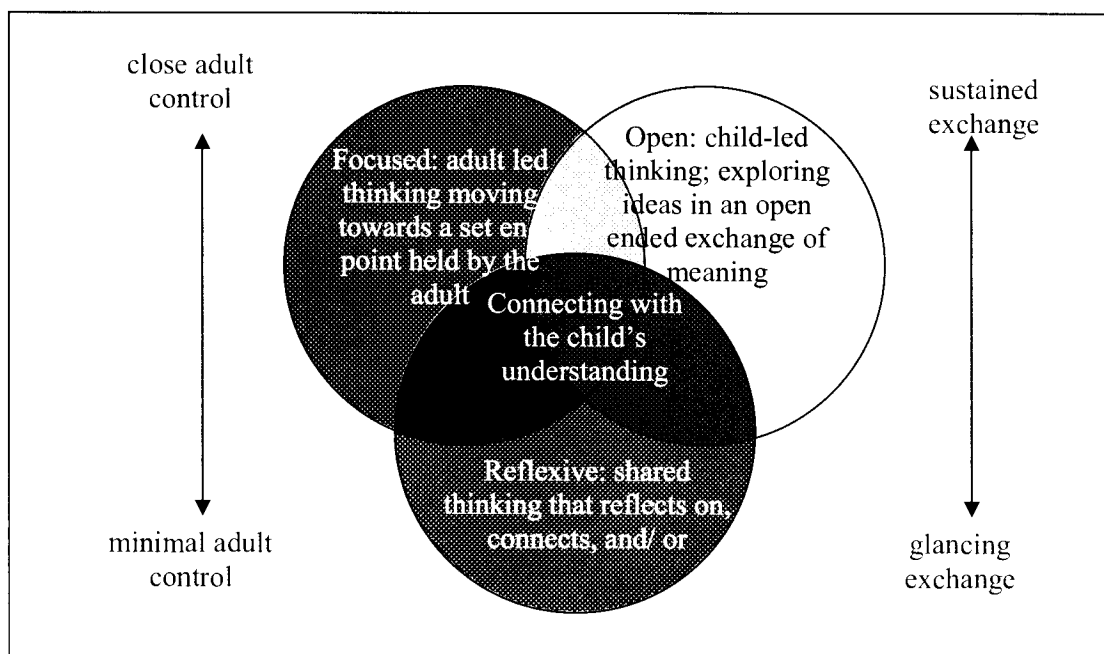
The process of cognitive and metacognitive development begins from birth, and while the process may be natural, routine and taken for granted it may not, therefore, be carefully reflected upon. This process of acquiring knowledge will form a key element of analysis in this thesis as it seeks to explore the interaction between parent and child and the transition to a more public educational context from a sociological perspective. The thesis attempts to make more explicit the implicit beliefs about learning that dominate our society and their possible effects (MacNaughton, 2005). Interaction, as a fundamental building block of young children's learning processes,

raises power/knowledge issues at several levels. It raises the question regarding the nature of interaction between parent and child, what our expectations of children are and the role of the state in intervening in parent-child relationships.

Siraj-Blatchford (2007) suggests that the ongoing arguments about the nature of pedagogies focusing on content rather than process (Potter, 2007, Soler & Miller, 2003) are based on a false dichotomy, causing pedagogy to focus on learning things rather than the processes that accompany them (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007). This research project investigates parents' and practitioners' perceptions of this issue, the cultural attitudes that contributed to the persistence of this debate and the continuing finding that many practitioners continue to give less than satisfactory attention to the cultivation of thinking and learning attitudes.

This section on metacognition has suggested that the activities of scaffolding and co-construction lend themselves to particular types of metacognitive experience, but that there are a number of additional features raised by consideration of shared thinking that are worthy of seeking out when observing interactions. Figure 2.1 sets out these three areas of variance to suggest their potential for overlap and interplay in interaction.

**Figure 2.1** *A model for analysing the interfaces of open, focused and reflective aspects in mediation regulated by control and time.*



Connection with the child's understanding is central to the thrust of each of the analyses of effective interaction included in figure one and the centre of the diagram suggests the possibility of 'full two way intersubjectivity' connecting events reflectively over time. There are a wide variety of possible exchanges that might be included under the heading of partial intersubjectivity where the adults would aim for the centre but from different starting points and for this reason it is helpful to use 'focused' and 'open' mediation to identify these starting points. The terms sustained shared thinking, dialogic enquiry and co-constructive interactions all highlight the contrast between focused and open pedagogic exchanges. They also point towards the importance of the third locus creating a framework for harnessing language to facilitate thinking.

The available texts investigating parent and toddler groups have tended to focus on the organisation, content and impact of parenting programmes. Several studies however, including evidence from Sure Start evaluations of parent and toddler groups presented in Chapters One and Three (Anning, 2005, *Parents as Partners in Early Learning*, 2007) suggests that an emphasis on care rather than cognition was common in parent and toddler groups. This thesis seeks to explore the interactional framework underpinning the learning/teaching relationships in such groups in more detail through the use of the model presented in figure 2.1. Such investigation should make the implicit patterns of guidance into educational discourse more visible and open to critique.

## **2.4 What does collaborative learning build upon?**

Having analysed some of the features that have been associated with advantageous outcomes from collaborative learning, it is also important to consider what aspects of experience might form the basis for establishing joint attention and developing shared thinking. The concept of affordance is developed in this final section of this chapter. The following section develops an explanation of how the individual mind might interface with the cultural environment (Del Rio, 2007, Gibson, 1979, Kytta, 2004). This is an important element of theory and relevant to the age of the children in this study because it should offer an explanation of how young learners can move from

personalised perceptions of their environment to learn collaboratively with adults. It is also potentially helpful in order to identify starting points for shared thinking and to identify patterns of mediation from the point of view of what adults seek to scaffold in the parent and toddler group context.

‘Building upon the child’s thinking’ is at the heart of the concepts of scaffolding, co-construction and metacognition. For many early years practitioners, the word *schema* has come to mean children’s interests in particular patterns of movement that form processes for investigating materials. (Athey, 2006, Nutbrown, 1999, Whalley & the Pen Green Team, 2001). These accounts of schema may explore in detail young children’s fascination with patterns of movement and suggest these as building blocks for developing concepts. Athey uses Piaget’s later work (Piaget 1969) to focus attention on schemes (operational thought) and schema (figural thought). Likewise, Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2002) suggest that it is useful to think of schemes as less developed stages on the way towards a more refined and nearer to socially recognised schema. Athey uses Bartlett (1932) and Piaget (1971) to argue that a schema influences both action and reflection on action: “schemas are patterns of repeatable actions that lead to early categories and then to logical classifications” (Athey, 2007, p.49).

Piaget uses the word schema to suggest a personal model or understanding, predicting the performance of a particular phenomenon. Vygotsky (1986) makes clear his conviction that learning a concept cannot be set out and taught in a neat logical sequence (Vygotsky, 1962) stating “concept formation never conforms to this logical schema”(p.80). He agrees with Piaget’s identification of spontaneous concepts (emerging through children’s own mental efforts) and non-spontaneous concepts (decisively influenced by adults). Vygotsky argues that Piaget’s work focuses mainly on the former. “He [Piaget] fails to see the interaction between the two types of concepts in the course of the child’s intellectual development,” (Vygotsky, 1962, p.84). Thus Vygotsky is arguing that even in the early stages of development sensory motor activity is bound up with interacting with objects that invite and afford certain actions and convey certain human values and purposes, that the adults supporting an infant’s earliest movements create a framework of human meanings around objects both natural and manufactured (Edwards, 2007a).

Similarly recent work by Susan Greenfield (2008) drawing on a considerable number of neuropsychological studies, develops just such a picture of consciousness being generated across the brain in the instant of context and that emotion and identity interact strongly in forming and applying any logical model of object (Greenfield, 2008). There is not space to develop this literature in detail here but there are a range of overviews of recent developments in this field presenting similar models of thinking (Eliasmith, 1998, Greenfield, 2000, Posner, 2001). Thus, the idea of schema, as similar patterns within experience, is useful, but should be viewed as connecting with and incorporating elements of social, emotional, contextual, experience. Rogoff (1990) also states her attraction to the idea of the motivating power of objects. She points towards connections between the development of Vygotsky's concept of activity by Leont'ev (1978) and Gibson's ecological theory (Gibson, 1979) and the idea of affordance. The following section of this chapter explores the attraction of 'affordance' for a number of social cultural theorists.

#### ***2.4.1 Affordances and the ecological frontier; some pedagogical possibilities***

Rogoff (1990) explains the attraction for socioculturalists of Gibson's theory of affordances as offering a basis for viewing thinking not as passive receptors of messages from the environment but as "an event in which the animal seeks information relevant to functioning effectively in the environment and transforms itself to better fit its niche" (Rogoff, 1990, p.31). Wertsch (1985) has also consistently highlighted some of the parallels and connections between Soviet and US sociocultural theories. Wertsch points to the connections between Vygotskian perspectives, the Gestalt theorists and work of James Gibson through the notion of "Umwelt" and "Affordungscharakter" (Wertsch, 1985, Wertsch, 1998, Wertsch, 2007). Del Rio and Alvarez in reviewing Vygotsky's work highlight both of these terms as a key foundation of Vygotsky's thinking on the zone of proximal development and describe this as the *ecological frontier* between the internal and external contributors to the mind, the mental and the material, the organism and the medium (Del Rio, 2007). The following paragraphs will explore the roots of current thinking about activity and perception, and consider how these ideas are presented in recent writing on the social mind.

Several authors point to connections between activity theory and the theory of affordances developed by James Gibson (Albrechtsen et al., 2001, Del Rio, 2007, Wertsch, 1998, Wertsch, 2007). Gibson's theory of affordances offers a useful explanation of a mechanism for mediation between social and individual knowledge. Wertsch (1998) draws attention to attempts to link the notion of affordances to mediated activity emphasising the need for "socio cultural research to formulate its position vis à vis the antimony between individual and society" (p.38).

Activity theory and Gibsonian thinking share the basic idea that perception is not afferent, that it is connected with action. Only through acting do people perceive their environment. Activity theory insists that our action and perception are mediated by a variety of tools. Activity theory gives a useful handle for understanding the mediators, and how they are shaped, in a dialectical relationship with the changing practice of use. (Albrechtsen, Andersen, Bødker and Pejtersen, 2001, p.15)

Del Rio and Alvarez (2007) discuss how Vygotsky was profoundly influenced by work from a Darwinian evolutionary biological perspective. Von Uexkull in 1909 suggested that organisms evolve in a 'Bauplan': that the organism develops in a medium and is shaped and adapted to that medium. It can readapt as that medium changes and is changed by the organism.

The amoeba, the tick, the sparrow or the wolf could all be defined by their functional circles and their specific contexts that determine their systems for perceiving and acting. The activity systems specific to each species thus configure their psychic systems (Jennings, 1909) (Del Rio and Alvarez, 2007, p.285)

Del Rio and Alvarez point out that a key contribution of Vygotsky was to highlight that humans have evolved by being able to mediate experience by creating tools to adapt our environment:

We might say that the adults lend the child, enslaved to his field in his passive attention, their active attention through this process of highlighting stimuli and capturing and guiding the child's gaze towards cultural affordances (Del Rio et al, 2007, p.287)

Lewin, whose work is focused upon by Vygotsky, also moved Von Uexkull's point forward through discussion of the quasi-physical and quasi-social natures of the objects in the environment:



all these things and events are defined partly by their appearance, but above all by their functional possibilities (the Wirkwelt in von Uexkull's sense) (Lewin, 1935, p.77)

He argues that the child's past experience is an essential constituent of the environment but there is still an instinctive psychobiological component to motivation:

Many things attract the child to eating, others to climbing, to grasping, to manipulation, to sucking, to raging at them etc. These environmental facts, we shall call them valences [*Aufforderungcharaktere*], determine the direction of the behaviour (Lewin, 1935, p.77)

It is interesting to note that "demand value" is also suggested in a note by the translator as a translation of *Aufforderungcharaktere*. Other contemporaries of Vygotsky, Koffka (1931) and Bartlett (1961), writing in 1932, both expressed in a similar way the idea that what is remarkable about animals' behaviours is that creatures of the same species do not respond in identical ways to the same stimulus. Rather that many species adopt different responses in different contexts, suggesting that experience puts a set of features and responses at the disposal of the conscious and unconscious mind and initiates actions that may be allowed to flow with less or more control from the conscious mind. Sir Fredrick Bartlett's 1932 work on "remembering" is particularly interesting and is still referred to (Athey, 2007, Bruner, 2007, Cole, 1996). Bartlett pursued similar issues to those later pursued by Gibson (1979) in the notion of 'affordance' developed from *Aufforderungscharaktere*. For example Bartlett suggests that

A new incoming impulse must become not merely a cue to setting up a series of reactions all carried out in a fixed temporal order, but a stimulus which enables us to go direct to that portion of the organised setting of past responses which is most relevant to the needs of the moment (Bartlett, 1961, p.206).

Gestalt theories of perception suggest that the human brain is tuned in to identify objects by the way the points of light generated by them move together as a whole. It is suggested that infants quickly come to recognise objects as wholes rather than as individual parts. The theory of affordances further suggests that young children's perceptions may be tuned into what objects and creatures can offer to them. Gibson (1979) shows how children are sensitive to the surfaces of materials, predicting whether they will be hard or soft, sticky or smooth. There are clear evolutionary advantages to being able to both predict where an object will be (in order to catch

hold of it) and to anticipate how it needs to be handled. Apes for example need to be able to form effective judgements about the ability of branches to take their weight. Gibson (1979) discusses how creatures become adapted to particular niches of the environment and how their senses become adapted to view the world with a particular focus on their physical needs and capabilities for movement and that what “other animals afford above all, is a rich complex set of interactions, sexual, predatory, nurturing, fighting, playing, cooperating and communicating. What other persons afford is the whole realm of social significance for human beings” (Gibson, 1979, p.128). Gibson’s theory suggests that if infants tune into the affordances, services or functions that items offer, then their attitudes towards objects will clearly evolve as the child’s capabilities and needs evolve. Gibson’s theory is very similar to the notion of *Umwelt* as described by Bruner (1983) which also draws attention to the importance of the creature’s worldviews in development.

Affordance is a very important concept to this thesis since it offers a prospective framework with which to analyse children’s interest in the material objects offered in Parent and Toddler groups. If children are responsive to the affordances of objects then mediation by others may alter the child’s perceptions and dispositions towards the way they view the world. Del Rio and Alvarez (2007) highlight this issue, indicating that Vygotsky’s key contribution is to point to how mediation helps children to adopt a whole system of activity without fully appreciating the detail of all the separate elements.

Gibson’s theory of affordances is founded in Lewin’s concept of *Aufforderungcharaktere* and it is useful to discuss this term further before developing relevance of the notion of an affordance as a noun.

The affordance of an object is what an infant begins by noticing. The meaning is observed, I think apprehended would be better here, before the substance and surface and colour and form (Gibson, 1979, p.134).

This emphasises the interconnected nature of experience for young children in particular. Gibson suggests that when we look at a wide selection of tools on a workbench it is not the constituent parts that we perceive but what the object will allow us to do is what we pay attention to. Humans must be anticipating their needs and so be searching for objects that fit a certain pattern. When things fit that pattern

the mind zooms in upon them. Humans being similar in size and needs are therefore inclined to perceive things in similar ways.

These are the invariants that enable two children the common affordance of the solid shape despite the different perspectives, the affordance of a toy, for example. Only when each child perceives the value of things for others as well as for herself does she become socialized. (Gibson, 1979, p.141)

Gibson's position is explicit, stating that affordances do not change with situation. This is in contrast to Bartlett's main thrust, that the world is not simply apprehended but that apprehension is mediated through social interaction. If we keep to Gibson's original sense of affordances, what those sociocultural theorists recently invoking Gibson's work appear to be doing is reflecting how social mediation of schemas, configurations, or active developing patterns mediate immediate perceptions towards social affordances. This approach to Gibson's theoretical framework urges reflection on what it is that adults often focus upon with children, which it is suggested is often specific elements of an experience rather than wider wholes of activity. For example in a pilot study observation a child was trying to work out how to open a jack in the box toy and the adults encouraged the child to 'try the buttons'. A broader view of children's capacity to comprehend and store moments of action; combining attitudes, feelings, sensations, sounds, communicated nuance, intentions, and consequences; encourages further consideration of how such a perspective might, in turn, offer the adults opportunities to shape attitudes to the experiences in these regards (Kyttä, 2004).

The child begins, no doubt, by perceiving the affordances of things for her, for her own personal behaviour. She walks and sits and grasps relative to her own legs and body and hands. But she must learn to perceive the affordances of things for others as well as her self. (Gibson, 1979, p.141)

If adults only view learning as something that has to begin with small units of meaning which are assembled into more complex wholes they may reinforce for themselves and the children a Piagetian mode of learning. The theory of affordances may help to reduce the tension between the Piagetian and Vygotskian views of pedagogy. It offers a model where by the child's mind may combine the quick appropriation of wider meanings and potential through social contexts as well as the more detailed grasp of operations through trial and error.

Hence, the primary unit of analysis is not the actors or the environment as distinct categories, but the *total ecosystem of actors and environment*. According to Gibson, *affordances* are material properties of the environment

that can support the actor's existence and survival, such as fruits, vegetables, cattle and prey. That is, properties that can be acted upon, for instance be harvested, hunted, cooked and eaten. (Albrechtsen, Andersen, Bødker and Pejtersen, 2001, p.7)

#### ***2.4.2 Joint activity in the ZPD and affordances***

Leont'ev (1978) identifies Vygotsky's unique contribution among his contemporaries as viewing human activity as principally carried out with tools, which are socially originated describing this as "the equipped ("instrumented") structure of human activity" (p59). Following this point through, Kozulin (1986) describes the ZPD not as a pedagogic act but as;

the place at which the child's empirically rich but disorganised spontaneous concepts "meet" the systematicity and logic of adult reasoning" ( Kozulin, 1986, p. xxxv).

When viewing the ZPD in such a way it is important to recognise that "spontaneous concepts" means 'the child's concepts formed through reflections on experience', but this experience is also bound up in social activity from the very beginning. The present study explores the nature of the child's spontaneous concepts at a particular point in space, time, culture and development, considering how these spontaneous concepts are engaging and evolving with social concepts and in turn with scientific concepts. This idea of 'social constructivism' gives a sense of the child developing, not simply progressing through personal discoveries, but moving from initial less conscious experience to more conscious experience where consciousness is defined by Leont'ev (1978) as "co-knowing" (p.60). This goes to the heart of the concept of Activity, which is that we, as humans, share a set of tools for thinking: not just words, but actions, and objects that allow us to communicate. Cognitive development is linked to physical development and involves being initiated into the use of tools, using them with increasing understanding and making them one's own.

Following Vygotsky's suggestion that children under four are strongly influenced by the 'demand value' of objects, and that play and adult mediation facilitate the child's development from spontaneous towards non spontaneous concepts, the aim of the final section of this chapter is to add to existing frameworks for the analysis of interaction an additional dimension that will help to explore the nature and direction of adult collaboration in children's learning.

### 2.4.3 Categories of affordance

The following orientations of affordance discussed in Gibson's work offer some useful points of reference as basic building blocks of joint attention. Gibson considers several aspects of the nature of affordances in addition to transparency that I wish to reflect on in the following paragraphs.

The affordance of an object is what an infant begins by noticing. The meaning is observed before the substance and the surface (Gibson, 1979, p.134)

The first aspect of affordances is that they relate to *purposeful benefits to the individual*: “the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal *for good or ill*” (Gibson, 1979, p.127). Gibson goes on to note that these will be relative values depending on the size and nature of the animal.

This is a radical hypothesis, for it implies that the values and meanings of things in the environment can be directly perceived. Moreover, it would explain the sense in which values and meanings are external to the perceiver. (ibid, p.127)

Gibson is pointing to a sense in which the nature of reality is constructed by the individual but is in some sense objective and apparent in relation to human needs.

The behaviour of observers depends on their perception of the environment surely enough, but this does not mean that the behaviour depends on a so called private or subjective conscious environment. (ibid, p.129)

There are four key areas where the individual's initial perceptions of situations might be revised and guided by others: Creatures, Substances, Objects, and Environments.

The second aspect of Gibson's affordances that I wish to highlight relates to complex judgments around interactions with other creatures.

What other animals afford above all, is a rich complex set of interactions, sexual, predatory, nurturing, fighting, playing, cooperating and communicating. (Gibson, 1979, p.128)

Gibson points to the evolutionary advantages that accrue by perceptual receptors being sensitive and tuned to focus on size, style of movement, facial expressions, and to associate fight or flight instincts with these perceptions. These skills might then be further sharpened or moderated by social interactions.

What other persons afford is the whole realm of social significance for human beings. We pay closest attention to the optical and acoustic information that specifies what the person is, invites, threatens and does (Gibson, 1979, p.128).

In a social creature perceptions need to be sensitive to attitude, moods, subtle expressions and to an awareness of the motives of others competing for the same resources. “Only when each child perceives the value of things for others as well as herself does she begin to be socialised” (ibid)

Thirdly, items are perceived not simply in their own right but in relation to how they might be modified to serve a purpose.

Detached objects must be comparable in size to the animal under consideration if they are to afford behaviour. Nevertheless, those that are comparable, offer an astonishing variety of behaviours, especially to animals with hands. Object can be manufactured and manipulated. (Gibson, 1979, p.133)

These three aspects of affordance are discussed further in Chapter Six in developing a framework for analysing adult child interactions.

## **2.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter identifies modes of interaction which have been demonstrated to result in positive learning outcomes for children aged three to six. These modes of interaction have been examined with regard to the key elements contained within them and their relevance to children aged one and two. It has been suggested that these models of collaborative learning offer the opportunity to identify patterns of interaction in adult-child interactions that indicate how far these interactions are progressing towards the models of interaction recommended by research and theory. The potential of affordance theory to help further categorise interactions has also been highlighted.

This analytical framework is elaborated further in Chapter Four and gives rise to the first research question: *What patterns of collaborative mediation are present in the parent and toddler groups?*

Documenting the pattern of interactions in particular contexts can help to illustrate how beliefs about learning are translated into practice. By observing how beliefs are translated into action and then through reflection upon the potential of that action to meet different stakeholders' expectations we can make more visible the taken for granted daily exchanges between adults and children. The need for more detailed study of patterns of such interactions was identified by Rogoff (1998); nevertheless there are still relatively few examples of this type of research as noted by Hedegaard and Fler (2008). By making these patterns visible we can create a forum for debate and considered evolution. Chapter Three describes the development of parent and toddler groups as spaces for adult-child learning interactions.

## Chapter 3

### A cultural-historical perspective of parent and toddler groups.

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the available literature on parent and toddler groups and describes the development of parent and toddler groups in England as a *sociocultural-historical activity* (Rogoff, 2003, Daniels, 2008, Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008).

Particular attention is given to these groups as a context for extending existing understandings of the interaction between adults and children in support of children's learning.

Socio-cultural perspectives draw attention to the role of the social context in shaping intentions and the induction of individuals into communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Rogoff & Gardener, 1984).

Of significance is Vygotsky's view that sociocultural theory insists that any activity is set in an historical and social context in which the individual resides. Cultural-historical theory foregrounds those contexts which shape social relations, community values and past practices which have laid the foundations of what participants pay attention to in their communities (Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer 2009 p.2).

Socio-cultural approaches are particularly helpful in exploring the nature of learning in parent and toddler groups because they focus on investigating how "Each child's development can be viewed historically and in this history the child's biological disposition is an important part; however they are not frames, but aspects that change and develop together with the child's psychic development" (Hedegaard et al., 2008, p.27). The mediation of actions and the induction of learners into activity by different cultural groupings are particularly emphasised in the approaches developed by Rogoff (1990, 2003) and provide significant guidance to the present study. The importance of setting actions in a wider context is also underlined by the very influential ecological approach to developmental psychology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner argues the case for psychological studies to move beyond a focus on the individual in isolation. He identifies four spheres of experience: micro, meso, exo, and macro



systems. Microsystems include the immediate relationships the child has with people in the different settings. Mesosystems are “the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person [child] participates” (Bronfenbrenner p.25). Exo systems relate to the locations that parents might participate in without the child, and macro systems comprise the broader societal contexts in which families exist. The thrust of Bronfenbrenner’s work is to urge those considering child development to take a broad and interconnected view of the influences upon a child’s development. The investigation in this thesis focuses upon the interfacing of the micro and meso system when learning moves from a more private, home focused sphere towards a more public ‘educational’ sphere. The thesis will consider in detail the role that adults adopt in the support of children’s learning in the context of a particular social activity, ‘parent and toddler groups’, at a particular time, 2008, and in a particular place, the Black Country area of the English West Midlands. The ethnographic methods and socio-cultural approach adopted in the research elements of this thesis examine the responses of a sample of mothers, toddlers and practitioners operating in, and responding to, this sphere of activity. This thesis considers the modes of support for learning presented in the course of these activities and the possible implications of these for the children’s orientation to learning. As a precursor to this study it is important to consider the broader macro system within which the parent and toddler group context is located, in order to identify some of the wider cultural influence shaping the modes of support that adults employ in supporting children’s learning.

This chapter draws attention to the limited representation of parent and toddler groups in the literature of early education, which is surprising since they focus upon very similar materials and environments to those presented in preschools (toys, paints, stories, etc.). This scarcity of literature may result from a combination of previously limited professional involvement in this sphere, and a traditional societal perception of such groups as a social activity as much for the benefit of parents as their children (Pugh et al, 1995). In England, and internationally, early education professionals are becoming increasingly involved in the operation of such groups as a result of research identifying the importance of early learning to the underpinning of lifelong learning dispositions (Wylie & Thompson, 2003, Schweinhart et al., 2005, Sammons et al., 2007). The co-involvement of parents, children and practitioners in this increasingly common situation of ‘supported’ parent and toddler groups (Jackson, 2006) offers

increasing opportunities for research. Parent and toddler groups usually last for one to two hours, once or twice in a week, with a focus on parents ‘staying and playing’ with their children. Such groups potentially offer insights into the type of orientations to learning that children may bring from the home environment into home-preschool transitions or into home-school transitions. Parent and toddler groups offer insights into parents’, practitioners’, children’s and societies’ constructions of both the role of the child as a learner and of the adult as a supporter of learning. Such insights may help us to develop systems that support the cognitive development of children, not only directly within the group, but perhaps also through influencing the Home Learning Environment (HLE) since this is identified as a more powerful predictor of successful adaptations to learning in the school environment than social class and cultural background (Sammons et al., 2007). Study of this context has the potential to influence practitioners’ understanding of young children’s learning and to develop contexts that promote positive learning dispositions in partnership with parents.

### **3.1 The development of parent and toddler groups**

The purpose of this section is to identify the nature of parent and toddler groups and to illustrate how they fit within the range of provision for children under three. It is helpful to explore how this social activity is viewed by different stakeholders within society and how these views have changed over time.

Parent and toddler groups have a relatively short and underdeveloped recorded history and so the account here is forced to draw from a range of disparate and sometimes tangential sources rather than a core of focused key texts as might be the case with a topic such as play.

The Preschool Learning Alliance (PLA) is a charitable, voluntary organisation with a history of supporting parent and toddler groups in England dating back to the 1960s.

The PLA defined parent and toddler groups as

a group of parents or carers with children under school age, most of the children below the age of three. These groups provide for both children and adults. Parents remain with their child(ren) throughout the session. (PLA, 1995, p.2)

In the English context parent and toddler groups are also often referred to as ‘stay and play’ groups or ‘playing together’ groups, emphasising the fact that the parent stays with and plays with the child and that this is not a crèche or childcare facility where the child can be left while the parent does something else, or somewhere where parents might simply chat while children play. Parent and toddler groups are most often short 1.5 to 2.5 hour sessions where children aged 18 months to three years are encouraged to participate in play and creative activities with their parents. The earlier term ‘mother and toddler group’ still appears occasionally, more often in conversation than on paper. The newer terms are generally favoured being more inclusive of fathers, grandparents, childminders and other carers who are encouraged to access sessions with the children they care for.

Social institutions are *of their time*. The development of parent and toddler groups in England in the 1960s may be associated with smaller family sizes and the increased availability of labour saving devices particularly among the middle classes (Giddens, 2006). It may also relate to the emergence of a more mobile nuclear family with less immediate access to family networks at the same time (Cosin & Hales, 2002).

Increasing secularism and the reduction of family activities around the church (Giddens, 2006) also continue to create a climate of change in parent and toddler group operation (Pugh, 1995). The emergence of play as a symbol of freedom of expression and as a vehicle for learning (Moyle, 2005), and the growth of television in the 1960s portraying idealised images of childhood play, also could be seen as influencing parents’ desire to meet and relax, socialise, share experiences and provide play experiences for their children. Documents from the period prior to 1997 lay emphasis on the mutual support of mothers as a key purpose of such groups, as summarised by the PLA

Bringing up small children is important - perhaps the most important work adults ever do. It is a very exciting and rewarding job but it can also sometimes be exhausting, lonely and worrying. Parent and toddler pre-schools can give adults a chance to share both the pleasures and the anxieties of child rearing. Taking an active part in the group can also help restore and develop adult confidence, which may have been shaken by the new responsibilities of parenthood. (PLA, 1995 p.5)

The focus of this statement clearly places emphasis on the group as a support for the parent and the suggested activities emphasise company for adults and then a focused

time for children to play with adults “not distracted by household chores” and perhaps with equipment not available at home. The booklets identify the possibility for children and adults to make friends and to access information on other groups. The documents stress the importance of the groups being open and welcoming to parents and children. The activities highlighted for toddlers are “messy play”/creative play, suggesting painting, printing, box modelling; imaginative play focusing on dressing up and household play; story telling; play with natural materials suggesting sand, water, wood and utensils; making music and sounds using simple instruments, singing songs and rhymes; physical play suggesting large boxes, chairs, climbing frames and ride on toys; manipulative play with bricks, threading, sorting and jigsaws (PLA, 1995).

Through the 1990s the sense of a change in the context of parenting was becoming apparent. Pugh, De’Ath and Smith’s 1995 review of the nature of parenting and of parental involvement practices in Britain comments on the similarity of provision to that which was in place a decade earlier. Pugh et al highlight the variety of organisations operating informal drop in parent and toddler groups, indicating the low level of involvement of health visitors, schools and community workers and that the majority of groups were being run by parents for parents through the PLA and National Childbirth Trust, both voluntary organisations. They also highlight the high proportion of religious organisations participating in this area. Pugh et al. (1995) point to the increasing appearance of self supporting discussion groups alongside parent and toddler groups when crèches were available, and the potential benefit of reducing parents’ feelings of inadequacy “brought on by professionals, politicians, magazines and neighbours who seem to know all the answers” (Pugh et al., 1995. p.164). Pugh et al. also report the PLA proposing the introduction of a training programme for those leading parent and toddler groups, but specific training for group leaders is something that is still not visible in the data collected for this thesis, suggesting that this has been an area receiving less attention than the general childcare workforce over the last decade of change in children’s services. However, Pugh et al. (1995) point to the lack of co-ordination of policy at a national level, increased pressures on mothers’ time and the fragmented development of services. These comments reflect growing concerns resulting from an increased understanding of the potential impact of parental involvement on the long term achievement of children. The Start Right Report (Ball, 1994) featured reports from the Perry Preschool Programme of effects through to the

age of 27 that drew the attention of a wide audience to this issue. The comments reflected the fact that through the 1990s the parenting and labour force demographics were clearly forming new patterns of more common maternal return to work and the increasing use of childcare putting increased pressure on the human resources for maintaining and sustaining parent and toddler groups, with parents having less time to attend, organise and run such venues.

Ten years ago we commented on the fact that very few of those working with families have, through their training, an experience of seeing families as a whole, tending to focus either on some members -usually the children- or on pathology and dysfunction. Although in the time available to us we have not been able to investigate developments in training, we believe that this is still an area of concern and that some voluntary agencies have made greater progress in developing appropriate training than statutory agencies. It is important that family workers have skills enabling, facilitating, listening, communicating and handling sensitive issues, and that they are aware of how their own attitudes, values and feelings will have an impact on the families with whom they work. (Pugh et al., 1995, p.223)

Pugh's comments also draw attention to the relatively low level of government led activity at that time and the relatively narrow focus of this support, a situation that changed considerably in the following 10 years.

### **3.2 Parent and toddler groups 1997 to 2010**

In 1997 The New Labour government quickly moved to develop a National Childcare Strategy (DFES, 1997) for England that sought to increase the availability of early education places first for all four year olds and then for all three year- olds whose parents required a place. This to some extent weakened parent and toddler provision in the voluntary groups supported by PLA by reducing the number of children who might access the groups, and more significantly reducing the number of parents who might access the groups and develop over time into leaders within groups.

Sure Start local programmes (Glass, 1999, Weinberger et al., 2005) initiated in 1998 sought to offer an enhanced programme of support for the families of children under five in the 10% most disadvantaged electoral wards. Most Sure Start Local programmes shared some targets with the National Childcare Strategy such as

developing preschool and childcare places, in order to support parents returning to work in order to reduce poverty and thereby increase children's prospects and material well-being (Needham, 2007). Sure Start local programmes (SSLPs) also had health targets focused on reducing infant referrals to hospital, supporting parents with young families to quit smoking, and a remit to protect children through early interventions in family and behaviour support strategies. Parent and toddler groups although a regular feature of SSLPs were not a part of government target-setting in the first ten years of the childcare strategy.

The development of Sure Start led to a surge of professional interest in parent support programmes (Needham, 2007, Nutbrown et al., 2005, Parents as Partners in Early Learning, 2007). Weinberger, Pickstone and Hannon (2005) illustrate ways in which the government's Sure Start policy led to the development of an increased quantity and variety of activities intended to increase parents' awareness of the importance of the nurture of children during these initial years. They present evidence of the low level of some parents' participation in play with children. They identified a lack of awareness of the importance of play and stimulation particularly with very young children and discuss how some parents responded to a 12 week course based on the Webster-Stratton approach to social interactions (Drake, 2005). Drake's study shows how such courses can be influential not only on behaviour management strategies but also upon the time parents spent engaged with their children.

As part of the government funded National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS), Anning, Chesworth and Spurling (2005) identified the progress made by Sure Start local programmes (SSLPs) in improving access to early learning play and childcare in areas of disadvantage. They identified informal drop-in 'stay and play' sessions as gateways to encouraging parents to access other services. However they suggest that SSLP managers were less likely to see stay and play learning as exploratory practices and identify that "in some services there appeared to be insufficient emphasis on children's cognitive development, with the bias being towards support for parents and enhancing parent child relationships" (Anning et al., 2005, p.1). They identify high quality services offering weekly opportunities for parents and young babies to engage in play experiences. These were intended to support the sharing of information on

children's learning between parent and practitioners, as well as to enrich the relationship between parent and child. They also highlighted the need for settings to show that they value home cultures and competencies. Ball and Niven (2005) highlight some differences in SSLPs over the connection between home visiting and outreach services, indicating that some stay and play groups are considered outreach where they are offered away from a central Sure Start location (Ball & Niven, 2005). Anning et al (2005) express the view that non-purpose built accommodation can compromise the quality of play experiences, particularly outdoor play. They identify that 30% of families with the Local Programme areas accessed services in the programmes sampled and suggest that a close association between Sure Start, play and other fun activities is "the best vehicle for outreach to families" (Anning et al., 2005, p.1).

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed competing social pressure for parents to return to work clash with concerns about disruptive children and their childhoods (Palmer, 2007). Issues of safety and protection from 'stranger danger' increasingly came into conflict with the concerns over lack of exercise, adventurous play and the collapse of community and social skills (Palmer, 2007). This has created increasing pressure for play spaces that are perceived to be social and 'safe' for young children, criteria that parent and toddler groups appear to meet. The more recent parent and toddler reviews (Parents as Partners in Early Learning, 2007), reflect on this increasing provision and professional involvement, highlighting tensions and changes in how to approach parent and toddler groups.

Following the Children Act (DCSF, 2004), Local authorities now had a direct responsibility for children's services and appointed officers to develop parental involvement more systematically. The act set in place a range of early intervention processes linked to interagency support for parents intended to promote social and emotional well-being targets for children as part of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda (Needham, 2007). The Every Child Matters agenda has also widened state participation in parent and toddler group provision and parents have become less visible although still important in organising provision for themselves. The state and media increasingly identified appropriate and inappropriate parenting behaviours (Marshall, 2007). There remains a tightrope to be walked for those supporting parents'

groups between discouraging parents from using them, empowering parents and making parents feel inadequate. While many parent and toddler groups are managed by parents with few funds in shared facilities promoting parents as self regulating actors, the development of children's centres initially in areas of disadvantage is offering more attractive and more 'professionalised' institutions. This is a very significant issue in the framing of relationships and interactions in the activity of parent and toddler groups, and many professional leaders are concerned to avoid disempowering parents.

While a great deal took place to restructure children's services in the period 1997 to 2010 under the auspices of the New Labour government (Needham, 2007), there has been a much slower shift in the co-ordination of parenting support compared to the development of childcare services. The survey carried out as part of this thesis suggests that many groups in 2007 (see Chapter Five) were very similar to those described by Pugh et al. and the PLA in the early 1990s, and were still run on a voluntary basis as a social meeting point for parents and children. The survey also confirms the trend identified by Pugh et al. (1995) towards some groups having a greater focus on parenting skills and a greater proportion of trained staff, particularly in the Surestart Children's Centre context. Similarly the trend identified by Pugh et al. (1995) regarding fewer mothers having time for such activities continues to be an issue. The increase in childcare and the discourse of "work life balance" mean that many parents and an increasing proportion of mothers are not free to attend groups with their children. According to the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) 25% of mothers in Western Europe return to work before the child's first birthday. However as the child gets older, considerable variation emerges across countries: 50% of UK mothers are working by the time the child is two years old; in Ireland this figure is reached when children are three and in Italy when children are four (ISER, 2006).

Studies in New Zealand highlight the reduction in parental involvement at all levels of education from 1990 to 1999, suggesting a halving of numbers of parents being involved with school activities (Biddulph et al., 2003). Such a pattern is likely to be less severe with children under three and this serves to emphasize the value of offering activities for parents with their children before the pressures for the parent to return to work have reached a zenith.



The first English Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007) placed emphasis on steps to develop further the involvement of parents in education services.

Partnership with parents is a unifying theme of the children's plan. Early years settings, primary schools and the best secondary schools have done much to work with parents and involve them in their children's education, however we have further to go to deliver our vision for all parents. (p.8)

The plan pledged £30m over three years to provide more family learning which will help parents and carers develop skills and learn with their children in schools. In relation to educational learning, the Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007) makes a commitment to the then recently defined foundation stage (0-5) as a "preparation for success in school,"(p55) and this would require further development of Children's Centres including "a fresh impetus on improving quality and supporting parents and providing help to those who need it most" (p.55). There was also a pledge to increase outreach work and clarify whether outreach refers to home visits or services such parent and toddler groups which are not childcare services.

In relation to pedagogy parent and toddler groups were in theory already encompassed within both the Birth to Three Matters non- statutory guidance (DFES 2002) and the statutory 0-5 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (QCA, 2000). The revised Foundation Stage, statutory from 2008 (DCSF 2007), sought to harmonise learning guidance for all children under five (see Chapter 1.4). While the EYFS documentation is quite accessible in some ways, being simply worded, set out in poster format and with attractive illustrations, it still clearly addresses the practitioner as the reader. The absence of parent and toddler groups examples within the Foundation Stage guidance may suggest that outreach parent and toddler groups could be more fully integrated alongside other early education services. Such documents might benefit further those working with parents by including more examples involving parents. This exemplifies parent and toddler groups' low level of visibility in government policy and in educare literature suggest a lower level of priority compared to 'interventions' in parenting programmes and childcare which work with the child and parent separately.

It is interesting to compare the English context to that of New Zealand where an increase in parent/whānau-led services including Playcentres with high levels of parental involvement in delivery of a pedagogic programme with 1:1 ratios for children under 2.5 years and Playgroups has been noted (Mitchell et al., 2006). Playgroups are “community-based non-profit making early childhood centres where groups of parents and children meet regularly with the purpose of providing early childhood care and education for the children and families attending” (Robinson 2002 p9). Such groups have been supported by government funding since 1974 and are supported by the Early Childhood Development Unit which is part of the Ministry of Education, offering groups information booklets, training and local and regional coordination with 20% of two year olds attended such groups in 2001 (Robinson, 2002). They offer sessions for parent and child together, a forum which is particularly popular with ethnic minority families where home language and culture can be extended into a more public sphere. Issues of quality of experience are highlighted by Robinson (2002) who points out that these are not a substitute for Early Education and Childcare centres. Mitchell et al. (2006) point to benefits to parents socially and in terms of understanding learning. However these groups were not highly rated with regard to “interactions between adults and children in which adults extend or scaffold children’s thinking and learning dispositions (and this way develop them)” (p.12).

In England the state is maintaining a low level of intervention with the day to day running of most groups and with many groups still in the voluntary sector supported by the PLA. However the pressures on mothers to return to work may reduce the organisational capacity as well as the take-up of parent and toddler group provision. The PLA’s website offers far less immediate access to parent and toddler group information compared to Playgroup Australia’s website, which is also supported by the Australian government. This site offers a clear, easily located, welcoming website for parents indicating how to join and set up groups for parents and children to play together (Playgroup Australia, 2009).

### 3.3 Encouraging the take-up of provision

Parent and toddler groups in Sure Start services are usually universal provision offering a non stigmatised service and therefore potentially a range of parenting models, matching the type of provision that many parents said they would like (Anning, 2005). The models are intended to promote a positive self image to parents as proactive and not reliant on professionals. The participation of a professional leader should offer greater scope to include vulnerable parents and to identify and support parenting needs. In practice this may be a fine line to tread and practitioners may need to balance a range of parents' needs and wishes for greater and lesser guidance (Wheeler & Connor, 2006). A parental survey from a particular Sure Start programme evaluation including 20 parents from one parent and toddler group (Davies & Thurston, 2005) draws attention to comments typified by the following comment 'Finding it difficult to find toddler group, all seem cliquey and often parents don't watch children, i.e. (name of toddler group). Toddler groups should be run by qualified people, not parents.' (Davies et al., 2005, p.31). This exemplifies Anning et al.'s (2005) point regarding the need for inclusive practices to be incorporated into provision.

The historical development of services in England has set the parent and toddler group apart from the professional domains of childcare and education in England over the past 20 years. Parent and toddler groups are predominantly a voluntary provision with a high degree of parental participation (Pugh, 1995). The PLA documents describe the often forgotten issues of organising and paying for venues, co-ordinating staff, checking staff and clearly indicating the need for parents to participate in the running and organisation of the group to keep costs affordable (PLA, 1995). All these can be very empowering tasks for community groups. The professionally 'supported' groups have trained staff and therefore organisational issues around venue become less visible to parents; however, this may detract from a sense of community endeavour (Needham, 2007). The voluntary group offers parents opportunities that affirm their self-motivation and organisational competence. The introduction of the professional potentially takes a strand of empowerment and affirmation away in relation to division of roles within the group. It may also create a tension between 'expert' professionals and parents with the potential to undermine the 'good enough'

parenting identities of those attending the groups. Finally problems may arise from an obscuring professionalised language. Professionals leading supported Parent and Toddler groups appear sensitive to these issues of potentially alienating parents and urge others to work to empower parents (Whalley & the Pen Green Team, 2007).

The limited literature on parent and toddler group provision suggests that this type of service is very popular with clients and from the perspective of interviews with existing users, the research does not highlight strong barriers to communication between parent and practitioner stakeholders. Wathall (2003) writing from a parent's perspective following experience in peer consulting on the development of Sure Start services in Birmingham in the late 1990s, identifies a number of parents perceiving the need for more parent and toddler provision. However she also highlights a lack of information and awareness of what was actually available (Wathall, 2003). Wathall writes that at the age of 37 as a first time parent she found parenting very hard in terms of knowing what to do and coping physically and emotionally with her changed role and new isolation, despite attending an antenatal group and reading lots of information. Similarly Anning et al (2005) identify parents reporting that they valued practitioners who established positive, respectful relationships with them and their children. They valued services that provided opportunities for children to learn and socialise and services that enabled them to enjoy activities with their children. They preferred to access advice about parenting in a non-stigmatised setting. They valued services giving them the chance to make friends, which empowered them to move on and set up their own networks of support.

Attendance at groups for most parents is entirely voluntary although some might be encouraged or compelled to attend by social workers. Grimshaw and Maguire (1998) identify that half of the parents they surveyed wanted to access a parenting programme before their child reached the age of three, although they also identify that parents needed programmes to be clearly relevant to their own children and that parents will adapt and modify what they receive to their own perceived needs (Grimshaw & Maguire, 1998).

An in depth study of 19 women explored the reasons why some women did not take up early interventions for their children (Barlow et al., 2004). The researchers set out

seven factors in the women's choices: where the women did not agree with the professional who had referred them to the early intervention service; where women were not motivated by the way the service was presented; where women felt they had other more pressing needs; where women did not feel what was on offer was appropriate to their needs; where women did not feel comfortable sharing personal information with professionals; where women felt they already had the support they needed from other formal or informal services.

Concerns about the take up of Early Years services particularly by families from disadvantaged groups with children under three continue to arise. Initial evaluations of the pilot funding targeted at offering early educational experiences to the under threes in disadvantaged areas (Smith et al., 2009) showed that although the take up of free childcare places was high where information is carefully targeted, only 41% of those surveyed used the other types of service offered by the delivery centres. This suggests that persuading many target families to participate in parent and toddler groups might be problematic, an issue which is developed further in the following sections.

### **3.4 Examples of parenting provision in England.**

The Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PPEL) programme brought together a consortium team from the National Children's Bureau and Camden Local Authority to develop materials to support local authorities in developing parental support programmes. The project began in October 2006 with an initial baseline audit of policy and practice across 150 local authorities (LAs) in England (Parents as Partners in Early Learning, 2007). This initial audit identified good practice and led to a two day training package delivered nationwide with funding from the Department for Children, Schools and Families for orientating staff to working with parents. Together with funding and resource issues, the review identified problems of educational jargon leading to communication gaps. Most significantly for this thesis, the report identifies a number of concerns related to supporting children's learning within the services available to support parenting with children under five.

Insufficient parental (and some practitioner) knowledge and understanding of the value of play or how activities shared with their children can benefit their children's learning.

Unrealistic parental (and some practitioner) expectations for children – typically expectations of children from deprived backgrounds that are too low and expectations of children from more affluent areas that over-emphasise specific aspects of learning such as literacy and numeracy.

Parents' limited knowledge and understanding of the importance of their role in their children's learning.

Insufficient practitioner knowledge and understanding of the importance of parental involvement in children's learning. This also extends to the skills and knowledge required to communicate and work with parents effectively. This key Continuing Professional Development (CPD) issue was identified consistently across the audited LAs.

The poor levels of educational achievement and skills development of some parents – resulting in a mistrust of education and difficulties in engaging with the education process on behalf of their children.

A knowledge deficit in some groups of parents for example, little knowledge of the importance of children's games, nursery rhymes, and traditional stories in developing children's learning.

A lack of knowledge of the local educational opportunities available for them and their children. (PPEL, 2007, p.6)

These issues draw attention to the role that parents decide to assign to themselves in supporting children's learning. It is suggested that play is not perceived by some to be a valuable developmental tool. A concern is raised in the PPEL report that in interactions, adults were drawing children's, attention towards literacy and numeracy activity, rather than wider learning and communication skills (Wheeler & Connor, 2006). The need for more specialised training for those working with parents is also clearly emphasised, which led into a government funded nationally offered Parents as Early Years and Learning (PEAL) training programme for those practitioners working with parents in 2007-2008. This programme focused on relationships between the practitioner and the parents, looking at the importance of the parents, parents' needs, respectful relationships and partnership working. However, PEAL did not focus directly on the interactions between parent and child but signposted practitioners to a range of other training organisations.

Before considering these organisations it is helpful to identify and classify different types of parenting programme. Epstein identifies a typology for parental involvement in schools with five main types:

- a. Parenting skills, child development and home environment for learning
- b. Communications from school to home,
- c. Parents as volunteers in school,
- d. Involvement in learning activities at home,
- e. Decision making leadership and government. (Epstein, 1987)

This typology, while not entirely appropriate to parenting programmes, offers a good reference point. The programmes that are to be considered should all fall into type 'a', however there is a need to consider how the role of the parent is framed within this type of programme. A 2002 study (Miller & Sambell, 2002) noted that in seven focus group interviews with a total of 37 women they identified three types of programme based from the perspective of the parent's choice.

the dispensing model: Parent asks 'What can I do to change my child?'  
 the relating model: parent asks 'how do I feel about this situation?'  
 the reflecting model: Parent asks why is this happening? (Miller and Sambell, 2002, p.36)

This research clearly illustrates parents' awareness that the nature of the purpose of participation affects the appeal of the programme with different parents opting for different preferences depending on their needs at different times.

This suggests therefore that within Epstein's single type there is a need to identify further sub-categories to explore the nature of the parent's involvement in the programme. The following adaptations are suggested as a framework for classifying parent and toddler group formats.

- Parents as students in a study group without children
- Parents learning through osmosis in a play scenario
- Parents as understudies participating in professionally led activities
- Parents as partners in joint activity
- Parents as managers of a play scenario consulting professionals

With regard to the first of the above formats, that of a study group, there are a number of courses such as the Webster Stratton Programme and the Parents as First Teachers (PAFT) 'The Incredible Years' course which have been widely used by Sure Start local programmes (Weinberger et al., 2005, Wheeler & Connor, 2006). These are short courses for parents that introduce them to an overview of child development, learning and behaviour. These may be linked to element one in Epstein's model, since crèche facilities are provided and adults are enabled to receive and discuss information in adult only groups. These types of programme may often be run alongside parent and toddler groups but are not directly connected to them. They do not form part of this study directly although it would be interesting to explore the overlapping effect of attending both types of group. The numbers of parents in the parent and toddler groups included in the present study who attended both was so small as to discourage this line of investigation. The impression received from the present study's survey and each of the case study settings, was that some parent and toddler groups had sister groups, and that these groups were targeted at younger and less experienced parents or those where a specific need is perceived. If this targeted approach is more widespread then there may be issues arising around the stigmatising of groups and the potential non inclusion or inappropriate inclusion of families is possible. This is an area where more research is urgently needed.

### **3.5 'Supported' Parent and Toddler Groups**

In relation to parenting programmes that involve parents learning with their children there are a number of organisations with training capacity and experience which have offered a lead in developing and delivering such groups. Pen Green and Thomas Coram are both long established children's centres offering training and literature on working with parents (Whalley & the Pen Green Team, 2001, Pugh, 2002); Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) developed more recently from a Sure Start Local Programme to become a trainer and provider of materials for parent and toddler groups (Evangelou et al., 2007). These organisations have developed models of parenting support programmes that align very closely with the parent and toddler group template. These consist of sessions where parents and children stay together in sessions and are encouraged to share experiences and learn from each other. Most



parent and toddler groups would fit into Epstein's second scenario where parents are able to see a range of other children and parents being together in the context of play and activity. However, the groups reported in the case studies in Chapter Five often blended the possible styles of delivery derived from Epstein's model, with practitioners adopting different roles at different times, but often with a view to encouraging parents to learn from each other rather than always adopting an expert leading role.

Pen Green Children's Centre developed from a Nursery centre to an Early Excellence Centre (Bertram et al., 2002) offering integrated early education, childcare and family services to a local community. Pen Green along with 100 other such pilot centres became the model for Children's Centres which were intended to be universally accessible by 2010. In this expanding climate of professionally managed and government funded children's centres, practice at Pen Green has been at the forefront of Children's Centre leadership (Whalley & the Pen Green Team, 2007). Tait outlines Pen Green's core offer to parents and children under three which is called 'Growing Together' (Tait, 2007). This offers;

- To give parents a chance to play with their child;
- To help parents understand more about their relationship with their child;
- To dialogue with parents about their children's development;
- To encourage reflective parenting (through reflecting on video material)
- To facilitate parent to parent support
- To validate the feeling women are experiencing, when they suffer from post natal depression
- To reinforce helpful attachment experiences.

(Tait, 2007, p.142)

Tait (2007) describes the Pen Green centre's approach to developing a parent and toddler group and emphasises the development of a caring responsive relationship. The team at the Pen Green centre have been particularly influential during the last decade with regard to parental involvement in early education. Their documented practice illustrates how involving parents as co-educators and researchers in the investigation of their children's learning can have positive impacts on the interactions between parent and children as well as between parents and practitioners, emphasising a cognitive as well as caring dimension to the parents' role (Whalley & the Pen Green

Team, 2001). It is interesting to note that while Pen Green emphasises *support for the parent child relationship* they also focus relationship development around understanding the child's cognitive development, a possible weakness identified by Anning et al's study in relation to the support offered by some centres. Tait proceeds to highlight how video and discussion has been harnessed to raise awareness of the emotional and responsive nature of parent child relationships. Nevertheless, the weekly one and a half hour session with preschool type activities for toddlers is still present and very much in line with activities for children offered by earlier parent and toddler groups.

The survey of parent and toddler group provision in the West Midlands conducted in 2007 (reported in Chapter Five of this thesis) suggested that one in five of the groups contacted were developing a model of professionally facilitated group with aims similar to that of the Pen Green example. It is this type of group that this thesis focuses upon. Jackson (2010) reports a rapidly developing model of 'supported' playgroups in Australia with professionals taking a more direct leading role in supporting parent led playgroups. The term 'supported' is adopted from the Australian context to distinguish the nature of the case studies considered in this thesis from other types of parent and toddler groups.

This chapter has already reported much of the available literature on parent and toddler group provision in England from the Sure Start evaluations and from specific provision such as Pen Green(Whalley & the Pen Green Team, 2007), Sheffield (Weinberger et al., 2005) and some international commentaries on provision. There has been very little systematic research on the range, effectiveness or nature of parent and toddler groups during the development of the present study, hence the perceived need to precede its detailed case studies with a survey that sets them within a broader regional context. The most notable exception is the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP).

PEEP is an example of a programme which potentially offers scope for each of the categories derived from Epstein's model: parents as students in a lecture scenario, learning through osmosis in a play scenario, as understudies participating in professionally led activities, as partners in joint activity, and as managers of a play scenario consulting professionals. Parents retain primary responsibility; practitioners

receive some training and guidance. PEEP draws heavily on the ORIM framework (Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan, 2005) encouraging parents to reflect on how everyday activity present ‘opportunities’ to develop key activities, ‘recognising’ and celebrating children’s achievements, ‘interaction’ that “supports, endorses and challenges” and the ‘modelling’ of activities by parents for children.

The ORIM framework was developed with particular attention given to literacy as part of the REAL project (Nutbrown et al., 2005), and as such the model relates to adults demonstrating to their children places in their daily lives where they read and write: lists, signs, packets, not just books and magazines. The PEEP project pays particular attention to pre-reading skills around story and rhyme sharing, but suggests applying the ORIM framework to a wider variety of activity supporting language and learning. PEEP began with a cluster of groups in Oxford and offered two core elements: group times and home visiting, split into Early PEEP age groups (0-2’s) and Foundation PEEP for children aged three and four (PEEP, 2007, Evangelou, Brooks and Smith, 2007). PEEP group sessions included Circle Time, Talking Time (discussion amongst parents), Story Time, Book Sharing, Borrowing Time and suggestions for games and activities to do at home.

Evaluations of the core PEEP groups (Evangelou et al., 2007) demonstrated that the PEEP programme made significant impacts on the rating of adult child interactions and on a range of literacy skills. Evangelou et al (2007) also identify an effect in a wider community space including those not attending sessions, suggesting the importance of outreach work, influence through pre-schools, schools and word of mouth. PEEP has been delivering training to groups involved in working with parents and young children since 2004 (PEEP, 2008) and now delivers training on their approach and materials nationwide.

Share a learning project run by ContinYou and funded by DCSF was originally focused on schools offering activities for parents to try at home with their children. This project was extended to foundation stage classes in 2002 and was positively evaluated (Siraj-Blatchford & McCallum, 2004) with regard to the provision of quality materials for use at home to support learning.

Children benefited greatly from being part of Share. Because the materials were good, children had fun, enhanced their learning and added to their play repertoire. Parents saw that Share had a positive impact on their children’s

basic and social skills, and on their disposition to learn (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2004, p.12)

The report identifies six models of delivery which tend to focus on practitioner to parent input and the report recommends more attention be offered to the training of staff and the development of models that include children, parent and practitioner together in order to develop greater awareness of the style of conducting activities with children.

Professionals delivering parent and toddler groups are faced with making difficult decisions on the balance of approaches to adopt: how much guidance to offer, how to offer guidance, whether to concentrate on supporting the parent or the child. There is not sufficient space in this thesis to examine all of these issues. The importance of offering support for the parents' self esteem, emotional well being and bonding with their child are clearly extremely important and connected issues (Jackson, 2006). Although the next section of this chapter examines the potential barrier between professional discourse and parents because of the focus of the thesis discussion will concentrate on interaction with regard to early education.

### **3.6 Barriers to communication regarding pedagogy between parents and practitioners**

The preceding chapters have illustrated some of the potential for professional uncertainty about how to support young children's learning. This section will illustrate some of the potential barriers to communication between professionals and parents. It considers the nature of the relationship between those developing parenting support programmes and those participating in them. This is set in the context of the revised Children's Centres strategy and the incorporation of the Birth to Three Matters into the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) from 2008, including the emphasis on parental involvement in learning in the accompanying Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme (EYQISP) documentation (DCSF, 2008b).

There are a number of sociological investigations that highlight potential barriers to communication in parent-child-professional interactions. Several of these studies

employ Bourdieu's ideas of social and cultural capital and the notion of habitus linked to Vygotskian perspectives on learning. These studies identify the importance of class and ethnicity as components of personal and cultural identity that should be kept in mind when considering the range of influences on the sociocultural practices in the parent and toddler group context. Bourdieu (1997) argues that the process of education is bound up with the transmission of cultural capital. He identifies three forms of cultural capital: embodied cultural capital relating to the knowledge and skills embodied in the person and habitus of the individual; objectified cultural capital such as books and artefacts; and institutionalised capital founded in the grouping of people by the processes of education they have undertaken and marked by qualifications (Bourdieu, 1997). Bourdieu shared the sociocultural theorists' interest in how individual agency is shaped in interaction with society (Hedegaard, 2001), although he considered wider social attitudes values and structures. The descriptions of cultural and social capital and of habitus developed by Bourdieu are helpful because they capture the sense in which individual agency is regulated by cultural context in a variety of ways.

The habitus, as the word implies, is that which one has acquired, but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions. So the term constantly reminds us that it refers to something historical, linked to individual history, and that it belongs to a genetic mode of thought, as opposed to essentialist modes of thought. (Bourdieu, 1993, p.86 cited in Connolly, 2004, p.84.)

The research reported in this thesis focuses particularly on the framing of interaction around endorsing particular modes of engaging with learning materials. This emphasises how culture might apply not simply to the cultural worth of specific items of knowledge but to the ways of engaging with knowledge. It suggests how children might be inducted into habits of engagement in educational activity from a very early point.

Bourdieu (1991) discusses the often hidden and unconscious processes in the formation of habitus:

the distinctiveness of symbolic domination lies precisely in the fact that it assumes, of those who submit to it, an attitude which challenges the usual dichotomy of freedom and constraint. The choices of the habitus are accomplished without consciousness or constraint, by virtue of the dispositions which although they are undoubtedly the product of social

determinisms are also constituted outside the spheres of consciousness and constraint (Bourdieu, 1991, p.51)

Again the research presented in Chapters Six and Seven of this thesis takes a section through children's everyday experience of a particular type of activity to ask how this might influence their thinking. It is beyond the scope of the present study to explore in depth the range of attitudes and values held by parents with regard to learning. The case studies of interactions presented in Chapters Six and Seven focus on attitudes specific to a particular learning context and the learning habits that seem to exist there.

The following studies are helpful in presenting findings about the potential of cultural differences to influence learning approaches.

Brooker (2002) describes and analyses home and school pedagogies, keeping in mind ethnic and class backgrounds; She notes that while she finds no evidence of the effects of school cultures and the regulative and instructional discourses of the Reception class on individual pupils, it is strongly suggested that;

The apparently weak classification and framing of the school's curriculum and pedagogy (and, implicitly, its child-centred and family-friendly practices) conceal a strongly framed set of rules which will not be equally easy for all children to access. In particular, these rules emphasize children's learning, rather than a teacher's duty to instruct (Brooker, 2002, p.88)

Brooker's chief concluding concerns are that schools may not be doing enough to make their pedagogic beliefs clear to parents nor doing enough to inform themselves about parents' pedagogic beliefs. In relation to a sample of eight 'Anglo' mothers she comments

Family activities, similarly, tend to be planned to maximise children's interests and enjoyment. Those mothers who do not actually participate in their children's play tend to believe, slightly guiltily, that they ought to; both literally and intellectually they feel an obligation to get down to the child's level, and to acknowledge the child's point of view. While none of the mothers report receiving this kind of attention from their own parents, they have acquired these socially approved attitudes from professional and media sources and the culture at large (Lightfoot and Valsiner, 1992) (Brooker, 2000, p.148)



Brooker goes on to illustrate how in a sample of Bengali parents there was a tendency to expect higher ratios of teaching to play in Reception classes compared to white working class families but that some of these families also had reservations about the amount of play.

While Brooker's comments relate to induction into school, similar tensions between practitioners' and parents' perspectives are also visible in the writing of the Pen Green team. In relation to supporting parents in pre-school sessions Whalley (2007) sets out a model of effective pedagogical strategies:

Staff at staff meetings extended their understanding of subtle intervention through discussion of Bruner's concept of 'scaffolding learning' (Bruner 1977), Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) and Bruce's concept of 'match plus one' (Bruce, 1977). We shared the view with parents that an overzealous focus on teaching could inhibit the children's learning. What worked best for children was an approach that combined observation, subtle intervention and reflection. (Whalley et al., 2007, p.72)

This highlights the potential for disagreement about the role of the adult in supporting learning, with particular regard here to overly directive adult interventions in children's play and activity. The section specifically on parenting children under three in 'playing together' sessions focuses on a closeness of relationship. The concept of companionship suggesting "responsive reciprocal relationship" (p.144). This suggests an ethos of "playing alongside" (p.85) supporting and sharing children's discoveries similar to that identified in some practitioner perspectives described by Pramling-Samuelsson et al. (2009).

Lareau, originally writing in the USA in 1987, presents a valuable insight into the nature of parent-school partnerships, comparing two schools with contrasting middle class and working class catchment areas (Lareau, 1997). Lareau sets out to consider how Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital might inform the analysis of these two schools' interaction with families. Lareau illustrates how not only the quantity but the quality of interaction differs between the schools and the parents. Lareau comments that in the past the general expectation would have been to leave the education of the child to the school, but a revised educational view emphasising the role of parents in the cognitive development of their children may be disadvantaging the working class children, as their parents respond to this change differently from middle class parents.

In the working-class community, parents turned over the responsibility for education to the teacher. Just as they depend on the doctor to heal their children, they depend on teachers to educate them. In the middle class community, however parents saw education as a shared enterprise and scrutinised, monitored and supplemented the school experience of their children (Lareau, 1997, p, 712)

Lareau draws attention to the comparatively less frequent and shorter spoken interactions between staff and parents in the working class context. She highlights expectations about work ending as the child leaves the school premises, and greater awareness of the groups and activities taking place within the school. Lareau also points to middle class parents having more flexibility and educational experience to support their children's learning.

The development of parent and toddler groups represents the type of activity identified by Lareau, educating and informing parents about the type of expectations that early educators are likely to have. They represent an important opportunity to learn more about expectations of parental partnership at a stage where educational subject knowledge is less important than attitude; where cognitive development is still primarily a parental role.

Reay (1998) explores the differences in approach among 33 mothers from different social class backgrounds to supporting their children at two London primary schools (Reay, 1998). Reay concludes that there were few differences in patterns of linguistic interaction between middle class and working class mothers but there were some significant qualitative differences indicating that working class mothers were:

Finding it difficult to assume the role of educational expert, they were less likely to persuade teachers to act on their complaints and were ill equipped financially, socially and psychologically to compensate for the deficits they perceived in their child's education (Reay, 1998, p.163).

Reay points to a reciprocity between middle-class homes and primary schooling suggesting that the middle class nature of schooling supports the cultural capital of middle-class homes to a greater extent than working class homes and vice versa.

These three studies are helpful in identifying the space for misalignments to occur between home cultures and school cultures. The parent and toddler group context is



not the same: the professionals operating the sessions are mostly not graduates and therefore class boundary markers may be less in evidence in these educational contexts, particularly as services are targeted jointly at parents and children. The issue of potential language and learning differences related to culture identified in these social cultural studies is clearly an area where the study of parent and toddler groups has potential to shine more light.

### **3.7 Comparing parents' and practitioners' perspectives on pedagogy**

This chapter has explored literature regarding early education and parent and toddler groups which suggests that more attention could be given to the practice of supporting cognitive development in parent and toddler groups. A key theme of this thesis is a consideration of the match between parents' and practitioners' views of learning. Chapter Two considered research into the types of interaction that seem to support the development of effective learning skills; I wish to refer to approaches such as these as pedagogies because they are grounded in theory and research and are applied by both practitioners and parents in a considered and purposeful way. Chapter Three has considered literature illustrating how parents and practitioners actually support children's learning. This review illustrates that amongst both parents and practitioners there is a wide range of awareness with some adults operating in an informed methodical way and some more on the basis of instinct and intuition. I wish to label these latter approaches as 'doxa'.

Bourdieu (1977) develops a very helpful analysis of 'doxa'. He defines doxa as;

systems of classification which reproduce in their own specific logic, the objective classes, i.e. the divisions by sex, age or position in the relations of production make their specific contribution to the reproduction of power relations of which they are the product, securing the misrecognition, and hence the recognition, of the arbitrariness on which they are based. (Bourdieu, 1977, p.164)

Bourdieu points to the fact that in most spheres there are common sense intuitive approaches to activities informed by previous experience. There may also be approaches to the same activity where professional ideologies guide practitioners on slightly different courses which sometimes may appear counter intuitive. Bourdieu is not suggesting that one is automatically superior to the other. Efficacy will depend on

the intended outcomes. There might be little difference in the way that pedagogy and doxa are enacted. Bourdieu suggests that doxa is only ever fully revealed when it is elaborated in the context of competing discourses (Bourdieu, 1977). In *The Logic of Practice* he elaborates the concept at length indicating how in the process of practice ideologies are mediated by habitus and field (Bourdieu, 1990). Thus in the context of supported parent and toddler groups adults teaching dispositions are influenced by their personality and experience regulated by the social context of the group.

Crossley (2005) points out that from Aristotle to Bourdieu the term doxa has not been used pejoratively. The term suggests that there can be truth in the sense that people perceive things to be such, but there may be deeper truths which lie hidden. The term doxa is present in orthodoxy: what is commonly held to be the case. This may be informed by experience but is contrasted with refined, philosophically processed knowledge (Crossley, 2005).

In a strikingly similar vein to Bourdieu's sociological critiques but from a sociocultural pedagogical perspective, Tharp and Gallimore (1988) draw attention to the failure of curricular changes to impact upon practice in the USA because of what they identify as a strong shared cultural construction of what 'school' is, and of the roles and rules for those involved in educational exchange. They argue that only through consistent challenge of the conceptions of traditional interactive processes through the actual practice of teaching and learning will change come about.

Alexander (2004) and Simon (1981) make similar critiques of English practice, suggesting that pedagogy is often misinterpreted in English and used to mean 'teaching', which may not be exploring fully the nature of the teaching learning relationship. Similarly Bruner (1996) discusses the notion of 'folk psychology' and 'folk pedagogy,' to mean culturally accepted views of the mind of the learner and the consequent nature of the relationship between teacher and learner.

From this work on folk psychology and folk pedagogy has grown a new, and perhaps even a revolutionary insight. It is this: in theorising about the practice of education in the classroom (or any other setting for that matter), you had better take into account the folk theories that those engaged in teaching and learning already have. For any innovations that you, as a "proper" pedagogical theorist, may wish to introduce will have to compete with, replace, or otherwise modify the folk theories that already guide both teachers and pupils. (Bruner, 1996, p.161)

The case studies of interactions in parent and toddler groups presented in part two of the thesis examine the praxis of parents and practitioners and compare this to how they conceive of their roles in supporting learning within the groups. This praxis is analysed with a view to identifying elements of pedagogy, particularly those outlined previously in Chapter Two, but also with a view to identifying elements of ‘doxa’ or accepted views of learning that might influence both parents and practitioners.

### 3.8 Summary of part one

Part one of this thesis, has suggested that traditional approaches to early education may have viewed children aged one to three years to be individual, independent explorers of material objects who construct reality through the systematic development of concepts of things and processes; they learn when challenges to their existing schema become apparent. The first part of this thesis has tried to suggest that while the child is to some extent an independent agent, there is increasing conviction in the literature that the child’s agency is shaped by social and emotional factors that also powerfully mediate cognitive development. This is a more complex idea to grasp, meaning that both parents and practitioners may need support in seeing the extent to which cognitive development is shaped by social context, expectations of role and involvement in social discourse; and that children are perhaps more ready and willing to engage on a more social footing in educational contexts than orthodoxy might suggest. As Edwards (2007) suggests, parents and practitioners may need support to reflect on the way that tools are not just there to be used but also may begin to shape us. Practitioners and parents may need help to realise that the processes of learning are as important, if not more important, than the content of learning at this stage of development.

This chapter has shown that there is relatively little literature specifically on the nature of interaction in parent and toddler groups as compared to home settings, or parents’ participation in early education settings. It has been suggested that the increasing state interest in early interventions is driving an expansion of professional activity in relation to the organisation of and support for parent and toddler groups. State interest has been led by research to focus on the home learning environment and

the interaction between mother and child in particular. However, influencing parents' interactions with children is clearly politically sensitive in both senses of the word. Accusations of 'nanny state' interference from media and political opposition (Wheatcroft, 2010) may engender some caution in developing parenting services that appear to target the HLE. This is compounded by the sensitivities in the developing relationships with between parents and professionals, and uncertainty in the developing discourses on parenting which may seem technical, confused and counter intuitive to many parents. Parent and toddler groups are being reshaped in this newly emerging context, as professionals establish new groups with attractive well resourced environments. Long established groups may be influenced if not taken over by this powerful agenda for change either by social pressure or by funding incentives. However it is also likely that even new groups will be influenced by their historical ancestors through the expectations of parents, leaders and resources. The mixing of professional and parental cultures and the cultural context for learning that they create is clearly an interesting but vast area for research particularly given some of the tensions between these two roles as highlighted in this chapter. The following research questions emerge from this analysis and have the potential to inform discussion regarding the nature of the teaching learning interactions that children are offered in parent and toddler groups.

***How do the adults in the parent and toddler group context interact with children to promote learning?*** Do adults encourage children to be independent investigators or social learners? Greater understanding of this question with regard to parent and toddler groups could help clarify expectations and roles and promote better understanding for those participating in and managing such groups. Therefore it is also important to ask: ***How do parents and practitioners conceive of their roles with regard to supporting learning in the settings?*** An exploration of parent and child activities within the parent and toddler group context may provide insights into whether such groups offer the potential to reduce or increase the achievement gap identified by Sammons et al (2007) as discussed in Chapter One.

Attempting to answer these research questions should be helpful to practitioners and parents by making the nature of interactions in parent and toddler groups and the way that they might influence learning more transparent. This could support discussion

and the sharing of ideas in order to identify where beneficial change might be possible.

The second part of this thesis develops the elements of learning interactions identified in part one and asks to what extent these are present in the interactions between adults and children in a sample of parent and toddler groups.

## Part II Case Studies of interaction in two parent and toddler groups

### Chapter 4

#### Data collection and analysis; principles and practice

##### 4.0 Epistemology and Socio-cultural Activity.

The theoretical framework for the present research draws from the sociocultural family of theories where knowledge is thought to be constructed by societies and to evolve through cultural-historical activity. Rogoff (1998) points out that the study of cognition as a collaborative activity is still emerging and developing from the foundations set out by Vygotsky and Leont'ev. Indeed several of the texts used to explain the methodology employed in the thesis have been published close to the completion of the project and are used to elaborate and reflect upon the framework set out by Rogoff (1998, 2003).

This first section of Chapter Four considers the nature of the sociocultural knowledge regarding interaction between adults and young children, before considering how such knowledge might be extended through the application of a sociocultural framework of investigation. Hedegaard et al. (2008) suggest that when studying social situations the traditional dominant scientific epistemology for constructing knowledge from objects and events is problematic. They argue that human activity is not purely logical but influenced by culturally and historically located belief. Sociocultural theories argue that the human environment is emotive, and that the combinations of elements that comprise a context have evolved through the history of human activity in that location and elsewhere. The contextual elements suggest responses to humans through their shape, texture and similarity to other contexts. *Activity* is therefore suggested as a fundamental unit of analysis of human behaviours as opposed to the individual components of the activity. Proponents of *activity theory* argue that it is activity or action in the world that has shaped and continues to shape the evolution of human concepts and ideas (Wertsch et al., 1984, Rogoff, 1998, Rogoff, 2003, Hedegaard,

2001, Hedegaard & Fler, 2008, Daniels, 2008). These ideas are engendered in the cultural practices of the environmental contexts that societies create. Hedegaard (2001) puts this very clearly

The historical concept of activity is found in the concept of tool/artefact and their procedures. Artefacts are the results of other humans' activity and the history of artefacts is embedded in its traditions for use. Further more, the process whereby an artefact/tool comes to play a role in a person's life requires that other persons demonstrate identify and pass on the procedures for using artefacts/ tools in their context for use. (Hedegaard, 2001, p.20)

Zinchenko, in reviewing the development of *theory* emerging from the work of Vygotsky, and those following, identifies two significant strands. Firstly ideas of 'social cultural learning' spear headed by Vygotsky himself, and second *activity* spearheaded by Alexei Leont'ev (Zinchenko, 1995). In cultural-historical psychology, mind is mediated by culture, whereas in the theory of activity, consciousness is mediated by tools. Zinchenko argues for the need to find ways of integrating these two perspectives and seeing them as complementary rather than antagonistic. This thesis explores such an approach, developing a view of the process of children's learning rooted in *socio-cultural activity theory*.

The view of knowledge as 'socially framed' set out philosophically by Marx and Engels was developed in a psychological framework by Vygotsky, Leont'ev and Luria in works published from the 1930s to the 1990s. Their ideas have been extended in a range of work on *Activity* that seeks to look not at the learner alone but at the learner as part of a system of mutually affective elements (Rogoff, 1998 Engeström, 1999, Hedegaard, 2001, Daniels, 2008). The set of approaches referred to as 'Activity Theory' share a focus on subject, object and mediating objects. Hedegaard sets out the central tenet of activity theory as viewing learning as the "appropriation of tool use and artefactual knowledge" (Hedegaard, 2001, p.15).

Cognition is analysable as distributed between individuals and between humans and their artefacts (Cole and Engeström 1993; Hutchins, 1994; Latour, 1987; Middleton and Edwards 1990; Resnick, Leving & Teasley, 1991.) Cognitive action incorporates the manipulation of artefacts and representational media in the communicative construction of socially intelligible meanings. The extent to which such action is termed private and "internal" mental process is a function of the manner in which individuals are located as participants in culturally mediated practices. (Engeström, 1996, p.4)



In the case of parent and toddler groups, children's orientations to objects of developmental/educational activity are being framed in interactions according to how those objects are presented to children. A key question for this thesis is: if, as identified in Chapter Two, effective interactive styles are identified which are related to conceptions of 'scaffolding' in the preschool context, then are such styles also relevant to the parent and toddler group context? If elements of these conceptions of scaffolding are relevant then it seems important to investigate if and how children are being initiated into the use of such modes of cognitive distribution. The term mode is used here to indicate the idea that different types of interaction represent ways of thinking and structuring joint activities. Such joint activity requires active engagement by both partners if it is to develop. Mercer's term *intermental thinking* draws attention to situations where several minds are meeting together in activity (Mercer, 2000, Mercer & Littleton, 2007) and the potential benefits of shared thinking.

The central research question becomes: How do people participate in sociocultural activity and how does their participation change from being relatively peripheral participants (cf. Lave and Wenger, 1991), observing and carrying out secondary roles, to assuming various responsible roles in the management or transformation of such activities? (Rogoff, 1998, p.695)

The present study seeks to identify the nature of the interactions in the parent and toddler groups studied as an indication of how children are being inducted into learning interactions and the extent to which they are guided to participate in learning through conversation and dialogue.

I have attempted to set out a justification for employing *Activity* as a unit of analysis for investigating the interaction between elements that represent key mediators of the educational process. I wish to suggest that the activity of parent and toddler groups is located at an intersection of different activities which are taken for granted as something children acquire: learning, *play*, and *socialisation*. 'Play' is the word often used within the parent and toddler groups and in related documentation but this may be taken for granted as a natural process led by the child, this is an argument developed in Chapter One. It is suggested that children are learning to use a variety of social tools within the parent and toddler group context such as questioning, sharing, playing and that the fundamental and flexible nature of these tools escapes immediate



attention. It has been suggested that the role and nature of the adult mediation of this activity may be less frequently in the mind of adults when interacting with children. Vygotsky's notion of social tools has been identified as being of particular value, and later chapters will develop the argument that, in the parent and toddler groups children are inducted into the use of a wide range of tools both physical and social. This induction is one of a range of contexts that will enable children to engage with increasingly sophisticated modes of learning.

#### 4.1 A methodological approach and appropriate research questions

Sociocultural approaches do not prescribe a particular set of methods (Rogoff, 1998)

Rogoff (1998) states that;

“sociocultural research emphasises both qualitative and quantitative approaches to understanding the meaning of events from a perspective that fits the practices of the community being studied and quantitative approaches can be useful in understanding patterns that appear across the case study settings.” (p.695)

What is important Rogoff argues is that they are exploring appropriate sociocultural research questions that examine how people participate in activity and how their participation changes over time, responding to various aspects of context.

The research questions of the present study are consistent with Rogoff's suggestions for appropriate sociocultural investigations, focusing how the adults and children are participating in the activities intended to promote learning in the settings.

##### **Research questions**

*How do the adults in the supported parent and toddler group context interact with children's activities to promote learning?*

*How do the parents and practitioners in these groups conceive of their roles with regard to supporting learning in the settings?*

*What patterns of collaborative learning are present in the groups?*

Consideration of these questions enables us to begin to consider how these interactions might shape the children's attitudes to learning in a social context.

The methods which follow are also consistent with Rogoff's suggestions, employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques to understand the patterns that appear across the case study settings.

## **4.2 Research Phase One: Using questionnaires to assess the nature of parent and toddler groups in the West Midlands.**

### ***4.2.1 Rationale***

In order to inform the selection of case studies it was important to reflect on the nature of the field and in the absence of literature on this topic it was decided that a survey of local provision would be helpful both for the identification and description of case study settings. The adapted typology, derived from Epstein, proposed in Chapter Three, was helpful in reflecting on selection criteria.

- Parents as students in a lecture scenario
- Parents learning through osmosis in a play scenario
- Parents as understudies participating in professionally led activities
- Parents as partners in joint activity
- Parents as managers of a play scenario consulting professionals

While these types were recognisable in preliminary visits to settings there was little research investigating the frequency of the different types. Similarly while various programmes have been identified in Chapter One the frequency, location and variation was not readily available. Likewise it was not clear to what extent the concepts of scaffolding, co-construction and metacognition form part of the orthodoxy of different groups. The initial phase of research, therefore, consisted of questionnaires to a sample of settings in order to be able to assess the context of parent and child groups more effectively.

Essential items for investigation in the research centred on the process of trying to support the parent in the development of fostering positive learning dispositions in the child. This became the primary objective of the questionnaires combined with an attempt to establish the level of awareness of the three key concepts, scaffolding co-

construction and metacognition in order to comment on the representativeness of the case studies selected in phase two. In broader and more factual terms practical information regarding the size of groups, the regularity and structure of meetings seemed to be an important first step in being able to select case studies. To this end a preliminary questionnaire was developed for a pre-pilot and trialled with a group of related parenting groups in one local authority. The questionnaire (see appendix 1) was designed to capture the names of settings, background of staff, and to gather an indication of named approaches being used. The questions sought to gain an indication of how settings approached interactions between children and parents without naming scaffolding, co-construction or metacognition. They were then asked specifically if they had encountered these terms in the final question. In order to try to suggest that they should not necessarily have heard the terms used it was indicated that they were recently developed terms and used in research. This was to try to encourage honest answers about the terms and not put people off returning the questionnaire by drawing attention to a knowledge gap.

Initially the intention was to distribute the questionnaire electronically however few of the pre-pilot group had regular and frequent access to an e-mail address and of 20 messages sent only four were returned. Likewise with paper versions to 20 people only two were returned. The information in the returns was as required confirming the appropriateness of the questions asked. The final question was reworded slightly to simplify reading. It was also decided to move to a pilot sample using posted hard copies of the questionnaire and to develop a sampled group using a telephone recruitment strategy and proactive follow up strategy in order to try to improve the return rate (de Vaus, 1996). This involved establishing contact details through the local authority Children's Information Service, contacting the settings by phone to ask permission to send the questionnaire. Stamped addressed return envelopes were included with each questionnaire. A reminder/thank you postcard was sent two to three weeks after the mailing of the questionnaire to all participants. A third mail out was sent after the initial data had been processed as a thank you to all settings. To settings who had not initially completed a response a duplicate copy of the questionnaire was included with a repeat request.

#### ***4.2.2 Sampling Strategy***

The sample targeted was parent and child groups meeting on a regular basis, for a minimum of once per month and consisted of a systematic purposeful and proportionate sample across five local authorities in the West Midlands. Firstly a target area was established taking the junction of the M6 and M54 as a central point and creating a 15 km radius catchment circle. This point just North of Wolverhampton enabled the sample to include an ethnically diverse conurbation area taking in Wolverhampton, Walsall, and Dudley, a rural section of Staffordshire and Shropshire as well as smaller towns such as Bridgnorth, Lichfield and Rugeley. A proportionate target number was shaped in relation to the number of registered groups in each local authority within the target area. A sample was then selected systematically (Robson, 2002) by selecting every other setting from the lists generated by the Childcare Link data base of parent and toddler groups. Preliminary telephone conversations identified 40 target settings representing 50% of the Children's Information Services (CIS) listed parent and toddler groups in the area who said that they were willing to participate in the survey. There are potentially other groups not wishing the detail to be made available or not registered with the CIS. The CIS managers suggested that this was not the case and that there were few unknown groups, although as was demonstrated in the course of the survey, groups do close down and new ones start on a fairly regular basis. These structured conversations yielded information on the management of the group and whether leaders were paid or voluntary, as well as establishing the most appropriate person to receive the questionnaire.

Records were kept of groups contacted and not responding at the initial stage of asking for agreement to participate or not returning completed surveys. Groups clearly addressing musical, storytelling or tumble tots single focus activities were not included. Groups only for children under 18 months were not included similarly; social groups without a specific learning-through-play agenda such as National Childbirth Trust groups were also eliminated from the questionnaire sample through initial telephone conversation sifting. Where a group did not meet the inclusion criteria it was replaced by the next nearest group on the list. Only a few of the groups called were not included mostly special issue groups such as tumble tots or purely social groups.

Questionnaires (appendix 1) were posted to selected settings and 20 responses were obtained. Missing responses are proportionate across voluntary and state provision, meaning that the sample does not appear to be obviously skewed out of proportion to the original sample. For the Dudley area, data protection agreements meant that the Children's Information Service applied the same sampling procedure to their list and mailed out to the settings without the initial telephone call. Forty letters were mailed and 11 returned. This sample is similar to the other local authority areas in the balance of voluntary and state led groups and in terms of leader training. The range of responses is also similar, and the telephone sample and data from the two samples is analysed together in the following sections

The mailing sample had the potential to yield information on 50% of the available provision in each authority across the sample area. The response rate was around 35% and represents about 20% of provision registered with the Children's Information Services.

#### ***4.2.3 Analysis of questionnaires***

The case studies questionnaires were used to sample parent and toddler group types in order to identify and locate case studies that were aiming to promote collaborative learning. These questionnaires were analysed using NVivo coding to identify and quantify common and exceptional responses (see appendix 1a).

### **4.3 Phase Two Case Studies of two parent and child groups.**

#### ***4.3.1 Ethnographic Case Study***

Ethnographic approaches feature strongly in Rogoff's 2003 text which seeks to illustrate how human development is influenced by different cultural practices in activities around the world and develop the methodological approach she set out in the 1990s.

moving from the individual to the activity as the unit of analysis has been informed by methodological approaches prevalent in disciplines other than psychology, notably ethnographic analyses and graphical analyses. (Rogoff, 1998, p.695)

Ethnographic case studies have been used in the present study in order to exemplify in some qualitative detail how cultural practices in supporting young children's learning might be similar and differentiated between individuals and groups.

Engeström (1999) suggests principles for research influenced by 'activity theory' which Daniels (2008) also supports. These principles are as follows.

1. Describe artefact mediated object orientated activity systems
2. Describe the multiple perspectives present in the system
3. Identify the historical background to the system
4. Identify contradictions within the system because these help to.....
5. Identify possibilities for change

These principles have already been utilised in the review of issues and concepts related to children's learning in parent and toddler groups developed in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis. The second part of the thesis seeks to apply these principles to the case study examples of parent and toddler groups.

In his earlier work Engeström reviews a range of research that seeks to apply activity theory to the investigation of working practices in different contexts (Engeström & Middleton, 1996). He characterises these works as "strips of discourse" embedded in thick ethnographic descriptions of the institutional setting and flow of work actions (Engeström 1996 p4). Engeström also draws attention to the value of highlighting the "multi-voicedness of work practices" (Engeström, 1996, p.5). This is the methodological approach that is adopted in the analysis of the case studies presented in the present thesis. The main research phase in this thesis is an analysis of two ethnographic case studies.

Fetterman (1989) describes ethnography as the art and science of describing a group or culture. Ethnography affords the researcher the opportunity to record the attitudes and dispositions of those involved in a specific context taking time to try to see things from their perspectives and to check their interpretations of what takes place in that context focusing on daily routines of people to identify patterns of behaviours (Fetterman, 1989). The purpose here is to describe the exchanges between several

*differently culturally enabled groups*; children, parents and early years practitioners.

Fetterman continues:

the ethnographer enters the field with an open mind, not an empty head, before asking questions in the field, the ethnographer begins with a problem, a theory or model, a research design, specific data collection techniques specific data collection techniques, tools for analysis and a specific writing style.  
(Fetterman, 1989, p.1)

Denscombe also characterises ethnography as attempting to examine and enter the culture of a group and endeavouring to present their perspectives on the activities they engage in (Denscombe, 2007). Denscombe also suggests that ethnographic accounts are recognised as an account constructed by the researcher and reflect something of the researcher and not a simple objective picture of the culture of the group studied. Such an ethnographic approach was deemed to be an appropriate because the research questions require an openness of mind towards the perspectives of the various stakeholders in the groups being studied. The purpose of the research was twofold: firstly to examine participants' perceptions of the activities taking place in the context of the parent and toddler groups in order to identify their implicit and explicit views of learning and epistemology. At the same time the study sought to compare these interactions between adults and children to elements of scaffolding, co-construction and metacognition. In order to balance these requirements a narrative observational approach was developed that focused on recording a single child's 'educational play' activities through the course of a session. This included recording in note form the contributions of those directly influencing the child. These observations were subsequently supplemented and verified the following week through interviews with the parent and practitioners. These interviews were also used to explore the purposes of parents and practitioners in open-ended semi-structured questions.

There is a growing tradition of ethnographic research investigating the cultural nature of cognitive development in the early years. Rogoff has done much to map out an approach to recording and presenting data in this paradigm (Rogoff, 1990, 1998, 2003, Rogoff et al., 1998) studying parents and children in a variety of contexts. Carr adopts a similar approach in recording observations of children's activity (Carr, 2001b), however neither elaborates in detail on their methodological approach. Brooker (2002) elaborates her methodological approach in more detail. When



introducing her work examining the triadic discourse between parent child and teacher she identifies some of the key issues in framing educational ethnography (Brooker, 2002).

ethnographic research, usually understood as ‘living with’ the research subjects, and sharing and reporting daily lives and experience, makes a special claim which other research strategies do not: to represent the culture of the research setting from the point of view of the participants (see for instance Fetterman 1989)” (Brooker, 2002, p.15)

The approach adopted in gathering observational data within the case studies has been similar to that set out by Hedegaard and Fler (2008). Observations were recorded in a narrative format describing the children’s activity during the sessions taking care to record information about their interactions with others. This observation was informed and focused by the research on collaborative learning set out in Chapter Two. This forms the research protocol material (Hedegaard & Fler, 2008), discussed in more detail shortly. This protocol material was then subsequently interpreted and analysed through the analytical framework set out in section 4.3.5.

#### ***4.3.2 Phase 2 Sampling Strategy***

Two case studies were purposively selected through the questionnaire survey responses because they represented contexts where the practitioners were explicitly aware of seeking to influence the quality of parent-child interactions. The process of this selection and the nature of these settings are discussed at length through Chapter Five. The selection of children and parents was more of an opportunity sample and the six children in each setting represent the eldest child in most of the regularly attending families in each setting where the maximum number of children was expected to be fifteen. Thus all the regularly attending children over the age of one in the first setting were included and a balanced sample of boys and girls by ethnicity was selected in the second setting but this only left out two regularly attending children over the age of 1. Again a detailed analysis of the nature of the sample generated by these principles is set out in Chapter Six.

Social class and cultural trends have been discussed in Chapters One and Three as something that may influence the practices within the groups and the case studies were selected keeping this in mind but not with this as a leading principle. The important influence of family socio-cultural backgrounds has been clearly illustrated



in Chapters Two and Three (Brooker, 2002, Connolly, 2004, Reay, 1998, Walkerdine et al., 2001). Following the key importance of mother's educational background (Sammons et al., 2007), interviews with parents enquired about educational and professional background and ethnic background, enabling the study to be alert to patterns of behaviour in relation to these factors. So while the settings were selected to represent practice, they also encompass a range of socio-cultural experiences. The participants were selected to be roughly representative and matched on the basis of gender and ethnic background. Parents' economic background was a matter of chance and the actual nature of the sample is considered at length in Chapter Six. The literature reviewed in Chapters One and Three suggests that those learning partnerships from more middle class backgrounds might be more likely to utilise more scaffolding and co-constructive interactions however such differences were not assumed and the clear coding criteria established were intended to facilitate some objective categorisations of interactions. By contrast the perceptions of the participants with regard to the situated activity was explored through a more grounded approach, through seeking to group participants by values and actions with no clear preconception of what the markers of these would be. Information on age was also recorded as a potentially informative unit of analysis.

#### ***4.3.3 Principles of participant observation***

The observations sought to explore behaviours within interactions that occurred in a real world context and encouraged the adult participants in the interactions to contribute reflexive comments. It is recognised that the researcher is not in a neutral role. The researcher's presence may create changes in behaviour as a result of initiating observations and discussing these with participants. Reflexivity is thus an important element of the research. As such the case studies should be regarded as examples of carer and toddler groups where a researcher is present.

The nature of the case studies and the design of the project lend themselves to the "participant as observer" model (Robson, 2002, p.317). The groups are limited in numbers and take place in relatively short 1-2 hours sessions on a weekly or twice weekly basis, thus giving plenty of time to record and develop observations in time to check with participants at the next session. The groups are used to having a number of professionals present and the researcher was viewed as an extension of that

professional group, engaging in activities such as taking photographs, recording behaviours and discussing aspects of children's learning and behaviours that the other professionals in the group might also do.

Another problem highlighted by Robson (2002) is that observations offer a ready opportunity to "find supporting evidence of virtually any initial hypothesis" (p.315). Again, the present study lends itself to Robson's view of an appropriate model of research, since it does not seek to confirm a clear hypothesis but rather to investigate the range of participants' behaviours in relation to learning and teaching. The observations are qualitative and interpretive participant observations (Denscombe, 2007, Robson, 2002) recording the observers impressions in a narrative form. It seems particularly appropriate to combine such observation with interview techniques in the carer and toddler context where the participants are engaged in what might be considered day to day interactions where they may operate at various levels of explicit and implicit consciousness.

Time was taken to get to know the groups by attending in the role of a visiting professional and acting in similar fashion to the other professionals, setting out, tidying up, playing alongside children, talking with adults. Carers were informed that the researcher's attendance was with a view to conducting research at a later point and he was identified as a university lecturer and researcher with an Early Years teaching background and a young family. This seemed to be helpful in reassuring parents about the experience, authority and safety of the male researcher. On a first visit to a setting the group leader commented favourably on the speed with which parents accepted the presence of the researcher and how the positive rapport established with children helped parents to accept the researcher's presence. The lengthy responses of those interviewed suggest some success in gaining a position of trust within the group in order to be able to identify various points of view with some validity (Denscombe, 2007).

A crucial issue for the present research is the extent to which the researcher affects the activity system being studied. There will always be concerns in research regarding how far "an outsider-in my case a middle-aged, middle-class white researcher-become an insider to the cultures of children and families from working class communities?" (Brooker, 2002, p16). However I have already indicated that I had some shared background with some members of the communities being studied, as both a parent

and practitioner. As an experienced practitioner and parent of a child in the same age range I am not unfamiliar with the context and relate closely to the practitioner group. In some respects my presence, while affective, was not incongruous to the context. The groups are used to having professional visitors and to discussing observations of the children: the taking of sequences of photographs is not unusual. This was one of the strengths of the context for study because parent and toddler groups afford the opportunity to study the carer child learning partnership in a less obtrusive environment than the home or laboratory. The gender of the researcher is, perhaps, of some significance. It is possible as a male adult researcher in a usually female adult environment that some mothers might become more self-conscious, and some children more interested in the presence of a male researcher. However, the nature of the research topic, focussing on children's learning, did not appear to create any gender based barriers or any significant disturbance. I was very conscious of taking time to get to know parents and emphasising my experience as a father of children aged three and ten in order to establish a rapport as a parent. This role was very much in the spirit of the groups studied. Once familiar to the groups, gender did not seem to bring any immediately noticeable effects, however it is important to remember that the researcher was very familiar with working in 'feminised' educational environments. With regard to ethnicity, although from a white British background I had spent four years working in schools in Pakistan which facilitated connections with the South Asian families in the groups. The extent to which the researcher "fits into" the context is important since it should allow for a naturalistic conversation to develop around the participants' perceptions of the context and of their own role.

#### ***4.3.4 Observing children's interests and adults' responses.***

Robson (2002), Denscombe (2007) and Engeström (1996) draw attention to the methods of the Chicago school, beginning with descriptive observations building up a detailed "story or narrative account" leading to a second stage of more focused observation. Both previous experience and pilot work clearly suggested that the behaviours and verbal exchanges with children under three were not so complex that they could not be recorded with written notes, and that recording, apart from being intrusive, often gave poor results due to background noise. Despite the decision to follow only one child during the session in the main case studies, and one successful recording, there was still insufficient time in the research process for children to

become relaxed in carrying a small but effective digital recorder. Initial attempts to do this were unsuccessful because the children were too interested in the recording equipment and this distracted them from their usual behaviours. By contrast the children were used to being observed in play by centre staff in both locations and because of the limited nature of the language used in conversations, written note-taking provided a more viable and reliable record of interactions in this context. Photographs were used to act as strong visual prompts and as an incentive to make written stories more attractive artefacts for parents, in order to encourage participation. Photography was a common feature in both the initial and pilot studies and was felt not to be too distracting for the children and adults, but it was used only occasionally, often to capture details of the tools involved, and often when children had completed tasks so as to reduce disturbance to the flow of activity. Robson (2002) and Denscombe (2007) recommend keeping on the spot records with memory joggers (details of verbatim comments) with these to be written up shortly afterwards to add detail and substance and clarity. This advice was found to be effective and a full record was always developed within 24 hours and before undertaking any further data collection. Parents were in every case pleased to accept the accounts of their children's activity as an accurate and insightful record of events.

As a starting point or core to both observations and subsequent interviews, *learning stories* were developed recording the interests of the children. The structure of learning stories put forward by Carr (2001a) is firmly located by Carr in the socio-cultural paradigm and emphasises that: "the focus is on the individual in action mediated by social partners, social practices and tools" (Carr, 2001a, p.8). Carr's model of a learning story is adapted here to become a single multiple narrative describing three perspectives in parallel and overlapping stories considering each of the aspects in figure 4.1.

***Figure 4.1 Carr's learning dispositions used to structure learning stories as part of the observation protocol***

Taking an interest	Being involved	Persistence with difficulty or uncertainty	Expressing an idea or a feeling	Taking responsibility
Child Parents Practitioners	Child Parents Practitioners	Child Parents Practitioners	Child Parents Practitioners	Child Parents Practitioners

This format was used for helping to structure the initial observation of the child but it was adapted to include reviewing the same structure but reflecting in the same way upon the adults' actions in relation to the child's activity. Initial pocket book notes were then written-up electronically within 24 hours of the initial observation. As has been stated previously this matches the methods advocated by Hedegaard and Fleer (2008). The learning story is accessible and common sense "acting as a record of the researcher's meaningful understanding as created through this interaction that becomes the data" (p.49). The story could be shared and verified by the parent and practitioners and enhanced. This data could then be subsequently analysed from a more theoretical standpoint.

Hitchcock and Hughes draw attention to the complex nature of classroom interactions (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995):

The use of trained observers and an 'uncontaminated' coding system ensures, it is argued, a measure of objectivity and neutrality reducing the possibility of any researcher effect or bias. The use of pre-coded categories and counts or tallies lends itself to statistical treatment and analysis" (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.235)

The methodology employed in the present research sought to avoid the weaknesses of relying on a coding system highlighted by Hitchcock and Hughes in relation to missing the insights afforded by context and situation, using coding as a complementary pointer to patterns that might otherwise be missed, but also being able to look at examples more qualitatively. The framework of analysis discussed in this chapter acts as a rubric in outlining the issues informing the observation process and offering initial steps into the coding of observations. Thus field notes were taken during the session in small unobtrusive note books and then written up with reference to photographs, using the headings taken from Carr (2001a) below as a record and the basis for shared discussion with adults at the subsequent session (See appendix3c).

The use of a systematic format for storing observations was to help compare incidents more easily without losing flexibility and the possibility of picking up on other nuances and helpful detail. The recorded observations were stored in a word format under headings for each episode plus comments under Carr's *learning dispositions* to

allow them to be transferred to NVivo software for analysis against other observations and interviews (see appendix 3b).

#### ***4.3.5 Analysis of observations***

Preliminary and initial observations of both supported and unsupported parent and toddler groups informed the study of the literature reviewed in Part One of the thesis. The literature review identified evidence of the value of adults engaging with children collaboratively in activity through the strategies scaffolding, co-construction, SST with reference to metacognition (Jordan, 2004, Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003, Wood, 1998). However critical analysis of these interactional roles, together with the difficulty experienced during initial pilot work of identifying each of these strategies, discrete in practice, revealed areas of overlap with regard to the identified key features associated with these types of interaction. There was also confusion of the concepts in pedagogical literature and practice, a point which has increasingly been highlighted by researchers (Chaiklin, 2003, Daniels, 2001, Mercer & Littleton, 2007, Rogoff, 1998). This led gradually to the development of a set of key features or elements of interactions drawn from the different roles identified in the literature on the importance of interaction in early learning, as a way of adding codes to each unit of analysis shown in Figure 4.2.

***Figure 4.2 Elements of analysis for coding units of interaction.***

- Focused:- the adult seems to have a particular knowledge objective
- Minimal:- the adult leaves as much control to the child as possible; fading
- Shared:-related information is passed back and forth between participants
- Open:- no particular intended outcome is apparent in the adult's mind
- Reflect:- the child is encouraged to consider previous experience
- Connect:- the child is encouraged to connect events
- Anticipate:- the child is encouraged to anticipate events
- Sustained:- four or more thoughts are interconnected
- Polychronic:- events are connected together across time

The methodology described in this chapter explores the patterns of collaborative mediation present in the parent and toddler groups through observation of activity



combined with adults' perspectives on the role in supporting children's learning in the settings.

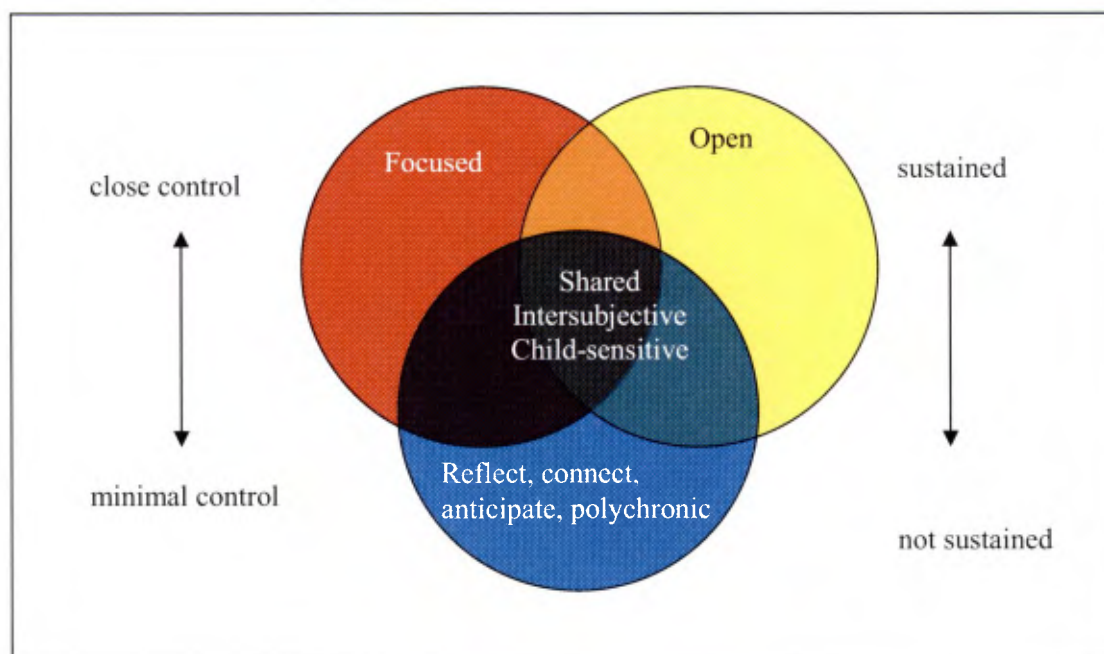
As has already been suggested, the unit of analysis in observations is taken to be an interaction with a set of related tools from a child arriving to departing or changing from one set of tools to another. If a child moves to a new location or returns to engage with new tools, or the parent returns with a new tool that dramatically amends the activity, then a new episode begins. If a child moves to a new location and takes tools with them to maintain a similar activity then the episode is considered to continue. This protocol resulted in 84 episodes of individually based activity being identified from the learning narratives of 12 children's mornings in the parent and toddler groups.

An episode could be coded in multiple ways rather than receiving a single code but an episode is not coded more than once against the same item, as set out in figure 4.3 below.

In this coding model, I have tried to distinguish focused mediation where the adult has a clear intention in mind (scaffolding as described by Wood and Jordan): Co-constructive mediation; where the mediator explores more openly the nature of activity and meaning with the learner (Jordan). Finally reflective mediation will be used to highlight where the mediator draws that learner's attention to aspects of what has happened, what will happen and the connections between events. This is not necessarily contingent with metacognition but related to metacognition.

In addition the models of effective collaborative learning identified in Chapter Two all involve an element of building upon the child's purposes or understandings. With regard to metacognition, scaffolding and co-construction it also seemed important to identify what type of knowledge was being scaffolded. The observations therefore sought to speculate on the interests and 'schemas' which were in the minds of the different participants (Athey, 2007, Nutbrown, 1999). In order to inform the collection of data and analysis in this regard, I have drawn on the wide range of perspectives related to interests, schemas, affordances and configurations discussed in Chapter Two to inform the qualitative observations.

**Figure 4.3 A model of the coding tool for interactions.**



In practice Affordance theory, as identified in Chapter Two (Del Rio, 2007, Gibson, 1979, Wertsch, 1998), was particularly helpful in offering a framework to identify the aspects of experience that might form appropriate meeting points for adults' and children's minds: these aspects are described as *purpose, emotions and feelings, control and shared meaning* as aspects of experience mediation that might form appropriate meeting points for adults' and children's minds. Gibson's theory of affordances suggests that if infants tune into the affordances, services or functions that items offer, then their attitudes towards objects will clearly evolve as the child's capabilities and needs evolve.

The affordance of an object is what an infant begins by noticing. The meaning is observed, I think apprehended would be better here, before the substance and surface and colour and form (Gibson, 1979, p.134).

From Gibson I have adopted the four perspectives related to orientation shown in the table below; 'emotional', 'functional' or 'purposive', 'control' and 'cultural'. The first three are the areas of primary meaning identified by Gibson. The fourth category 'cultural' results from Gibson's assertion that:

The child begins, no doubt, by perceiving the affordances of things for her, for her own personal behaviour. She walks and sits and grasps relative to her own legs and body and hands. But she must learn to perceive the affordances of things for others as well as herself. (Gibson, 1979, p.141)



The following section explains how the two dimensions of collaborative mediation and affordance are combined in a matrix to form the analytic and conceptual framework that could be used to code the observations, interviews and questionnaires employed in the case study research. The framework shown in figure 4.4 (below) allows visual analysis and reflection not only on what different adults focus upon but what different instruments afford. The framework also facilitates further consideration on how these perspectives of interest might in turn offer the adults opportunities to shape attitudes to the experiences in these regards. The alignment of activity theory and affordance theory is highlighted by several authors (Albrechtsen et al., 2001, Hedegaard, 2007, Rogoff, 1995, Wertsch, 1998) and has been discussed at length in Chapter Two.

**Figure 4.4 Coding Framework for the analysis of observed interactions**

<b>Child orientation Towards activity</b>	<b>Parent mediation</b>	<b>Practitioner mediation</b>	<b>Secondary parent mediation</b>
<i>Purpose</i>	Focused- Minimal- Shared- Open- Reflect- Connect- Anticipate-  Sustained- Polychronic – Intersubjective	Focused- Minimal- Shared- Open- Reflect- Connect- Anticipate-  Sustained- Polychronic – Intersubjective	Focused- Minimal- Shared- Open- Reflect- Connect- Anticipate-  Sustained- Polychronic – Intersubjective
<i>Emotions and feelings</i>	Focused- Minimal- Shared- Open- Reflect- Connect- Anticipate-  Sustained- Polychronic – Intersubjective	Focused- Minimal- Shared- Open- Reflect- Connect- Anticipate-  Sustained- Polychronic – Intersubjective	Focused- Minimal- Shared- Open- Reflect- Connect- Anticipate-  Sustained- Polychronic – Intersubjective
<i>Control</i>	Focused- Minimal- Shared- Open- Reflect- Connect- Anticipate-  Sustained- Polychronic – Intersubjective	Focused- Minimal- Shared- Open- Reflect- Connect- Anticipate-  Sustained- Polychronic – Intersubjective	Focused- Minimal- Shared- Open- Reflect- Connect- Anticipate-  Sustained- Polychronic – Intersubjective
<i>Cultural meanings</i>	Focused- Minimal- Shared- Open- Reflect- Connect- Anticipate-  Sustained- Polychronic – Intersubjective	Focused- Minimal- Shared- Open- Reflect- Connect- Anticipate-  Sustained- Polychronic – Intersubjective	Focused- Minimal- Shared- Open- Reflect- Connect- Anticipate-  Sustained- Polychronic – Intersubjective

What is explored, therefore, is how some of the key elements contained within conceptions of scaffolding, co-construction, SST and metacognition, match with the forms of adult mediation employed by parents and practitioners in parent and toddler

groups and with their views on their roles within the groups. This methodology is well matched to the aim of investigating the potential for exchange between theory and practice and reflects the value of socio-cultural theory in exploring what Del Rio and Alvarez (Del Rio & Alvarez, 1995) describe as;

the theoretical and methodological possibility of obtaining a convergence between what Garfinkel (1967) calls the etic level (the scientific description) and the emic level (the level of popular everyday descriptions or distinctions that, according to Garfinkel should be the subject for ethnomethodology). (Del Rio and Alvarez, 1995, p.227)

## 4.4 Case Study Interviews

### *4.4.1 Conducting the interviews with parents and practitioners*

The initial intention from a practical point of view, in order to focus attention on scaffolding, co-construction and metacognition, was to identify examples of these modes of interaction and ask carers and practitioners to reflect on this. This intention lends its self to Kvale's Process typology (Wengraf, 2001), where introducing questions is done in the context of asking the interviewees to recall a particular occasion. The "rich spontaneous descriptions" (Wengraf, 2001, p170) of activity might then be followed with probing, specifying, direct, indirect and interpretive questions. A potential difficulty with this strategy is that it can also lend its self to the genre Wenger (2001) describes as an asymmetrical trust interview.

In the asymmetrical trust interview, the interviewer is described as sage, as a source of counsel and wisdom, and the interviewee as petitioner, holding the weak side of a power balance. (Wengraf, 2001 p 153)

Since the intention of the research was to try to elicit the parents' and practitioners' vocabulary for what they do it was decided to use a narrative account and present this as the focus of discussion keeping the analytical comments separate. The intention was to strive for an interview where an even relationship (Wengraf 2001) is sought emphasising the interviewees' knowledge as valuable and increasingly opening up the ideas of the researcher in the later interviews in a more open exchange of ideas.

The observation notes taken of interactions between the children and the mediators around them were used to structure a series of interviews which were conducted with staff in order to explore their perceptions of their goals for supporting the learning of

both parent and child. A series of interviews was conducted with parents to explore how they perceived the sessions to be benefiting their child's learning and modifying their ideas about how to support their child's learning. The aim of these conversations was to explore the parent's and practitioner's perspectives on their role in supporting the child's development as a learner, in order to explore the way that they described their pedagogical approach. This would range from discussing particular instances observed, to explaining how these were representative of behaviours in other contexts. Language is clearly an issue in this context (Fontana & Frey, 2003) and the terms *scaffolding*, *co-construction* and *metacognition* were avoided. The ethnographic nature of the study allowed time to appreciate the registers adopted in the group and for the interviewees to become accustomed to the language of the researcher. Instead of the terms *scaffolding*, *co-construction* and *metacognition*, prompts were offered in relation to how children were;

- Encouraged to take up activities
- Perceived to be interested in the activity
- Supported when they ran into difficulties
- Left to investigate things for themselves
- Offered prompts and ideas for things to try out
- Encouraged to talk about what they were doing
- Encouraged to link one experience to another
- Encouraged to ask questions
- Encouraged towards particular behaviours (see appendix 4)

#### ***4.4.2 Analysis of interviews with parents and practitioners***

In addition to the observations of interactions the investigation explores practitioners' and parents' views on their role in supporting the children's learning through interviews. The interviews have been gathered following two more protocols. Practitioners were interviewed in the context of debriefings reviewing the session that had just ended and introducing questions emerging from reflections on the series of sessions. Parents were interviewed the week following the observation, having been given the written account of their child's activity to review. These protocol materials were analysed through the identification of common themes and exceptional comments with particular attention to roles, and purposes as identified in activity

theory (Leont'ev, 1978, Rogoff, 1990, Engeström, 1999). Hence the observation and interview methods adopted for the present research do not seek a positivist categorisation and quantification of these terms but rather to consider how individuals interpret their roles.

## 4.5 Ethical Issues

### *4.5.1 Reporting the survey responses.*

British Education Research Association guidelines (BERA, 2004), regarding the responsibilities of educational researchers, have informed the process, analysis and reporting of this thesis throughout. The findings aim to be open, transparent and honest reporting the nature of interactions in the groups and views of those participating in them. This is demonstrated in the findings chapters by the use of complete episodes wherever possible and complete extracts from interviews transcripts and questionnaires. Sampling issues have been fully reported to give the reader a detailed insight into the different data sets. The presentation of the data particularly from the more open-ended questions aims to present enumerated values for different points of view and offers quotes from documents to allow the reader to judge for himself or herself the validity of the interpretation put onto the comments by the researcher.

In relation to *consideration and respect for the participants* and the 1998 Data Protection Act and British Education Research Association guidelines (BERA, 2004) have been followed with cover information clearly stating the origin and purpose of the survey. Identification data has been stored on password protected computer systems. Requests not to be followed up have been respected and all data has been presented in an anonymised form that does not identify groups and changes the names of parents, practitioners and children. All participants who said they would complete the questionnaire at the phone stage were sent a thank you/reminder postcard after three weeks and then a copy of a summary report as a final encouragement to participate. The summary report describes the findings with very limited evaluative comment. It is hoped that this might prove helpful and reassuring that there are others in a similar position to respondents. There are affirmative messages about the value of

parent and toddler group and some links to relevant information if leaders wished to investigate issues further.

#### ***4.5.2 Responsibilities to participants***

Issues of *informed consent* and *right to privacy* have to some extent already been discussed. An example of a consent form is attached as Appendix Six. These were completed following individual negotiations explaining the nature of the project. Materials from questionnaires, surveys and interviews were stored in a folder in bags when in transit and lockable cabinets. Computer data was protected by personal passwords. Where data has been used in this thesis and presented at conferences, care has been taken to disconnect photographs from accounts and analysis. Photographs are not included in the thesis document and are to be deleted in the year after completion. This approach was adopted following reading and discussion with early childhood researchers who argue that children's rights should be more fully acknowledged than has been the case in previous educational research and in BERA guidelines (Harcourt & Conroy, 2005, Whalley & the Pen Green Team, 2007). While, I would agree with the principle of seeking informed consent with children described by Harcourt and Conroy (2005), I do not feel that fully informed consent was possible with the children in these groups (Harcourt & Conroy, 2005). I would explain to children that I was writing down what they were doing and allow them to inspect and write in my notebooks. Children were asked if their picture could be taken and were always shown the pictures taken both initially and within the observation document relating to them. An explanation of what the documents would be used for was considered beyond the comprehension of the children. The phasing out of photographs respects that as the children studied mature they might not wish the image of their younger selves to be presented publicly. I would argue that purely written accounts offer greater anonymity.

*Protection from harm* the third key area of ethical consideration (Fontana & Frey, 2003) requires more detailed reflection here. My personal stance is that all human beings are vulnerable to psychological impacts on self identity particularly in relation to parenting. In this situation the intention was to take care not to make parents feel inadequate or to be letting their child down. Analyses of interactions were presented neutrally. Parents were not identified in deficit models (see Chapter One) however

ideas about scaffolding, co-construction and metacognition were introduced to the groups in later discussions since there also ought to be an obligation to the child to offer positive support. This is not fully open and honest but it is motivated by a wish to protect rather than conceal.

There is a growing realisation that interviewers are not the mythical, neutral tools envisioned by survey research. Interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in interactions with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts in which they take place. (Fontana and Frey, 2003, p.96)

Parents' view points have been portrayed so as to present the spirit of their views accurately, grammar and syntax have been modified to make their intention clear. Transcripts of conversations have been offered and occasionally reviewed by participants to confirm accuracy.

The interviews aspire to the feminist interviewing practices described by Fontana and Frey, who characterise traditional interview practices as seeking to portray neutrality and objectivity, thus exploiting participants by not treating them as individuals and accepting no role or responsibility for their well being (Fontana & Frey, 2003). Lincoln 1995 (in Fontana and Frey 2003) describes the position of the feminist communitarian researcher as follows:

The feminist communitarian researcher does not invade the privacy of others, use informed consent forms, select subjects randomly, or measure research designs in terms of their validity. This framework presumes a researcher who builds collaborative, reciprocal, trusting and friendly relations with those studied.... It is also understood that those studied have claims of ownership over any materials that are produced in the research process including field notes. (Lincoln in Fontana and Frey, 2003, p.96)

However, I was uncomfortable with the idea of dispensing with informed consent forms, as suggested by Lincoln, because I find this a useful if uncomfortable process. Seeking informed consent formally compels the researcher to explain the processes and conditions that information will be used in, anticipate the circumstances and try to explain these to the group. The consent forms used were not binding upon the parent and the possibility of withdrawal and control over transcripts was made clear. Neither did I feel comfortable with dispensing with notions of validity: there is a need to set participants' views in context and consider their perspective in detail. This does not



mean that some perspectives are more valid than others. In other respects the data collection process aimed towards the perspective described by Lincoln.

Informed consent with regard to the children was sought through the parents, this was with the assurance that if distress or discomfort was caused by the observation process to either parent or child then it would be suspended and reviewed. Carers were present throughout and could act as advocates on behalf of the child. Consultation and validation of observations by the children was not considered appropriate in this 18 month to 36 month age range. The observations did however give something of the children's perspective on the nature of parent and toddler groups. As such there is some input from children into the research which is preferable to only including interviews with carers and practitioners.

#### ***4.5.3 Responsibilities to the research community.***

Survey questions: There is a great deal of consistency in the responses to the questionnaires. The open ended questions mean that there are a variety of responses and different leaders may emphasize different things. It is argued that while the reliability might be improved by more closed or prescriptive questions, this format is valid because it gives more genuine personal interpretations of the questions so that issues raised are genuinely in the mind of the respondent rather than being placed there by the researcher. The validity of the researcher's analysis is improved by the more detailed case study exploration of issues with practitioners. An analysis of the findings was sent to respondents and ongoing contact with practitioners suggests that they recognise the portraits of practice presented.

The incompleteness of some of the open ended questions presents a problem of interpretation; it is not clear whether uncompleted questions were understood and ignored because of time constraints, deemed to be indistinguishable from other questions, or not understood. For this reason comments on these questions focus on positive responses and avoid assumptions based on interpretations of blank responses although issues of comprehensibility and workforce awareness are part of the issue under investigation. The final questionnaire clearly shows that many practitioners were not explicitly familiar with the terms under investigation.

The observations may have been written differently by different observers but are presented as straight forward narratives which were agreed with very few amendments by parents and practitioners. The accounts are similar in style to those proposed by Carr (2001a). Digital recording of observations would have enhanced the reliability of the accounts but would have compromised validity since the children in the pilot trials were all too conscious of the recording equipment. The miniaturisation of recording equipment would allow for children to be recorded without their knowledge but this would have compromised the ethical principles of the research. It is argued that the taking of notes was familiar to the children and did not impinge too frequently on their actions. Although the children's awareness of the presence of the observer is clear in some of the observations, it is argued that these are still valid accounts of practice within the groups with all participants behaving in similar ways when they were not the focus of an observation.

The interviews involved only minimal shaping by the researcher. Parents and practitioners appeared comfortable to expand on the topics raised, and again it is argued that the compromises to reliability are balanced by the gains in the validity of responses which emerge from the participants. The consistency of themes between participants supports that the procedure is sufficiently reliable and a valid way of capturing views on the topics raised.

The findings chapters try to reflect the possibility that the behaviours presented in the context of the parent and toddler group may give an indication of activities in the home but are potentially a performance particular to the parent and toddler group context.

#### **4.6 Changes from the Pilot phase to the main phase**

In order to assess the practicability of the proposed research process a pilot case study was carried out in the type of parent and child group to be studied in the main phase, just outside the perimeter of the area set for the study. The setting was identified through contacts within the Surestart team as covering an appropriate age range and having objectives that included the modelling of adult child interactions. It was an established group developing from a Surestart project that met twice a week on a Monday and Wednesday from 1- 2.45pm. Two Surestart staff prepared the activity



room, which was in a converted shop. The group had a stated aim of encouraging parents to play with their children reflected in the title of the group “playing together”. Indeed, on one occasion one of the practitioners drew one of the parent’s attention to the title to suggest she should be playing with her child rather than leaving him to investigate things by himself.

The pilot case study confirmed the model of activity theory set out in this chapter as a framework for focusing on significant and worthwhile aspects of the parent toddler group activity. The use of the concept of activity did facilitate analysis across the case studies of the study. It served as a framework for the integration and critique of different data forms from field notes, observations, and interviews with parents and practitioners.

The pilot phase tracked several children across a number of weeks and while this confirmed the accessibility and attraction of the learning stories to parents, it also highlighted the difficulty of developing discussion around these in the setting. This led to the proposal to follow a single child in each session, but a different child each week. This meant that discussion was needed with only one parent each week, which was easier to manage. This was facilitated by centre staff caring for that parent’s children for 10-15 minutes. This also allowed for a range of interactions to be captured with different materials in the setting and reduced the risk of missing elements of activity. This approach misses out on developments in interactions over the weeks of the study but it allowed six children to be included in each case study rather than three or four. This method may lose some insights through the interviewer and interviewee relationship being developed. I hope that this was compensated for by developing relationships through attendance and general conversation. It was useful to take ten minutes at the beginning and end of sessions simply to act as a regular staff member and interact with the full range of those attending. Field notes on the setting, rules, division of labour, and tools could be developed in this time.

It could be argued that tracking children over time is valuable for initial starters to the group. An alternative way to reflect on this aspect is through peoples’ opinions about change and the inclusion of people who have been attending for different lengths of time. This approach has advantages in not relying on specific children to attend each week. It also helped to capture the different relationships established by individual children which tracking single learning episodes did not fully illustrate. Tracking a

single child also enables a recorder to be used with that child to track language exchanges more accurately.

The other key area of change was around the analysis of observations. The simplification of coding and the development of the integrated view of scaffolding, co-construction and metacognition follow on from attempts to distinguish these interactions as distinct and separate.

#### **4.7 Chapter summary**

The methodology described in this chapter has been developed to investigate the *collaborative* 'teaching/learning' perspectives of the adults and children in a particular cultural historical context; exploring how both adults' and children's activity relating to the use of tools available in the parent and toddler group context, combine. The development of the particular model, using affordances in combination with activity theory, is innovative in relation to the investigation of the joint activity of adults and children. The coding model of collaborative strategies developed is also innovative because it integrates key features of scaffolding, co-construction and metacognition as strategies within a broader view of scaffolding. Chapters Five, Six and Seven explore how helpful this coding model was in analysing interactions in the parent and toddler groups.

## Chapter 5

### Parent and toddler groups as learning communities

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter sets out the nature and context of the case study groups by comparing responses from a wider set of questionnaires which was used to help select and locate them. This comparison draws from the findings of the survey questionnaire together with the case study data obtained through interviews with staff and parents. The chapter describes the nature of the resources available in the case study groups in terms of staff, materials and space. In addition the chapter identifies the perceptions of parents and staff regarding the purposes and roles of the case study groups and in view of the limited existing information on parent and toddler groups sets the case studies in a regional context. These data sets complement each other and offer an insight into the range of parent and toddler group provision in the sample area of the West Midlands. The chapter is particularly helpful in identifying the range of backgrounds of the parent and toddler group leaders and their outlook on some of the central issues related to the framing of interactions with children considered in this thesis.

#### 5.1 Phase One Data; a survey of parent and toddler groups

##### *5.1.1 The Questionnaire sample*

The sampling strategy and data collection protocol described in Chapter Four yielded 32 completed questionnaires from the six local authority areas as set out in table 5.1 below. This sample of parent and toddler groups excluded certain groups: those with a single focus such as music, storytelling or ‘tumble tots’. Groups limited to children under 18 months were also not included. Similarly, social groups for parents without a specific ‘learning through play’ agenda. Particular interest groups such as Natural Childbirth Trust groups were also eliminated from the questionnaire sample through process of conducting initial telephone conversations.

**Table 5.1 The location of survey settings**

Local Authority	Actual Number of groups in target area	Telephone Sample Targeted	Mail Sample	Return from area
Wolverhampton	42	19	15	10
Shropshire	10	7	7	3
Dudley	60		40	11
Staffordshire	30	15	8	2
Walsall	30	20	18	5
Birmingham	6	3	2	1
Total	164	98	90	32

This represents a 33% response rate to the survey, and a sample of 18% of the listed settings in the sample area. De Vaus (1996) suggests that non-returners are more likely to be older and less educated. In this sample, where the ages of the respondents are quite often over 35, it is possible that younger potential responders with young families are more likely not to have responded. It is also possible that additional non-returners might have seen the questions as difficult and not relevant to their groups, in which case the missing data might have added another perspective.

### **5.1.2 Reliability and Validity of responses**

The questionnaires contain both factual and qualitative items. The factual parts of the form first gather information on contact details of the leader including age, gender and qualifications. These sections were all completed. In addition there are three factual questions asking if the group follows any named scheme and asks them to name what services they offer. These were completed similarly by the respondents and with few suggestions of irrelevant answers suggesting misunderstanding. The management status of the group and the status of the leader were checked in the initial phone interview and in the case of the Dudley settings following receipt of questionnaires. It is possible that the final factual question regarding awareness of sustained shared thinking, co-construction and metacognition may have been omitted by some respondents since it falls at the end of the form, but several questionnaires with earlier blank spaces have completed this final section.

The four more open ended questions have to be viewed more cautiously. Several settings indicated that they believed these questions were not applicable to them with simple N/A, some left them blank (see table 5.2).

**Table 5.2 The number of responses to qualitative questionnaire items**

Items from the questionnaire	Number of responses	Number of blank responses
How does your programme work to address parent's roles in encouraging children to select, persist with and reflect on the activities they do?	26	6
How does your programme encourage carers to think about offering clues and hints to children to encourage children's thinking rather than always giving complete answers or instructions?	25	7
What other aspects of adult-child interaction does your programme draw attention to?	21	11
Please indicate which of the following terms are familiar to you? Scaffolding, Sustained Shared Thinking, Metacognition	19	13

Some group leaders' comments suggested that while they do not actively promote interaction issues they could see that the activities they offered did relate to the interaction styles mentioned. Only one or two responses suggested misinterpretations of the questions. These may indicate difficulties in understanding the questions or perceived lack of relevance to some groups. I have tried to avoid speculation on this basis. I have also tried to avoid comparing one group to another on the basis of omissions. Taken as a whole the responses suggest certain frequently occurring orientations towards supporting interactions. Where there appear to be null responses the blanks often still reflect something of the thinking of the respondent as expressed in other questions. Written responses, because they arise unprompted, indicate something of the respondents' vocabulary, understanding and attitudes to the issues raised. Themes attributed to promoting interactions in the explicit responses are few, and the promotion of play is common. In each section of the following analyses the most common positions are the starting point, the variance between groups is explored and viewed as indicative but not convincing evidence (Miles, 1994). Some issues that arise are then taken up in more detail in the interviews from the case studies.

### ***5.1.3 Background information and qualifications***

The initial telephone protocol discussed the nature of the group to check that it met the criteria for inclusion in the survey. It also checked on who was responsible for the group and the voluntary or paid status of the staff. The group details yielded additional information regarding staff qualifications. The main point of comparison emerging from this element of the survey process was that the majority of parent and toddler groups in the survey area were run on a voluntary basis (21), many connected to religious groups. A few were on a school campus or were part of children's centres (11 from 32). As has been highlighted in part one of the thesis, this is potentially an important point of difference between groups, with state funded groups being more compelled to follow government set agendas and guidelines and more likely to have paid staff involved in ongoing professional development. This is not a clear divide as some leaders in voluntary settings were graduates and qualified teachers, and sometimes paid. Equally, paid leaders' responses suggested they might share many of the ideals and experience of those in the voluntary sector. For example, in a visit to one setting from the survey but not finally included in the case studies or pilot, the group leader, while paid as part of her other responsibilities to co-ordinate the group, had set the group up ten years previously when she was a parent herself and said that she would continue to support such a group even if she were not paid.

Only two groups mentioned any connection with a nationwide parenting approach; one group linked to the Share project and one to Peers Early Education Partnership PEEP (see Chapter Three).

The implication of these findings is that the majority of parents in the region would be served by voluntary led groups which would be likely to be less well resourced and funded than the two case study groups that will be introduced shortly.

The table below lists the qualifications reported by those completing the questionnaire survey forms sent to parent and toddler groups. Twelve of the thirty-one responding group leaders' training qualifications implied that they had had no formalised training into models of teaching and learning in early education.

The twelve with Nursery Nurse Qualifications (NNEB), and preschool practitioner Qualification (Preschool Diplomas and NVQs in Early Education and Childcare) should have had some introduction into models of learning and teaching. However, as has already been discussed, strategic reports have identified concerns with this training background as not sufficient in relation to the pedagogy advocated for the delivery of the EYFS, particularly in relation to children under three (Anning, 2005, Parents as Partners in Early Learning, 2007); this is also reflected in the training required by those seeking Early Years Professional Status as leaders within settings (Children's Workforce Development Council, 2010).

Those running groups in Surestart managed settings had NVQ3 or equivalent qualifications, and two had foundation degrees. One teacher was involved in the older age range with 3-4 year-olds. This suggests a higher level of pedagogical awareness in the Surestart groups.

**Table 5.3 Leaders' qualifications**

<b>Relevant Qualifications</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
No relevant qualification	11
NVQ2 childcare	2
NVQ3 childcare	4
Diploma in preschool practice	2
NNEB	4
NVQ4	2
Foundation Degree Early Childhood Studies	2
BA English	1
B.ED/PGCE (teacher)	3
Total	31

Nevertheless, these findings still suggest that few of the group leaders had received training in relation to working with parents in such contexts, or more in-depth reflection on the nature of learning relationships. Only two leaders indicated a connection to a national parenting initiative or specific parenting training. This finding strengthens the case for consideration to be given to parent and toddler groups in terms of support and awareness raising around promoting cognitive development (Anning, 2005, Parents as Partners in Early Learning, 2007).

The sample in this survey suggests a reversal of the position set out by Pugh et al (1995), since the state sector workers had received more training related to working with parents than the voluntary sector groups. The state sector groups' leaders'



training was also more frequently complemented by courses such as Early Childhood Studies Foundation Degrees and NVQs in Childcare which increasingly offer content related to involving parents.

#### **5.1.4 Describe briefly the services you offer?**

Most groups met once or twice a week, with a small minority meeting monthly or twice a month. Meetings lasted one-and-a-half to three hours. At face value most groups offered a similar format of activities, providing for both children's and parents' needs.

*we offer a playgroup facility for both parents/carers and children to interact with one another, this helps children to socialise with one another prior to nursery/reception and for isolated carers to share problems, seek advice and socialise; we have a good range of toys from ASCOS and other suppliers; we offer children drinks and toast and biscuits, we offer carers tea /coffee. We run activities most weeks; we also have a yearly outing (survey response)*

This is very much in line with earlier PLA guidance (1992) and the models described by Pugh et al (1995) discussed in Chapter Three. Support for parents will be discussed shortly but the analysis of survey findings begins by considering the types of support that group leaders indicated that they offered for children. The following table summarises the types of activities the groups' leaders suggested that they offered for children.

**Table 5.4 Activities for children**

'Service offer' for children	Number of groups mentioning
Play	24
Craft/ Painting/drawing colouring	10
Singing	17
Story	13
Books	10
Imaginative play	4
Outdoor play	4



Play is the main item explicitly and consistently mentioned by most group leaders. A singing or rhyme component sometimes with a story seems to be the next most common element. Books and crafts are both less consistently mentioned including arts and crafts that were intended for parents and toddlers to do together. Other items mentioned are then explicitly mentioned by fewer than four groups.

In the groups visited as part of the pilot and case studies, a similar format existed. This involved an informal arrival with children being allowed to select and play under the supervision of the parent for about half of the session; this phase of the session leading into a snack time and then a whole group singing, story and rhyme time with lots of short active pieces. A variation to this most typical format was a small number of groups that included a specific information-sharing component. Parents interviewed in the case study settings clearly identified differences between the different parent and toddler groups that they had attended, primarily by size and organisation. Some groups were identified as offering larger spaces and having higher numbers compared to the case study groups which kept numbers to between 10 and 15 parents. Large groups were also be perceived in some instances as less sociable, more cliquy and harder for the parent to supervise their children in, even more so if the parent has more than one child in their care.

It is interesting that with little apparent coordination at a local or national level such similar patterns arise. It is possible that the cultural-historical development of parent and toddler groups outlined in Chapter Three still exerts some influence over parents' and practitioners' expectations. It suggests that there may be strong shared expectations about the nature of parent and toddler groups and the activities to be expected in them. There appeared two alternative expectations: either large noisy social spaces for free play, or a more structured forum for some child-led play and for some adult-led activity with some whole group activity to conclude. This second format fits in with the type of experiences set out in the EYFS and perhaps clearly offers parents experiences that might help prepare their children for preschool. The remarkably similar shared expectations of groups and what is offered, suggest that this shared view is as much a socially accepted expectation of a context appropriate to young children as it is a pedagogically informed construction. Indeed in the survey

only one group specifically mentioned the Birth to Three framework in their response to the question of the type of services they had to offer.

Support for parents' own needs was less emphasised than children's needs in the survey responses, thirteen groups mentioning social opportunities for parents specifically (see the table below). This is the third most commonly mentioned aspect of activity but, as some of the longer question responses reveal, while this was clearly very important to some leaders others raised concerns when parents socialised 'too much' with each other. 'Advice' appears to be a topic of some sensitivity and differentiates some groups, with only six groups suggesting that they offered advice to parents. This suggests that in many cases parent and toddler groups are seen as being for parents to share experiences with others and learn through an informal agenda. Perhaps this reflects the societal and cultural sensitivities to interfering in parenting or suggesting that some need support with their parenting reported in Chapter Three.

***Table 5.5 Opportunities for parent activities***

Friendship social for parents	13
Information exchange	9
Advice	6
Links to parenting courses	3

In addition a few groups mentioned links to health visitors (2) parenting courses (3) and information on other support services (3). The majority of settings also identified the opportunity for parents to relax and share information and experiences. A small number of groups seemed to react against a suggestion in the more open ended survey questions that they should be doing something to promote adult-child interactions, emphasising the importance of a relaxed, social, non-directive forum for parents. With regard to the adaptation of Epstein's (1987) model of types of support offered to parents discussed in Chapter Three, it would appear that the parent and toddler groups offered a range of approaches drawn from categories two, three and four:

- Parents learning through osmosis in a play scenario.
- Parents as understudies participating in professionally led activities.
- Parents as partners in joint activity.

One issue that was highlighted in the survey, and will be returned to in the further analysis of the case studies, was that, although the groups indicated a focus on play and learning opportunities for the children, there were few explicit mentions of discussion with parents about supporting children's learning. There was also little mention of focussed personal support for parents in contrast to the type of groups described by Jackson (2010).

## **5.2 The phase two case studies.**

The phase two case study groups were identified through the process of conducting the survey because they represented the type of planned coordinated, practitioner led groups with a deliberate intention to support adult child interaction. These two groups are introduced at this stage in order to be able to extend and exemplify some of the comments made in the questionnaires. This early introduction to the case studies also helps to emphasise that they are representative of a particular type of provision and not typical of the majority of parent and toddler group provision.

In relation to the survey sample described in section 5.1 both of the case study groups were connected to children's centres and were facilitated by trained staff with early education qualifications.

### ***5.2.1 Background information on the Case Studies***

The first case study had a single practitioner in an outreach role with a second practitioner from the Library Service supporting at two to three week intervals. This was located in a meeting room and attached courtyard within a Methodist Church centre as an outreach project from the main Children's Centre building. For mnemonic purposes this group will be referred to throughout as Outwell. This means that with regard to physical resources this group is in line with the environments available in the majority of the parent and toddler groups surveyed in the region, in having a room not primarily intended for children's use with resources that need to be taken out and stored away for each session. It did have an outside paved area for outdoor play at each session.

The second case study had initially three and then finally two practitioners facilitating a 10 week “PEEP” programme located within a Children’s Centre building. These sessions were intended to include opportunities to discuss children’s learning and this group is referred to throughout as Talktime.

Talktime was in the less common position of being run in a dedicated, purpose built room within a children’s centre building, with age appropriate toilets, wet non-slip floors and carpeted surfaces, with art sinks and all furniture at child height and to a very high standard. One limitation to the sessions was that access to the outdoor play area was restricted due to it being required by nursery classes operating at the same time in a different part of the building. A key feature of this group, and a contrast to Outwell, was the planned shared discussion time with parents incorporated into the session.

The case studies represent the minority of parent and toddler groups in the regional survey, since the case studies had high levels of human resources both in terms of staff qualification and support structures. The two case study groups were both organised and managed by long established former Sure Start centres that had evolved into children centres. They were supported by clear line management structures and had active line managers with responsibilities in the children’s centre that ensured their interest in visiting and observing the sessions, monitoring attendance numbers and the quality of the activities on offer. The groups were part of a local Surestart strategy seeking to promoting positive parenting approaches that would in turn support children’s social behaviour and learning. This already establishes the case studies as not in the majority experience at the time of the survey although this type of activity is rapidly expanding with the target for all Local authority wards to have access to children’s centre services.

This may mean that parent and toddler groups have inherited cultural practices that may or may not be in conflict with their present aims as suggested by the staff in the Outwell Case Study;

*We put out flyers to all of those outlying groups so it is not just all here. So we are trying to reach the harder to reach communities in that way as well. By supporting what’s already established. (Outwell Staff Y)*

*There has been an existing group at a church on xxxxstreet and it has been the same people running it for 20 years but their numbers are very low. 1 or 2 but last week Jill was told off and not to bring anymore activities down so that group we will have to back off a bit. (Talktime Staff D)*

Both Outwell and Talktime were part of a collection of groups co-ordinated by children's centres. Both indicated they built on established provision which might have a reputation for delivering a certain type of opportunity to a particular community. The case study parent and toddler groups were both led at a sessional level by comparatively well trained practitioners with level three childcare qualifications, who were then line managed by graduate and post graduate specialists in early years education and care. Outwell had a single permanently assigned worker with an NNEB background. However this group also had occasional support from a qualified teacher leading the shared story and rhyme times as outreach from the library service.

Talktime had a much more varied staffing pattern, moving from being staffed by three workers to two and having several personnel changes so that five different staff were included in the observation and interviews. These were all level three qualified staff with one recently completing studies to graduate level. Three of the five Talktime staff had undertaken PEEP training.

Discussions with the staff in both centres suggested that they were interested in the possibility of graduate level study but concerned about how that would fit in with their personal and work lives and how challenging it might be. Staff in both settings were visited by line managers during one of the observed sessions. These line managers were both graduates from early education and care backgrounds who spent time discussing a range of issues related to working with parents with those working directly in the groups.

### ***5.2.2 The services offered by the case study groups***

Both of the case study groups operated sessions that were approximately two hours long and similarly structured (Outwell 9.15-11.15 and Talktime 9-11). This allowed for older siblings to be dropped at school or nursery provision close by and for families to move smoothly on to the parent and toddler session.

*We've got a routine and that's really for parents who haven't got a routine and they need to learn that and to teach that to their children so that we make it structured in that we set it out with a messy play we'll have outdoor, some table top activities some floor activities, make it quite comfortable we've got kitchen facilities they can make a drink but also at fruit time the children come and sit at the table and they are being taught manners they have got a choice of fruit, milk or water and that is a healthy choice and so after it we've got story time and singing time that is structured for the children and for the parents to join in. as well so overall the stay and play that is offered on a Monday and a Thursday at a time that the parents have requested 9.15 to 11.15 kind of for themselves to attend in that way to be involved.  
(Outwell Staff Y)*

The emphasis the practitioner places on the importance of routine for the parents is interesting. There was far less time for the Outwell practitioner, as the only staff member present, to engage with parents to discuss routines and issues. The idea of modelling interactions is perceived to be important and in addition to general administrative tasks, supporting new arrivals, getting out and putting away equipment, the practitioner seemed to spend most of her time in leading an activity with small groups of children.

The second case study differed in that considerable thought was given to the creation of a context for shared discussion of issues. The sometimes two, sometimes three practitioners in the Talktime group placed more emphasis on the parents when planning future sessions, regularly discussing ideas for activities with parents. In some sessions they created a time where one of the three practitioners chaired a discussion while children were encouraged to play under the supervision of the other staff members.

*B; Yeah. The people that access the group they tend to be that little bit more confident I know that one or two people who have been invited to join the PEEP group and they have come to one, I am not sure whether they didn't like the set up of it whether they didn't like the talk time. But with some people I don't think they are ready for that I don't think they are confident enough in their own parenting skills to say oh I try this. And take on new ideas because that is what the PEEP group is about*

*A: but PEEP some of the other mums come to the other groups which are a bit less structured*

*B: they can just get on with interacting*

*M: there isn't a spot light on them?*

*B: no yeah that is exactly it yeah (Talktime Staff)*



The type of activities offered in the survey and case study groups seem to align themselves with those associated with a positive Home Learning Environment (HLE), and positive longer term educational outcomes at age 5, 7 and 11, by the EPPE project (Sylva et al., 2010). Activities focused on in the HLE, such as frequent reading at home, weekly visits to the library, frequent use of song and rhyme, painting, drawing and higher levels of adult child interaction, are all elements identified by group leaders as opportunities that they offer. This suggests that parent and toddler groups have the potential to influence and support government objectives as stated in the Children's Plan and to support parents' role as their children's first educators (DCSF, 2007).

In both of the case study groups the planning for the sessions drew from staff observations of the children's responses to the activities available and the development of those activities in that particular session as well as subsequent ones. The activities that the children demonstrated an interest in were identified and responded to by staff. Staff then provided similar materials the following week with adaptations or variations on a theme intended to engage the children.

### ***5.2.3 The case studies; some self evaluations***

Both the parents and practitioners in the case studies made distinctions between the groups they attended now and parent and toddler groups they had experienced previously. They suggested that the case study groups were smaller with regard to the number of families attending and more focused on supporting children's learning. They were characterised as less noisy, less chaotic, with the parents being more focused on their children's activity through the session.

*This group is good in that parents are used to the routine and they do sit with their children and join in sometimes it is difficult to do this. We have talked about putting cushions out to encourage the parent to get down to the children's level. (Outwell Staff V)*

*They might just see it as a playgroup but this group is actually structured from 9.15 to 11.15. There is actually quite a lot of structure to it (Outwell staff Y)*

*We go to a play group at a church tomorrow on a Tuesday morning quite a different one actually a large one with 20 or 30 children and lot of toys it is quite manic really, whereas this is quite structured and I like the singing and the nursery rhymes at the end and the break for food in the middle, so they are*

*different sorts of playgroups and quite different sorts of people go to them, (Outwell parent)*

*My eldest child went to a church group which was quite different, there were just toys to play with which were in the middle of the room, it was less directed the children were encouraged to get on with things. There were no creative activities but there was singing at the end like here. (Talktime parent)*

The practitioners in both groups were very clear about the purpose of the groups being about promoting interaction between parent and child through participation in play activities.

*MN: do you see it as your role to model? If you do what things do you model?*

*C: interactions I'd say*

*D: interactions*

*C: getting down getting right in there with the children*

*D: being on the floor, getting down to the child's level. I think to listen sometimes because not all parents listen to their children. They do a lot of talking at them, but they don't always respond back. Modelling that you are listening, which can be quite exaggerated sometimes. (Talktime Staff)*

*I think parents need to understand also that they've got to be there with them, for them not to play on their own, for them not to supervise them, but to support them also to be involved because it is a stay and play. Yes it is flexible according to what time they want to come in, but it's quite structured in that we've got a routine (Outwell practitioner Y)*

Practitioners in both settings were keen to promote engagement; this often seemed to be expressed as being close to the children and following their lead and facilitating, not explicitly an immediate communicative exchange. This was expressed as follows:

*It kind of fits in with the ethos, because it is all about being child led following their interests, validating what they are doing and expand on that. And I think for us to do something as rigid as a PEEP group could be, I say could be, I think that would go against the grain and that is not how we work here (Talktime practitioner D)*

The messages about following and supporting seemed to be received by parents to a greater extent than the playful engagement that practitioners celebrated in their own interactions with children.

*There's a name for the treasure baskets and stuff isn't there? It's a different approach to play a lot of the time they give you the usual dolls slides and so on in the groups I have been to in the past. There is a lot more creative play*



*here, that gives the children a chance to make their own play activities instead of having something set for them. It's good for their development I think. Not many places offer sellotape for them to do cutting and that definitely seems to be her favourite thing at the moment. (Talktime parent)*

The practitioners were clearly uncomfortable when parents were not with their children and engaged in chat as opposed to discussion of appropriate issues. The leader of the Outwell group said that a big concern was when parents were reluctant to engage with children and spent time sitting on the side chatting; this was not so bad if talk is related to children's development. This same implicit rule was also expressed in relation to particular parent behaviours at Talktime

*She has picked that up then because when they started those two mums they weren't really part of the group. They sat at the side talking. And it has been a slow journey but you can watch them getting just that little bit more involved. And the language has changed there was like "naughty" and shouting which has gradually come down. (Talktime Staff B)*

Tensions between the parents' and practitioners' perspectives arose because the primary purpose for many parents attending the group was to use the group as a stepping stone to greater independence for their child.

*The last few weeks he has been very clingy, his Dad went to India he was all quiet all of a sudden 'cause he misses his dad and he was asking about his dad. And Yusuf's mum she used to bring him here and he used to get upset and start to cry. So what I thought was, I'm going to bring him here because he is going to start nursery soon and to settle him I think its best to let him move off from me. 'Cause I'm a nursery nurse, you see, and I have seen that that if you have a child and you let them move off from you it is easier. (Outwell parent)*

The aim to promote the child's independence could be seen to contradict the engagement and interaction purposes of the practitioners. Another frequently mentioned purpose was to promote mixing with others, which could also work against the practitioners' purposes. This perhaps goes some way to explaining a possible compromise position where the parents are attentive to the children but not necessarily engaging playfully with them.

*Do things with the children sometimes and play with them but I also feel they need to develop confidence and not be sitting on my lap or mum's lap all the time. Yes keep a good eye on them from a little way away (Outwell grandparent)*

Similarly some parents suggested that their children were comfortable to explore more independently and in a less demanding way than at home which afforded the parents the opportunity for much desired adult conversation.

*Time for me to have a chat. It's nice to know that there are plenty of activities for them to do so you can just relax and have a chat and I've been coming here for three years now so in itself it's a support so you can share problems and share ideas. (Outwell parent)*

*Erm I sort of try to give her ideas but she has definitely got her own little head on her shoulders and she knows what she wants to do and sometimes no matter what I say to her she has got her own little thing going on. She doesn't always take on board what I am saying but I am there for her if she needs me more than anything. I think I have realised I have got to take a bit of a back seat in whatever she does and just let her get on with it. It's nice it gives me a bit of a break and a chance for bit of a chit chat without having to worry about being there for her all the time. (Talktime parent)*

There is clearly some potential for tension between the practitioners and parents so it is important that both parties negotiate sympathetically with each other to reach a situation that satisfies. In both groups the practitioners were careful to be explicit about the aims of the group to those joining however there were several parents who attended only one or two sessions.

### 5.3 Promoting Interaction

The third section of this chapter examines the more open-ended questions in the survey relating to promoting interaction between parents and children. This section integrates comments from both the questionnaires and case study interviews. This analysis begins to identify some commonalities in terms of a learning culture(s) among parent toddler groups which are developed in the remainder of the thesis.

While the primary aim of the survey was to gain an impression of the range and nature of parent and toddler groups, the essential focus for investigation in both this and the later case study phase of the research was to examine the nature of the 'scaffolding' interactions between practitioners, parents and children, and the implications of this for the distributed cognitive practices the children were being introduced to. This secondary objective of the survey questionnaires attempted to establish the level of awareness, implicitly and explicitly, of key elements of the pedagogical concepts, scaffolding, sustained shared thinking and metacognition (Anning et al., 2004) discussed in Chapter Two. The questions sought to assess awareness of some of the issues involved in scaffolding, co-construction or

metacognition without compromising construct validity and reliability by solely using the terms themselves because these were likely to be unfamiliar or interpreted differently by the respondents (Connolly, 2007). The questions therefore focused on how parents were encouraged to do the following things with their children;

- Select, persist and reflect on what they do
- Develop shared understandings
- Offer hints and clues rather than doing things for children

Analysis of these questions can not indicate whether the terms scaffolding, SST and metacognition are understood by the group leaders, particularly in the unmediated context of a postal survey rather than a face to face interview where meaning can be checked (Robson, 2002). However the pilot process and main survey phase showed that group leaders did offer various appropriate responses to each of these questions. These responses suggested some validity in the questions as a tool for exploring practitioners' grasp of these issues. The commonalities and differences between responses were then analysed not in relation to a fixed category, but by allowing themes to emerge from readings of responses and then collating similar responses using Nvivo software (Gibbs, 2002). One advantage of the questionnaire is that the responses are not mediated by an interviewer as in the later case studies and that they arise in relation to a relatively uniform stimulus.

In the final question of the survey, respondents were asked specifically if they had encountered these terms. This does not show understanding, nor whether respondents have in fact encountered the terms, but it does give an indication of respondents' ability to recall the words and reveal an awareness of them. It is also possible to imagine some respondents having heard the terms, but being uncertain of the meanings, choosing not to answer positively to knowing the term. This question was deliberately placed last in order to reduce the likelihood of influencing earlier responses. The inclusion of the offer of additional information was intended to encourage honest answers about the terms and not put people off returning the questionnaire because of indicating a knowledge gap. This question, while useful and partially indicative of confidence in the terms, may not be as reliable as the earlier closed questions on leaders' ages for example.

### ***5.3.1 How does your group work to address parents'/carers' roles in encouraging children to select, persist and reflect on the activities they do?***

Many groups said that this was done through normal play activities, encouraging parents and children to play together (17). Three respondents suggested that parents pick up on the idea of persisting and reflecting through absorbing the models offered by other parents in the group and that the practitioners only offered advice if it was requested. Four respondents identified a more explicit discussion of such issues,

*Adults are asked to enjoy activities with children, each activity has a supervisor modelling language and open ended questions and lots of praise, if mums do the activities we show by example and mums learn by seeing what other children are capable of. (questionnaire response)*

One group leader commented:

*Advice offered, parents encouraged to sit back, observe, let children lead. (questionnaire response)*

This is in keeping with Whalley's (2007) comments suggesting that 'less can be more' in promoting children persisting longer than if the adult is guiding the activity too much. Seven group leaders identified story, singing and rhyme time as a particular point for children being encouraged to stick with the activity and reflect on songs and stories.

In the case study settings the nature of interactions was a key issue voiced by the practitioners.

*Obviously a variety of different parents do attend so it is about confidence building and providing indoor and outdoor play, but within that not just your fancy toys and few kind of natural type of objects. So like today we have had the sand and that's been quite nice for them. Some children might like the opportunity for play but I think parents need to understand also that they've got to be there with them also with them, that for them not to play on their own for them not to supervise them but to support them also to be involved because it is a stay and play. (Outwell staff Y)*

The problems of getting parents to engage with children in the group sessions, frequently identified in the survey are also voiced by the practitioners in the case study settings. In the Outwell group Vivian who worked across a number of groups,

identified Outwell as having a very positive culture of interaction in relation to other groups but still with room for further improvement.

*This group is good in that parents are used to the routine and they do sit with their children and join in. Sometimes it is difficult to do this. We have talked about putting cushions out to encourage the parent to get down to the children's level. (Outwell staff V)*

Nine responses were quite general and suggested no particular additional consideration was given to supporting selection and persistence at activities other than by encouraging parents to join in with activities. One respondent suggests that they acknowledged that some parents did not facilitate this:

*Probably doesn't [the group probably doesn't address this issue directly]. Some mums do, some don't. Too many [families] to offer individual input. (questionnaire response)*

Some of the more qualified practitioners identified 'following the child's lead' as a priority.

*Demonstrating use of language, open ended questions and lots of praise. If mums do the activities for children, we just show by example and I think mums learn by seeing what other children are capable of (qualified teacher questionnaire response)*

*Parents are encouraged to sit back and observe their children rather than make decisions for them" (foundation degree questionnaire response)*

The high priority given to building upon the children's activity closely matches the concern expressed by Whalley et al (2007) regarding over-directive exchanges but there is a danger that some comments might miss Whalley et al's (2007) notions of subtle interventions and playing alongside. More detailed discussion of this issue also emerged in the pilot and case studies.

*Cause it is very tempting to take over. In addition, I think as adults we have expectations about how things should be done; and what an end product should be, but we try and steer parents away from that so if they want to, I don't know, if they [the children] want to use say a Duplo train as a rocket then that is fine and we model that so the parents know that it is OK to do that. And it's OK to use toys in appropriate ways but different ways. (Talktime Staff D)*

The conception of support for learning emerging from observation could apply to either SST or to scaffolding. Indeed as two practitioners from the pilot study expand on the point, the idea of ‘leaving it to the children’ comes through more clearly in this discussion about how parents support their children’s learning.

*J: and the language as well*

*D: It is the language. Yeah 'cause a lot of parents fire questions at their children don't they? What you doing? What's that?*

*J: The children can only answer yes or no just one thing. Encouraging them to leave it more to them and things like art and crafts, it's getting away from that end product thing. You know it's got to look like something particular. It must look like a house with a window and doors.*

*D: It is not the end product it's the process of the children doing whatever*  
(Talktime staff)

With regard to the importance of children taking a leading role in managing their own learning these are very valid and helpful insights, emphasised in the literature and policy documents discussed in Chapter Three. Nevertheless the possibility exists of misunderstandings arising if, as in some of the comments above, there is a view of simply relinquishing control of the situation to the child and reducing the role of the adult to that of observer. In this case scaffolding could be interpreted as offering minimal prompts and leaving as much as possible to the child. It might miss the idea of giving voice to the child’s actions, highlighting significant features in elaborated discussions of scaffolding (Wood 1998). This is a theme echoed and supported in the analysis of the observations in Chapter Six. The notion of developing independence and individuality takes precedence in this pedagogic discourse. While independence *is* important (Schweinhart et al., 2005), a notion of scaffolding in this form plays down the role of language exchange in the learning process.

The nature of the interactions employed in parent and toddler groups is investigated further in the analysis of observations and interviews conducted in the case studies and discussed in Chapters Six and Seven. The identification of disagreements between some practitioners and parents about the best role for the adult to adopt in supporting children’s learning is clearly present in the questionnaires and staff interviews. These hint at three possible models of learning: first, a traditional behavioural pedagogy



focusing on exploration and discovery that practitioners might shorthand as Piagetian, second a view of learning being constructed by the child but strongly influenced by those interacting with the child (Vygotskian), and thirdly a model that identifies with teaching particular facts and skills through repetition, question and answer, that might be allied with a behaviourist approach to learning that some practitioners aligned with a parental doxa.

It is not surprising that a divergence of teaching/learning models should emerge in this analysis. The development of SST (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004) as part of the REPEY study of preschool pedagogy highlighted concerns regarding the relatively low percentage of shared dialogue as compared to more closed questioning. If practitioners are modelling 'hanging back' only, rather than sometimes offering a higher level of interactive engagement, then low frequencies of SST might also be experienced in parent and toddler groups. The issue of SST is thus raised as a possible area of underdevelopment in the conception of some practitioners' pedagogical armoury. This is an area of growing knowledge and issues of relevance and style need to be investigated and considered, not least because of the lower level of productive language and the styles of interaction employed by younger children.

The less qualified leaders' responses to this survey question about supporting learning also often reflected an informal, implicit approach to influencing parents.

*We only give advice if requested (questionnaire response, no qualification)*

*Parents are encouraged to join in at song and story time and also tidy toys with children (questionnaire response, no qualification)*

In such implicit discourses, the subtleties of the different approaches to supporting learning may be missed. Once again the Pen Green approach to discussing video films of interaction in play and co-researching with parents (Whalley et al 2007) seems to offer a valuable, non-patronising forum for sharing views on pedagogy more explicitly.

***5.3.2 How does your group encourage parents and carers to think about the way that they interact with their children in order to develop an exchange of understanding during activities?***

Seventeen leaders responded to this question by suggesting that exchanges of understandings were encouraged by children and parents doing activities together. Nine respondents specifically highlighted *playing* together, five suggested this was done in discussion times, six said this was informal through modelling and three of these stressed parents learning from each other.

*Following the PEEP methodology the session topic is discussed by the parents at circle time and followed up during activity (Questionnaire response)*

Two responses suggested that interaction between parent and child was encouraged specifically in story and tidy up time rather than in general play. This might be exemplified by one of my own child's parent and toddler groups where play with materials has no leadership from the group leaders, who then lead rhyme and singing activities at the end of the session. This contrasts to the case study settings where the practitioners spent a great deal of time deliberately interacting with a range of parents and children throughout the sessions as well as modelling interactions in singing and story sessions.

Two of the questionnaire responses mentioned rearranging seating around activities to promote parents joining in: this is a strand of concern echoed in the literature and in the case study groups. This suggests that some of those leading groups have a concern that parents are not joining in with children's activities in the way that they would wish. On one visit to a library based setting, one parent, also a KS1 teacher, commented that she was surprised at how, in the groups she went to with her child, many parents did not seem to know how to play with their children.

The analysis of the case studies in Chapters Six and Seven explores this issue further asking;

- Why might parents behave differently in a group context?
- Are parents uncertain about entering into more playful play in front of other adults?
- Do they see promoting independence as a key objective in the groups and therefore play less?

It is also possible that children, inspired by new resources, opt to explore more by themselves and seek less interaction with their parents. It is also possible that the



presence of other children encourages apparent self directed play because they are taking in what others are doing around them but in a less obvious way (Trevarthen, 1998). Insights into these issues might help group leaders to deeper understanding and an even more supportive relationship with parents.

There was little difference in the responses between more and less qualified leaders regarding offering positive role models or child-initiated learning to support exchanges of understanding:

*Group activities are encouraged including song time and story time but advice has to be very general. (questionnaire response)*

*This would be a visual opportunity for the parent carer to see how other parent carers interact with their children (questionnaire response)*

*Some children do not get to do art activity i.e. painting at home, play in water or sand, some children may not have many toys. The parents learn the importance of spending valuable time with their children, the importance of variety of play, sharing playtime, reading books together, sharing songs you may be poor but you can make items from boxes. (questionnaire response)*

Although several responses suggested that leaders did not see this as the purpose of their groups they still recognised that they offered the opportunity for such support.

*We do not actually have that kind of organisation at present. We do not see our role as implied by the question. Obviously we always encourage the parents and carers to take part in everything their children do. (voluntary teacher/parent questionnaire response)*

Many leaders referred to their previous answer, suggesting that they did not identify a need to distinguish the two questions.

The majority of responses to this question suggest that for most leaders the issue of promoting the exchange of understanding, while a part of what was on offer, was not perceived as requiring special attention. The two groups who mentioned organised programmes referred to information on a separate parenting course; one organised programme referred to the use of observations, photographs, discussion and modelling but had not connected this to the previous question about promoting extension and reflection on activity. An issue investigated further in the detailed case studies is whether discussion could be helpful in promoting awareness of sustained shared thinking. Discussion was not a common element within the sample perhaps because

discussion is difficult to organise unless there are well established formats together with willing participants and enough adults on hand to allow focussed discussion to take place without the children causing too much distraction. Informal discussion with parents is possibly easier and more natural but not easy to direct and focus. One group mentioned using photographs and perhaps, as with the previous survey question, a reflective discussion on past activities could be the most effective way of raising awareness of interaction. There are potential dangers in both of these strategies that parents might feel too self-conscious or 'not good enough' and withdraw from the group.

In regard to both parents and children there is some evidence in the responses to support the suggestion that learning might be viewed by practitioners as something that individuals should acquire through observing what others do rather than talking about what is taking place and sharing ideas. This may be a viewpoint shared by parents and practitioners, reflecting a wider societal view of learning being the responsibility of the individual and that they should absorb information and skills through experience and observation in the absence of an explicit dialogue of practice. This possibility echoes the findings and concerns of advocates of dialogic learning, (Mercer, 2000, Pramling-Samuelsson & Fleer, 2009). This is not to suggest that we do not learn through personal reflection on experience but that many tacit and less obvious issues may be underdeveloped in the absence of dialogue. The remaining chapters will explore this possibility in more detail.

### ***5.3.3 How does your group encourage parent/carers to think about offering clues and hints to children to encourage children's thinking rather than giving complete answers or instructions?***

This question was designed to explore practitioners' awareness of the value of letting children work things out for themselves, a topic that has already emerged in the responses to the earlier questions. It also offers the chance for practitioners not familiar with the term scaffolding to identify with helping children to spot patterns for themselves. This question was left blank by twelve respondents, which may suggest as indicated in several responses that this was seen as strongly related to previous questions and therefore to have already been covered by previous answers. However,

a few responses (3) did clearly indicate that they felt that their setting did not cover this, for example;

*Too chaotic for this most of the mums use the group to give support to each other (questionnaire response)*

This comment is interesting because, while only one response said that there was no time to promote this it reminds us that the short span of the session can be very busy for the leader, co-ordinating activities, possibly sorting refreshments, admin and meeting and greeting parents.

*We are not involved in advising or educating, but the group does provide an environment for parents to share ideas about children's development. We predominantly encourage free play-encouraging children to play with their peers and not to be reliant on adult intervention to provide stimulation. (questionnaire response)*

The second comment clearly suggests, once again, a philosophy aimed at promoting independence and minimising the adults' role in engaging with directly with learning.

Several responses indicated that the leaders did encourage the use of hints and clues by example;

*During story time;-our stories are very interactive with questions, repeated replies, actions and lots of visual aids (questionnaire response)*

This could be a very effective way of raising awareness of questioning techniques that encourage children to predict what will happen, guess at answers, and suggest ways of solving problems.

Six group leaders said that “*modelling of activities in the sessions by practitioners has proved beneficial and a starting point*”. Children's self solving of problems was promoted through modelling, but only two of these suggested that they discussed this in any detail with parents. One response commented that they modelled this approach but that “*parents were not ready to extend their children's thinking process.*” This comment was echoed in some of the lead practitioner's comments from the Outwell group. She felt that parents were not ready to consider arguments for developing a more interactive style in children's learning.

Two groups suggested that they modelled the use of clues and hints in story times. Taken in conjunction with the previous survey questions, these responses together

also suggest that many of the group leaders adopt a non-directive approach to interaction, leaving parents to absorb messages from observing leaders and other parents' behaviours. The previous comment is one of a few implying an inadequacy and is difficult to interpret clearly.

Four responses mentioned promoting child initiated learning but these differed in outlook, for example;

*The groups are child led-following the child's interests. Encouraging children to stretch their imagination and creativity through letting them explore in their own way. (questionnaire response)*

The above response suggests a view of knowledge developing through discovery learning, whereas the following response suggests an orientation towards vocabulary assessment and development rather than towards problem solving and thinking.

*Parents and carers allow their children to choose which activity they wish to do. e.g. If it is working in arts and crafts and making a face we and the parents will ask the children to point out features such as eyes etc(questionnaire response)*

Overall, where the issue of encouraging children through the use of clues and hints is perceived to be relevant, the responses in the survey again often highlighted the need to promote the independent activity of the child and to encourage parents to allow their children freedom to follow their own interests. This might involve little interaction with the parent. For example in the previous comment, where dialogue is suggested this seems to be orientated to vocabulary acquisition, extension and consolidation through a question and answer format rather than through reflection on process.

The survey data is helpful in illustrating that the case study group's views on interaction and learning are represented in other groups. It is helpful in identifying wider attitudes to some aspects of interaction but it is too limited to make well informed judgments about the prevalence and understanding of the specific terms 'scaffolding, SST and metacognition'. However, the final question which asked group leaders to indicate if they were aware of the terms suggests that the terms were present in the field but not widely known (see table 5.5 below).

**Table 5.6 Group leaders' familiar with terminology**

Name of strategy	Scaffolding	Sustained Shared thinking	Metacognition
Number of practitioners indicating awareness of this term	6	6	3

In the pilot case study, interviews with the seven different staff members who attended at different times showed that three of the seven staff had heard the term scaffolding, and only one had heard the term shared sustained thinking. In the subsequent case studies all the staff were aware of the terms 'Scaffolding' and 'Sustained Shared thinking', indicating the increasing attention drawn to these concepts in the EYFS.

The final section of this chapter will try to summarise possible shared cultural orientations to learning suggested by the survey together with points of difference requiring further reflection.

The comments of practitioners in the survey data suggest that this discourse regarding mediation, and shared thinking, is still emerging and might not form part of the mainstream experience of some practitioners unless they are engaging with continuing professional development (CPD). Texts in this field may represent more difficult, subtle arguments. The most mainstreamed of the three concepts in early years provision is Iram Siraj- Blatchford's SST (Siraj-Blatchford, 2005), a term which only entered the official Foundation Stage vocabulary in 2007. While it is useful to have an indication that six of the leaders had an awareness of the terms scaffolding and sustained shared thinking and while three indicated an awareness of metacognition it is perhaps more significant that while many highlight play and independent play as aspects of their practice, fewer highlight an active promotion of adult engagement in play and some draw attention to parents not engaging in play. The next stages of the research analysis explore this area in more depth whilst still posing the question of how this is relevant or significant to the practice of parent and toddler groups.

## **5.4 Themes emerging from the survey findings.**

The data in this survey has been interrogated to analyse the nature of parent and toddler groups within particular organisational or area based clusters. The survey is used to develop a picture of the range and nature of provision across the region. Although the findings suggest many similarities with regard to the type of activities and structures across the groups there seemed to be some distinctive points of variance in terms of purposes, staff training, organisation and strategies. The survey data suggests that the case study groups similar to other Surestart Children's Centre provision were at the upper end of the spectrum of provision in terms of management resources for supervision, staff training and professional development. They were also towards the more interaction orientated end of the spectrum of groups. This is illustrated by their having learning objectives and expecting to develop parental interactions with children through the sessions. However, the case study groups were more typical of children's centre provision. The two case studies represent two further distinctions present in the wider sample and the practitioners led Children's Centre sub-sample. First the case studies present the opportunity to reflect on the influence of a dedicated room as compared to a temporary space. Second the case studies allow some comparison of the use of formal and informal discussion time. The following overview uses headings taken from activity theory (Engeström, 2007, Rogoff, 1998) in order to highlight aspects of purposes, roles and intention, and will serve to facilitate a comparative summary of the survey data, case studies and literature.

### ***5.4.1 Instruments***

There is a great deal of commonality in regard to what appears to be offered in the spaces provided for these parent and toddler groups: space to play, toys to explore, activities around arts and craft, rhymes song and story in a group context; physical activities if there is enough space. These instruments, therefore, mirror closely those available to the child starting nursery or reception classes and support the validity of investigating the parent and toddler group context to examine how children are introduced to learning through the use of these objects in the case studies that follow.



#### **5.4.2 Purposes**

Emerging from the questionnaires, there was a strong sense that the group leaders' prime purpose was to support children's introduction to learning through play activities. Responses tend to put activities for children first and support for parents second. This suggests a stronger focus on the child's needs ahead of those of the parent as compared to documentation in the early 1990s (PLA, 1992). This supports the argument made in Chapter One that the importance of the child's learning has been afforded more significance by society in the wake of research presented by (Feinstein et al., 2004) and raises issues about the need to keep the parents' social, emotional and learning needs in focus (Jackson, 2010).

The survey questions are framed to explore attitudes to adult child interactions and in this context there is a great deal of common ground across each of the questions. Responses suggest the promotion of children as independent learners: this is sometimes more or less explicit. Types of approaches to learning are in line with the literature discussed in earlier chapters on pedagogical thinking (Whalley & the Pen Green Team, 2001, Athey, 2007, Pramling-Samuelsson & Fleer, 2009). This supports the arguments put forward in part 1 of this thesis that there may be some mutually affirming activity with children wanting to play and explore independently which meets parents' aspirations and allows parents some space for adult conversation. Trevarthen's review of patterns of interactions of children aged around two years suggests that patterns of apparently independent play are common in this age group (Trevarthen, 1998) and that this may influence both parents and practitioners to adopt a more supportive and less interactive role. This represents an important strand of investigation that is developed further in the case studies to consider the extent, frequency and nature of this space for learning.

It is clearly worthwhile to explore adults' beliefs about both their own and their children's roles in supporting learning in the parent and toddler groups in order to see how the potentially competing discourses of 'play with' and 'let go' are expressed by the adults. By gaining a better understanding of these perspectives it may be possible to influence accommodation and change. The tacit rules that regulate behaviours in the social context of the group, may offer some further insight into roles, expectations and purposes that can help to understand and support this activity. There was certainly

some suggestion that a tension of purpose existed for some of the group leaders who felt that some parents were not providing the close support they expected. In some groups this resulted in group leaders feeling obliged to rearrange the seating, moving seating closer children's activities in order to limit adult to adult conversation and increase interaction with children.

#### **5.4.3 Rules**

In relation to each of the survey questions on interactions there appeared to be some clear messages about the precedence of child initiated/ child led activity. Some practitioners suggested that some adults interfered too frequently in children's activities and neglected the development of children's interests. One issue raised several times is the issue of whether parents engage with children to the satisfaction of the practitioner in the setting. Rules of non-intervention were tangible in many responses but appeared to be more implicit and not rigid. Group leaders for the most part seemed not to discuss practices formally with parents but expected parents to learn through absorbing messages through practice in the environment.

This suggests mixed expectations of the value of and purpose of the groups. Some parents and leaders viewed the session as a chance for relaxation, adult conversation and for children to play and explore for them selves. While other group leaders and parents might see the groups as a place for parents to learn to interact more effectively with their children. This might lead to tensions between parent and practitioners if their purposes are not complementary.

#### **5.4.4 Community**

There was a sense from the language of the responses collected that leaders perceived themselves to be a part of the community of the parent and toddler. Some responses suggested that the leader was one of the 'mums' while on the other hand some forms set the leader more apart from the parents. Few of the forms appeared to locate the parents within other class or ethnic communities either explicitly or implicitly. Only one form clearly suggests the leader may see some of the parents as 'poor' but that this is no reason not to 'make items from boxes'. On balance this would seem to suggest that although some leaders might see themselves as 'not parents' there were few who distanced themselves from the wider community within which the parents



were located. There is a sense emerging of the families in the groups defining and forming the community, rather than being part of a school community for example. The children's role is to learn to function as part of this community: "The children have to think about making friends, share with other adults and children". It is possible that those staffing the sessions are not as markedly different as some qualified teachers teaching in disadvantaged wards might be. This might explain comments where practitioners distinguish themselves from parents by virtue of their knowledge of children's learning, rather than by class or group differentials.

#### ***5.4.5 Division of labour***

The survey suggested that parents are for the most part with their own children and have primary responsibility for mediating the activity for them. It is also suggested that in some groups, group leaders exert the most direct modelling in relation to books and rhymes. Several groups indicated this as a time to model interactions to parent and child together. The survey seems to suggest that many leaders adopted a very light facilitating role with few interventions. The comments about rearranging chairs around an activity to promote parents playing with their children suggests low power differentials between leaders and parents since practitioners seemed disturbed by parents' behaviours but apparently offered very tentative implicit responses. The case studies explore the nature of the dialogue on learning between setting and parent in more detail. The private/ public split in the division of labour identified by Marxists in relation to the family unit (Robinson & Jones -Diaz, 2006) is perhaps manifest in sensitivities identified in parents and practitioners regarding interference in 'family space'. Exploration of what parents seek from parent and toddler groups and how they receive the implicit and 'discussed' messages offered might be helpful. Qualitative analysis of the dialogues established in parent and toddler groups may be very helpful to those walking this difficult line.

#### ***5.4.6 Subject***

It would appear that for most respondents the 'subject' or 'actor' focus of the group is the child and the parent jointly. Responses to the first question regarding the services offered identify both of these partners and most respondents agreed that the group supports the parent and child dyad. There is a sense with some respondents that the child is being supported in moving from this relationship into a wider community.

The nature of this subject orientation may be important in framing how the group orients its activities towards the parent child partnership, independence or tentative steps towards other learning partners, or collaboration with parents.

### **5.5 Setting an agenda for analysing pedagogy and doxa in the case studies.**

This chapter sets the scene for the subsequent case study chapters. It has clearly identified that although the supported parent and toddler groups only made up one third of the provision surveyed, there are many common attitudes to the resources and purposes of parent and toddler group that were shared across all those sampled. A very similar set of artefacts has been identified across both supported and non-supported parent and toddler groups. The survey and interviews and findings support the PPEL study (2007), suggesting that while there is common support for providing a forum for children to play together with parents and other children, there is some uncertainty about how to support and structure this. While practitioners in the case study settings had received training in relation to structuring groups and working with parents they were clearly still much less confident in this regard than in structuring the play sessions.

The features of the practitioners' pedagogy that are highlighted in the analysis of the survey sample suggest a weakly framed and implicit form of transmission. If there was a stated strategy for influencing parents, it was often one of modelling between parents, or modelling by practitioners, while explicit discussion was less frequently mentioned. The case studies seek to explore the messages being modelled and discussed by practitioners in more detail to see how this compares with parents' own strategies for supporting learning behaviours. The survey responses suggest there may perhaps be some commonly held perspectives on exploratory independent child led play as a powerful form of behaviour driving learning. More detailed examination of the overlap of parents' and leaders' perspectives may be helpful in seeing where there is common supportive ground and where there is tension. An understanding of the nature of this tension might prove helpful if there are commonly held views that at this age 'care' is dominant over 'education' (Pugh, 1995). Then perhaps revisions to the notion of pedagogy as a term unifying care and education in the development of

the child rather than separating the two would also be a useful step for policy makers and providers to begin to address.

Drawing from the findings of the PPEL study (2007) and the Sure Start evaluation (Anning et al 2005) regarding supporting children's cognitive development, one significant issue may be practitioners having appropriate strategies and vocabulary for sharing their beliefs about children's learning with parents. Practitioners might benefit from additional insights and support in reflecting on the meaning of sustained shared thinking and scaffolding which few were familiar with. The survey has begun to highlight some differences of perspective particularly between parents and some practitioners. There is clearly a potential tension if practitioners are seeking to promote parents' engagement with children in activity whilst the parents are seeking to provide an opportunity for their child to move towards a greater independence from the carer and increasing contact with others. The multiple perspectives of parents, children and practitioners will be developed further in the following chapters. These will explore these contradictions and tensions in more detail: the tension between child centred learning and adult social activity; between adult engagement in children's learning and adults taking a step back to observe children's learning, with a view to identifying possibilities for change.

## Chapter 6

### Patterns of interactions in the case study groups

#### 6.0 Introduction to the sample of observation data

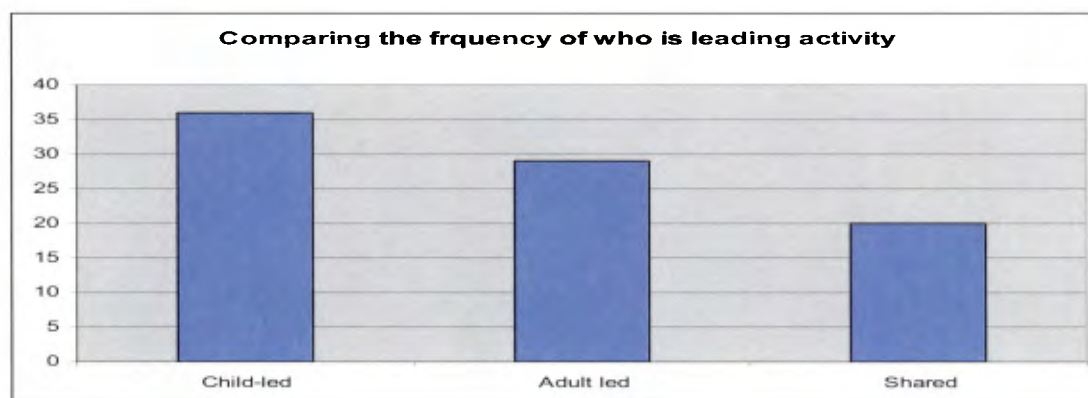
This chapter presents an analytical overview of the observations of a sample of children's activities and interactions carried out in the two case study settings, Outwell and Talktime. Each group case study comprises six observations centred on individual children that record their activity and accompanying interactions throughout one single session for each child. The twelve resulting learning stories were shared with the respective parents and the practitioners and so the analysis of the observations is supplemented by parents' and practitioners' comments about each child, as well as the adults' comments about their own roles. This data has been coded following the methods identified in Chapter Four in order to develop a portrait of models of learning existing within the community cultures in the groups.

This analysis begins by considering the overall experience of the children in relation to interaction with all adults before going into more detail about how this might vary between different groups of adults. A total of 84 episodes are included for analysis representing the activities of the twelve children across the two case study groups. These 84 episodes exclude snack times, story and singing sessions which fall outside the scope of this study. Thirty-three episodes were recorded in the Outwell group and 51 in the Talktime group. In only two activities was the child exploring alone away from any adult and one of these episodes involved interaction with another child but no adult. This means adults were present alongside the children in 82 of the 84 coded episodes. In 14 of the 82 episodes adults were involved in a process of directing the child towards a welfare need such as clean clothes, the toilet or snack time and the interactions were perceived to be functional and any learning incidental. In 63 of the episodes the children were interacted with in some way by an adult, most frequently their parents (56/21). These are possibly high levels of parent attention to activities in relation to some of the concerns reported by some of the practitioners in Chapter Five, regarding the proportion of time parents spent talking with each other. This supports opinions expressed in both groups in Chapter Five that the ethos of both case study

groups promoted parents being responsible for their children and being expected to support the children's activity. The location of Talktime within a purpose built location and the fact that it was permanently set out with a higher number of accessible materials compared to Outwell, may explain the slightly higher number of activities observed in that group, 51 compared to 33, particularly given the similar timings of the two groups and that the same amount of time was spent observing in each group.

There were 36 episodes where children led play with low levels of adult participation and guidance compared to 29 adult led episodes (see figure 6.1). Again this suggests high levels of adult participation in relation to the pre-study group and some of the comments from parents and practitioners reported in Chapter Five regarding low levels of adult engagement in other groups.

**Figure 6.1 Comparing the frequency who is leading activity**



The potentially beneficial mix of child-led and adult-led activity identified in Chapter Two appears to be available in these groups. The smaller number of 20 'shared' episodes where the adults really seemed to engage in playing with children is reflected on throughout the remainder of the thesis.

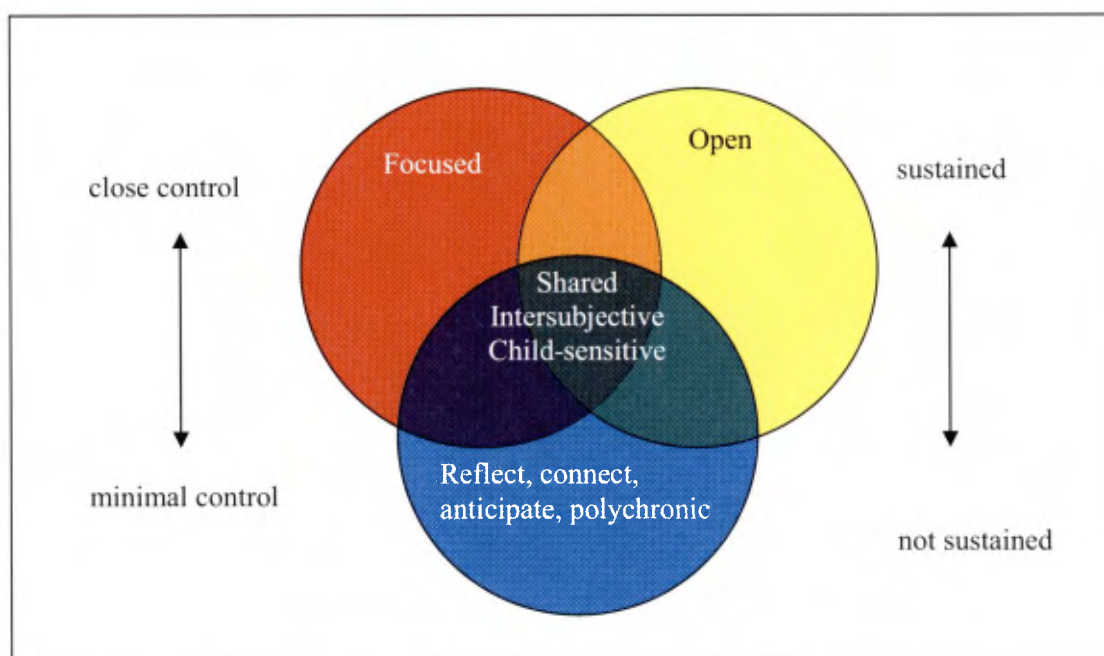
It is difficult to judge how accurately these observations reflect interaction in the groups. I can only report that I did not perceive an obvious change in behaviours between when parents knew they were the focus of observation and when they were not. It is possible that there is some degree of performance for observation and this might be illustrative of what is perceived to be positive behaviour or of performance inhibited by nerves. It is therefore important to view these findings cautiously. Most importantly the findings should not be assumed to represent interactions in the home context. The findings reported in the following chapters try to concentrate on what

the data suggests about understandings of how to support learning in the parent and toddler group context. Where references are made to possible implications for the home context, this is intended to indicate the potential for further investigation.

### 6.1 An overview of interaction

The aim of the study was to identify and analyse how the patterns of interaction employed by adults supported children's learning and to consider the implications of these experiences. Each child's learning story was divided into episodes on the basis of the continuity between related actions. These episodes were then analysed using the collaborative learning coding tool featured as Figure 4.2 in Chapter Four.

*Figure 4.3 A model of the coding tool for interactions.*

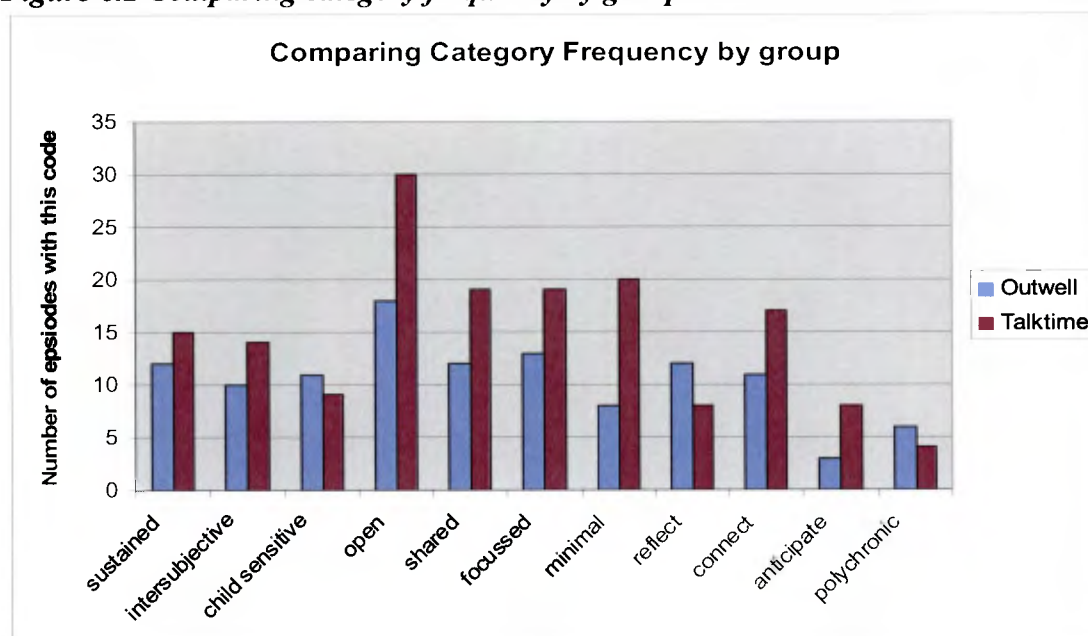


This chapter compares the individual elements of the coding framework before reflecting in more detail on how these elements are combined into modes of interaction. The initial analysis of the individual elements of the coding framework provides a useful starting pointing for checking the validity of the analytical codes and the sample.



Figure 6.2 (below) presents the number of interactions in each setting that were coded by the elements of the collaborative coding tool and also the number of episodes of each individual's observation that were coded to that element. This straightforward comparison of the codes allocated in each of the case study settings using the elements of the collaborative learning coding tool highlights many similarities and only a few differences between the settings.

**Figure 6.2 Comparing category frequency by group**



Although there is a higher frequency of episodes in the Talktime group a similar pattern of distribution of frequency occurs across both groups. The timing of the groups was similar but there are a greater number of episodes recorded in the Talktime setting. This may be attributed to two reasons: first the slightly earlier start time in the Outwell sessions and the greater range of activities available in the Talktime group located in a purpose built dedicated room within a children's centre. Some parents had requested that the Outwell group commence from 9am so that they could arrive directly from the school run, however, many parents seemed to prefer to arrive between 9.15 and 9.30. The 9.15 start of the Talktime group seemed to suit this same pattern with most families arriving between 9.15 and 9.30. The permanent layout of the Talktime with materials openly accessible to the children presented them with greater options not only in terms of individual activities but for transferring equipment between locations in the room. The 51 to 33 difference between the groups

is interesting but there was a similar structure and scope for exploratory and creative play in both groups. The pattern of data analysis initially suggests that while the Talktime group as a whole experience a greater number of episodes the pattern of elements are in proportion with this difference.

The most prominent feature in figure 6.2 is the higher frequency of open ended interactions compared to focused interactions.

This pattern of interaction is similar to Rogoff's finding that adults tend to give control of the learning context over to the child; "mothers generally observed and supported the play without entering it by performing pretend roles and actions," (Rogoff 1998a p709). This suggests that the activities offer child oriented affordances which quickly communicate possibilities for the child to engage with. In order to achieve this with this age group it is likely that control and sensory experience will take precedence over more complex social activities. There is a suggestion that this pattern might be slightly more pronounced in the Talktime group where the ratio of open ended interactions and minimal direction seem to be proportionally higher than the Outwell group

Some of the elements from the metacognitive circle suggest a difference between the groups with regard to the frequency that the adults encourage children to 'reflect' on events and connect events across time (polychronic). These two elements of interaction run counter to the otherwise similar pattern in the other categories. The higher number of episodes with these codes in the Outwell group suggests a parallel with other research findings suggesting that higher frequencies of reflective interaction containing 'reflection' and 'connection of events over time' may occur in middle class cultural groups across a number of ethnic groups (Hasan, 2002, Rogoff et al., 1998). The Outwell group contained four graduates among the six parents sampled, whilst the Talktime group had no graduate parents. However with such a small number of children the data is sensitive to individual events and case differences and the numerical data here is used to identify possible trends that can then be explored in more depth with the qualitative data. Possible explanations for these differences are explored in the remainder of this chapter with a view to considering their significance and whether these have any implications for the operation of the groups. However before proceeding with this analysis, it is useful to

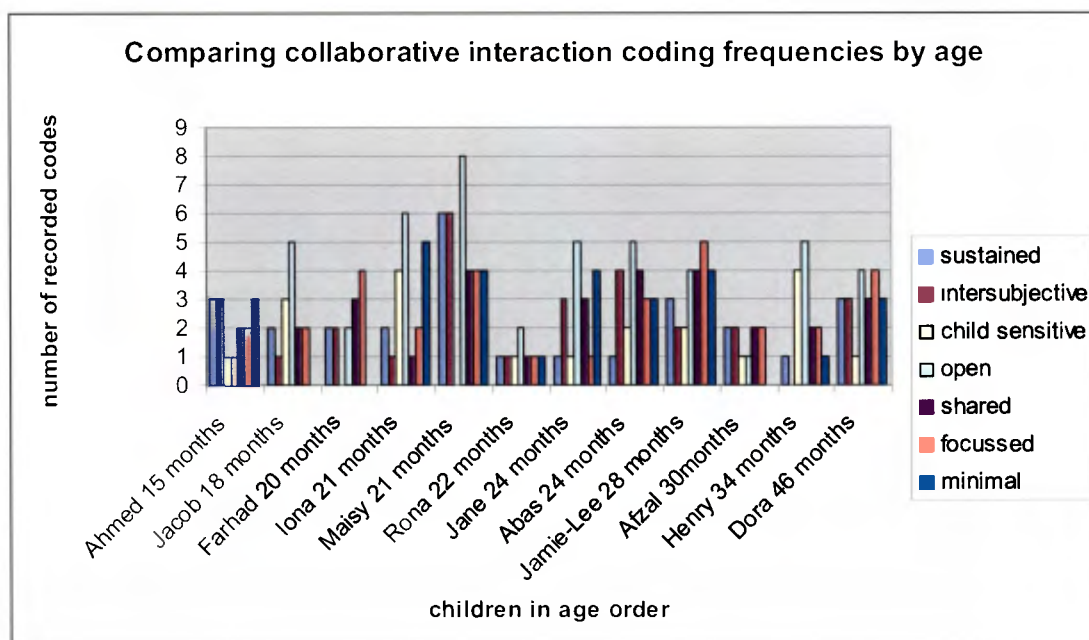


consider potential influences on the cultures of interactions in the groups that might exert significant influences on interactions beyond the organisational framing of the groups.

### 6.1.1 Age of children

There are no clear differences in the pattern of collaborative codes for individual children simply on the basis of age (See figure 6.3). One might expect longer and more co-constructive interactions to be present in the interactions of the older more linguistically mature children. However even with regard to Dora aged three and a half, where the nature of her interactions was different with regard to the quantity of language used in the interactions, the balance of elements of interaction does not stand out from the rest of the sample, where the ages vary between 15 months and nearly three years. Figure 6.3 suggests that children's experience of non-directed, directed and co-constructed learning support during activity in this context did not correlate directly with age.

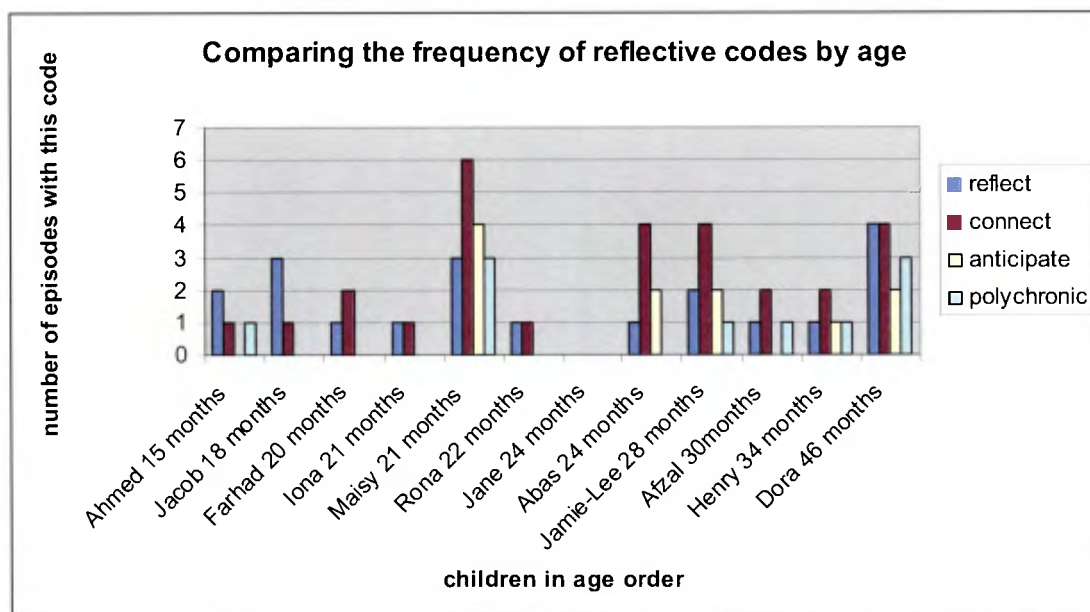
*Figure 6.3 Comparing collaborative interaction coding frequencies by age*



In regard to the frequency of different types of reflective prompts that adults supported (figure 6.4) the pattern appears to be, as one might have anticipated, with a higher number and greater range of reflective elements associated with the older, more language competent children. Maisy and Jane are notable exceptions to this

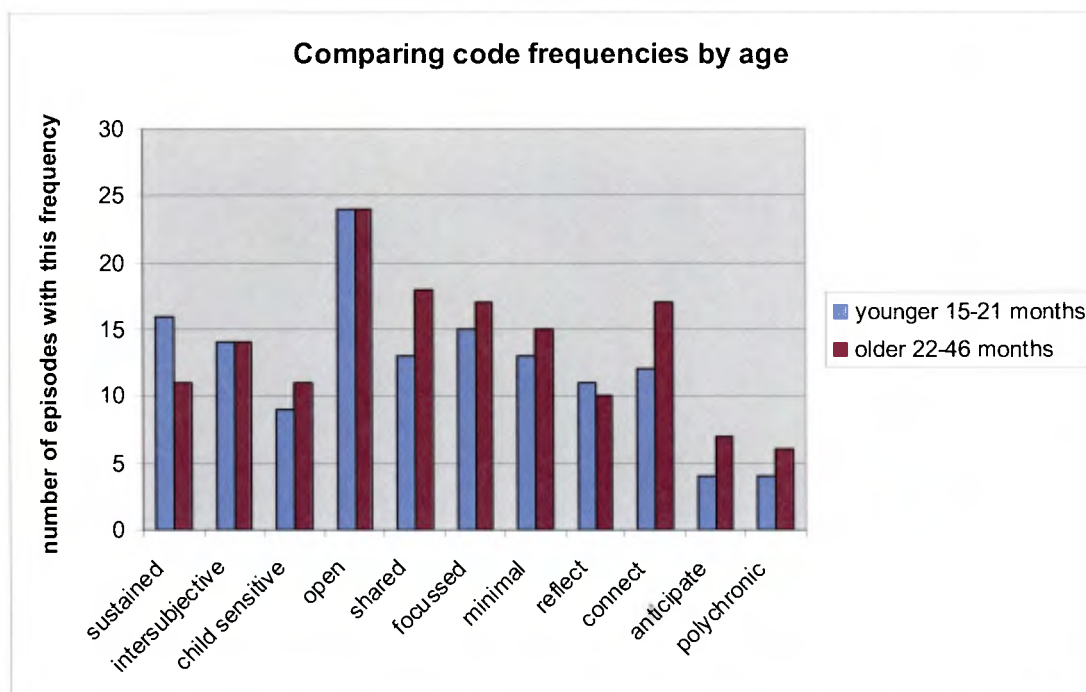
pattern and these two children's interactions and background are explored in more detail in Chapter Seven.

**Figure 6.4 Comparing the frequency of reflective codes by age.**



Grouping the six youngest and six oldest children's data together suggested that the older children were very slightly more inclined to experience more shared exchanges including some of the metacognitive elements *connecting* and *anticipating* events in time and space.

**Figure 6.5 Comparing code frequencies by age**

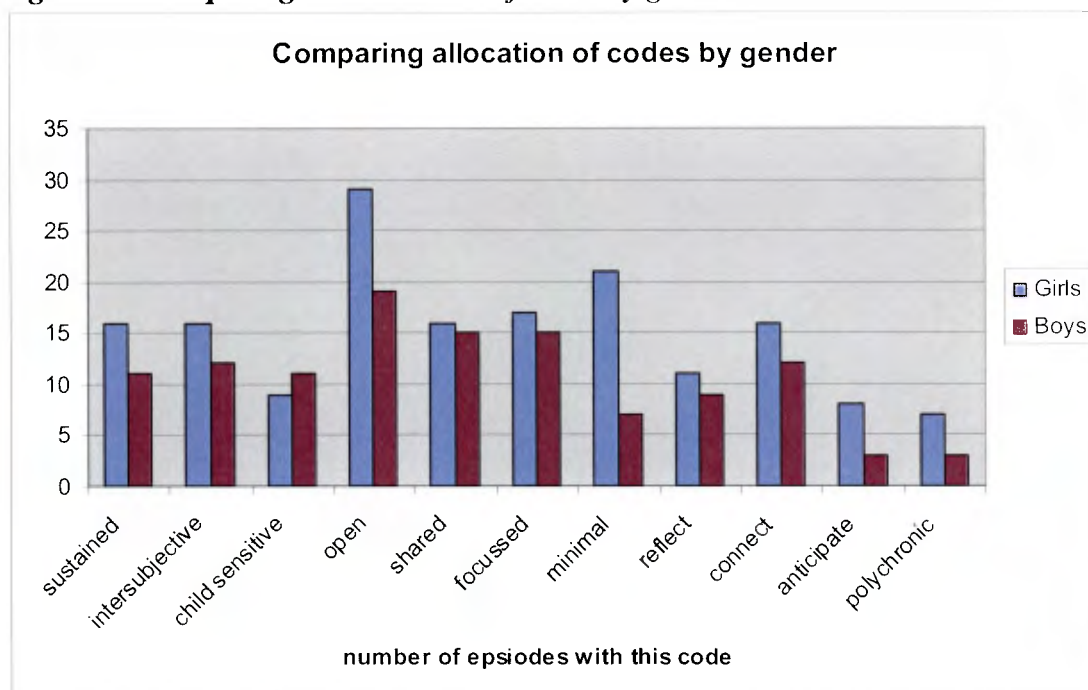


The children from the two case study groups are split evenly into each of the age groupings and so comments relating to this factor should not of themselves distort a comparison of group findings.

### 6.1.2 Gender

Gender appeared to be a more differentiating distinction than age, with the girls seemingly receiving a greater proportion of sustained interaction linking to their understanding in open-ended interactions (see figure 6.5). There is insufficient data here to comment further other than to suggest that further investigation could be helpful in identifying how communication patterns at this age might serve to widen gaps between girls' and boys' language competencies at this early point in their learning. If girls are experiencing more interactions that involve more productive language exchanges then this early differentiation in learning focus might be a contributing factor to the differentiated achievement identified in schooling. As with age there were an equal number of boys and girls in each case study.

**Figure 6.6 Comparing the allocation of codes by gender.**

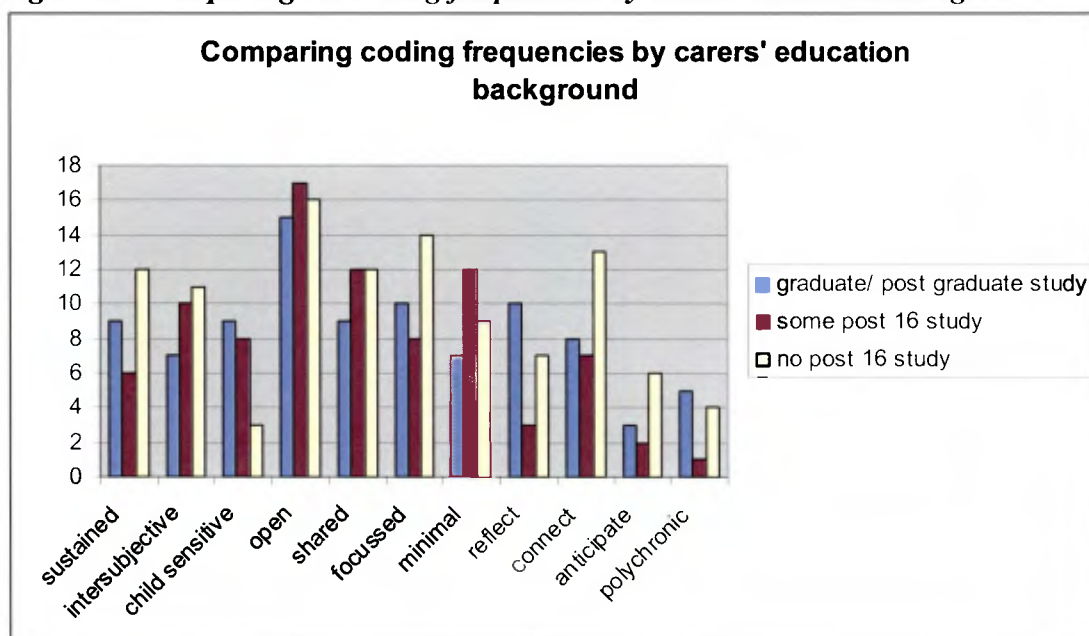


### 6.1.3 Educational background of the carer

The following figure examines the interaction of the children grouped on the basis of the educational background of their carer. It is important to keep in mind that these codes include interactions with the practitioners as well as the parents. There are equal numbers of carers in each group: one grandmother is included in the no post-16 study group and all the other carers in the sample are mothers. All of the parents had some qualification. Figure 6.7 suggests similarities in the patterns of interaction across each grouping. There is a hint that the children of the ‘*no additional post 16 study*’ group may receive slightly more focused and connective and sustained interactions.

The similarity in frequency patterns for each ‘*education background*’ grouping is interesting (see figure 6.7 below): one might expect greater variance according to educational background following the findings of the longitudinal studies (Sylva et al., 2004, Wylie & Thompson, 2003).

**Figure 6.7 Comparing the coding frequencies by carers’ education background**



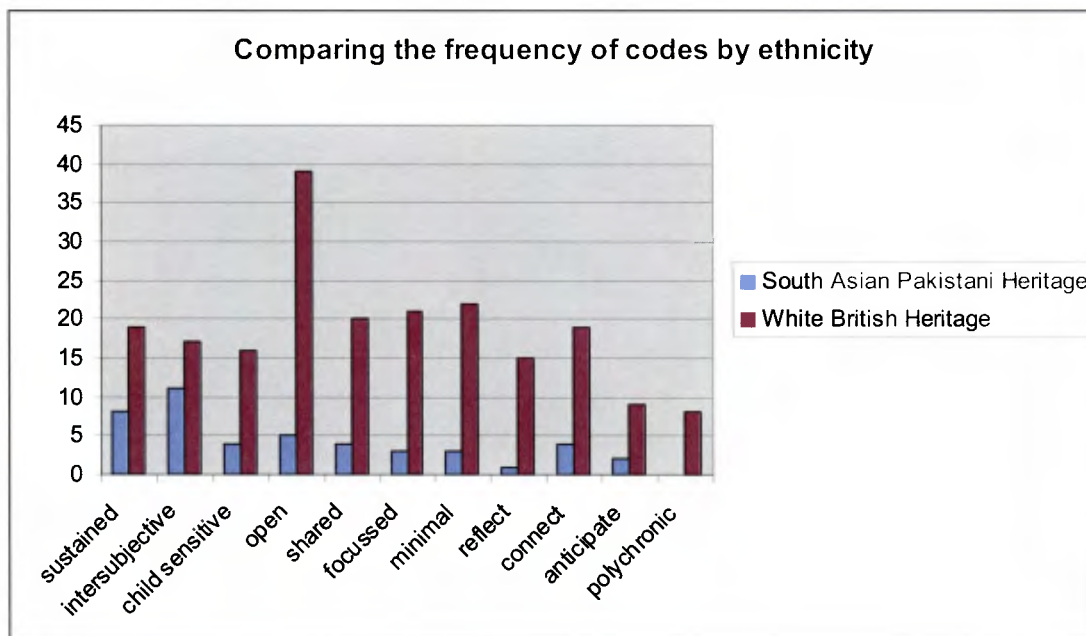
This finding is more in line with Tizard and Hughes’ (1984) research in that there were not significant differences in the styles of interaction between different mother and daughter pairs. However, although the slightly higher number of reflective interactions in the most educated group appears small in figure 6.7 above, further

separation of the episodes into parent-led and practitioner-led interactions (see figure 6.20) reveals the graduate parent group involved in more than twice as many reflective interactions as the other two groups. This is much more in line with the commentaries reported in part one of the thesis, that some parents draw more attention to analysis and reflection in interaction (Bernstein, 1971, Bruner, 2006, Rogoff, 2003). It is important to note at this point that the four graduate mothers were all in the Outwell group and that there is an imbalance between the case study groups in this regard. This might be connected to the seemingly higher frequency of reflective and polychronic interactions in the Outwell group but it would seem that other personal influences should also be examined in more detail.

#### **6.1.4 Ethnic Background**

It is important, when viewing the chart comparing ethnic background (figure 6.7), to remember that there are only four boys from a Pakistani heritage background in the sample compared to eight children from a white British Background.

**Figure 6.8 Comparing the frequency of codes by ethnicity**



The issue of gender highlighted in 6.1.2 illustrated the difficulties of speculating too far on the influence of a single aspect of identity because there was variation within the group most particularly with regard to Ahmed, whose parents had both studied at post graduate level. The pattern revealed here by comparing the frequency of coding of observations by ethnicity suggests a smaller number of activities, particularly of an open ended nature, in the South Asian heritage group, however there is the suggestion of a high frequency of intersubjectivity and sustained activity within this pattern.

Once again there are clearly numerous possibilities arising from circumstances on the day of observation and the variance of complex combinations of factors of identity and experience, as well as localised cultures, which could account for these differences. It is not the purpose of this study to pursue the connections between ethnic background and interaction in the group in great detail: insufficient detail and data has been sought to pursue these investigations further. The purpose of this discussion is to illustrate how these factors may influence the two case study samples.

It is suggested that overall there is a balanced and helpful cross section of carers and children and that comparisons between the groups are not particularly distorted by a single factor. It is suggested that the above analysis of these potentially influential factors indicates that the case study samples from the group were balanced with regard to gender, age, and ethnicity; however the educational and social class background of the parents is not balanced across the groups and clearly needs to be factored into any interpretation of the data. Although the Outwell sample has a significant proportion of graduates which the Talktime group does not, this distinction does not appear to create immediate clear distinctions in the patterns of interactions between the groups.



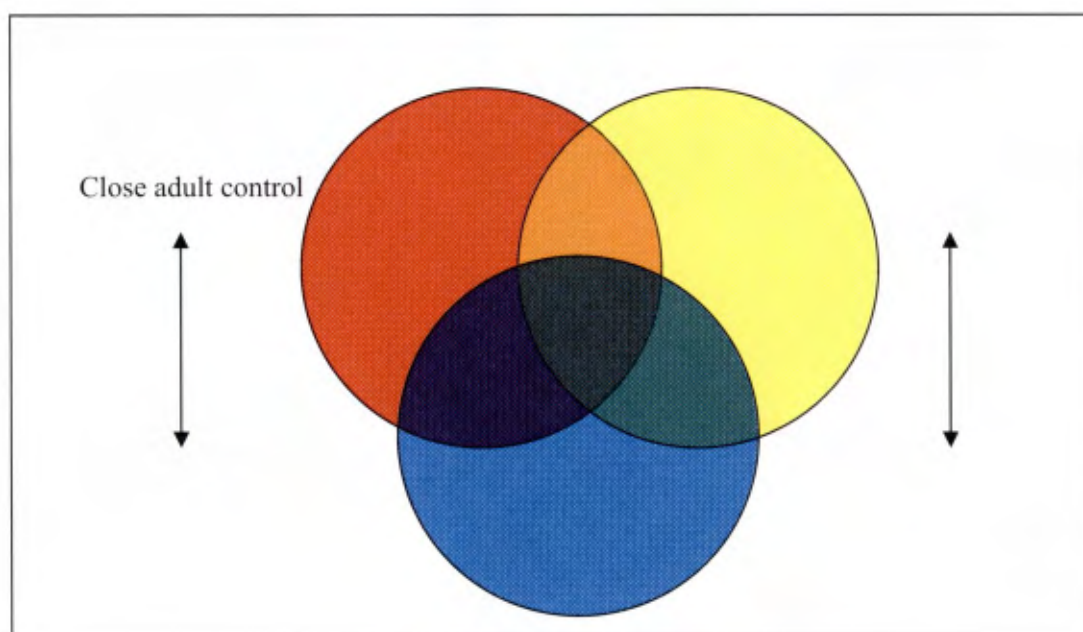
## 6.2 Modes of adult-child interaction

The next phase of the analysis examined each episode and identified the pattern of coding elements from the analytical framework in order to try to identify how they were combined into modes of interaction. The identification of modes of interaction helps to draw the elements into more meaningful descriptors of how learning activity is framed within the parent and toddler groups. This process led to the identification of six modes of interaction: *Controlling, Monitoring, Affirming, Teaching, Lending ideas and Playing*; these are described in the following sub-sections. In the course of discussing these modes I will begin to illustrate how the use of affordance as a concept is helpful in identifying how parents and children's purposes may resonate or clash.

### 6.2.1 Controlling

The episodes identified with this modal descriptor were blankly coded, because they were simply about controlling or meeting the needs of situation, for example where children needed to go to the toilet, put on an apron, or wipe their nose.

**Figure 6.9** *Elements in controlling interactions*



These episodes prioritised close control over the elements of collaborative mediation because they were not open to supporting the child's own interests nor serving a deliberate learning objective of the parent. This is not to say that a child might not learn from such exchanges. In the following example Dora can see that she and the environment are both trusted. She is free to go outside provided that she prepares against the cold, but it would appear that neither the child nor the mother has a learning agenda in this exchange.

***Controlling (example 1) Talktime. Dora, age 48 months with Mum.***

In-between times where Mum is talking to other parents about going to a playbarn in the afternoon and Dora is taking in the conversation she says that she would like orange juice and blackcurrant juice. She indicates that she wants to go outside and that she doesn't want her hair clips on. Mum helps her to put her lace up shoes on, insisting that she'll need her coat on if she is going outside. Dora asks where she should put her clips and her mum takes them.

In the following example Farhad is pursuing his own investigation alongside another child in the water tray monitored by his mother who only intervenes to prevent Farhad from becoming too wet. Farhad's mother gives him some space to investigate the materials by himself and develop the activity with the other boy. Again in this example Farhad's mother does not appear to focus on a particular learning point, she doesn't try to explain her actions to Farhad rather to move him swiftly into another activity.

In this second example Farhad appears to be motivated to seek to control the water tray materials whereas the mother concerned at the potential of the water to compromise the personal needs that she perceives for the child. In both cases the perceived well-being of the child takes precedence over any intended learning agenda.



***Controlling (example 2) Talktime. Farhad age 20 months with Mum***

Farhad returns to the water where Ejaz is already playing wearing a tall hat and pouring water from a small yoghurt bottle into the water wheel. "I'm in the water," says Ejaz to Farhad.

Farhad watches as Ejaz continues to pour water from a small cup to make the water wheel spin around. He then hears a second water wheel squeak as a work experience student pours water into it. Farhad pulls Ejaz's wheel closer to him to peer into the yellow funnel at the top and then uses a measuring jug to pour water in. He takes up the cup that Ejaz had been using and has a little sip of water and tips the rest into the funnel to make the wheel spin.

"oy oy oy," he announces loudly to Ejaz as they both pour water on to the wheel. Farhad's older sister arrives at the water tray and he looks and smiles broadly at her as she arrives. "Oh oh," he says.

Farhad pours more water into the wheel with the measuring jug. "Oo oo oo," he says and watches his sister pouring water out of a yogurt bottle into the water. He then begins to pour water on himself and his mum says, "No Farhad". He watches her as she moves away, "Oooo dad a," he says to his sister as she pours water into the funnel of the water wheel.

Farhad has noticed water dripping from the bottom of the cup he is pouring from and the work experience student shows Farhad how to hold the cup steady so that the water drips straight down out of the four holes in the bottom. Farhad watches this carefully and then pours the water out into the water tray. Farhad's mum returns and Farhad continues to pour water into the waterwheel funnel saying, "Hey". He then pours water from the jug onto the front of his apron and his mum comes over.

"Look what you have done. Stop playing in the water or you'll never dry." She takes off his apron. "Why don't you play with the cars?" she suggests. "Come and play in the cars". After a little initial resistance she leads him willingly by the hand over to the carpeted area where the cars are kept.

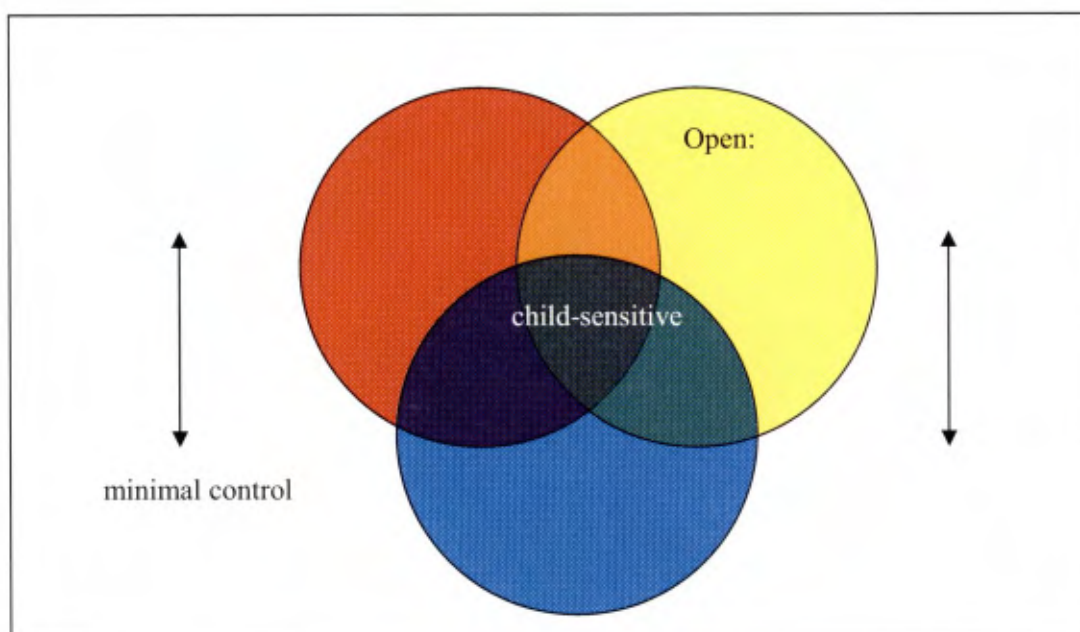
In these examples of *controlling* the coding circles are completely blank because the adult is not seeking to conserve the child's activity or lead into a learning point. This is not necessarily insensitive to the child's learning but rather neutral towards learning emphasising the primacy of rules beyond the knowledge offered by the materials. In the first example neither the child nor adult seem to connect with a particular affordance: the exchange is purely regulatory and that regulation relates to the personal needs of the child. This represents a very weak classification and framing of learning in relation to the materials themselves but a very strong classification framework in relation to the rules of behaviour in context such as keeping dry, sharing materials or not making too much noise.

Learning in these modes seems likely to be in relation to identifying the norms, expectations and rules of behaviour in the group. The power of the adult as the arbiter or the interpreter of the rules of the setting is clear and the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours as well as the imperatives of personal care are set out. These are not collaborative learning episodes and while the thinking is with the adult one might argue that there is some clarity about how one is expected to behave given these circumstances. The child is expected to draw conclusions about social priorities and rules; these are sometimes made more explicit and sometimes kept concealed if the child is distracted away from an undesired activity without explanation.

### 6.2.2 Monitoring

Interactions in the ‘monitoring support’ mode are distinguished from the previous mode because the adult is present, watchful, gives space to the child’s activity and acts to conserve and prolong it with minimal disruption.

**Figure 6.10 Elements in monitoring interactions**



In these activities the adults were present but for the most part quiet and not intervening unless the child required support. These episodes are coded as only minimal or only open codes or both open and minimal. The adults did sometimes offer minimal support which might sometimes be silent in order to ensure that the child could continue. The adult thereby identified an idea of what the child was trying

to achieve and supported the child's intention. These episodes were not coded as shared or intersubjective because there appeared to be no back and forth sharing of ideas between adult and child.

In the first example Abas's mother offers a sequence of musical instruments that prolongs his activity of testing them but there is little exchange between the two regarding the quality of each instrument. Abas's mother appeared to be particularly concerned that he share the resources fairly with those around him and not damage them and there was a slight tension in the activity with a sense that she might respond by asserting control at any moment.

***Monitoring (example 1) Talktime. Abas age 30 months with Mum***

Abas hears a child on the carpeted area banging a drum. He looks around and then moves towards them taking off the apron and passing it to his mum who is already helping him to take it off. The mums on the carpet arrange the drums to make space for Abas and his mother. Abas and Kerry [child] take it in turns to bang on a large low drum with beaters.

"Share it," says mum. The boys continue.

"Share it," they are advised again.

Abas starts trying to move the drum to his advantage.

"Share," says his mum and offers him a different drum from the basket of instruments which he places next to him and then beats slowly and deliberately. Mum offers him a shaker from the basket which she shakes and then he copies her briefly and then uses the shaker as a beater to continue beating the drum as before. Mum offers him a transparent layered shaker with beads that she revolves so he can hear the sound and see the beads moving inside. Abas takes the shaker and lays it beside himself. Mum offers him a set of sleigh bells which he shakes and lays aside. Mum then offers him a toy hand bell from a set of hand bells as Iona starts to ring two bells from the same set and dance in time as she rings them. Abas takes the offered bell and uses it to hit the drum several times. He then stands up to copy Iona and accepts a second offered bell. He turns around to look at himself in a full length mirror that is next to him. He rings the bells one by one and then reverses to sit on his mother's lap and slides down onto the floor in front of her giving one bell to her and offering the other to Kerry.

This example demonstrates the potential to become a completely controlling episode and contrasts with the following example where Abas's mother is more relaxed and feeds Abas's own activity. She still offers only a minimal input which while helping to sustain the activity, does not develop or extend it. In this mode, reflection on any knowledge gained seems to be left entirely to the child unless the activity is returned to in later conversations or episodes.

In the second example Ahmed's activity with the skittles in the outdoor area is closely watched by his mother throughout.

***Monitoring (example 2) Outwell Ahmed age 15 months with Mum***

Ahmed climbs out of the car and picks out another skittle from the boot of the car. He shows them to mum and she smiles. He then walks in a circle around the yard tapping the skittles together. He moves back towards his mum.

"Bang bang," she says and he offers them to her. She takes one and taps it gently against the other skittle that Ahmed is still holding. He takes the second skittle back from his mum and walks around tapping both skittles together as before. This is repeated twice more and then he moves in through the door followed by mum still holding the skittles. He continues tapping the skittles as mum greets one of the other mothers and Ahmed continues to tap the skittles looking around at what is happening in the room. Martin says he has seen Ahmed playing with the skittles and says it looks like a fun game. Martin holds out a hand asking for a skittle; Ahmed passes him a skittle then takes it back. He continues tapping the skittles together talking to himself.

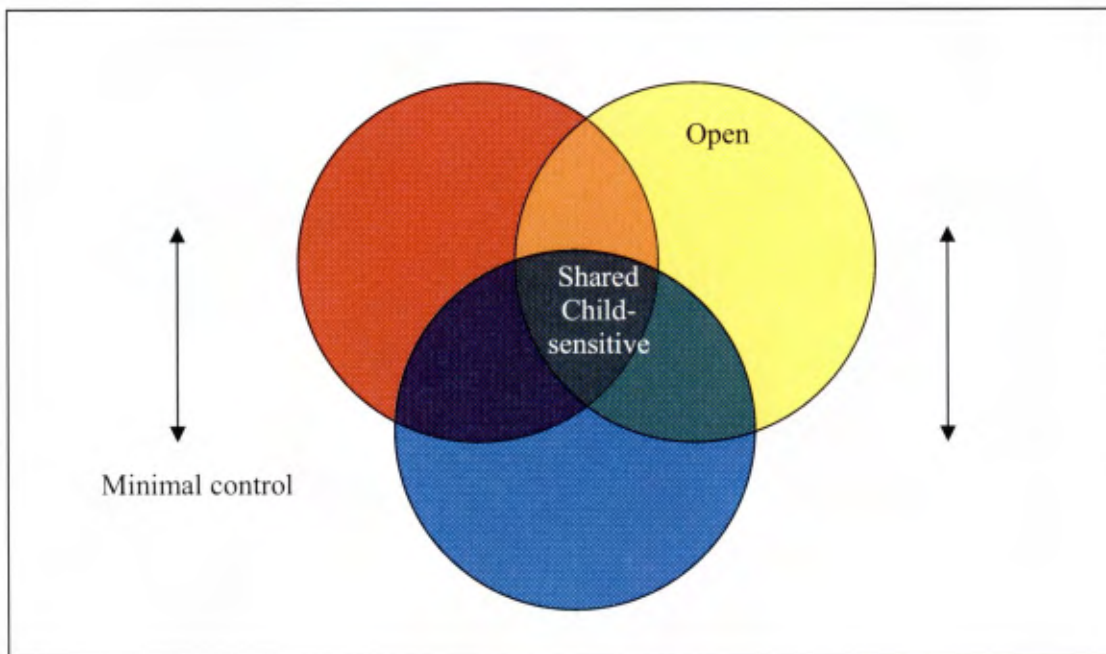
When Ahmed moved inside with the skittles the activity changed to become a traditional skittle game of counting how many skittles were knocked down. This activity extended the use of skittles and encouraged Ahmed to recognise a different purpose for the materials, but it does not explore further his own original activity with them. As discussed in Chapter Two, many practitioners might seek to 'scaffold' further reflection on the transporting objects or putting objects into enveloping containers as a way of building on schemas to promote further reflection on the activity. In both of these episodes the boys appear to be motivated by the materials to explore ways to control the sounds that they produce and in both cases the mothers recognise and accept this affordance provided it doesn't become too loud or too dangerous.

It is difficult to see these examples as collaborative learning: the learning is turned over to the child and the adult offers little feedback as long as the child is keeping within the bounds of expected behaviour. The adult may see things at least partially from the child's point of view but thinking is not shared between the adult and child and there is no co-construction of meaning. Some might argue that these episodes are creating a scaffold for reflection on experience by creating a space for promoting the value of individual exploration; this may be true but it does not match with the descriptions of scaffolding offered in Chapter Three (Jordan, 2004, Wood, 1998). The adult offers no guidance, prompts or support for directing learning or metacognition.

### 6.2.3 Affirming

In these activities the adults were observing the children's activities and commenting on what they were doing such as *that is nice, oh you did it*, or asking rhetorical questions such as *are you putting the hat on?*

**Figure 6.11 Elements in affirming interactions**



These episodes featured the pairing of shared and minimal codes or shared and focused or shared and open. Again these were episodes that were not perceived to be intersubjective and have not been coded as such, reflecting a lack of direct engagement between adult and child. The adult supports the child's activity with understanding. Episodes within this mode also rarely contained elements from the circle of metacognition.

The first example of Affirming centres on Maisy who is not quite two years old. She is quite capable of developing imaginary play scenarios in other episodes and is identified as such by her mother, who links this to having two older siblings. In this example Maisy's mother and the setting staff play a supporting role. They offer support and prompting questions that affirm their support for Maisy's activity. This affirms Maisy as the focus of attention. It lays the child at the centre of activity pursuing interests. Such exchanges affirm roles where the adults pose questions and



support the child; whilst in one way this places control with the child it sets limited flexibility around the role of the adult and restricts the child's power to engage the adults in playful modes and assign them new roles.

***Affirming (example 1) Talktime. Maisy, age 21 months with Mum.***

Maisy takes a policewoman's hat from one of three boxes of dressing up clothes. She puts it on and her mum encourages her to move around the other side of the boxes to look at herself in the mirror. Having looked at herself briefly in the mirror Maisy places the hat on a table by the boxes and then starts to pull items from the box as if considering their appeal. She holds up a yellow belt and her mum says "It's a Bob the builder belt for putting tools in". She lays the belt on the floor and takes out a pink dress which her mum helps her to put on over her clothes. A practitioner from the centre passing through the room stops and says how beautiful the dress looks and how it matches with Maisy's pink shoes.

Maisy pulls out a blue silky dress and starts to take off the pink dress giving the blue dress to her mother to hold. Maisy pulls out a pair of adult's heeled sandals from the box and sits down to put them on, again mum helps her to do this. Having put on the shoes she starts to move slowly across the non-carpeted part of the room towards the toilets looking and listening to the clicks of the shoes on the floor. Before she reaches the toilets she turns around and comes back to her mother, walking up close to her and putting her face close up to her mother's with a broad smile, using her eyes to engage her mother. She walks back towards the toilets and back to her mother and then her mother helps her to put on the blue dress. They exchange some quiet words during this process. Maisy walks towards the toilets once again, this time holding up the hem of the dress so that she can look at her feet. [Maisy's mum says to Martin that she loves dressing up at the moment]. Maisy moves up to Kay[practitioner] to show her the dress. "Is this Cinderella then mum?" Kay says to Maisy and her mother. "Where are you going now?"

Maisy points to the toilets. She goes to the toilet area and then comes back up to Kay and shows her the shoes she is wearing.

"Oh you look beautiful," says Kay.

Maisy turns around on the spot once and then a second time. She moves back to the dressing up area and Martin asks if he can take her picture. Maisy happily agrees and sits down waiting for the camera.

In the above example Maisy identifies the purpose of the clothing items moving directly to apply them to the correct part of the body and a discernable intention controlling the clothes by being able to put them on and move in them. Her mother appears to accept this affordance perspective but also associates the belt with the particular character Bob the Builder. The practitioner, Kay, is prompted by the long dress and heeled shoes to make the connection to affirm the potential of the clothes to reinforce feelings of self-worth, and makes a connection of meaning to Cinderella. The emotional affordance identified by the adult appears to connect with Maisy. The semantic affordance does not appear to resonate with the child in terms of prompting

a response, however Maisy proceeded cheerfully across the room confident in her activity.

In the second example (below) Jacob's mum affirms the activity of making music that he is engaged in with both words and gestures. She seeks to prolong it by offering the tambourine when Jacob appears ready to move on to something else. In this example the adult is not offering to join in with the child's activity rather suggesting that he might continue in a slightly different vein. The offered tambourine is left for Jacob to explore further without additional comment.

***Affirming (example 2) Outwell. Jacob, age 18 months with Mum.***

Jacob plays around the edge of a baby walker. He has discovered a small keyboard in the frame of the walker and presses the key for it to play a tune. His mum asks if he is making music. She comments that he loves making music at the moment. Jacob moves around the edge of the baby walker to feel the different activities but none capture his attention in the same way as the music. He pauses and looks across the room to see what else is taking place. Mum offers him a tambourine holding it out at arm's length and shaking it gently to attract his attention. He remains by the walker for a short while longer examining the other activities it offers, then moves over to pick up the tambourine which he holds in one hand and claps with the other. He 'sings' making tuneful noises but not articulating clear sounds with meaning.

In this mode responsibility for reflecting on the activity is predominantly left with the child but the adult has acknowledged the value of the activity and possibly drawn attention to particular elements of the activity such as characterisation in the first example or sound making in the second.

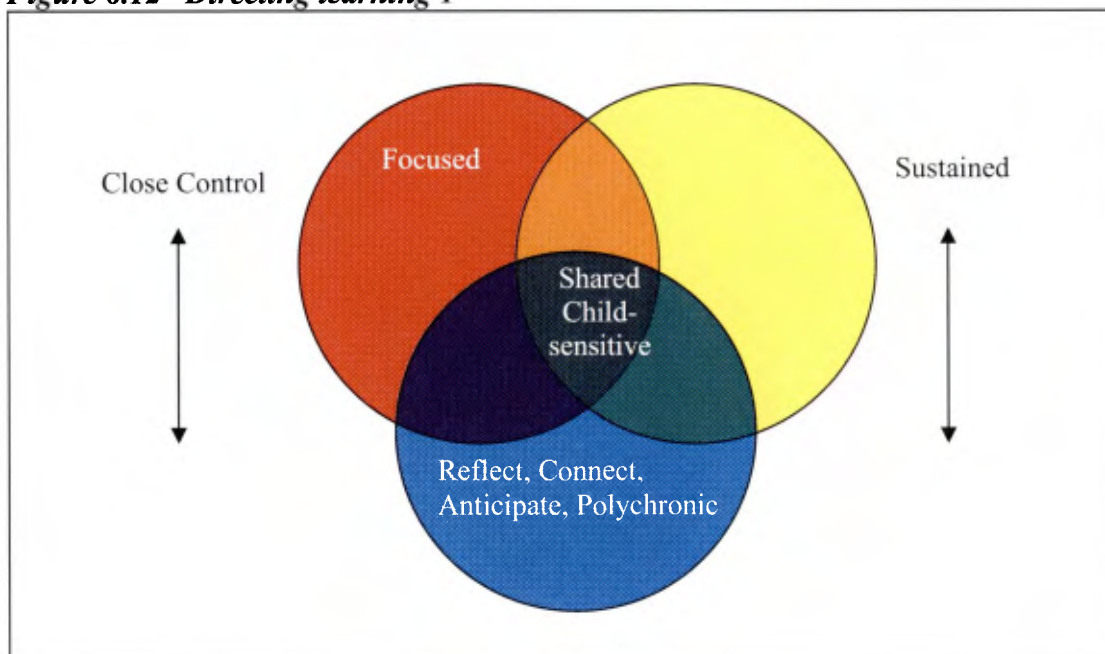
#### ***6.2.4 Directing learning.***

These episodes featured the 'focus' element from the analytical framework but not the 'open' or 'minimal' elements. These episodes varied in nature depending on how well the adult's strategy connected with the child's interest.

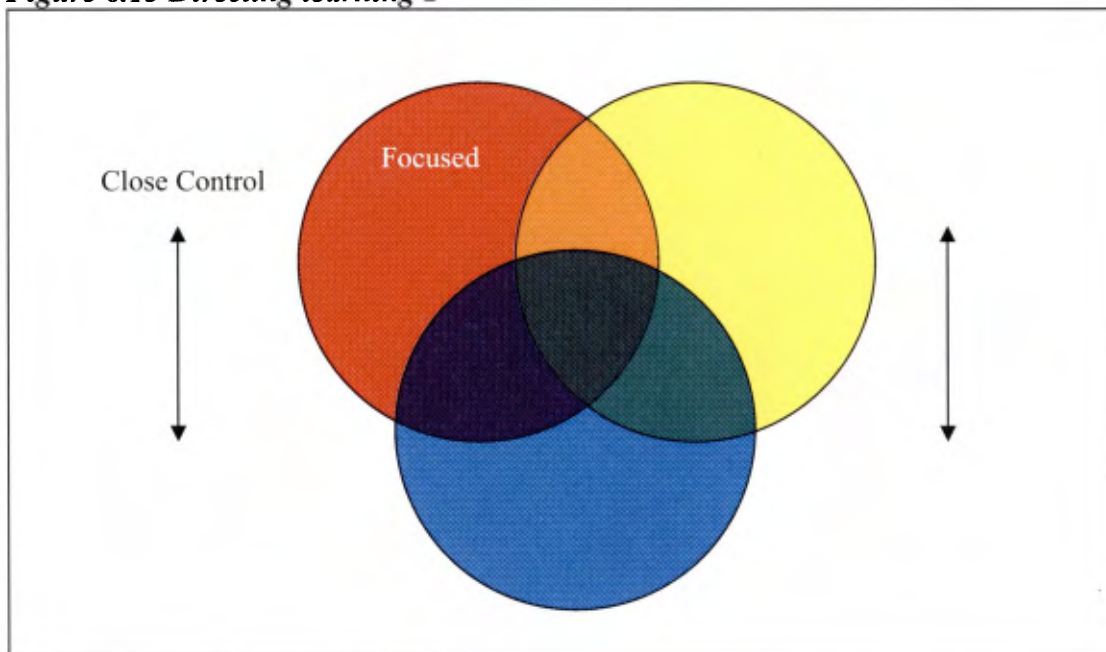
There were several examples where the adult seemed intent on the transmission of a particular point irrespective of connection with the child's needs and these directed learning modes can therefore be subdivided into two types depending on the sensitivity of the adult to the child's ability to engage with the activity. The apparently more successful episodes feature shared agenda setting and intersubjectivity. The

apparently less successful attempts to direct learning lacked the shared direction and seemed to lack intersubjectivity. These episodes emphasise the power of the child to accept or reject the direction offered by the adult and demonstrate that the child may choose to reject what the adult is proposing or simply not understand what the adult offers.

**Figure 6.12 Directing learning 1**



**Figure 6.13 Directing learning 2**





In the examples that follow there is an implicit requirement on the child to anticipate the adult's intention and connect labels with objects in the here and now.

In the first example below Ahmed appears to be motivated initially to explore the texture and control of the water in combination with the objects set out with it. His mother identifies the opportunities for developing shared labels for the shaped objects in the water and seems to initiate a familiar 'game' format. Ahmed is clearly able to respond correctly to his mother's requests, a degree of intersubjectivity is established and the activity is sustained for several exchanges. Ahmed's acceptance of the game offered by his mother contrasts with Iona's rejection of the offered discourse in example one.

***Directing learning type 1. Outwell Ahmed age 15 months with Mum***

As soon as they arrive, mum asks if the water activity is still going on. Mum helps Ahmed to find an apron and to put it on. He stands by a pan in which an older child has placed a water wheel. His mother holds his hand and guides him, pouring water from a small blue cup over the water wheel. Ahmed smiles broadly as the water flows over the wheel making it spin around. His mother continues to support this for several minutes and then Ahmed continues to spin the wheel using his hand. Ahmed struggles to reach inside the pan to the shapes and containers inside. He takes the shapes and passes them to his mum. She asks for the star and draws his attention to the star by holding it out to show him saying, "good boy" Ahmed seems to share the connection between this word and the yellow star shaped pastry cutter in the water.

"Star chaieya," [can I have the star please] says his Mum.

Ahmed picks out the star again from a red bowl next to the pan.

"Cross chaieya..... Hexagon chaieya says mum.

As he hands her the objects, she shows them to him and names them.

"Ahmed Star chaieya. Star"

"Star" says Ahmed handing his mother the star.

"Good boy," she says smiling enthusiastically.

There are several shapes in a red bowl that mum offers to Ahmed. She asks him to pick objects from the bowl.

"Square dedo." [pass the square] "Hexagon dedo. Cup dedo. Ysme[this thing] dedo," she says as Ahmed passes the objects from the bowl and drops them into the pan. Again, when she says "star dado" Ahmed selects the appropriate shape and she smiles and says good boy. "Missed," she says as the object that Ahmed is dropping back into the pan misses and lands on the floor. He picks up the cup and gives it a tentative lick.

"Ne ne [no no,]" says mum.

Ahmed cannot now reach the objects in the bottom of the pan and Martin helps mum to move the pan to a chair so Ahmed can see inside. Another child has started playing on a piano and Ahmed pauses to look for where the sound is coming from. Mum holds a blue cup and Ahmed takes objects from the pan and places them into the blue cup.

Ahmed's mother explained her role in the following way: "I try to make it as interactive as possible. He can't sit still and listen to a story you have to involve him;

he is at the age where he likes to feel involved.” This suggests that she identifies a proactive role for herself in involving Ahmed with the materials as she perceives they should be used. She identifies knowledge for acquisition explicitly to Ahmed and reviews the extent to which he has absorbed that knowledge.

In the following episode Iona seems content in controlling the objects going into and out of the bucket. As in the previous episode featuring Ahmed, Iona’s mother seeks to initiate a familiar game allocating number names to a controlled counting process. On this occasion however Iona very clearly rejects this offer and creates a space between herself and her mother to pursue her own preferred agenda. Iona’s rapid and decisive action suggests that she is very aware of what her mother is trying to achieve and indicates clearly it is not what she wants to do right now.

***Directed learning type 2. Talktime. Iona age 21 months with Mum***

Iona returns to the chalkboard and stands next to Fazal [child]. She wipes the board from side to side with a wooden board duster. She picks up the bucket from the stand and moves away from the easel.

Iona takes the bucket to the middle of the carpet area where there are corks and tamarind seeds in metal bowls. “Shall we put the corks into the bucket?” asks her mum. They begin to fill the bucket with corks one by one.

“Shall we count them?” asks her mum, “1..2....3” “1...2...3”.

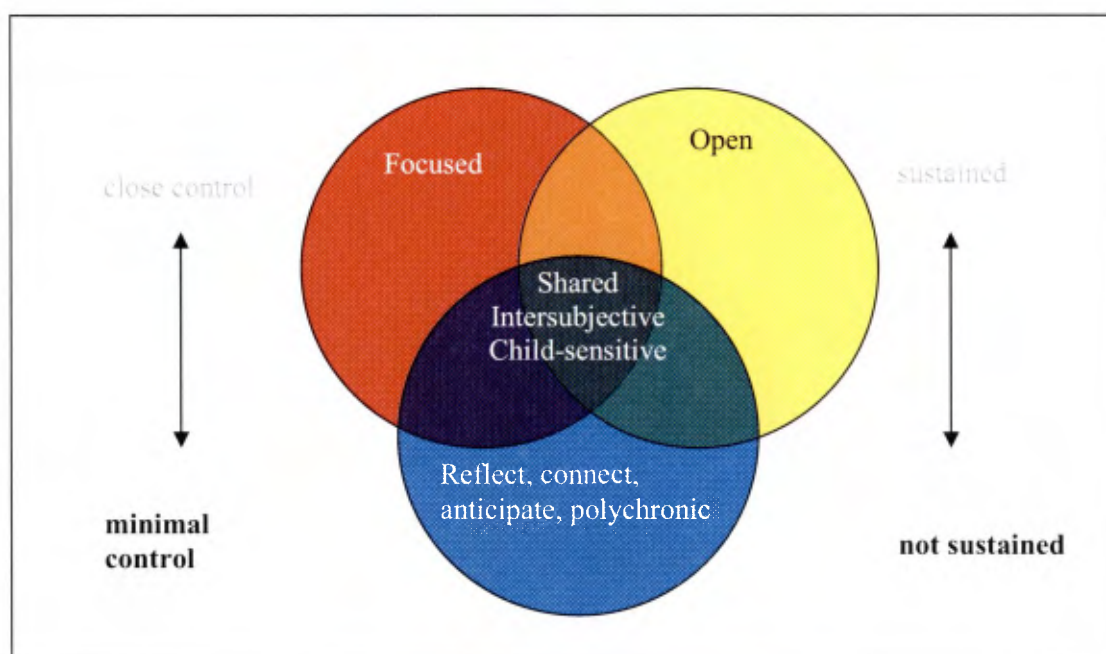
Iona moves the bucket a couple of feet away from her mum and puts the corks in handfuls into the bucket. Iona says “bye,” and waves to her mum. She moves to the home corner and watches Jack, who has a bucket and a wooden spoon. She picks up an extra bucket and takes both buckets back to the drawing table. She puts the lids on the felt tip pens. She picks up a rolling pin that has been left on the table, and puts this back with the dough. She gives a drinking glass that has been left on the dough table to Martin, implying it was left in the wrong place. She takes a piece of dough and then spends several minutes dividing the dough into small similarly sized pieces on the drawing table.

It is easy to imagine a similar situation where understanding was simply not present, in which the child would continue without reacting at all to the mother’s initiative. The first example of Directed learning does carry features of a more collaborative learning dialogue, with ideas exchanged and in some cases sustained between the adult and child, but the adult is clearly in charge of the direction that the thinking is taking. This creates a scaffold in the sense that Jordan (2002) invokes where the child has less practice in pursuing a particular agenda and probing the thoughts of the learning partner.

### 6.2.5 Sharing ideas

Episodes in this category feature the Shared and Open elements from the analytical framework. The episodes in this category are also intersubjective and there is also more of a tendency compared to the previous modes for the adult support to vary. The adults offer more or less support and focus depending on their perception of the child's need for support. The adult support might be faded out, allowing the child to pursue her/his own independent enquiry, or increased. This fits most closely with the notion of scaffolding described by Wood (1998), because it builds upon the child's initiative but the adult support leads towards a particular point that the adult considers appropriate to the child and the materials. Although each of the episodes might not meet each of Wood's criteria there is a sense of aspiration towards this.

**Figure 6.14 Elements in sharing ideas interactions**



This mode also seemed more likely to include metacognitive elements. The following examples illustrate a clearer shared purpose as compared to some of the previous modes of interaction. In this first example the activity has been set out by the practitioner Yasmeen and she is working together with Rona (age 22 months) to achieve a defined but flexible outcome.

In the first example (below) producing a food item is the clear function of the activity. This is clear to Rona and she is eager to engage with the process of making the nest and with eating several of the components. The process of making the nest is transferred as much as possible to Rona. The practitioner, Yasmeen, consistently offers prompts to the next step but is not overly controlling on quantities or layout. She invites children to consider their feelings and offers them vocabulary to express actions and feelings.

***Sharing ideas (1) Outwell. Rona age 22 months with practitioner Yasmeen***

Rona having arrived and taken off her coat moves straight to the activity table, which is set out with an eye catching patterned tablecloth.

Yasmeen asks Rona if she would like to make an Easter nest. Rona nods, smiles, and sits down at the table. Yasmeen provides Rona with an empty bowl and asks if she would like some of the mix. "We can squeeze honey in and then mix it up".

She offers Rona a small dish with pieces of shredded wheat, a bowl with mixed raisins and asks again if she would like some.

Rona takes the small handfuls of the ingredients and puts them into a breakfast bowl. Yasmeen holds the squeezable honey bottle over the bowl and they both squeeze some honey into the bowl.

"Mix it up Rona! Mix Mix Mix," says Yasmeen. "Rona look," says Yasmeen taking the mixture, which is now bound together. "Then we can put it in a paper case" Yasmeen continues, offering Rona a paper cake cup. "Scoop it in use your fingers to mix it up".

Rona mixes it some more.

"Have you tasted it? What does it taste like?"

Rona tries a little and smiles broadly at Yasmeen.

"Would you like to put an Easter egg to put on top?"

Rona takes an egg from the centre of the table and holds it close looking at Yasmeen. "Put it on top," says Yasmeen.

Rona continues to look at Yasmeen and shakes her head. "I know what you're thinking," says Yasmeen pausing and smiling, "put it on there and take another one. They are for later".

Rona quickly complies with this request and puts two of the mini eggs wrapped in foil on top of her nest.

"Do you want to taste this?" Yasmeen asks taking some of the unprocessed shredded wheat herself.

Rona takes a piece and cautiously tries it. "Crunchy crunch," says Yasmeen, Rona smiles and then picks up a few raisins trying one.

"Do you want to taste another one?" asks Yasmeen.

Rona shakes her head. She takes some more shredded wheat.

"What does it taste like? ..... Crunchy crunch crunch," continues Yasmeen.

Rona smiles and nods.

The first stage of the episode has been coded as directing learning but in the second half of the episode the activity switches from constructing the Easter nest to checking out the ingredients. The interaction is more flexible than in the directed learning examples and although Rona doesn't say anything, there is the sense of a constant

exchange of gestures and meanings between the two, which Yasmeen checks by vocalising ideas for Rona to validate.

This particular example appears to have some affinity with Jordan's (2004) description of scaffolding: the activity is pre-planned by the practitioner with a specific outcome in mind. However, it also contains some co-construction of meaning around responses to the experience and guided participation in terms of being inducted and orientated into the process by the adult. This illustrates the difficulty of making distinctions between scaffolding and co-construction in practice. It is clear in the above episode that some elements of control, direction and power remain with the child and that the episode is sustained and extended through dialogue, reflecting sustained shared thinking.

In the following example the activity is less planned. It emerges from Dora's interest in the letters and develops from an initial interest in controlling the letters sticking to the magnetic screen to one of transferring meaning into the letters.

***Sharing ideas (2) Outwell. Dora age 46 months with Mum***

Dora sits on her mum's knee and they take turns putting large coloured magnetic letters on to a magnetic base.

"It's my name," says Dora looking at the letters that her mum has put on the board.

"What does this word say?" she asks after a short pause.

"Harrison" [Her brother] replies her mother.

"What does this word say?" Dora asks again.

"Terry," says her mother.

Dora having added letters after her own name asks her mother what they say.

"Doramager" replies her mother.

[Dora adds more letters. "What does it say now?" she asks.

Her mother replies that it doesn't say anything.

"What does this say?" Dora asks, putting on another letter. Again her mother explains that it doesn't say anything, there are too many letters. She asks Dora what letter this is showing her 'a' and then 'b', which Dora names correctly. She then makes the word cat inviting Dora to guess the word. Mum asks what letter is pointing to c and giving the phonetic pronunciation. She then gives the clue, "what animal lives next door to us?" Dora can't guess and her mum says cat. She then asks "what is d [phonetic] for?" and Dora replies dog.

"What is w for?" asks her mum, giving the clue "You dressed up as one at Halloween?" Dora replies "Witch".

Then "What is I for?" giving the clue "Eskimos live in a ....."

Dora replies "Igloo".



One of the parents in the Talktime group described her role in supporting her daughter in the following way.

*I sort of try to give her ideas but she has definitely got her own little head on her shoulders and she knows what she wants to do and sometimes no matter what I say to her, she has got her own little thing going on. (Talktime Lynn)*

Initially I had applied the label ‘mediator’ to these episodes but I have applied the label sharing ideas in the hope that this is more transparent to practitioners and parents.

The episodes identified with lending ideas involve a greater sense of collaboration and co-construction with each participant taking note of the others responses. The co-construction of meaning is more transparent in the older child but the thinking does appear to be more genuinely shared and sustained in both examples. In both the adult is promoting reflection on ideas, intentions and events beyond the present and obvious resources. New knowledge is being offered to the child to extend their current activity through language. This is accompanied by practical testing of the ideas. The adults offer reasons and explanations for occurrences in the activity. These episodes share many of the features of co-construction described by Jordan but the direction of the activity and conversation is more in the control of the child.

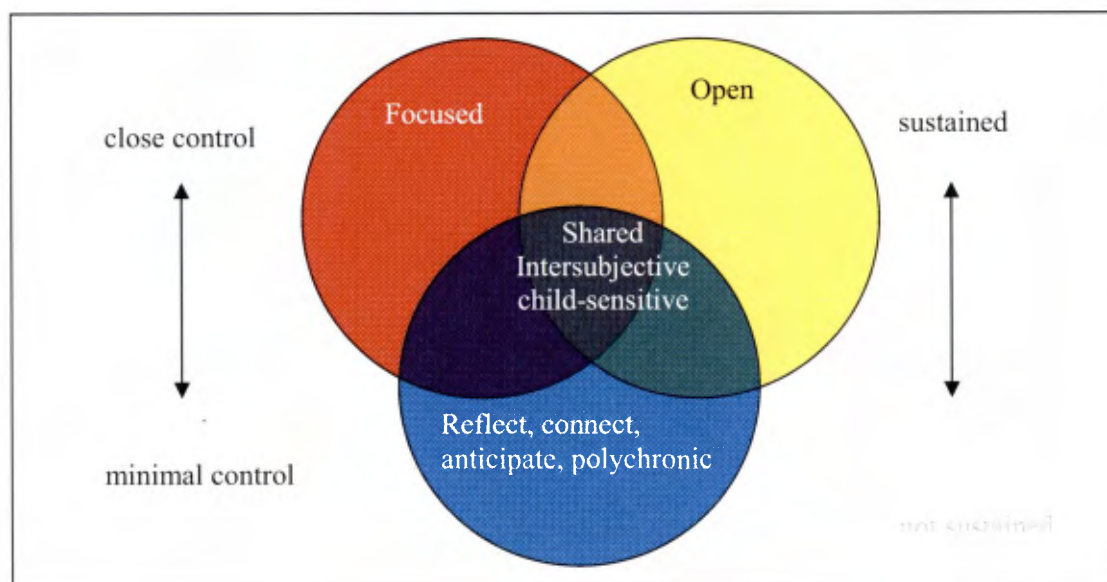
#### **6.2.6 Playing**

Finally there were a small number of activities which were shared, open, focused with sustained adult support and intersubjectivity that was not faded out. The examples captured by this coding are different from the other examples of mediating activity because they are less focused on an objective and feature more joint activity and shared enjoyment of the materials.

Vivian, an experienced early years teacher, visited the Outwell group regularly, to deliver 15 minutes story sessions on behalf of the library service. Vivian chose to spend part of her time “getting to know the children”. In the following example she was lying on the ground next to Jacob and adopted a playful and excited tone rather than a calm supportive adult mode. Jacob, who was not quite two years old and not yet in a position to negotiate the play verbally, engaged enthusiastically with this mode of interaction with which he appeared familiar and confident. In the example

that follows an adult develops an activity playfully with a single child, but this quickly draws in other adults and children.

**Figure 6.15** *Elements in playful interactions*



The main affordance to the child appears to relate to controlling the ball, perhaps tapping into the deep psychological legacy of emotional excitement that exists around hunting and hiding for young children. The exchange promotes swift and urgent reflection on the information exchanged between the participants. Vivian seems tuned into the excitement and immediacy of this activity for the child. The other adults seem to respond to Jacob's enjoyment and Vivian's lead.

Visitors to a group, such as Vivian, may help to redefine or reshape the rules and roles of activity within the community of the setting. Educational, teaching modes could include this playful mode of interaction, particularly since it draws in multiple participants. In this mode the child is at the centre of a group, engaging with other adults and children, but still with a high stake in what transpires.

*Playing (1) Outwell. Jacob age 18 months with Mum and practitioner Vivian*

He moves towards the ball again. "Have you found your ball?" asks mum.  
 Jacob goes carefully under one in a line of chairs to retrieve the ball but as he touches it, it rolls further along the line of chairs.  
 "Oh, oh!" says Jacob.  
 "Oh, oh!" say both adults.  
 "Can you get it?" says Vivian. "Where is it? Look?"  
 Vivian pushes the ball back to Jacob. "Get it quick, here."  
 It passes Jacob and goes under another chair on an adjacent wall. "Get it quick" says Vivian. "Have you got it? Where has it gone?"  
 "Eea, eah eah, eee" Jacob says smiling and laughing looking at Vivian as he throws the ball back.  
 "Have you found it?" asks his mum  
 "Where is it, where has it gone?" says Vivian rolling it under a chair again. "Go and fetch it Jacob."  
 "Eeah!"  
 "Where is it gone?" says mum.  
 "Where is it now?" says Vivian.  
 His mum comments that he has a ball at home but he doesn't have nearly as much fun with it.]  
 Jacob goes to retrieve the ball again from under a chair.  
 "Don't bump your head," says Angela [Rona's grandma].  
 "Mind your head Jacob," says mum too "Oh oh".  
 "Dow!" says Jacob.  
 "Down down," says mum. "Do you want to look at this truck book? You've got one like this at home".  
 Jacob continues to try to reach the ball.  
 Vivian collects and rolls the ball to Jacob but it rolls past and goes under another chair.  
 "Eeema, Eema," says Jacob as Vivian helps Jacob to retrieve the ball.  
 Rona [age 2], who has been watching the game, picks up the ball and bounces it on the floor.  
 Jacob picks it up. Rona points to the ball and moves closer until she is touching it with her pointing finger. Jacob begins to look concerned and holds on tightly. Angela clears a space to allow the children to throw it to each other and Mum urges Jacob to roll it to his friend.  
 "Say Jacob," Angela says to Rona "Can Jacob roll it to Rona?"  
 Jacob bounces it to Rona and then moves to sit next to his younger brother on his mother's lap.

There are potentially social embarrassment obstacles to adults playing in front of other adults. If these are to be overcome it will require professionals to engage with play rather than standing back and discussing activities.



In the following example play takes a more exploratory orientation rather than a game format. In the previous week's session parents and children have covered a balloon with paper mache and have been covering the hardened structure with glue and glitter.

***Playing (2) Talktime. Abas 24 months with practitioner Julie and child Jane.***

Abas moves from the home corner area to stand at the large tray of gold glitter where Julie is already sitting talking with Jane. Mum remains behind watching from the other side of the room. Abas picks up handfuls of the gold glitter from the tray and holds them up.

"Are you squeezing them?" asks Julie. He allows the glitter to fall out of his hand. He looks up at two parents standing nearby and watches them talking as he feels the glitter in the tray with his fingers. He presses both palms into the glitter and studies each one before clapping his hands together hard and watching the glitter spray off in both directions. He repeats this touching then clapping several times. He sprinkles the glitter from one hand onto the other. "Are you sprinkling it from hand to hand?" asks Julie.

Abas suddenly looks towards his mother. "Mummy," he calls.

"I'm just here" she reassures him from the home corner area. He goes over to her and brings her back to the glitter tray and he resumes pouring the glitter.

"Sparkles," says Julie. Abas repeats the touching and clapping.

"This is why we come here so we don't have this mess at home" says mum.

Abas shows a palm full of glitter to Julie who says "ready" as she indicates that she is going to blow the glitter. They blow together, Abas laughs out loud and the others also laugh. They repeat this.

Jane who had left sometime before returns to the glitter tray and Abas moves off towards the washroom with his mum. They return shortly and mum again remains on the other side of the room while Abas returns to the glitter to continue blowing the glitter gently from his hands. Jane has placed a large baby doll in the tray and Abas sprinkles glitter onto its forehead. He blows a palm full of glitter over the doll.

"That was a great big puff of wind" says Julie as Abas looks to her and laughs out loud again. He heads back over to his mum and draws her with him towards the bathroom.

"He just likes to use the hand-dryer" she explains "that is all it is."

Abas soon returns to the glitter tray. He holds the baby by the waist and dips its feet gently in the glitter. He puts the doll down and holds another handful of glitter towards Julie. "Do you want to put it on my hand?"

He sprinkles the glitter onto Julie's hand.

"Oh wow!" she says.

Abas tentatively licks the glitter. "It doesn't taste nice" says Julie.

Abas tries to head for the bathroom a third time and mum catches him by the waist and turns him round saying that he doesn't need to wash his hands until he is finished. He returns to the glitter tray and he holds up another handful of glitter for Julie to blow which she does. Abas then moves towards the toilets again where he uses the hand-dryer to blow the glitter of his hands. He washes his hands and then blows them dry supported by his mother. He then skips back from the bathroom to the glitter tray.

Here the materials seem to motivate Abas to develop control and sensory enjoyment. Julie recognises and shares this pleasure in parallel to Abas. She introduces blowing to the activity which develops both the control and sensory affordances of the materials and begins to form the basis of signifiers for more figurative interactions.

“That was a great big puff of wind” introduces a more social semantic aspect to the interaction: it is a simple and transparent metaphor and (Pramling & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2009) it is a step towards substituting one thing for another that will move play into richer symbolic territory. It begins to offer an insight that play gives rise to the opportunity to gain insight into how others perceive the world. “Research questions emerging from this discussion include whether teachers make use of ‘discursive space’ (Haworth, 2001) that is, ‘opened up’ by figurative language in relation to its referent, and how learners respond to the learning opportunities they encounter” (Pramling et al, 2009 p336).

At this stage it is not important whether Abas fully understands Julie’s point: the important thing is that he should be able to start to use language to share experience, and increasing exposure to this will form the path to increasing sophistication in doing it.

Both of the examples reflect SST in a playful exchange. They suggest that the adults value the activity to such an extent that they join in on similar terms to the children and that they are affected by the child’s information and knowledge rather than servicing it. The richness of these examples supports the value of thinking of play as an activity format rather than as an activity in its own right (van Oers, 2010).

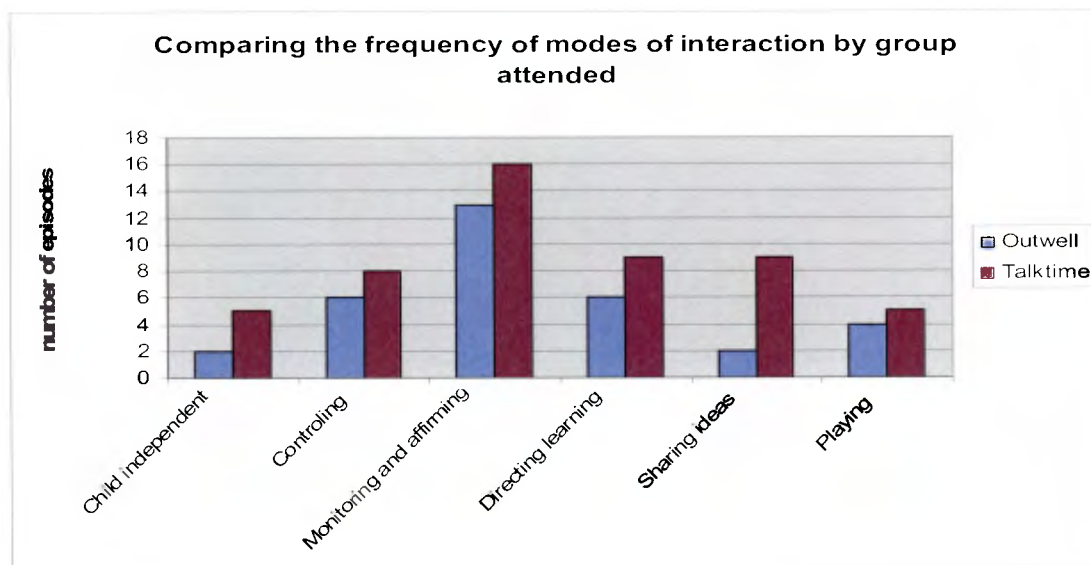
Learning to play with others enables the child to engage more deeply with socially generated knowledge rather than personally generated knowledge might be considered part of orthodoxy but van Oers insight in conjunction with these findings suggests that adults may also need to learn to play with children.

### 6.3 Comparing patterns of interaction across the two case study groups

The modes of interaction identified in the previous section (6.2) form a more meaningful platform for comparing patterns of interaction across and within the groups. Table 6.16 below compares the frequency of the different modes of interaction in the two groups. It suggests that the overall pattern of interaction in the groups during their open activities is very similar. As with the individual codes it is suggested that the higher number of episodes in the Talktime group results from the

greater variety of materials available in the more spacious and purpose built environment.

**Figure 6.16 Comparing the frequency of modes of interaction by group attended**



Children in both groups experienced similar proportions of each mode of interaction. This finding is useful in establishing that the modes of interaction identified in the first part of this chapter occur in similar proportions across both groups. This suggests that commonalities in cultural approaches to learning can be identified in such groups. The similarities in patterns of interaction between the groups are interesting given that they are not connected in management structures. It establishes that cultures of learning might be similar across such groups and that this analytical tool might help to identify similarities and differences between groups.

Modes where the child is leading activity, with little adult input, are the most frequently occurring mode in both groups the categories *independent, monitoring and affirming* accounting for 36 episodes. Modes where the adult is leading activity account for 29 episodes (*controlling and direct learning*). The more co-constructive modes of interaction, *sharing ideas and playing*, are the least frequently experienced modes (20 episodes).

This is an encouraging balance of passive, active and reactive modes and confirms the selection of these groups as case studies of positive practice. The analysis of Chapter Five would suggest that other groups with more *laissez-faire* organisations would have higher ratios of independent, monitoring and affirming and more examples of control. Although the more co-constructive episodes are the least frequently occurring

of these three groupings, this still seems positive in relation to the REPEY study findings on preschools (Sylva et al., 2010). Child-led initiated activity was comparable to the REPEY ‘excellent’ settings with two thirds of episodes being initiated by children, half of which were extended by adults. However, the different nature of the context and the absence of comparable studies, emphasises the need for more of this type of pedagogical investigation to inform practice in parent and toddler groups. In the parent and toddler group the much higher adult child ratio, the younger age group and the presence of parents should all impact on the signature pedagogy of the context. The following sections will explore the nature of these influences and discuss further the appropriateness of the modal balance identified above. Chapter Seven will explore how individual experiences may vary within this overall pattern of interaction.

Taken at face value, parent and toddler groups are directed towards parents and children ‘playing together’. However, this ‘play’ may have a strong educational and object orientation. Episodes of exploratory investigation where the adult allows the child to investigate in their own way or in structured activities are not collaborative and not necessarily ‘playful’ and the analysis in figure 6.15 illustrates that the role most often adopted by adults was a watchful one. When adults did engage more directly with children this was most often in a controlling or directive mode (29 of 84 episodes). These episodes might include games but were not necessarily playful and featured adults guiding children’s learning towards a particular agenda. In only 20 episodes was activity more collaboratively exploratory with adults acknowledging and negotiating children’s interests and in only nine of these episodes did adults join children in playing. Parents’ perspectives gathered in interviews from the case studies suggested that they may see the activity as preparing their child for managing their own time, space and relations in preparation for preschool education.

*I think I am just here to support her really and check what she is doing and make sure she is alright. And plus have a chat with the other mums and it gets me out of the house as well [laughs]. (Talktime Parent)*

This analytic tool suggests that both case study groups reached a similar point of equilibrium in resolution to the tension between the purposes of group leaders and parents highlighted in the previous chapter. If practitioners are looking for parents to interact and play with their children, while parents are looking to help children to

move away from parental support perhaps some discussion and balancing needs to take place within the community of the group to resolve this tension. Across the two case studies the adults are present in 82 of the 84 episodes. However the high frequency of monitoring and affirming episodes may represent a compromise between the practitioners' objectives to promote parents supporting play and the parents' objectives to promote independence. There would appear to be some scope for increased levels of more collaborative co-constructed interaction and this seems to reflect more tangibly the nature of criticism of parents' engagement in the groups identified by the practitioners in the previous chapter. These two perspectives on the nature of activity in parent and toddler groups do not need to be mutually exclusive. It is suggested that group staff could do more to model and discuss the varying modes of engagement allowing children space to develop their own ideas and playing with children while still allowing some control to remain with the child. Using the labels for interaction outlined in this chapter could be helpful to practitioners. These modal labels recognise the range of interaction offered by parents and challenge them to promote adults and children playing together as playmates, as well as facilitators and supporters.

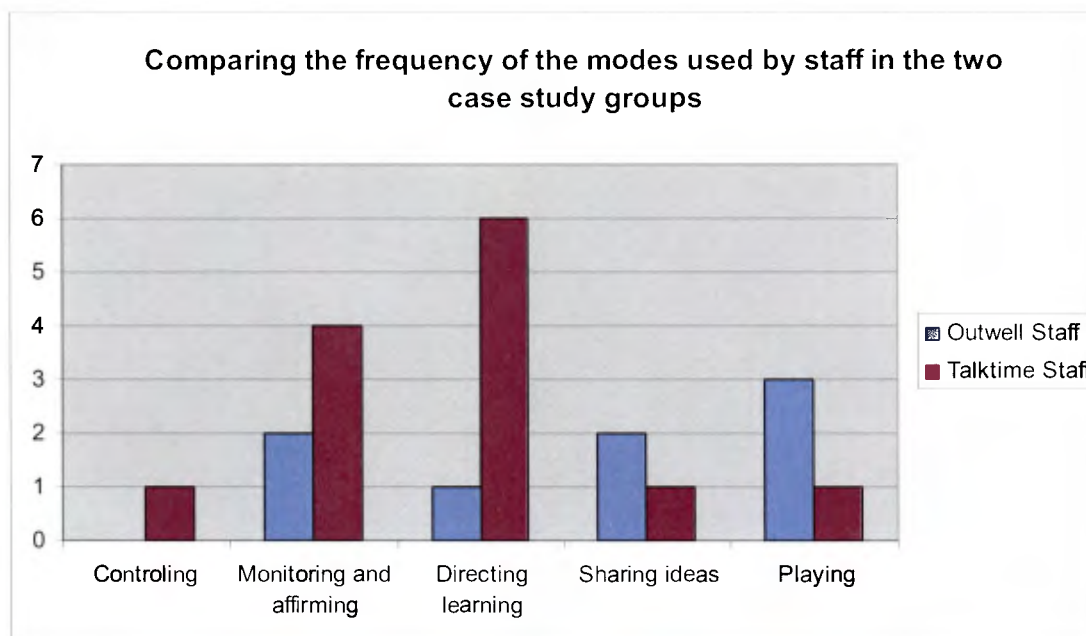
There are several examples of play where adults moved towards more abstracted play themes and the children responded positively suggesting that the children are motivated to respond to pretend play but perhaps need more support to do this. If materials and adults do not create a motivating and rewarding ZPD then this type of play will be less frequent. Children's and adults' responses suggested that pretend play was a greater feature at home and with older siblings and friends. Another cultural layer is the reluctance of adults to engage in pretend play in front of other adults. In the Outwell group outside of a protocol observation one of the mothers pretended to be a frog which stood out as an unusual event and provoked later comment from the practitioner in the reflection after the session. If pretend play will become a leading form of development there is perhaps an obligation on the settings to do more to facilitate opportunities for pretend play. Greater provision for imaginative affordances with materials might promote more playful interactions as adults find easier more transparent points of connection. Practitioners might also do more to role model pretend play with children but this will not be easy because of cultural barriers to adults engaging in pretend play. One potential consequence of

adults not engaging within the institutionally educational context of the parent and toddler group is that this is casting adults into a role as sympathetic but less fun collaborators in play. Children are learning to play in particular ways with children not adults. This might not be a problem if all children experienced the same opportunities, however if certain children have access to a wider range of language orientated activities than others then they are likely to continue to accrue advantages at each step in the educational process.

### ***6.3.1 Practitioners' Interactions with children.***

The staff in both settings were, unsurprisingly, recorded as engaging in fewer interactions with the children than the parents because the parents remained close to their child through most of the session and the practitioners supported a range of children. The clear difference in the number of recorded interactions between staff and children in the two groups presented in figure 6.17 (below) is primarily because there was always one more staff member in the Talktime group.

***Figure 6.17 Comparing the frequency of the modes used by staff in the two case study groups***



Outwell began with two practitioners and reduced to one, Talktime started with three and reduced to two. This being the case draws attention to a clear difference in the pattern of interaction between the two groups not apparent in figure 6.16. Figure 6.17



supports the suggestion that the Talktime staff operated more in terms of observing and then of directing children's thinking towards particular goals while the Outwell staff seemed to set up more adult planned activity and therein engaged more frequently in open ended exchanges with the children.

As Rogoff (2003) points out, however, interactions are a joint product and it is possible that the children in the Outwell group were more open to more co-constructive exchanges though similar engagement with their parents (see section 6.5). More detailed investigations of how the same children and adults respond in different parent and toddler groups could provide interesting clarifications of this question.

These findings support the value of the type of research undertaken in this thesis in identifying more detailed mapping techniques in order to explore how learning cultures might be shaped by various practices and participants. By identifying the balance of modes of interaction we begin to create a forum for discussion, reflection and change. Reflection on the balance of modes of learning interactions identified in the two groups confirms the potential influences on this area of variance.

In the two case studies the practitioners' 'non-active role in play' identified in part one of this thesis may not be as pronounced as was suggested in Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer's study (2009) of some pedagogies. The case study practitioners' interaction combined with their comments regarding scaffolding and schemas discussed in Chapter Five suggest that, while they were aware of Piagetian perspectives on self exploration and schema, they were also conscious of engaging with children's learning and aware of promoting more responsive open ended exchanges. This seems to be more pronounced in the Outwell group data; however, the numbers of observations in the sample are too small to draw firm conclusions. There is still a question mark over the extent to which the practitioners are engaging in shaping activities they have planned rather than participating in children's play with very few examples of practitioners playing with children as compared to engaging with children in more purposive conversations.

The two examples of adults 'playing with children' (included earlier in this chapter as exemplars) both feature practitioners because as is demonstrated in the following section 6.5 there were even fewer examples of parents playing. There is only one

example of an adult entering into more ludic play (Hutt et al., 1989, Moyles, 2005) as compared to exploratory play, the example featuring Mandy. Playing in front of other adults is perhaps a significant barrier to play in a public space but the richness of the two examples presented in this thesis in terms of emotional and intellectual opportunities would suggest this is an area where practitioners might develop a more leading role. The rarity of such playful behaviour in parents is expressed in the comment from Yasmeen, the practitioner at the Outwell group:

*I know, she kind of like jumped in didn't she! I remember seeing her I think wow she is jumping like a frog, but then I know her background and she is used to doing drama, she is not afraid to jump like a frog so that was really nice.*

The recognition of the potential benefits of play is present in this dialogue between Julie (practitioner) and Marion (the Talktime group line manager).

*J: I have had more language from her today than I have ever had but sometimes you couldn't catch it so I repeated it and she has nodded*

*M: I knew she was responding to you but I couldn't catch it*

*J: And towards the end she was laughing with me as we put the thing up and then I am not going to be here for the next few weeks I am really fed up about that.*

*M: You know some of that interaction was so joyful it struck me as "I know this so well now I can play with it." She was just revelling in the fact that she knew it; she was sharing that with you.*

*J: Because normally there was that moment where we share, it sounds a bit romantic but we were lifting up the lids and finding other lids, she actually waited and we shared it together and that's because we have had a few weeks of getting to know each other.  
(Talktime Manager)*

### **6.3.2 Parents' Modes of Interaction**

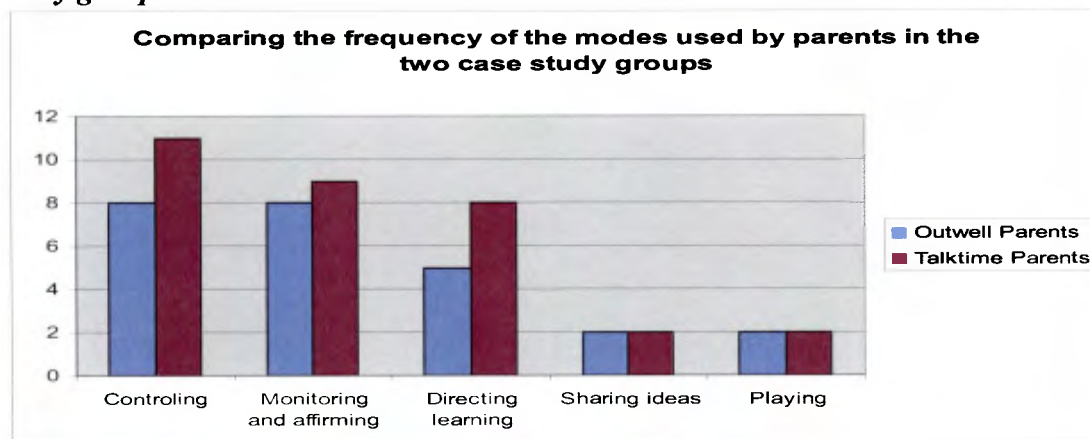
Comparing the frequency with which the different modes were employed by the sample of parents once again reveals a very similar pattern in the two groups.

The findings presented in figure 6.18 suggest that in the context of the groups parents co-constructed meanings to a lesser extent than the practitioners. This cannot be attributed to training or pedagogic beliefs derived from Piaget and Vygotsky. It is



therefore more likely to reflect socially located attitudes and expectations related to learning in this social space influenced by the setting they are attending.

**Figure 6.18** *Comparing the frequency of the modes used by parents in the two case study groups*

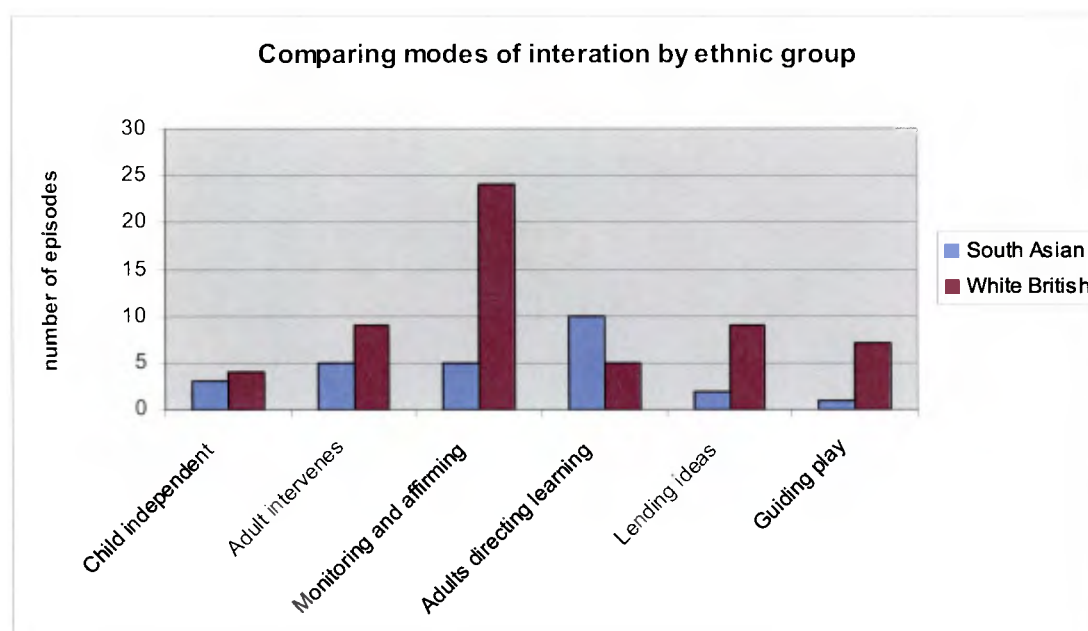


As discussed in Chapter Two, Bourdieu uses the word *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1990) to refer to commonly held values, beliefs and knowledge and I will adopt this terminology here. I do not wish to imply an automatic inferiority to the parent's knowledge of learning compared to specialist practitioner knowledge but rather to distinguish the less theoretically informed constructions of child rearing practice that might underpin and influence both parents and practitioners. Vygotsky (1986) suggested that spontaneous and scientific concepts need to grow towards each other to increase an individual's understanding, and perhaps this is also the case here. If parents' spontaneous conceptions of learning seem to tend more towards supporting personal exploration and offering direct instruction in this context then perhaps experience and discussion might increase opportunities for more open exchanges of ideas. The frequently cited purpose of promoting independence identified in Chapter Five would also be an issue to be considered if promoting interaction is accepted as a priority in groups. Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009), in the educare context, assert "that the teachers can never interact and communicate too much with the toddlers in early childhood education since there are so many children and few adults," (p188). This is less the case in parent and toddler groups because adult to child ratios are so high but the proportion of time adults spent in a non-active role in the case study groups is worthy of deeper reflection and investigation. In the parent and toddler groups the practitioners proportionally engaged in far more interactive exchanges as compared to

the parents. The exchanges involving practitioners explored earlier in this chapter and in the following chapter show the practitioners were very adept at tuning into children's interests and developing exchanges around these. However it will always be more difficult for practitioners to promote some of the reflective elements in interactions because they do not possess the same level of shared experience with the children as do the parents. This aspect of interactions is considered shortly in section 6.6. Practitioners might find it helpful to reflect on and explain more explicitly the advantages of the different modes of interaction outlined in this chapter with parents.

It is interesting to note that when reviewing the combined categories of elements a difference was suggested between the two main ethnic groupings in the case studies. Figure 6.19 suggests that the children from a South Asian background appeared to experience a higher number of direct learning experiences.

*Figure 6.19 Comparing modes of interaction by ethnic group*



This stands out because there are only four boys from this background compared to eight children from a white British heritage. This might reflect increased expectations in some of the members of this community that learning in an educational context should feature higher levels of adult guidance. This might relate to some of the attitudes to learning reported by Brooker (2002) in relation to expectations of more adult initiated activity when children start school. The South Asian personal heritage

of Yasmeen the lead practitioner in the Outwell group might also be a factor in her clear commitment to engaging with the children. It may influence her reported concern at what she perceived to be low levels of parental engagement with the children.

Yasmeen's own engagements with the children are characterised by a high proportion of shared ideas and reflection.

#### **6.4 The Elements of Reflection from the analytical tool.**

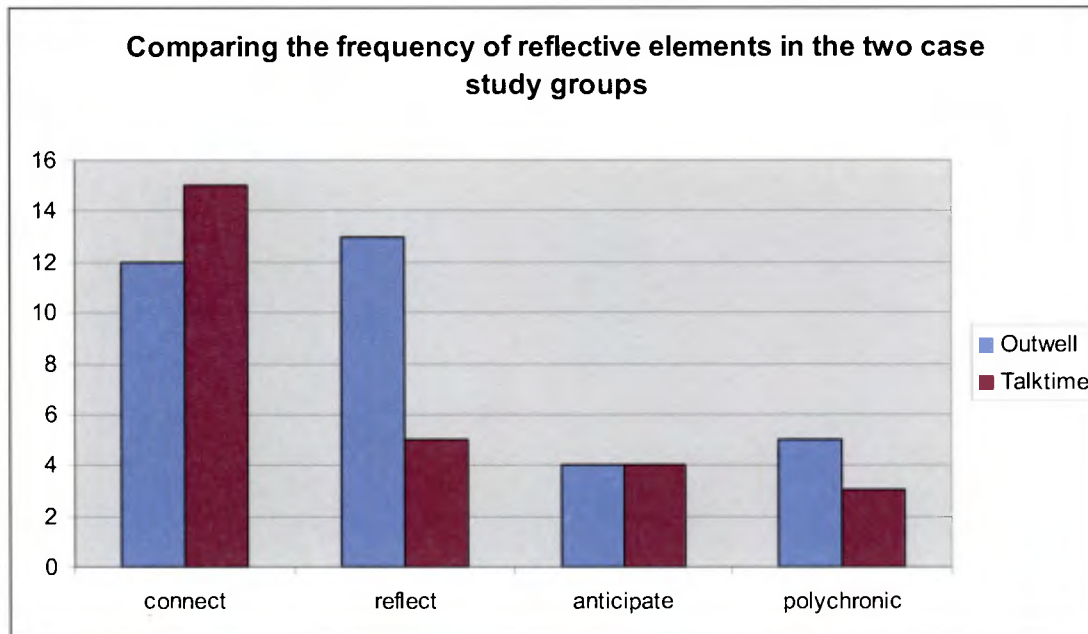
Evidence presented in part one of the thesis has drawn attention to the possibility that the level of reflection and analysis that adults employ in interaction with their children may impact upon later educational achievement (Hasan, 2002, Rogoff et al., 1998, Sylva et al., 2010).

One apparent difference between the two case study groups was the seemingly higher frequency of elements from the metacognitive circle of the analytical framework in the Outwell group. Once again this is particularly noteworthy bearing in mind the higher number of episodes in the Talktime group and the additional staff member, which might lead one to expect a proportionally higher number of metacognitive features in this group. When this is separated into parent and practitioner interactions (Table 6.20) there is a higher proportion of reflective interactions in both the parent and practitioner interactions in the Outwell group.

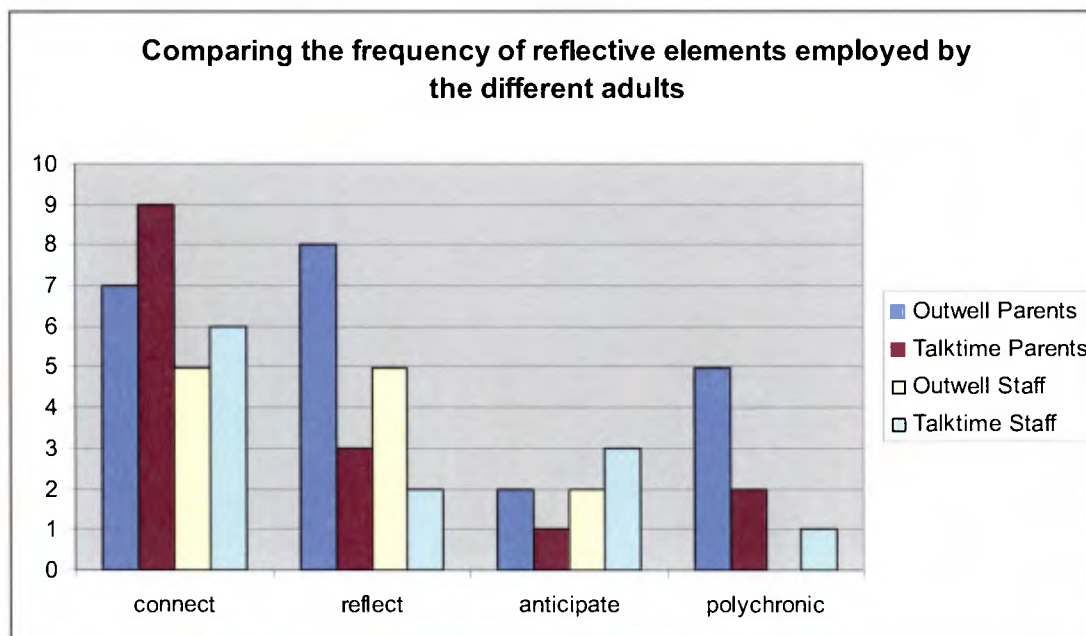
The literature reviewed in Chapters Two and Three identifies differences between social and cultural groups and the educational level of mothers with respect to the extent to which events are connected together across time and space (Guo & Mullan-Harris, 2000, Hasan, 2002, Rogoff, 1998). The Outwell group had a much higher proportion of more educated and more middle class parents and it would be interesting to investigate this potential difference in more depth.

Within the groups questions about wider group cultures are raised. Social class and educational background may be contributing factors to the higher frequency of reflective and polychronic interactions, although it is very difficult to say if it is the practitioners and parents modelling such interaction or the children's ability to engage in these exchanges because of familiarity from home circumstances.

**Figure 6.20 Comparing the frequency of reflective elements in the two case study groups.**



**Figure 6.21 Comparing the frequency of reflective elements employed by the different adults**



If this reflective nature of interaction is influential as suggested by Hasan (2002), then it is also an unspoken and less visible element of discussion in the groups as

suggested by Bourdieu (1997). It may be beneficial for practitioners to draw more attention to this aspect of interaction.

There is insufficient data in the present study to substantiate differences between different ethnic and social class groupings. This was not the aim of the study and the data has only been explored in this way to check for bias in the samples. The research does show considerable variance in the exposure of different children to the metacognitive elements and this is explored further in Chapter Seven. It is also clear from this sample that some of the parent child dyads did not conform to the patterns that might be predicated on the basis of social class or ethnicity, reminding us that identity and habitus are complex in nature.

## **6.5 Aspects of affordance**

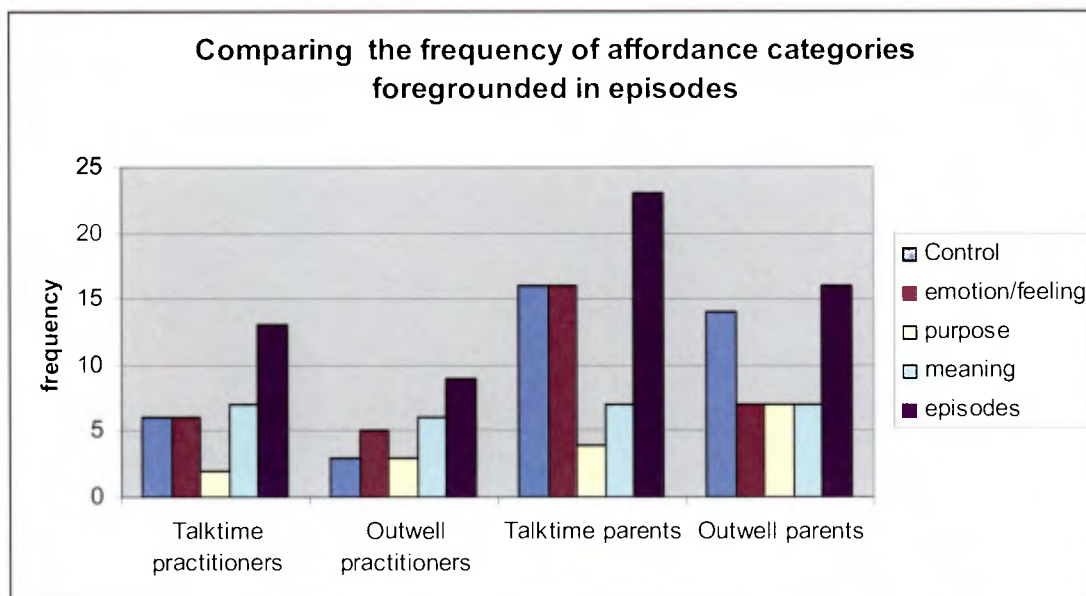
The idea of affordance broadly categorised into control, feeling, purpose and meaning may be helpful to both practitioners and parents as a means of checking that the experiences offered help to support a range of modes of interaction and helping parents to think about tying the ideas that they seek to direct or share into appropriate starting points for engaging with children's thinking.

Taking the 63 examples of adult child interaction each was coded in relation to the types of affordance foregrounded in the episode. This might be a single type of affordance or multiple types. Once again presenting this data by group separated into parents and practitioners reveals a complementary pattern to the analysis by reflective elements.

The practitioners in both settings allow meaning to come to the forefront in activities or they gravitate towards materials that offer opportunities to share meaning, much more consistently and frequently than do the parents in relation to the number of episodes they are engaging in. Once again in a smaller number of episodes, both the practitioners and the parents in the Outwell group equal the Talktime group in relation to the extent to which children have opportunities to reflect on meaning and purpose. This indicates the higher density of reflection identified in the previous section (6.4.).

The high prevalence of control and emotional/sensory affordances where parents are present could be explained either by where the practitioners choose to locate themselves and/ or by how they engage with the children.

**Figure 6.22 Comparing the frequency of affordance categories foregrounded in episodes with adults present.**



The following examples begin to consider these possibilities and the possible role of affordance is developed further in the case studies of specific children given in Chapter Seven. In the first example Farhad has rich opportunities for personal reflection on the sensory and control affordances of the water and objects therein. To some extent his older sister reveals the purpose of the funnel. However the meaning of the activity remains very much on this sensory plane, with the activity affording personal enjoyment.

***Talktime. Farhad 20 months with Mum monitoring***

Farhad returns to the water where Ejaz is already playing wearing a tall hat and pouring water into from a small yoghurt bottle into a water wheel. "I'm in the water" says Ejaz to Farhad.

Farhad watches as Ejaz continues to pour water from a small cup to make the water wheel spin around. He then hears a second water wheel squeak as a work experience student pours water into it. Farhad pulls Ejaz's wheel closer to him to peer into the yellow funnel at the top and then uses a measuring jug to pour water in. he takes up the cup that Ejaz had been using and has a little sip of water and tips the rest into the funnel to make the wheel spin "oy oy oy" he announces loudly to Ejaz as they both pour water on to the wheel. Farhad's elder sister arrives at the water tray and he looks and smiles broadly at her as she arrives "oh oh" he says.



Farhad pours more water into the wheel with the measuring jug “oo oo oo” he says and watches his sister pouring water out of a yogurt bottle into the water he then begins to pour water on himself and his mum says “no Farhad and watches her as she moves away “oooo dad a” he says to his sister as she pours water into the funnel of the water wheel. Farhad has noticed water dripping from the bottom of the cup he is pouring from and the work experience student shows Farhad how to hold the cup steady show that the water drips straight down out of the four holes in the bottom of the cup.

In the following, examples of interactions are contrasted in order to illustrate the potential difference between a less and a more reflective exchange. In the first example, Farhad is initially offered the opportunity to connect animal figures with their names and the noises that they make. This foregrounds the potential of these figures to symbolise meanings that are shared between Farhad and his mother. Farhad is being prepared with the type of knowledge he will be expected to acquire but this is connected only weakly to themes which might engage and sustain the exchange.

***Talktime. Farhad 20 months with Mum***

Mum starts laying some train track from a basket on the shelf moving away from the base of the shelves. Farhad has picked up a yellow car and seems to be considering dropping the car on a smaller boy who is approaching. His mother catches the car as it drops and then tries to distract Farhad with a model giraffe from a basket.

“Giraffe,” she says.

He takes the giraffe and puts it down. She then says “tiger,” offering him a tiger. Farhad takes the tiger and shows it to Martin who pretends to roar. Mum offers Farhad a tiger cub and says “Tiger”.

Farhad says “grrrr,” and shows the tiger to mum who offers him a horse . “Horsey, horsey clip clop,” she says.

Farhad takes the horse and puts its mouth to the ground pretending it is feeding.

“Moo,” says mum giving Farhad a cow.

Farhad takes the cow and Martin asks if it is hungry like the horse.

“ I bet it would like some grass too,” he suggests.

Farhad takes the cow and drops it carefully into the stable building of the farm. He takes a series of animals and repeats this action.

The second Farhad example contrasts to the Henry episode below where he is being asked to reflect on his feelings about the roller, the smell and texture of the paint. The connection of meaning to rich sensory and control experience seem to create a more resonant exchange.

This questioning seems to draw out the statement from Henry about mixing the paint which fits in stylistically with a reflexive discussion in terms of an observation about

the nature of the materials offered. Henry's mum also asks him to reflect on whether he likes using the roller. It would appear that Henry is already used to and comfortable with engaging in this type of discussion. Both Yasmeen and Henry's mum offer a similar type of discourse that is able to prepare Henry very well for the type of questions he is likely to be presented with in preschool and school. The above and following episodes help to illustrate that SST is different from simply extended joint activity, that the nature of the interactive exchanges can frame the variety of connections that the child is guided to towards. The questions offered in the Henry example provide a structure that if sustained sets down a pattern of questioning and enquiry.

***Outwell. Henry 34 months with practitioner Yasmeen***

Yasmeen asks and with Henry nodding she squirts some of the washing up liquid on to the painting and some on his hand. "There you are wow."  
 Henry looks carefully at the spongy roller that now has lots of tiny bubbles on it.  
 "What does it feel like?" she asks.  
 "Its blue and yellow," replies Henry.  
 "Can you smell it?"  
 "I can smell it."  
 "What does it smell like?"  
 [couldn't pick up Henry's answer]  
 "It smells of lemon," says Yasmeen. "Is it slippery when you touch it?"  
 "Blue and yellow make orange," says Henry  
 "Blue and yellow make orange," says Yasmeen "Wow."  
 Henry continues to use the roller he looks over towards his mum who is looking after his younger sister.  
 "Look mummy look."  
 "What are you doing?" Asks mum.  
 Henry continues to roller sponge.  
 Mum picks up the blue paint and puts some more on to the paper. "There covered," she says, "Can I have a look at what you've done?" asks mum. "Do you like painting with the roller?"  
 "Can you put some on?" asks Henry.  
 "That's very good," says mum.

The Farhad example connects object, language and sound but does not offer the same questioning and opinion valuing frameworks as the Henry example. It important to point out again that is not in the nature of the study to draw conclusions about the long term nature of particular children's experiences. In this example Farhad is considerably younger than Henry, and the examples are taken only to illustrate a range of possibilities. Section 6.1 illustrated that age, education and ethnicity do not



offer neat predictors of interactive patterns: individuals in these groups behaved differently.

The argument developed here, and in the following chapters, is that the range and balance of modes of interaction are important. Concern would begin to arise if interactions were limited in style. It has already been suggested at the beginning of this chapter that it is not appropriate to draw firm conclusions since we may only be seeing a limited range of the interactions that the carer/child dyad experience in the wider range of contexts that they inhabit. The analytical framework and particularly the categories developed in section 6.2 offer an accessible starting point for practitioners to reflect on modelling in their own interactions and discussing with parents. Chapter Seven will seek to illustrate the potential benefits of each category and consider how some children might experience quite different ranges of interactions. The potential of promoting reflection as well as connection is also a realistic goal. There were relatively few polychronic references, which is not surprising since connections to past events are more likely to be in the grasp of parents. However the idea of ‘connecting things in time’ might prove an accessible topic for discussion with parents. The potential for developing a process-orientated framework for practitioner training, and for discussion in the parent and toddler group context, will be developed further in Chapter Eight.

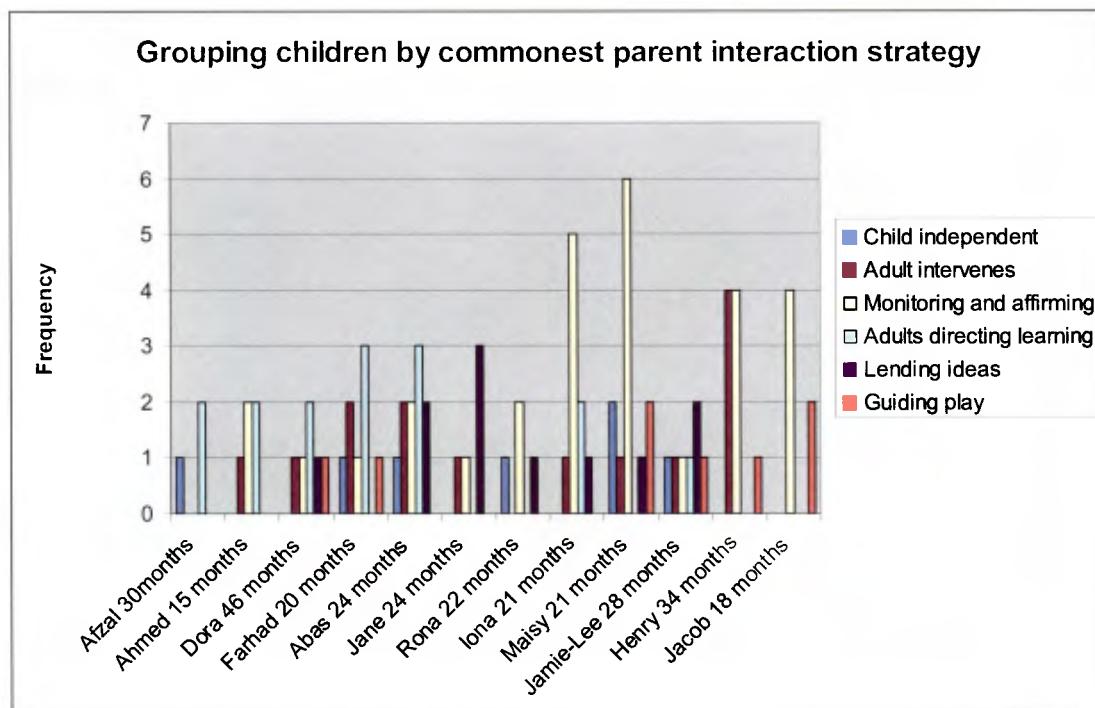
## Chapter 7

### Three children's experience of learning at parent and toddler group sessions.

#### *7.0 Selecting three children for more detailed analysis*

This chapter examines three examples of children's experiences of a whole parent and toddler group session. This illustrates how individual experiences vary from the general pattern of interaction set out in Chapter Six which was similar in both case study groups. The three children have been selected to illustrate three distinctly different types of experience. It is suggested that the remaining nine children's experiences are similar to one of these three patterns of experience.

**Figure 7.1** *Grouping children by features of their parent's most frequently observed interaction mode*

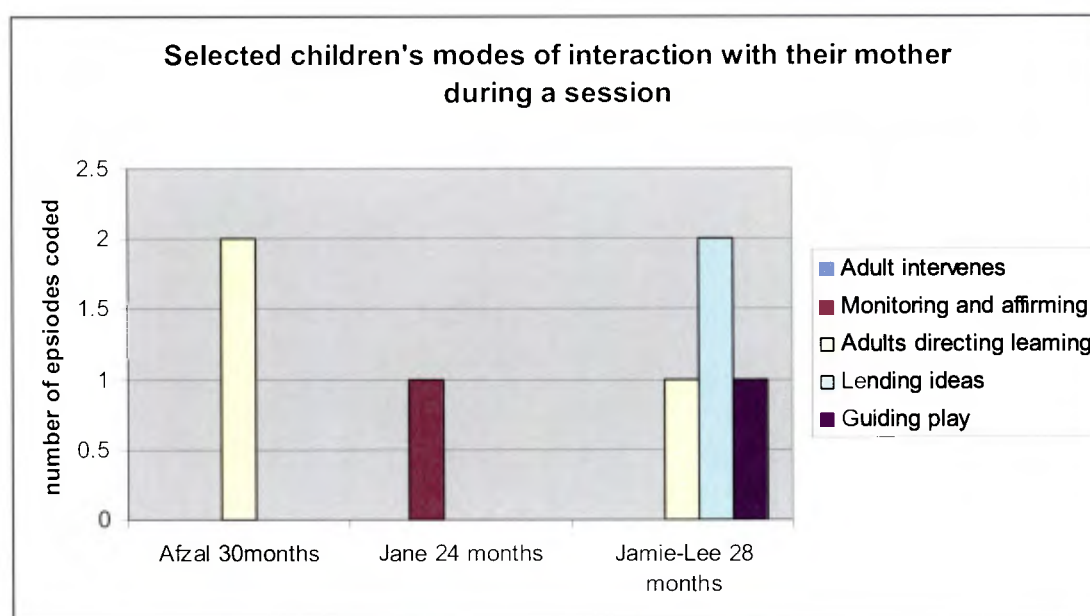


Although the table above includes all adult interactions these patterns are strongly influenced by the parents' preferred styles of engagement in the sessions. Afzal, Ahmed, Dora, Farhad and Abas all experience adult directed learning. Jane, Rona,

Iona and Maisy all experienced monitoring and affirming predominantly from their carer (grandmother in Rona's case) and their experience of other interaction in the session is significantly shaped by the practitioner. To some extent Iona and Abas straddle both of these groups. Jamie-Lee, Henry and Jacob experienced a combination of monitoring, affirming, sharing ideas and play with their parents. Afzal, Jane and Jamie-lee have been selected as examples which illustrate features of these groups most clearly.

If we look at the pattern of modes of interaction experienced by each of the three children with their mothers in figure 7.2 we can see how these experiences of interaction may vary across a session.

**Figure 7.2** *Selected children's modes of interaction with their mother during a session.*

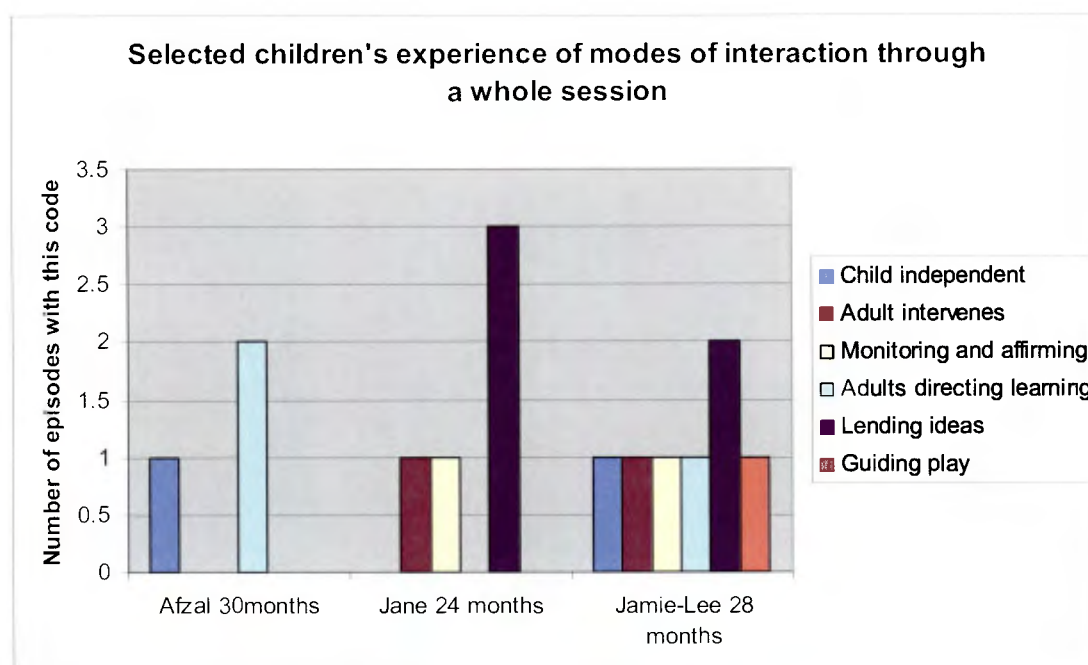


It is suggested that Afzal might experience a greater proportion of adult directed learning, Jane may receive a greater proportion of monitoring and affirming while Jamie-Lee appears to receive a mixture of guidance and support in play. Clearly this is not a complete picture of each dyad's relationship, and one should not make assumptions about the continuity of experience from one session to another or experiences outside the session, but these examples offer a useful basis for reflecting on the possible implications if such patterns were repeated over time with a particular

child. The three selected children are chosen to portray how different modes of engagement might shape the learning opportunities within a single session; these will be combined with parent and practitioner comments to consider how representative these examples might be of the child's wider learning experiences.

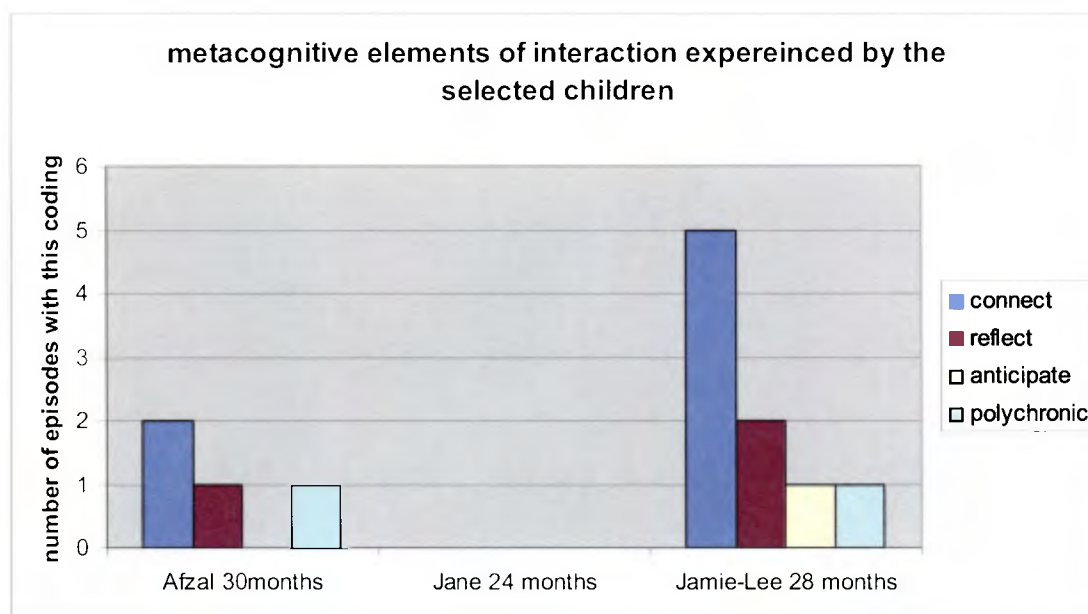
Figure 7.3 below shows the other interactions with adults that the selected child received during the session. We can see that in addition to interaction with their mothers Afzal and Jamie-Lee have some additional opportunities for independent play and that Jane has several interactions from the practitioners in the centre.

**Figure 7.3** *The selected children's experience of modes of interaction through a whole session.*



In relation to the metacognitive circle of analysis, figure 7.4 illustrates clear differences in the experiences of the three children over the course of the session, with Jamie-Lee experiencing most of these elements and Jane experiencing none.

**Figure 7.4 Metacognitive elements of interaction experienced by the selected children**



The following sections will exemplify these differences in interaction more qualitatively.

### 7.1 Afzal; 2 years 6 months (Outwell Group)

Afzal came to the session with his mother (Shafiqah) and his friend Imtiaz. Shafiqah age 40 worked part-time in a nursery centre and had an NVQ level 3 qualification. From an Indian Punjabi speaking background, she went to school in England.

Afzal arrived 30 minutes into the session. In this his first episode of the session, he was comfortable to play along side his friend from home in the outside courtyard.

### ***Afzal Episode 1.***

Afzal and Imtiaz stand next to each other by a washing up bowl that has been placed outside on a table with plastic cups, plates, pans and jugs. They quietly take items and place them in the water looking around. Afzal tentatively picks up a blue metal enamelled pan and puts it down again. Martin encourages them to put more items into the water by asking shall we wash this pan up as well?. Martin puts the pan in the water and rinses it out showing Afzal how clean it is. Afzal and Imtiaz continue to play side by side dipping things in the water and pouring the water out. Mum, who has gradually withdrawn and gone to sign in, returns but maintains a distance, commenting to her friend that Afzal is playing nicely and indicating that she would keep her distance for a while.

I initially tried to engage with the boys by trying to check my guess that they were role playing washing up but this tentative move to check shared meanings was not taken up by the boys. Afzal's mum watched this episode taking place from a slightly distanced vantage point in the doorway to the outside courtyard. During an interview the following week, Afzal's mother began by suggesting that primarily they had come to the group to have fun together.

*Oh yes the water. At this age 2 and half they are interested in water and bubbles, he loves playing with water, he loves feeling it, he loves it. I was at home today and I have housework to do but I thought we'll come here and have fun he must have fun so we'll come to this group. I don't come all the Mondays just some Mondays I've been here. (Shafiq)*

This comment shows that the mother is deliberate in choosing to monitor Afzal's behaviour from a distance; she accepts exploring the sensory feeling of the water as a legitimate activity and is happy to allow Afzal space to explore this in the company of another child. This is not only about allowing Afzal space for sensory play. Afzal's mother went on to explain concerns about him starting in preschool and nursery.

*He goes to playgroup this afternoon. He used to go to playgroup once a week. But because he starts nursery school in September I want to give him that opportunity to know that he is going to have a routine. To be able to go out and play with other children and he goes now three days a week Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. I used to drop him the first few weeks and he used to think where is she leaving me and he got quite upset and I didn't like it. I stayed with him 20 minutes to half an hour and it was explained to him "mummy's coming back". Have a nice play then tell me what you done, show me your painting. So now he is OK. He's alright about it. (Shafiq)*

She relates this behaviour in public to his behaviour at home:

*The last few weeks he has been very clingy, his Dad went to India he was all quiet all of a sudden 'cause he misses his dad and he was asking about his dad. And Imtiaz's mum said that she used to bring him here and he used to get upset and start to cry so what I thought was I'm going to bring him here because he is going to start nursery soon and to settle him I think its best to let him move off from me. 'Cause I'm a nursery nurse, you see, and I have seen that that if you have a child and you let them move off from you it is easier. (Shafiqah)*

And to her own experience as a child:

*Shafiqah: I'm quite old now in our generation. I don't think we got English like a first language 'cause my mum is like Punjabi, Punjabi speaking, so I remember when I was at nursery, you know when like you haven't got much English. So I was like quiet. So I want him to know the English I want him to know what is happening around him and what is not happening. That was like scary for me because I didn't get that for myself. So I want him to get that language first.*

*A lot of the Asians do want to speak Punjabi first because that is our mother tongue language but I speak English myself you see, because I want him to know all the basics in English first. I still speak Punjabi as well and I have started to speak Punjabi to him as well now. I think of Afzal and I think if he goes to Nursery and if he hasn't got that language he like isn't going to be with it. He is going to be like shy and quiet and I don't want him to have that.*

*Martin: So independence is something you're trying to promote?*

*Shafiqah: Yeah that's it yeah. He's been doing that from a very young age, trying to do things for himself. But in a situation like this he just stands back and watches everything.*

The four South Asian heritage mothers in the sample (two in each case study) were all very proficient in English but differed in approach to using language within the sessions. Afzal's mum was the most proactive in promoting confidence in English. Ahmed's mum took the opposite view and promoted Urdu in the session, keen to ensure that her son retained some confidence in the language of his cultural background. The other two mums were more mixed in their approach. The presence of mum is more than a physical reassurance: she helps the child to interpret the rules and expectations of the setting translated into their own home culture. This would apply equally to native English speakers. The child can return to mum for reassurance that they are acting appropriately and that their connection to home is not broken.



In the second episode of Afzal's morning, his mother adopted a far more proactive role and appeared to be keen to take the initial sensory affordance of the children and connected this towards a much more semantic purpose. She encouraged Afzal to participate in a new direction creating meaning in pictures and with language that she felt connected to his experiences outside the immediate context of the group.

### *Afzal Episode 2.*

Afzal and Imtiaz having watched three children playing in a water tray on the floor move around to the tray as the other children move off. They crouch by the tray and pick up and put down the boats in the tray. They pick up the stones in the tray and drop them into the water. "like Spiderman". Mum draws lines on the face on the floor like a spider's web. "Are you going to paint one?" she asks offering him the brush.

"Big one," says Afzal not accepting the offered brush.

"Shall I paint a spider?" offers Mum.

"Spider," says Afzal as she paints a spider on slab with the water.

"You do one," suggests mum offering him the brush and he carefully and intently paints over the top of the Spiderman face.

"Do another one!"

"It is all wet there now. Do another one over here, find a dry floor." They move to a new slab mum does a larger face "Finish it off Afzal," she suggests and Afzal carefully does the eyes and mouth again.

Afzal points to a third dry patch "Do big one," he says again.

"Afzal do a big one. I'll do the head you do the face. Look at that, you do the eyes."

Afzal does the eyes. "You do the body now Afzal."

Afzal makes marks under the head. "Where are his arms and legs Afzal?"

In contrast to the first 15 minutes Afzal's mother adopts a much more proactive role in the remainder of the session. Shafiqah follows his lead to the materials but she then appears keen to move Afzal to a topic where they can establish more communication. She sets a new agenda for the exploratory water activity but one that connects with Afzal. The materials which offer an opportunity for controlling the brush and water become an opportunity for comparing meanings and connecting these meanings to the home context through the Spiderman theme.

This is a situation that a practitioner without the same in depth knowledge of Afzal's interests as his mother would find it difficult to recreate. It establishes the principle of the materials moving beyond the control affordance to creating a point of shared meaning that can be repeated and developed. It establishes the idea that materials other than paper and pencils can also be used to create images to summon events from



other times and places. Afzal participates willingly in this activity for a sustained period and thereby also potentially develops his skills in collaborating with regard to listening to what is offered, picking up the rules of the activity and conforming to these. The discourse set out by his mother is quite directive, the questions relate strongly to performing the steps in the process, and while there is some connection of events across time there are few calls for reflection on evaluating each step. In the third and last activity of the session before snack and singing time, Afzal continues to be drawn to the sensory and control affordances of the water.

### ***Afzal Episode 3.***

*Ahmed's father is pouring water from a cup into a water wheel to make it spin around, Saying "Ahmed look at the water" Afzal pauses and stands to watch.*

"Afzal shall we do raindrops?" says mum, dripping water from the paint brush on to the floor. "Can I do raindrops now? Afzal! Look at this Afzal!" Afzal watches and then takes the brush to shake some drops on to the ground. He looks back at the water tray. "What is in there, a jug?"

Afzal points and says "cups". He watches as mum pours water from a jug into the water wheel and then as Ahmed, with the help of his father pours water into the water wheel. "Do you want a cup?" asks mum

"Yes"

Afzal picks up a toy frying pan. "What is that Afzal? Pan"

"Pan"

Afzal pours water into a cup using a yellow jug. He picks up a stone and drops it in causing a splash "where has the water gone?"

They now take it in turns to drop stones "one ... two," says Mum. "Afzal count one two"

"No more... no more" says Afzal.

He reaches into the water and pulls out a large green foot mould. "Feet" he says, "big feet".

"Is that your foot?" asks Ahmed's dad.

Afzal shows the foot to him and to his mum and then drops in back into the tray.

Afzal pauses and looks around the outdoor area. Time has moved on and it will be time to tidy up soon. Mum says "Look Afzal look around do you want to play with something else. Do you want to take off your apron and put it over here?"

He looks a little longer and then returns to pouring water from the pan into the jug. After a couple of minutes he takes off his apron and puts it on the table where his mum had previously pointed. He returns to the water tray and continues to pour, this time from a yellow cup into a yellow jug. Having filled the jug he picks it up and tips it out. He stands up again looking around and his mother asks if he would like a towel to dry his hands. He moves to the towel when one is brought out and pats his hands carefully on to the towel. He then returns to the water and watches Ahmed a little longer and then the bell rings to tidy up.

In the third episode before the group activities of snack time and story time we can see that Ahmed's father (of a similar South Asian heritage and with a degree in IT) is also proactively engaged with the materials and focused on control but also on developing shared meaning through language.

Afzal picks up again on dropping the stones into the water and again his mum is keen to move to what might be considered a longer term semantic affordance of the activity moving the activity towards the educational skill of counting. However, this connects far less successfully with Afzal's interests than the Spiderman painting, and is quickly dropped. His mum then seems more content to allow Afzal the space to repeat the pouring of water from container to container. This last activity appears to afford control opportunities to Afzal but seems to lack connections of purpose and meaning from the adults' point of view. Consideration might be given to the provision of a balance of activities within a session that affords opportunities for independent control of materials but also some opportunities for adults to make connections to more purposeful activities beyond the immediate context. Washing up could lead into a recreation of activities within the home. Equally parents might be encouraged to indicate emotional connections with the feel of the water and sounds it makes.

This case illustrates a more proactive style of interaction which was not exclusive to but a feature of the four South Asian parents in the study: the pursuit of language and numeracy objectives. Afzal is being inducted into participation in interaction in this context, that expects questions to be posed around the categorisation of objects and that is well suited to the traditional question and answer discourse identified by Bruner (1986) and Mercer (2002). The concern that Brooker (2002) raised about the diversity and transparency of the curriculum to parents is interesting in this context because Afzal's mum having a role in early education is clearly familiar with the proposed value of independence and exploratory play and creates space for a range of adult led and child led activity within the session. Shafiq's action nevertheless suggests a deep commitment to the importance of the role of the adult in directing the child's participation in activity. More hidden values of reflection and evaluation of experiences are less visible.

## 7.2 Jane; 2 years 2 months (Talktime Group)

In the second child/parent case study Jane was 26 months old. Her mother Rachel had part-time checkout work and some level three Information Technology qualifications. Jane and her mother arrived at the beginning of the session and Jane quickly separated from her mum and moved towards the water tray, comfortable to engage and explore the activities offered in the setting.

### *Jane Episode 1*

Jane watches Farhad and Anicia playing in the water tray. She moves between them, dips her hands in the water tray and continues to watch as they throw balls into the water making it splash. Jane starts to splash the water towards, but not at, Anicia.

Jane's mother is close by throughout this first episode of the session. She chooses to monitor and observe Jane's activity rather than engage directly with it. By not stepping in to control the splashing too quickly, Mum gives Jane time and space to show that Jane is aware of rules around not being too boisterous in the water. This monitoring mode of interacting with Jane's play is supportive and may promote self confidence and independence. However taken as a regular pattern of interaction in the sessions such consistent monitoring came to be viewed as problematic by the staff.

*Rachel for example, who I have been working with one to one over the months, I have come to realise that she is a 'needing more support' sort of person so Charlotte our CAMHs worker has been doing the Solihull approach on a one to one with Rachel and that has had a positive affect on her attitude and now her attitude to parenting is changing, so I have a good idea of what is happening in the sessions and Rachel says that she is retraining her brain. And retraining the way that she deals with Jane. (Amy practitioner and home visitor in the Talktime group)*

In this context Rachel, like Afzal's mum, sees this episode as a positive example of independence and socialisation, helping Jane to work along side and getting used to other children.

*Being able to play with other children being the only one at home in the day, learning to share things that not everything is hers and getting her to share things with other kids and getting her confidence up. She didn't used to be like 12 months ago wherever I was she was. When she is playing on her own she doesn't want mum to play. With a couple of the adults that I have got know*

*and got friendly with I have a chat. We help each other. We talk to each other and discuss problems we have got. (Rachel)*

Overall Rachel suggests that she is interacting more than she has in the past, accepting the practitioners' assessment of the need for her to engage more directly with Jane in the sessions.

Sometimes we need to interact together and a few months ago I wouldn't interact with her and I asked Angie to help me after the session had finished and she helped me at home. She come over and watched the activities that we do. (Rachel)

In the following episode Rachel continues to be close to Jane through the session but I would suggest that her role remains one of affirming and monitoring. Both parent and practitioner give space to the children and they collaborate peripherally with them, providing materials and 'moral' support. This affirms the children as having control in the situation and gives space to personal reflection and action.

This meets the ethos set out by the group as they describe it.

*It kind of fits in with the ethos. Because it is all about being child led, following their interests validating what they are doing and expand on that. (Julie practitioner Talktime)*

### *Jane Episode 2*

Jane moves back to a tray that is full of paint and shaving foam. She watches Maisy who is mixing paint and foam with a spoon in a balti bowl to make a chocolate mix, and picks up a squeeze bottle of paint and tries to squeeze it out into the tray. Mum who is next to Jane asks if she wants her to try getting the paint out. "That's it", she says as they do it together.

Kay says, "Has it all gone! Oh dear."

There is paint on Jane's hands and the bottle. Jane wipes her hands on her mother's hands so that both have a generous covering of paint. Mum accepts the paint.

"Slippery, slippery," says mum.

"More spoons" says Jane,

The adults bring extra spoons and ask if the girls would like more foam.

"Jane, you've got it on your top," says Kay.

Having put foam onto Maisy's bowl Kay asks if Jane would like more foam on her side. Jane continues to stir the foam paint with the spoon and fingers. Jane looks down at her training shoe, which has a blob of paint on it. Martin says "Hey, look at that you've got paint on your shoe. Shall we wipe it off?" Jane keeps her foot still and continues to look at it. Martin wipes it off in a big blob and smears the paint back onto the palm of Jane's hand.

In the above episode validation and expansion of the child's activity take place through providing resources such as additional spoons and foam that serve to share, sustain and expand the activity. This is clearly collaborative but continues to be supportive to the affordances which are more transparent to the child rather than adding ideas from the adult's perspective. Some practitioners might describe this as scaffolding because it is adding props to feed and extend the children's activity. The episode evolves when a tart tray is introduced by the practitioner, Kay, and the interactive mode involves much more mediation and conforms more closely to Wood's (1998) description of scaffolding. The children's interest is identified sensitively and when the baking tray is provided it is immediately taken up as it clearly affords the opportunity to spoon foam into the separate compartments. There is a higher degree of negotiation and information exchange between the children and the adults in this episode which is focused on the control of the materials present but also acknowledges the sensory pleasure involved in the action. The episode potentially offers the scope to connect to baking experiences at home and role play but neither adult nor child takes the play in that direction.

The adults appear to maintain a focus on the sensory and control affordances of the materials. This focus offers some scope for reflection on the sufficiency of the materials but this is not so explicitly evaluative and reflexive and illustrates the weakness of the practitioners at establishing connections to other events relative to the parents. The adults seem to emphasise the connections between the children's actions and corresponding language. There is also some potential here to talk to Rachel about how engaged Jane is with the activity, how the introduction of the tray extended and intensified the play and how Kay uses language to encourage the linking of words and action. There is an opportunity for the adult to join in with the play, perhaps developing their own pretend baking along side the girls asking them to pass this or pass that. The adults could say something like "We have run out of buns! We need more current buns!" The moment to do this will always be hard for adults to judge, sometimes adult participation will enhance and intensify the play and sometimes it may stifle it. Sometimes it may be better to leave the children to develop the play themselves but this study suggests that at least sometimes adults be allowed to participate too and that this doesn't have to be an 'intervention' in play where the adult hijacks the control and direction of the activity.



### *Jane Episode 3*

Kay places a tart baking tray in the middle of the tray and following Maisy's directions fills each space with foam. Kay asks if she should put it in Jane's holes on her side of the tray and as Kay does this Jane scoops it out with the spoon and mixes it into her bowl. Kay refills it each time. Kay asks Jane if she would like her own baking tray, as they want to do different things. Kay brings Jane her own tray. "Would you like to do some?" she asks Jane. "That's the button on the top, do you want Kay to show you?" Kay presses the button and foam squirts into the tray. "Do you want to push the button?" Jane tries "Is it a bit hard?" asks Kay. Kay shows Jane again and the foam spurts out into the larger tray. "There's some little bits coming out." Jane watches as Kay responds to Maisy's request to fill up the empty cups again. Jane has continued to spoon and touch the mix but she pauses and watches carefully as Maisy heads off to wash her hands, Kay sits down in Maisy's place opposite Jane. "Gone!" says Jane and then she picks up the bottle of blue paint and tries to squeeze it onto the mix

"Do you want me to do it?" asks mum.

"Look! Wow!" says Kay as it spurts out and then, "Has it all gone?" as it stops.

Jane pauses to wipe her own hands on her mother's hands.

"Do you want the red one? Oh that made a gurgling sound," says as Jane squeezes it out into a bowl.

"Do you want me to squeeze it?" asks mum

"Squeeze it, squeeze it" Jane gives the bottle to her mother and then takes it back

"Mine," she says.

"Do you want to squirt it?" asks mum.

"Squeeze it."

Jane picks up dollops of foam on each hand and goes splat splat splat with her palms on to her mother's palms

"Do you want more?" asks Jane.

"You like flicking it don't you? Go like this scoop it up and splat it down" says Kay.

"Do you want to have a go?" Jane flicks the foam and some gets onto her nose. Kay wipes it a little then Jane tries to wipe it some more and puts more paint on to her face from her arm.

Jane tries to get more paint from the squeezey bottle

"Do you want mummy to squeeze it?" asks Kay and then to Maisy who has returned,

"Maisy do you want some water in your bottle?"

Jane looks over to Maisy again and Kay asks "do you want some water in your bottle too?"

Mum fills the bottle taking Kay's lead from the water tray and when she gives the bottle back to Kay, Kay squirts it down into the baking tray. Jane moves over next to Maisy as she squirts the watery paint mix she now has in her bowl. Both girls squirt paint into the bowl and then Maisy stirs the water as Jane continues to squirt in more paint. Kay suggests that they empty the bowl into the water tray to wash up. Jane fills up her bottle with water from the water tray by herself and fills her own bowl stirring it with a spoon. Jane then watches as Kay starts to empty the water tray with a washing up bowl.

"We need to put it away now, we need to tidy up now. Mummy will do it with you."

Jane is reluctant to stop and is a little upset as the materials are tidied away.

The extract from the interview that took place the following week demonstrates the potential of research protocols to generate helpful reflective dialogue. Different research aims and objectives might help to make such a dialogue more explicit about the potential advantages of sustained activity and language development.

*Martin: Can I ask what Jane did on the Wednesday following last Monday's observation?*

*Rachel: She did practically the same as she did on the Monday she put the paint in the glue and making the cakes and stuff like that,*

*Martin: And did she do it for the same amount of time because it was like 30 or 40 minutes?*

*Rachel: She did it the same, she did it just before tidying up time. So got into it we couldn't get her off it at all. She didn't want it tidied up or nothing.*

*Martin: Did she do the same thing with putting it into the trays?*

*Rachel: Yeah putting it into the little cake trays.*

*Martin: Spooning it out and spooning it into the bowl?*

*Rachel: Yeah doing it with a bent spoon or with her fingers*

*Martin: Does she do anything like that at home?*

*Rachel: Not really no, she has got other toys that she plays with.*

*Martin: Does she do other things session after session?*

*Rachel: Each session is different normally. She does play dough first, she'll do the gluing, drawing, she'll go over to the water for a bit and then when its tidy up time she'll come over here for a bit and do something on the carpet. If she does get fed up after a bit she'll explore something different.*

Although the style of interaction adopted by Rachel frequently came up as a cause for concern in the practitioners' reflective evaluations that followed each session, the ongoing and sustained attendance of both Rachel and Jane at the centre, seemed to have encouraged Jane to engage confidently with the other adults and children in the group. Jane often played alongside other children, something demonstrated in each episode, and she sought to engage with other adults through these shared activities. This engagement with others is reflected in the comments made by Rachel about Jane's growing confidence, reported at the beginning of this section.



### 7.3 Jamie-Lee. 2 years 3 months (Talktime group)

In this final case study of a child's day in the group, I have selected a session which contains a range of modes of engagement. Jamie-Lee's mother Lynn was a full time mother approaching her mid twenties, who had two older boys and was expecting a fourth child shortly. She had GCSE qualifications. Lynn was perceived by the staff to be engaging very effectively with Jamie-Lee demonstrating the interactive models they were promoting.

#### ***Extract from Talktime staff discussion***

**Marion (Manager):** *With Lynn reading that 'Tickle My Nose' book with Jamie-Lee because it was that particular book. She was actually doing the actions with Jamie-Lee it was again showing that you don't just have to read the book but it can be an interactive activity. Lynn has been very keen on taking the story sacks hasn't she. That might be something you can talk about.*

**Julie (practitioner):** *We are talking about the learning, coming back to the balloons, I am talking to them, and Lynn was saying I feel like I am doing the same thing, and I said you like doing it, but you are also moving it on you have continuous provision and then you extend it on, so when you add different things to it. And she started asking me questions about it, so I said when your child does something and it might seem like the same thing they're not bored with it they are just strengthening the way that they do it so they are relearning it and I said that is good for their brain development.*

Staff noted the pressures on Lynn and admired the way that she engaged with Jamie-Lee at ground level despite being heavily pregnant in the episode that follows. The above staff dialogue is very helpful in presenting the type of interactions that staff expected in both of the case study groups. The practitioners' comments present the adult role as one of allowing the children to lead episodes and for the adult to then extend the children's lead through questions. This is modelled slightly differently by Kay with Jane where extension was through similar but related materials by introducing a tart tray; Julie with Ahmed where extension was through introducing blowing glitter in addition to sprinkling it; and with Yasmeen guiding Rona and Richard through activities and asking them to reflect on a variety of component elements. Lynn's questions to Jamie-Lee in the episode below also feature this type of questions but in a relatively long joint exchange of ideas.

### *Jamie- Lee Episode 1*

Jamie-Lee is kneeling on the floor next to a tray of sand. She is filling a white bucket with sand using a spade. Her mum sits down next to her. "Cake" says Jamie-Lee.

"That's a good idea," says her mum, "put the sand in there first." They both scoop sand into the bucket and then tip out the sand. "Oh dear," says mum laughing as it falls flat. "Shall we try mixing some water in and see what that does?" Mum takes the bucket and asks if it is OK to put a little water in the sand which she does, creating a small strip of wet sand. "Let's try that sand and see what happens." They both put sand into the white bucket and then mum turns the bucket over and lifts off the bucket revealing a well formed shape on the sand. "Yeaay, it worked!" says mum. JL swings her hand and chops a corner off the top of the castle and then with another chop knocks the 'cake' down.

"Would you like a book now?" asks Lynn and she moves around the other side of the dividing shelves. JL continues half filling the bucket with sand. "Lee would you like a book now?" JL moves to the opposite side of the sand tray so she can see her mother more easily but continues to fill the bucket. Her mother comes back next to her and says "Remember which one made a sandcastle, remember the wet one." Mum starts to fill a transparent bucket with sand while JL continues to fill the white bucket. JL stands up with the bucket of sand and moves towards her mother but in passing Martin he says, "That looks really heavy, you must be very strong." JL offers the bucket of sand to Martin and hangs it on his offered hand "Wow it is heavy," says Martin. JL smiles and then returns to the sand pit to get a spade of sand and then starts to return to Martin to put the sand into the bucket which he is holding. "Hold on," he says, "I had better come over to you so the sand goes back into the tray." He puts the sand down and they both start to fill the bucket with sand "shall we put some more in?" he asks.

"Yes" she replies. They fill it to the top and JL taps it down with the palm of her hand and the back of the spade. "Shall we tip it over?" Martin and JL both hold the bucket. "Shall we tip it over? 123 tip." The sand runs out "Wow," say Martin and Lynn. Martin returns to making notes and JL repeats the same sequence of bringing the half filled bucket to Martin to hold and then repeat the filling and turning over the bucket. Martin again makes notes and JL joins her mother in filling up the transparent bucket with sand. "Do you need some taps on the bottom? Shall we tip it ? 1..2...3." Again the sand tips out of the bucket but they both note that the sand can now be seen halfway up the inside of the bucket. Lynn encourages JL to touch the wet sand. "It is cold and wet look at that one it runs through your fingers, hold your hand out and it falls, try this one [dry sand] it doesn't make a ball. Can you do it with the wet sand?" JL does this and holds the ball of sand in her palm. "Ball" she says "Have you made a ball?" says her mum.

This is a more playful joint participatory exchange as Lynn follows and joins in with Jamie-Lee's lead. Mum puts forward a new suggestion and checks this with Jamie-Lee. They then continue to participate jointly in the activity. Jamie-Lee puts in her next idea chopping the "cake" down. This offers the opportunity for more imaginative and meaning-heavy activity, but neither mum nor the researcher pursues this in the remainder of the episode. As Jamie-Lee draws in the researcher to the play the emphasis from the adults' perspectives remains on the control of the materials. Both join in with the child's activity and try to help her run through the sequence of

sandcastle creation, drawing attention to the significant aspects of the process. I have categorised this episode as mediated because not only it is not simply open but involves some exchange of ideas. Lynn uses language to outline and revise the idea she offers to Jamie-Lee without demanding compliance.

*“Erm I sort of try to give her ideas but she has definitely got her own little head on her shoulders and she knows what she wants to do and sometimes no matter what I say to her she has got her own little thing going on. She doesn’t always take on board what I am saying but I am there for her if she needs me more than anything. I think I have realised I have got to take a bit of a back seat in whatever she does and just let her get on with it. Its nice it gives me a bit of a break and a chance for bit of a chit chat without having to worry about being there for her all the time.” (Lynn)*

This pattern is repeated in the second episode of the session. Lynn joins in with the

### **Jamie-Lee Episode 2**

JL moves to a tray that contains plastic crockery, picks out a roll of blue tape and a pair of scissors that she had placed there earlier and pulls out a 30 cm length of tape.

“Shall we cut some?” asks her mum, who takes the tape reel and holds it out with a length of tape extended for JL to cut with the scissors.

“There’s a good girl,” Her mum offers as JL snips at the tape with a hand on each handle of the scissors. “Waaay!” says mum as a piece of tape separates from the reel “there’s a good girl.”

“Sticked” says JL as the tape curls up and sticks together. JL tries to cut another piece with her mum still holding the tape.

“That’s it, if you do a little cut.” Lynn holds up a pair of scissors for JL to see. “Open shut. Open shut.”

“Let me see you do it a little cut and then pull the tape.” JL succeeds in cutting another long piece of tape. “One last piece, we don’t want to waste too much.”

JL moves all the way around the area dividers to pick up some crinkly scissors from the collage area where the tape and scissors are out on tables. She brings the scissors to her mum and offers them to her because the teeth are locked together. “Are they stuck?” says mum as she tries to open them. While some of the adults open up the scissors JL picks up a reel of transparent sellotape and pulls out a length of tape which breaks off, then JL crinkles it up. She tries to pull another length of tape but the tape is stuck down and she smiles to her mother and offers the reel to her saying “here.” She goes back to the shelves and chooses a reel of masking tape and pulls off another long strip then puts the reel down on the shelves next to mum. JL finds another roll of sellotape but it is also stuck down and so she chooses a reel of red tape. “Red tape have you got red tape, red.” JL chooses some red handled scissors. “They are red scissors to go with your red tape. Put your fingers in there,” and Lynn guides JL’s fingers into the scissors so that she could use one hand: “Open and shut, open and shut.”

Lynn holds the tape for JL to cut and JL goes back to holding the scissors with two hands but this time with the point facing down and cuts two or three pieces of tape. “Mum, mum,” she says passing the scissors to her mother.

The focus of attention in episode two is still very much on the control affordance presented by the materials. The language used labels the objects and actions that confirms joint attention and helps to reinforce intentions but perhaps doesn’t clarify

them. In the following two episodes the focus of the interactions is upon the meanings offered by the materials. Lynn is able to link the characters on the paper to Jamie-Lee's experiences at home with TV but this still does not instigate a sustained episode of negotiated meanings.

### *Jamie-Lee Episode 3*

Lynn picks up a paper with CBBC characters on and points to different characters asking JL who they are[this was not audible]. They point and talk about the paper for a short time and then JL chooses a rhyme book from the book shelves and brings it to Lynn. Lynn starts to read through the rhymes and involves JL with actions like tummy tickles and nose squeezes. JL starts to turn the pages quickly missing out some of the rhymes. For the last rhyme tickling with a feather is involved and Lynn picks up a yellow feather to do this and they take it in turns tickling each other's noses. "Those ducks are yellow, do you think this could be a duck's feather? Do you think he is a sad duck?"

In episode three Lynn accepts Jamie-Lee's invitation to read the book. This time Lynn lends ideas by adding action to the words offering greater scope for Jamie-Lee to engage with the words physically. Once again this interaction connects thought, spoken words and actions. The adult has more control and takes a more leading role in these examples but the child is very much opting in to sustain the exchange of actions and ideas.

In the fourth episode of the morning, Jamie-Lee extends the previous activity by drawing in the researcher again. In this episode words are translated into actions first by the adult and then by the child. This episode illustrates some of the limitations of the activities with a control affordance and suggests a level of language competence that Jamie-Lee does not demonstrate so clearly in the other episodes.

***Jamie- Lee Episode 4***

JL returns the book to the book shelves and Martin draws her attention to the rhyme 'a Freezy Weezey Snowman' again, showing her actions. JL offers Martin a book which involves a cat growing a beanstalk. Martin talks about the pictures with her and when he says how the plant gets bigger, JL says "big big bigger." She puts the book back on the shelves and picks up another handing it to Martin saying "Read me."

The book involves guessing animals by their tails "I wonder who's tail that is?" asks Martin.

Zebra," says JL.

"And who could this be?"

"Bear," says JL, "Big big," she continues, leaving the book and climbing up the bookshelves. "Big, big, big."

Martin supports her at the top and as she jumps down.

She repeats this three times.

In the session evaluation the following week the practitioner, Julie, comments how she too has been surprised by Jamie-Lee's language competence.

*Marion (line manager): It was great for Jamie-Lee because she had been climbing all day.*

*Julie (practitioner): Yes, 'cause I was going up to her and she was beaming and smiling. She is very quiet Jamie-Lee.*

*Beryl (practitioner): She normally plays on her own.*

*Julie: I have had more language from her today than I have ever had but sometimes you couldn't catch it so I repeated it and she has nodded.*

*Marion: I knew she was responding to you but I couldn't catch it.*

*Julie: And towards the end she was laughing with me as we put the thing up and then I am not going to be here for the next few weeks. I am really fed up about that.*

*Marion: You know some of that interaction was so joyful; it struck me as "I know this so well now I can play with it." She was just revelling in the fact that she knew it; she was sharing that with you.*

*Julie: Because normally there was that moment where we share it sounds a bit romantic but we were lifting up the lids and finding other lids. She actually waited and we shared it together and that's because we have had a few weeks of getting to know each other.*



One has a sense that Lynn's consistency with lending language to Jamie-Lee's activities is paying off with Jamie-Lee realising the power of language to confirm the focus of attention and elicit responses from others along similar lines.

In the final episode of the session Jamie-Lee returns to a more control based activity where she has the opportunity to explore materials for herself and to develop activity and communication in collaboration with another child.

#### ***Jamie-Lee Episode 5***

JL moves towards her mother who has continued to produce a collage from the paper that they were looking at earlier and to talk with Carley's mum. JL picks up a crayon and considers it for a few seconds and then picks up a dough cutter and some yellow dough with glitter in it. She puts the dough on the table near her mother and starts to roll it with a toothed rolling pin. "Play dough play dough," she says as she moves next to Carley and takes a piece of dough.

"You have to share Carley," says Carley's mum.

JL tries a red Christmas tree cutter sinking it deep into the dough and leaving it there she then tries a green animal shaped cutter but this is partially blocked by the red cutter so she stops and pulls hard to extract the red cutter she then tries the green one again. She takes a pen from the pot on the tables and draws some simple blobs of colour on a piece of scrap paper on the floor. She picks up the brown cutter again and goes next to Carley's mum and Carley where they have a large block of dough rolled out. Sinking the cutter into the dough she then gets the red cutter. Carley and JL then spend several minutes making sounds to each other and sharing the dough and cutters.

Overall Jamie-Lee receives a range of experiences during the session that promote directed, individual and shared exploration of physical tools, linguistic tools and interpersonal tools. She encounters fewer of the more formalised questioning exchanges experienced by Afzal. She is being encouraged to link thought and action in different ways, particularly to use language to reflect on cause and effect in the sand pit and with the sticking tape episodes. She is being encouraged to learn from and with others. She is also given space to learn from her own activity.

#### **7.4 Reflections on children's experiences of the sessions**

I have tried to identify some of the potential benefits of the different experiences of each of these individual children by tracking them through a single group session.

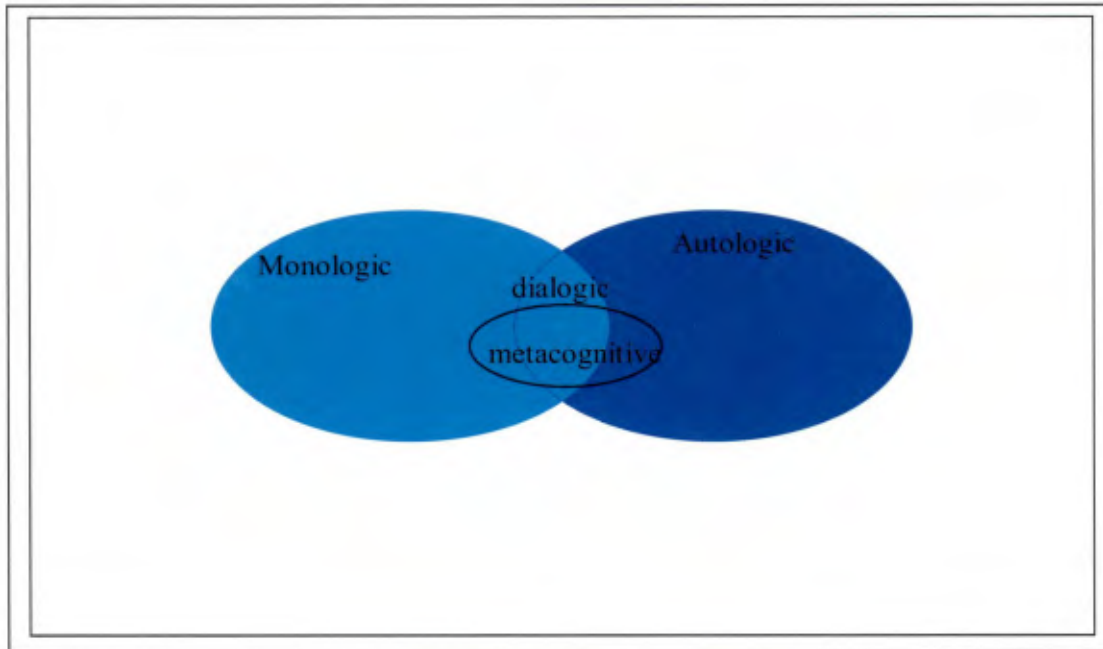
It is suggested that the balance of modes of interaction experienced by the children offer different frameworks for development of learning habits.

By examining three children's experiences of the whole of the 'free choice' part of a single parent and toddler group session, this chapter has illustrated how varied the experiences of the children are as a result of the adults' roles in the activity. An issue would clearly arise if it emerged that children were consistently experiencing a limited range of interactions. In the case studies of children presented in this chapter it has been argued that each child's experience in the sessions observed might lead the child towards the development of certain attitudes and dispositions over others. Afzal, it was suggested, might be well prepared by repetitions of such experience to listen to and respond to a teacher led discourse. Jane might be well prepared to establish connections with and learn from other children and adults. Jamie-Lee seems to be being prepared to engage in a variety of ways of investigating including reflective joint working. Clearly these are tentative speculations, but the task of this thesis has been to develop techniques for analysing interactions in such a way as to facilitate the identification and discussion about the relative merits of different experiences in the parent and toddler groups particularly with children under the age of three. It is not within the scope of this thesis to establish the long term connection between interactions and educational outcomes but rather to point towards a way of investigating the transformative processes of activity.

The tracking of individual children through the case studies in this chapter facilitates our own reflection on the nature of the framing of young children's learning discussed in Chapter Three. In the case of Afzal, there are strong examples of monologic discourses (Hakkarainen & Paavola, 2007) where the adult is leading the child directly in a particular direction. These still have the potential to become dialogic if the activity engages the child in an intersubjective exchange. In these Shafiq, Afzal's mother, seemed able to steer the episode towards culturally shared meanings through shared experiences and known interests that helped to establish dialogue and increase motivation, prolonging the interaction. In the second case study, Jane experienced mainly autologic guidance from her mother where she was provided experiences for self-reflection with relatively little dialogic exchange. In the third case study Jamie-Lee experienced a mixture of support in autologic, monologic and dialogic (Mercer & Littleton, 2007, Wells, 1999) styles. Each of these approaches to increasing

knowledge offered different opportunities for developing thinking through helping to inform children of the language, habits and social rules for engaging in learning alongside others. It is in the dialectic between the autological and monological that the opportunity for shared thinking and guidance in the use of thinking tools becomes more visible.

**Figure 7.5** The continuum of support for learning



Chapter Three argued that there were several dimensions to learning contained within the metaphors offered to practitioners and that needed to be teased out because these framed the epistemological framework that adults offer to children. This is encapsulated in the study of the models offered by Piaget and Vygotsky; both are in agreement that a solely monologic approach to supporting children's learning fails to maximise the child's capacity and need to make sense of the world around them. Vygotsky is critical of Piaget's model as overstating the individual agency in this process arguing that social relationships with both people and artefacts are interconnected with this process. The analytical tool used in the present thesis has helped to illustrate that the children in the parent and toddler groups were exposed to a variety of interactive experiences along the continuum from more adult focused (monological) purposes to more open-ended child-led (autological) purposes. This study suggests that the adults in the parent and toddler groups may vary in their instinctive approaches to presenting learning to the children in the parent and toddler group context. Some offer more opportunities for the child to self manage activities,



some take a greater lead and some seek to provoke dialogue. Each of these approaches frames the connection of thought and language (Vygotsky, 1986) in slightly different ways for the child. They also frame the child's relationship to extending knowledge in slightly different ways: each perspective employs thinking tools slightly differently and carries different social rules and roles. This chapter has presented examples of three patterns of interaction exhibited within the parent and toddler groups and has speculated on the potential benefits of each of these. Although much of the literature reviewed in Chapter Three has drawn attention to the benefits of dialogic interactions this is because this has been observed to be the mode less frequently employed in practice (Mercer, 2009, Pramling-Samuelsson & Fleer, 2009, Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004) rather than to suggest that other modes are unimportant. This study suggests that it might be helpful to promote parents' and practitioners' understanding and awareness of the full range of modes of interaction and how these might help different thinking skills and dispositions towards learning. This leads towards the concluding sections of the thesis which consider ways in which parent and toddler groups might promote a range of interactions.

### **7.5 A pedagogy of activity, affordance and play**

The materials offered in the two groups clearly appealed to the children's interests and the case study of each child in this chapter illustrates the attraction of the activities for children. The analysis of affordance at the end of Chapter Six illustrated the attention given by the children to sensory experience and gaining control over objects. The three individual case studies illustrate that while children are often content to explore the possibilities for control independently, unsurprisingly meaning and purpose feature more prominently where the adults engage with the children. If some parents appear to find playing difficult in the groups it may be that some of the materials absorb the children so completely that the adult's role tends towards monitoring and affirming the child's own exploratory play. Where adults sought to direct children's attention in particular directions this seemed to succeed where it tallied in some way with the control and sensory affordances recognised by the child. The more playful exchanges between adults and children tended to give rise to more extended reflections where the objects had greater potential for shared meaning. In the

sandcastle example featuring Jamie-Lee (episode 1) the power of language to transform the sand into a cake has the potential to evoke additional affordances and hence new possibilities that are not actually present. By invoking 'food' the possibilities for slicing, sharing and eating are suggested which resonate with some of the properties of the object. If as Chapters Five, Six and Seven have suggested some parents find playing in the groups challenging one possibility is a lack of experience and confidence in renegotiating the transformation of objects within the realm of affordance. This leads us back to Vygotsky's (1978) interest in the power of objects and the power of play to transform a stick into a 'horse' "he does not see the word but the thing it designates." (Vygotsky, 1978, p99). The trick to engaging in play and meaning is to spot how the affordance the child is interested in might connect to more imaginative situations. The adult is seeking words or actions that may conjure up alternative 'organised settings' of activity or schema (Bartlett, 1961) engaging patterns of previous experience to new possibilities in the child's mind which may inspire new activity and dialogue.

It is possible that parents might benefit from reassurance that even young children's schemas can relate to complex systems of activity as well as basic patterns of movement. The affordance of an object invokes its potential for activity. Changing the focus of activity may inform the development of the use of the object. There is a danger with the objects in an early education environment that the range of activity is limited to sensory and control experiences.

In the final part of this chapter I would like to explore the issue of appropriateness to the age group of pretend play and the potential of this type of play for generating more dialogic exchanges.

The previous chapter has already presented the only two examples of interactions that have been characterised as play from a total of more than 80 episodes. Several of the children engaged in pretend play during the observations but were not necessarily joined in this play by the adults. I will conclude this chapter with one further example of play which predominantly involves the researcher and has therefore not been included in the data considered in the previous chapter. This episode occurred at the Talktime group on the only occasion when the group was able to access the outdoor

play area at the centre which was usually used by the nursery class. The outdoor space is perhaps significant since examples of pretend play also seemed to arise more frequently in outdoor space at the Outwell group.

***Talktime: Maisy 21 months***

Maisy goes back into the house and asks Martin and her mum to return inside. "I'm going up stairs, I'm going to find a bed," she announces and stamps up the steps and on the upper floor.

"Is that a giant up there?" Martin asks, "It sounded like a giant. She comes back down the stairs smiling and picks up the car.

"Is that the giant's toy?" asks Martin

"I'm going to put it in the oven," she says.

Martin asks if she is going to cook it for the giant to eat.

Maisy opens the top half of the stable door and says hello to her mum who replies. "Shut it please shut it," she asks her mum who is outside. "Squish, squish," she says pushing it to. She goes back up the steps and three other children come in and wave to Maisy. Maisy picks up a wooden box she has found up the stairs and picks it up "Is it too heavy?" asks Martin.

"Look a box," she says and starts to bring it down the stairs.

"What's in the box?" asks Martin.

"Golden coins," she answers smiling.

[ "that's the pirate influence," says her mum, explaining that Maisy has a 5-year-old brother and 9-year-old sister whom she plays with a lot.]

Maisy has moved outside again and is looking at the bread crates "Are you going along there?" asks her mum. Maisy does so, once and then climbs on to a tricycle. "I find you," she says to Martin as she returns to the front of the house

"Shall we hide the giant's treasure?" suggests Martin

Maisy places the box on the bench beside the side of the playhouse. Martin pretends to look for it in a couple of places and then finds it on the bench. "Ah, there it is I found it." He then hides the box in some tyres next to the play house and Maisy runs off to three corners of the play area looking for it. Martin offers a clue. "Look over here," he suggests. This activity is repeated several times with Maisy increasingly using words to regulate the play. "Its in the wheels," "Have you found it yet?" "Its in the sand," "Me hide it again," "Me hide it in the sand," frequently giving away the location of the box in requesting Martin to find it again.

"I'll hide it in the wheel," she says.

All the time Maisy moves back and forth between the hiding place and other locations frequently going up the climbing frame and on several occasion a plank in one corner leading to some large tree sections. Once she falls from one of the stumps and her mother goes to see how she is. Maisy gets up and quickly resumes the game.

In this episode Maisy is inside a large playhouse in the middle of the outdoor play area. There are a window, a table and benches downstairs as well as stairs to an upper floor with a bed. There is a cupboard with cooking toys.

The playhouse and its contents cry out to be used for pretend play because they are obviously representations of human activity. The environment is already heavily laden with meanings, the objects suggest actions, roles and storylines to Maisy that she is familiar with. The amount of language elicited in this context also contrasts sharply to the indoor environment where the materials mostly appear to afford Maisy opportunities to develop control over materials. The larger scale as well as the more culturally symbolic artefacts seemed to trigger more language-laden responses for Maisy. The vocabulary of everyday objects is familiar and allows greater scope for play and manipulation of meaning than the more experiential and craft orientated activities.

In this example language is used to add layers of meaning to the objects connecting them to stories across time and promoting anticipation of actions between the participants.

Playing together is predicated upon the establishment of shared agreements regarding goals, rules and roles; it is therefore rich in dialogic exchange and the potential for guiding the use of physical and abstract tools. It might be helpful for practitioners to help parents get to know the language they use for the different materials offered in the sessions. Practitioners may find it helpful to model a range of modes and mention to parents what they were trying to do in different situations. The latest practices being employed at Pen Green, where video is used to promote dialogue about practitioner styles of interaction, may offer profitable methods for staff and perhaps parental development.

Practitioners may also find it helpful to think about what the range of materials in a session might offer to children. A session with a high proportion of tactile abstract materials may afford plenty of opportunity for children engaged with control but it may afford few opportunities for adults to engage in negotiating the purpose, meaning and emotional aspects. These are strengths of the role play that becomes so significant in the preschool 3-5 age range that this offers the opportunity for children to explore these aspects in great depth and subtlety. Rogers (2010) like van Oers (2010) and Edmiston (2010) advocates the value of adults supporting play process in itself, and role play in particular, without controlling the play agenda to such an extent that the benefits of play are lost. In the case studies there are relatively few exchanges in the sessions experienced by the children that explore the purpose of what things are for or

emotions beyond the pleasure of achievement of control. The promotion of adults 'lending ideas' through language and action seems to offer a clearer pathway towards more reflective forms of thinking.

I suggest that an alternative view of play pedagogy might be as a negotiated 'space', both physical and conceptual, for children and teachers to explore identities and desires, and evaluate questions of voice and power in the classroom. (Rogers, 2010, p163)

The more abstracted negotiated social meanings involved in pretend play as compared to the more 'directed learning' and 'monitoring/supporting' modes afforded by materials demanding control and exploration, should be noted, so that a balance of activities can be offered. I would suggest that if we consider it appropriate to guide children towards educational interactions in school and preschool that it should also be appropriate for adults to support children towards the pretend play skills that form a key element of the EYFS.

## Chapter 8 Concluding Discussion

### 8.0 Introduction

This thesis has investigated parent and toddler groups with careful regard to the three domains of pedagogy identified by Alexander (2008): teacher/ learner/ content, institution/policy and culture/community/identity. It contributes to knowledge by providing an insight into the pedagogy of the practitioners in the case study contexts and how this interacts with the wider teaching/learning doxa of all the adults involved in the groups. This chapter concludes the thesis by reflecting on some of the key points of difference between learning/teaching doxa and pedagogy. The chapter follows Engeström's (1999) lead in applying the concept of activity to focus on how and why differences in purpose may occur and thus to try to identify how parents' and practitioners' perspectives might inform each other in developing their respective roles and the 'rules' of behaviour within the groups.

The survey of parent and toddler groups presented in Chapter Five revealed many similarities in the resources and structures of parent and toddler groups in a sample drawn from across five different local authorities in the West Midlands. These similarities occurred despite limited co-ordination, regulation, guidance and specific training offered to those leading the groups. The survey data, together with case study parents' and practitioners' comments, suggested a continuum of group classification between two foci: groups that offered a more free play and social forum and groups that offered a more purposeful learning forum with focused activities for parents and children to share together. The two case study groups were examples of groups closer to the second. They offered similar materials and experiences emphasising creative and exploratory opportunities. This reflects pedagogical insights regarding the value of particular materials that promote engagement, exploration, problem solving and creativity. It may also reflect an interaction between pedagogy and doxa. Parents also valued these materials, indicating the pleasure, engagement and independence the activities provoked in their children. Parents noted the calm and focused learning environment and attentive staff and contrasted this to other less structured and more

toy-orientated groups. The activities offered in the groups motivated the children to engage with them for sustained periods of time: many of the episodes observed were more than ten minutes in duration and included themes and schema that re-occurred over several sessions as well as in home activities. Parents frequently mentioned the enjoyment and enthusiasm the children displayed at home about attending the sessions and cited this as the chief reason for continuing attendance.

In the two case studies both the parents and practitioners paid close attention to children's engagement with preschool learning materials. Supervision was frequently close with parents and practitioners keen to promote children's engagement with adults as well as children and materials. The settings offered the children rich 'play' opportunities and an opportunity to engage with creative activities with focused adult attention, experiences that parents said would be difficult for them to replicate at home because of additional space and resources together with fewer worries about mess and a lack of distractions.

### 8.1 Patterns of collaborative learning in the case study groups?

The two case study groups in conjunction with the survey findings suggest some common features of doxa and pedagogy: similar modes of interaction in similar proportions, set in similar patterns of activity with similar materials. More detailed analysis revealed some parents and practitioners employed more varied patterns of interaction while others presented more restricted modal patterns.

The study has identified six modes of adult engagement with children during the sessions that could be used to categorise all of the time spent by children in individualised activities in the groups. The independent, monitoring and affirming modes identified in Chapters Six and Seven that comprised 35 out of 84 episodes may include the adult empathising with the child but are not a two-way sharing of thinking. The high frequency of *monitoring*, *affirming* and *lending ideas* modes suggest an acknowledgement by the adults of the importance of opportunities for child independence and the need for them to think for themselves, a concern raised by



Whalley et al. (2007). Research has clearly acknowledged the importance of children having the time and space to identify, develop and reflect on their own activity.

*Monitoring and affirming* modes were the most commonly observed modes particularly among particular parents. It is suggested that pedagogically this mode of interaction has been promoted as a prerequisite for effective learning which can be supported by adults who seek to identify children's present state of understanding and building upon this. The interviews with parents suggested that this approach may play differently with different parents' conceptions of learning/teaching. For some parents this seemed to play very well with their purpose for attending groups, encouraging their children to become more independent. Other parents seemed to find this idea more difficult to adopt, and were drawn to lead their child's activity towards specific features.

It is not within the scope of this study to investigate beyond the parent and toddler group context where interactions may be quite different, but even if the patterns demonstrated in Chapter Six and Seven are only representative of this one context, the case studies do suggest that for some children the low frequency of adults *lending ideas and playing* could help to establish the preschool environment as a place for personal investigation rather than for *conversation* and *dialogic exchange* (Alexander 2008). Thus while some children may have plentiful opportunities to 'play' with materials there may be few opportunities to develop play as an activity format (van Oers, 2010) to its full potential. Such a division may not help children engage playfully with adults in the exchange of ideas in an educational context. This might leave them with less confidence in processing the knowledge offered to them by others, as well as less experience of validating their own understanding and extending knowledge through questioning others in an early education setting context. Children who experience low levels of interaction might experience a further delay in gaining experience of sustained shared thinking if groups funded to address the promotion of language acquisition unintentionally inhibit language-rich interaction between adults and children in play.

The case studies of children's activity suggested that there is variation in the extent to which some parents and practitioners engaged in more dialogic interactions.



Chapter Two and Chapter Seven identified that some parents, in the context of a group situation, might require encouragement to adopt this particular mode of support rather than an over-controlling adult-led agenda. Concerns of over-control in parent child dyads highlighted by practitioners in this sample and in the literature (Whalley et al., 2007) were visible but not dominant in any of the relationships in the case studies. Controlling and directed learning which did not engage children's learning comprised 22 episodes and might represent the type of interactions that might concern practitioners. However approximately half of the directed learning episodes did engage children's interest and contained some exchange of ideas. This mode of adult-led learning may deserve some re-evaluation if it can engage children in shared exchanges. Provided that adults do not pursue an agenda being rejected by the child such exchanges might offer valuable experience of the form and social rules of more 'school-like' questioning (Alexander, 2008, Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The study suggests that despite the attention given to play in early education there is still a need for further reflection on ways to observe children's play and for adult to find ways to engage with play and *playing*.

The modes of interaction identified within the study as 'adults directing learning', 'adults lending ideas' and 'adults guiding play' each suggest more collaborative models of learning. The findings suggest that parents' own approaches to learning/teaching (doxa) encompass all three of these modes but that particular parents might favour particular modes or combinations of modes. Pedagogy in both groups appeared to promote the *adults lending ideas* mode, borne out in both the interviews with and in observations of the practitioners. This was not explicit in discussions with parents and less visible in the observations of parents' interaction and in their interviews. Practitioners were particularly critical of directed teaching and modelled this less frequently and yet the observations in Chapters Six and Seven show that in some dyads this was happily accepted by the children. Practitioners could perhaps learn from such learning doxa and, provided common purposes can be agreed, interactions in this mode could provide valuable experience of participating in what research shows is likely to be the dominant mode in primary education (Alexander, 2008, Mercer 2009).

Shared dialogue was present in half of the 15 directed learning episodes plus all the shared learning and play episodes, a total of 27 episodes; this compares to 47 episodes

where adults interacted in passive or controlling modes. What is interesting about this study of the parent and toddler group context is that the modes of collaborative learning identified are very similar to those identified by Tharp and Gallimore (1988) in the kindergarten and school context, where dialogic modes were also less prevalent in interactions. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) suggested that for many children the division between personal and public knowledge is reinforced over the period of the schooling process, which asserts the dominance of knowledge that is authorised and delivered by the teacher. This is echoed in concerns raised by Rogoff (1998) and Pramling-Samuelsson et al (2009) in relation to similar contexts outside the UK. Promoting an appropriate balance in teaching/learning interactions is at the heart of the critiques developed of preschool and primary school pedagogy which are contained within the terms scaffolding, co-construction, SST and dialogic learning. Tharp and Gallimore (1988), Alexander (2008) and Mercer (2009) suggest that studies of pedagogy focus too frequently on curriculum and structures and not enough on interaction. Sociocultural theory stresses the mutual affectivity of the participants engaged in activity; the power of cultural history imbued into physical, linguistic tools and the contexts that they populate. Sociocultural perspectives emphasise that children do not simply mature into school dialogic learning. They will need support and guidance to be able to operate in this genre. Children are very effective in guiding each other into the use of play as an activity format. The question is can adults be equally supportive in helping children to apply this format to the construction of knowledge. Pedagogical ideas related to dialogic exchange may struggle to compete with a strong cultural orthodoxy of learning related to the value of independent learning and direct instruction. The concluding sections of this thesis will explore further this idea that cultural conceptions of learning may be influencing both parents' and practitioners' interactions with children influencing resistance to dialogic approaches, and leading to the reproduction of these attitudes.

## **8.2 Adults interact with children in the case study groups?**

The case study findings are helpful in illustrating four modes of interaction which might be considered types of 'scaffolding': 'monitoring and affirming', 'directing learning', 'sharing ideas' and 'playing'. This supports Rogoff (1990, 1998, 2003) who

points out that collaborative learning can adopt many forms and that scaffolding can be interpreted as covering a range of these forms. Rather than introducing new terminology it might be helpful to practitioners and parents to discuss more explicitly different ways of ‘scaffolding’ in these different situations. Chapter Seven has suggested that it is where access to a range of collaborative experiences is limited that questions should be raised regarding the consequences for children’s learning dispositions, a point consistently argued by Rogoff (1990, 1998, 2003). The general pattern of interactions across both of the case study groups suggested that parents thought it important that groups give space to the children to learn to be around others and to investigate activities for themselves. Collaboration was at a minimum in this monitoring and affirming mode of interaction although monitoring of activity sometimes resulted in the provision of fresh materials that could be labelled scaffolds and actions that sustained the activity. Of the three more collaborative modes of learning interaction, the first, ‘directing learning’, involved adults identifying opportunities to develop ideas within the available context and offering prompts and instructions to guide learning. Where this successfully engages the child, this seemed closest to the model of scaffolding described by Wood (1998) and characterised by Jordan (2004). The second approach to collaborative learning was a more open ended negotiation of activity where the child retained more control over direction and purpose and the adult seemed keen to negotiate that purpose, which seems to align more closely with the model of co-construction set out by Jordan (2004). The third more collaborative mode of interaction was where the adult joined in with an activity playfully: in this case the adult provided a framework to sustain the activity rather than a deliberately supportive frame.

To some extent each of the six modes of interaction identified in the study might be defended by a practitioner as being ‘scaffolding’ implying a framework of guidance with some element of space for self-realisation of significance where ideas are supported by adults. For example in the case of *monitoring* the presence of the adult might be considered supportive particularly where observation results in later discussion and action. For scaffolding to remain the useful metaphor for discussion that it is, it could be supplemented by the different modes identified in Chapter Six. The present research has not evaluated each mode of interaction with regard to the effectiveness of the learning they promote, as did Wood, Bruner and Ross (1979), but rather set out to identify if scaffolding was present in the parent and toddler group

context and to consider how the activities offered in parent and toddler groups might prepare children to engage with similar activities in the future. In this regard the children seemed to be guided more towards learning through investigation and to a lesser extent through directed tutoring. Experience of joint shared endeavour and shared reflection on learning were represented to a lesser extent in the observed episodes. More work on exploring the pedagogical patterns in other groups could be helpful in mapping, comparing and evaluating practice in this context.

Open ended exchanges of meaning which are a feature of SST and co-construction were proportionally more visible as strategies of interaction employed by staff with the children, and communicating this pedagogy more explicitly to parents in sessions might be helpful within and beyond the group context. Parents in the case studies talked about sharing ideas and exploring ideas and discussion using such straightforward language might facilitate the connection between doxa and pedagogy.

Chapter Two of the thesis drew attention to the need not only to clarify the nature of scaffolding in the age group and context, but also to consider the basis upon which any scaffolding was building. The success of the materials offered in the groups as highlighted by the parents and practitioners is in their power to facilitate independent, creative exploration. This relies on the transparency and power of the affordances to inspire appropriate actions in the children (Carr 2000, 2001b). The attention paid to schemas in practitioners' planning results in considerable attention being paid to control of materials in scaffolding interactions between adults and children.

Practitioners indicated their uncertainty about discussing schemas as an idea with parents, which left the curriculum in the groups weakly framed in terms of knowledge and process. So although the parents attending the groups appreciated the opportunities for independence as a support for later learning, some seemed to wish to extend these activities towards linguistic and mathematical classification and quantification. More explicit discussion of preparing children to engage in different ways with materials might offer a greater sense of purpose and satisfaction for some of the parents.

The success of the materials offered in the case studies to promote individual engagement potentially influences the noted tendency for the collaborative episodes to focus on the control of materials and less frequently on shared meanings and feelings.

The more directive episodes featured shape, space, colour, the names of animals and the sounds they make. However half of these directed learning episodes failed to connect with children's attention perhaps because the control affordances in this age group are so strong (Del Rio, 2007, Vygotsky, 1986). The differences recorded in the levels of reflection on meaning and connections between more distant events suggest that there might again be value in discussing the potential importance of encouraging reflection and modelling how this might be done. Adult engagement alongside children with the materials available in the groups frequently seemed to focus on how to make things, how to control things or work things. The few examples of more playful situations seemed to offer more opportunities for negotiating meaning. If children in this age group are becoming less restricted by the physical being of materials, then adults could and did help children to ascribe new meanings to objects, however this was infrequent. While the use of schema can be helpful in developing activities with children, in the immediacy of engagement with children the simpler division into purposes, control, emotions, and meanings might also be helpful for parents and practitioners for reflecting on the way that they support children's activity.

Natural logic and Piagetian theory would suggest that the child has to build knowledge incrementally from the experience of objects in the real world. In such a view child's play is a matter for children; their knowledge is of a lower order and adult engagement is needed. This is a bottom up model of knowledge creation. Phenomena such as children acquiring first words apparently support such a view, suggesting that children have to learn the meanings of words to construct sentences. Sociocultural theories argue that children also absorb knowledge in a more top down fashion, taking in systems of related events, but not with full understanding of the workings of the constituent elements. In learning language young children are clearly not certain of the meaning or function of words such as 'am' taking in instead larger chunks of meaning.

One consequence of interactions being focused on controlling affordances might be to limit the experience of metacognitive elements. The findings in Chapters Six and Seven suggest that it was in the more collaborative modes of play and sharing ideas that metacognitive elements were more likely to arise. The literature reviewed in part

one of the thesis suggests that the development of more analytical forms of thinking is a contributing factor to the stratification of educational achievement that begins in the home learning environment. There are hints in this research that some children, particularly those with more educated parents, experienced more reflective and polychronic interactions. There would therefore appear to be a case for practitioners to model and explicitly discuss the value of talking about feelings, experiences, and meanings rather than concentrating on control of tools. They could likewise encourage reflection on these things and the connection of events across time. These aspects of interaction are increasingly identified as influential but less visible elements in more elaborated codes of communication. Once again this initial analysis of parent and toddler group pedagogy highlights the potential benefit of a more substantial study as prequel to the EPPE study (Sylva et al., 2010). A more substantive study could help focus both training and funding policies with the aim of supporting achievement across a variety of target groups as well as families in general.

### **8.3 Adults' roles in the case study groups?**

The weakly framed rules about interaction in the case study groups allow for a variety of interactive styles. The frequent adoption of a present but passive role by some parents in the case studies is counter to the concern of over interference in some literature (Whalley & the Pen Green Team, 2007). This suggests a commitment to the importance of children finding out about the world through first hand experience and controlling their own learning, which has been a major pedagogical theme in early education for some time which are being gradually overlaid by a more postdevelopmental Vygotskian perspective (Wood, 2010).

Children's ready engagement with the control affordances of the materials offered in the groups serves to reinforce the orthodoxy that children can learn as independent little scientists and that knowledge is constructed through the bottom-up, first principled discovery of the properties of materials through the application of logical principles. Cultural historical activity theory reminds us that even the simplest artefacts are created and shaped over millennia to present themselves as fit for



purpose (Del Rio, 2007, Leont'ev, 1978). Children's ready grasp of how to pick up and apply tools should be promoted not only through giving them space to do this but also through engagement with more competent others who can reveal the complex social processes in which those tools can be employed. The findings strongly suggest that all of the parents in varying degrees saw part of their role in the groups as being a promoter of children's independence which was moderated by the perceived need to monitor and protect the children. This was manifested in allowing children to lead activity and apparently control activities, with the adult sometimes offering materials to sustain activity and sometimes intervening to maintain social rules. It is suggested that the strong ethos created by the groups that parents were there to support their children's learning resulted in a situation where even though parents were usually present they might still be passive in support of their children's activity. This may not be an easy tension to resolve and the findings of the study suggested the frustrations of some practitioners may become apparent, which might create barriers to successful partnerships.

Implicit social rules of behaviour may engender further barriers to more collaborative play modes. The adults are perhaps more comfortable to join in with children in relation to the investigation and control of materials whether as mediators, supporters or teachers. Play in front of other adults is perhaps a more embarrassing proposition. Thus, in this context, collaboration and support may be focused on encouraging personal experiential learning and the labelling of objects and action. There is far less collaboration in play with meanings in the case studies although there is some evidence of the children's ability in this aspect of play presented at the end of Chapter Seven. This suggestion seems to match with the findings reported in Pramling-Samuelson and Fler (2009) that adults are likely to facilitate learning through materials rather than through engagement in more imaginative play genres. This is not to say that the adults do not engage in this mode under other circumstances. The importance of practitioners modelling this playful mode of interaction is emphasised by the findings: it is an underrepresented area that parents might find it helpful to be reminded of, particularly if children do not have older siblings or access to play with older children. Practitioner modelling is also essential in legitimising such behaviour within the group.

Play offers a potentially liberating and creative learning opportunity, but the ground rules and roles within parent and toddler groups need to be considered carefully to achieve this. Socio-cultural theories suggests that play emerges from the social cultural context and not magically from within the child (Bröstrom, 1999, Hakkarainen, 1999). Play is a complex and varied mode of social engagement that can be learned and developed. It is not something to be taken for granted. Those children with few or no siblings and in age stratified nursery groups may find it helpful for adults to do more to initiate children into playfulness, compensating for a role which might in other social contexts be left more to other children. This process is not helped by the doxa culturally- historically embedded in the word 'play', which serves to diminish its value and discourage adults' engagement in play.

The analysis developed in Chapter Six raises helpful questions about how to induct children and parents into learning communities. Practitioners might find the labels for the modes of interaction developed in this thesis helpful in enabling children to adopt both exploration and play modes that facilitate a wider range of learning opportunities. There may also be benefits for some children if they are encouraged and enabled to engage with their parents through new modes of playful engagement in other contexts beyond the parent and toddler group. In contrast to preschool age children, two year-olds are far less likely to engage directly with others in this age group. While toddlers do observe each other, and react to what they see others do, the term parallel play is entirely appropriate in that they seldom engage with each other as directly as they do with adults. It is not clear whether the shared expectation that children should have some space to develop their own explorations in the context of the group arises from practitioner disapproval of excessive intervention, the push towards independence from mothers, or from a shared belief that this is a positive way to learn, or because this is the way the children behave. I would suggest that it is a combination of all of these factors because this is the direction of change in mothers' patterns of interaction over time as noted by practitioners in both settings. The absence of obvious discussion of this issue and the acknowledgment by mothers of independence as an objective would suggest that these parents perceive a clear value and enjoyment accruing to the children from this more passive mode of support.



It is important to monitor the way in which the word play is utilised: practitioners', parents' and toddlers' views of what play is may differ. Promoting reflective analysis of play activities by both practitioners and parents could help to ensure that children are helped to experience a variety of forms of play and to develop the skills to generate their own versions of the activity of play. If children are learning that adults value individualised self-directed investigation and that adults withdraw from play, this may limit their engagement with adults in preschool and school contexts. For play to be developed and sustained between two individuals, it requires the dialogic agreement of rules and purposes for each to maintain the participation of the other. It is suggested that this could be a valuable interactive mode in its own right and continues to be so in the playful exchange of ideas that represent more satisfying and sustaining learning exchanges and debates (Goleman, 1995, Greenfield, 2008).

The case study parent and toddler groups offered a good deal of the type of experience suggested by the Highscope programme (Schweinhart et al., 2005) to be important for children to develop autonomy and independence: generating their own tools, rules and roles not just for play but in a range of activities. However an increase in the proportion of playful adult participation with activity identified by the REPEY study (Siraj-Blatchford, 2003) might be helpful not only in stretching children's thinking but in promoting open interactive relationships between children and adults. Chapter Three has drawn attention to the many authors arguing for a greater participation of adults in preschool play situations. The findings in Chapter Six suggest that the cultural separation of educational work and child's play may already being passed on to the children in this context. This is an issue with implications for access to education and for narrowing the achievement gap, because as Brooker (2002) points out, if middle class children are able to extend each others' learning in the play based format of the Foundation Stage, those less experienced in interactive genres may not benefit as much from either other children or adults who might stretch the zone of proximal development.

Some practitioners in the case studies modelled playful and co-constructive exchanges with children's activity more than others and this would seem to be important practice in setting both implicit and explicit ground rules with parents. Practitioners could be more explicit about what they are doing and why but will need

to unpack educational jargon for parents. It was interesting that the Talktime group moved towards more contextualised conversations with parents during the course of the study, finding the organised group discussions uncomfortable. The group conversations observed focused on ways to support children's development in particular areas such as maths and physical movement. Guidance and training about how to discuss pedagogical style with parents seemed to be something that those practitioners would benefit from.

#### **8.4 Training implications**

In a context where practitioners are expected to engage with parents, there is renewed emphasis on the importance of reflexive practice. Practitioners need to be even more aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it, and to be conscious of how they convey those messages to others. The clear tensions around the objectives of independence and improved interaction is something that would be useful to include in the training and framing of groups. To acknowledge the value of the parents' perspectives in promoting independence might reduce tension within groups between leaders and participants promoting increased levels of participation. Chapters One and Five of this thesis identified the risk of parents being placed as in deficit by educators. Presenting a clear reason why parents' behaviours might be counter to those pursued by practitioners allows practitioners the opportunity to be supportive of parents' objectives, to acknowledge the positive impacts of the interactive styles that they do use and at the same time offer opportunities to see other patterns of interaction. This could be achieved through a combination of modelling, discussion and shared research. Practitioners' comments in Chapter Six and the research base discussed in Chapter One showed that establishing dialogue between parents and practitioners is not easy, and the educational language employed needs to be more accessible to both practitioners and parents. It is for this reason that the Pen Green approach of developing partnered research on children's learning is so appealing. If groups become too formal this study would suggest that some parents are likely to find participation more challenging.

This thesis has illustrated that practitioners clearly identified the need for more training in relation to working with parents. They were also clearly engaged in trying to establish contexts and formats that worked in terms of drawing parents in and promoting positive interactions.

Practitioners in the case study groups who had been exposed to training had absorbed the ORIM framework (Nutbrown et al., 2005) promoted by PEEP training which affirms that the role of the practitioner in scaffolding the parents interactions with their children is helpful in supporting and empowering parents. They had also grasped the PEAL training messages (Parents as Partners in Early Learning, 2007) regarding the type of respectful partnerships that might need to be established with parents. EYFS training regarding child led learning and the importance of SST appeared to have been absorbed (DCSF, 2008a). These training programmes still leave a space for support where practitioners have to adapt existing preschool pedagogy to a context with younger children and with other significant adults present. Future training for those working in the parent and toddler groups should be able to give greater attention to pedagogic interaction in ways more specific to this context.

Further research and guidance on models for parent and toddler groups could be very helpful to those developing services with new groups of parents on a regular basis. This thesis suggests that while the practitioners were secure in their engagement with children, employing a range of collaborative learning styles, they were less secure in discussing these with parents. It is important that practitioners are offered models and language that translates from the professional to the general domain. The use of discussion groups may be effective for some topics but not others. So too the use of video with parents, as advocated by the Pen Green team (Whalley & the Pen Green Team, 2007), but perhaps to include some discussion of the modes of interaction identified here. More explicit modelling and discussion of styles by practitioners might help some parents to broaden the range of interactive modes that they employ. Research formats create a more flexible cultural space focused around constructing meanings of events with some focus and detail where practitioners' and parents' views can be exchanged more equally. Practitioners may require more training in developing the use of research techniques to use with parents.

The substantive difference between the case study groups seemed to be the extent to which children experienced reflective cues. For practitioners to draw attention to the

reflective elements in their modelling and in talking about their modelling might be helpful. It is the tacit and hidden codes of communication which Bourdieu (1990) and Bernstein (2000) seek to expose in order to promote greater equality. This is easier to say than to do, and further study of groups that establish a reflective and inclusive dialogue with a variety of parents should be encouraged.

In order to promote richer collaborative opportunities I would propose development in two directions. First, groups could promote more genuine adult participation in play, with practitioners not only following the traditional adult role of either monitoring and affirming children's investigations or leading the more organised 'creative' activities. Small world play and role play present more social barriers for adult participation but are rich in opportunities for rehearsing real world activities in such a way as to hand power and control over to the children.

Second would be developing genuine group activity, involving children in preparing and serving the snacks, caring for their younger siblings, joining in adult conversations. This might include activities that the adults want to do like keep fit exercises, making toys or jewellery. This carries the benefit of creating an opportunity for modelling and discussing the benefits of involving children in activities in the home and community. As Rogoff (1990, 1998, 2003) has consistently pointed out, guided participation in activity is the most common everyday form of knowledge transfer. While schools are struggling to connect lessons with the real world in order to help students connect school knowledge to their wider lives, both the above suggestions could provide a foundation for this endeavour.

## 8.5 Policy Implications

There is a rapidly increasing level of professional interest and participation in activities with parents. The findings from several countries (England, New Zealand, Turkey and USA) regarding the lasting benefits of preschool have stimulated interest around the world in investing in it. Current models of provision continue to favour increasing the provision of institutional preschool places for children aged two and younger. The significance of the home learning environment in amplifying the effects of educational provision has been registered by policy makers but initiatives in

promoting activities with parents are far less visible. The issue of reducing the clash in cultures between the language of the learner and school has long been identified and yet structures for bridging the gap between home and educational contexts have been slow to emerge (Bruner, 2006). The development and take up of joint play sessions may be a significant but relatively small step towards something that has the potential to improve understanding between home and school at a point when the gap between the two is not too wide. The groups offer an opportunity to make the more elaborated codes of education more visible (Bernstein, 2003) to both parents and children. Parent and toddler groups could become part of the structure of education rather than an early intervention. Potentially inhibiting factors on the take up of stay and play sessions are affordability, not in terms of the cost of the sessions but in terms of the time taken out of earning. Similarly the framing of sessions around parenting carries the danger of alienating parents sensitive to being labelled as being in deficit (Parents as Partners in Early Learning, 2007). Thirdly if the sessions are too educationally orientated some parents and children may experience negatively the pressure to behave and conform in particular ways causing them to opt out. Fourthly parents greatly appreciate the opportunity for adult contact during days that can be dominated by family roles, so the opportunity for parents to talk freely with each other is a factor that requires consideration. There is plenty of evidence that points towards the long term benefits of activities with parents but there are few evaluations of specific models. There is a need for further research on how a range of different provision might suit different parents.

The promotion of social play spaces for parents and children offering a range of sessions has the potential to promote parents as active agents in children's participation in informal and more educational activities. Parents are willing to take this role and state policies should be careful not to disconnect parents from education at such an early stage. The enhancement of flexible parental leave enabling women and men to take out some time from the week to spend with their children would acknowledge them as first educators. The provision of spaces for parents and children to be together at weekends would also facilitate wider participation in such activity. There are an increasing number of sessions for fathers and children offered in children's centres such as Pen Green. Simply making the early education environment available to children and parents of both sexes might create a social space as popular with parents as parks, more popular on cold winter days. This is potentially expensive

provision and perhaps more research is needed with regard to the potential cost benefits of such developments with differing levels of professional participation. The personal cost to children who find accessing education challenging is already clear and the difficulties of promoting access to targeted services are apparent. The promotion of universal services with targeted support for parents requires commitment but is not impossibly costly: provision in the form of school environments already exists along with the concept of extended schools. It is the development of play and learning co-ordinators that is the additional expense and under researched element.

### 8.6 Pedagogic Research

The impetus for the thesis was my own inability to evaluate satisfactorily the practice observed in a parent and toddler group. It has had to engage tangentially with a variety of literature on children's learning in other contexts, partial references in reports and books and a few journal articles looking at the external impact rather than the inner workings of parent and toddler groups. One of the main reasons for conducting the questionnaire survey of parent and toddler groups was because there was so little information available on the nature and range of provision on an area basis.

The basic questions included in the survey regarding management, structure and workforce were very helpful in deciding the focus of the case studies and in helping to limit the scope of this study. The questions on interactions are more interpretive and therefore less reliable because the reasons for null answers are never clear. With the benefit of hindsight conducting all the questions as a telephone survey would have helped to clarify whether the null answers were due to perceived repetition, uncertainty or time pressures in completing the survey. The last more positivist question clearly indicates considerable practitioner uncertainty with regard to the concepts of scaffolding, co-construction and metacognition, but there is still some uncertainty with the written survey as to whether these questions were left blank purposefully, accidentally or due to time constraints. Given the final number of returns despite the initial telephone recruitment and three mail-shots, time would probably have been more profitably invested into 40 telephone questionnaires which



would have been possible with the time constraints and limited resources of the study. Nevertheless the data obtained from the questionnaires when combined with the interviews is very helpful in showing the representativeness of the sample and the views expressed by the practitioners particularly in the absence of other literature for triangulation. The low penetration of training into the groups, the limited number of graduates in the workforce, the similarity of aims and resources whether in supported parent and toddler groups or in traditional parent and toddler groups were all helpful findings and data that was not available from other sources.

The case studies worked well with regard to generating valuable interview and observation data. The observations were sufficient, less invasive and less time consuming than video data but perhaps less open to detailed analysis. The modes of interaction and the characterisation of these which emerge from the analytical frame work are helpful in drawing attention to the nature and balance of interactions on offer in the groups. This is sufficiently detailed to encourage practitioners to reflect on the balance of interactions that they and individual parents offer. The vignettes give helpful illustrative examples to exemplify the numerical tables. Coding the narratives rather than directly coding observations allowed for more objective and considered reflection on an observation validated and extended by parents' and practitioners' comments. The use of the metacognitive circle is important although difficult to report clearly in parallel with the other data, but particularly if used in a larger sample might substantiate important differences in interactions which could facilitate valuable development and change. Similarly the use of categories generated from affordance theory added a new and potential helpful perspective to the analysis of pedagogy and doxa in this context.

## 8.7 Further Research

The sample in this study did not lend itself to a comparison of experiences of interaction by gender. The presence of four of boys and no girls in the South Asian heritage group means that although there were even numbers of boys and girls overall, comparison of interactions by gender is complicated by an imbalance in ethnic make-up and vice versa. The presented pattern of interaction suggests similar patterns across most modes of interaction across the gender groups except for direct learning and the lending of ideas where boys received more of the former and girls more of the latter.

It seems likely that this interesting pattern is strongly influenced by the ethnic background of the group. It would be interesting therefore to investigate the issue of gender in more depth, comparing whether girls might be exposed to more shared exchanges and how this relates to language development. It would be interesting to extend this into interactions in other contexts particularly home contexts. The tools available to neuroscience are developing rapidly and a further interesting area of exploration would be a comparative study of the thinking patterns revealed by EEG and fMRI techniques drawn from those exposed to similar and differing patterns of interactions. This would help to inform us of the flexibility and durability of the patterns of thinking generated through patterns of interaction. As has already been mentioned in this chapter a broader study of pedagogy in these groups would be very helpful in justifying and focusing funding to support this increasingly significant area.

### **8.8 The next steps?**

In researching this topic and attending international conferences it is clear that there is a parallel development related to the increase of supported or professionally facilitated provision occurring across the industrialised nations and increasing interest in some of the rapidly industrialising nations. There is a great deal of uncertainty and reflection taking place with regard to the role and relationship between parents/ carers and professional educators. There is an urgent need for a sharing of experience in this area of practice. Preschool provision has fought to establish principles distinct to those of school arguing that children's learning is different in focus and process in that phase. There is an urgent need to review provision for the under threes in the same way, to consider how their learning might best be supported with the resources available to us. There is potentially a very rich opportunity to support the transition from the home learning environment to the educational learning environment on a much wider scale than has previously existed. It is an opportunity to develop the 'transitional capital' of both parents and children. Parents have an opportunity to learn some of the vocabulary and attitudes of the professionals to play and learning that could help them relate to teachers in later transitions. Children have the opportunity to see how adults establish new relationships in an institutional context and to be guided in establishing friendships with others. Alternative models may place more emphasis



on the social or health aims rather than the educational gathering (Jackson, 2006). The impact of various structures and attitudes to parent and toddler groups on the home learning environment should in particular be studied, not least with regard to the extent to which different models facilitate the take up of provision.

Governments around the world are evincing an interest in developing the parents' role in education and in a time of increasing financial pressure it is essential that effective models of practice are documented and shared. If we are not able to develop and document these models quickly, the chance to expand towards a universal offer with regard to the provision of such services will quickly pass. The change from a Labour Government to Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition is likely to mean a serious review of spending commitments. Early indications (HM Government 2010) are that funding for children's centres will continue but may focus on a 'core offer', and targeted interventions particularly on health education. Outreach services, of which parent and toddler groups may be considered a part, are under review, and there is a suggestion that work with under threes should be focused in the family support provided by health visitors. The danger with such a shift might be the diminishing or removal of pedagogy and pedagogues from these early learning opportunities, which this thesis suggests has many potential benefits for informing learning orthodoxy.

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## **Appendices**

<b>Appendix 1 Survey Questionnaire</b>	<b>284</b>
<b>Appendix 1a Telephone recruitment protocol</b>	<b>285</b>
<b>Appendix 1b Parent and Toddler Group Questionnaire. Coding summary report; activities offered</b>	<b>286</b>
<b>Appendix 1c How does your programme work to address parents' roles in encouraging children to select persist with and reflect on the activities they do?</b>	<b>291</b>
<b>Appendix 2 An example of an observation</b>	<b>293</b>
<b>Appendix 2a An example of a coded observation</b>	<b>296</b>
<b>Appendix 2b Interaction coding tool summary for all 12 observations</b>	<b>298</b>
<b>Appendix 2c An extract from a notebook observation</b>	<b>302</b>
<b>Appendix 3 Permissions letter for parents</b>	<b>303</b>
<b>Appendix 3a Sample parent interview</b>	<b>306</b>
<b>Appendix 3b The codes applied to the example interview</b>	<b>309</b>
<b>Appendix 3c Parents' purposes: Node summary report</b>	<b>310</b>
<b>Appendix 4 Sample practitioner interview</b>	<b>318</b>
<b>Appendix 4a The codes applied to the exemplar practitioner interview</b>	<b>325</b>
<b>Appendix 4b Practitioners' comments on community; Node summary report</b>	<b>326</b>
<b>Appendix 5 Ethical Approval Submission</b>	<b>328</b>

## Appendix 1 Survey Questionnaire

Name of your programme/group \_\_\_\_\_  
 Your name (you can leave blank) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Position \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Male/Female \_\_\_\_\_  
 Contact e-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_ Post code \_\_\_\_\_  
 Your Qualification \_\_\_\_\_ How long has the group been meeting \_\_\_\_\_

1. Describe briefly the type of service you offer.

2. Does your programme follow an identified named programme(s) or approach (es)? I.e. PAFT, Webster-Stratton

3. How does your programme work to address parents' roles in encouraging children to select, persist with and reflect on the activities they do?

4. How does your programme encourage family members to think about the way that they interact with their children in order to develop an exchange of understanding during activities?

5. How does your programme encourage carers to think about offering clues and hints to children to encourage children's thinking rather than always giving complete answers or instructions?

6. What other aspects of adult-child interaction does your programme draw attention to?

7. Recent research in England and New Zealand has drawn attention to the value certain types of interaction as being particularly helpful in supporting children's learning.

Please indicate if you have encountered the following terms previously in your experience;

Scaffolding ☐, Sustained Shared Thinking ☐, Metacognition ☐

Please underline the names of the terms here if you would like to receive more information on these ideas.

Many thanks for your help.

**Appendix 1a Telephone recruitment protocol****Telephone Prompts for recruiting groups to the questionnaire survey**

I am trying to contact the leader of.....

Hello my name is Martin Needham I am a senior lecturer and researcher at University of Wolverhampton. I am trying to identify parent and toddler group leaders who would be willing to fill in a postal questionnaire

Can I have a two of minutes of your time to check what type of group it is?

Does it have paid staff?

How are you managed?

What age range does it cover?

Is it a social group for the parents? Does it have learning aims for the children?

Would you be willing to fill in 20 minute questionnaire if I mail one to you? There are only seven questions requiring short answers.

Can I confirm your address who should I address it to?

If I keep the name of the group confidential can I use the information you have already provided about the group when I report about the range of toddler groups across the West Midlands?

Thanks very much for your time.



## Appendix 1b. P and T Group Questionnaire Coding Summary Report ; Activities Offered

Page 1 of 5

**Project:** parent and toddler questionnaire

**Generated:** 01/12/2010 22:33

### Coding By

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Initials</u></b>
in7974	MN
<b><u>Total Users</u></b>	1

### Internals\Survey data summary

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\activities,	23	2.98%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\activities,\activities and crafts	12	0.91%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\activities,\children allowed to choose	11	0.40%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\activities,\craft	4	0.21%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\activities,\seasonal activities	1	0.02%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\books	9	1.24%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\crafts	13	1.28%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\fun	5	0.85%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\imaginative	4	0.35%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\imaginative\imagination	4	0.25%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\large space	3	0.27%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\other oddities\baby massage	2	0.02%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\other oddities\toilet training	1	0.01%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\outdoors	6	0.93%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\physical play	2	0.14%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\play	24	3.06%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\play\free play where children can learn to socialise	1	0.04%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\play\older children invloved in holiday time	1	0.03%

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
Tree Nodes\child orientations\play\physical play	2	0.11%



**Node Coding****0.56%****Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\child orientations\play\play with peers

**2****0.06%****Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\child orientations\refreshments

**13****1.97%****Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\child orientations\refreshments\eating together

**2****0.10%****Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\child orientations\religious activity

**3****0.18%****Node Coding****References****Coverage**Tree Nodes\child orientations\religious activity\are reflection  
along prayer lines**1****0.03%****Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\child orientations\ride on toys

**2****0.13%****Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\child orientations\song

**18****2.45%****Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\child orientations\song\singing

**13****0.61%****Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\child orientations\story

**13****1.86%****Node Coding****References****Coverage**Tree Nodes\child orientations\story\tell stories and discuss  
importance**10****0.40%**

**Node Coding**

0.02%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\child orientations\tidy up\tidy time

2

0.04%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\child orientations\trips

3

0.35%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\Parent orientations\advice

6

0.85%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**Tree Nodes\Parent orientations\advice\advice and  
friendship

5

0.20%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\Parent orientations\friendship social for parents

13

1.86%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\Parent orientations\information exchange

9

0.78%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**Tree Nodes\Parent orientations\information  
exchange\developing terminology,

1

0.02%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**Tree Nodes\Parent orientations information  
exchange\discussion

8

0.38%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**Tree Nodes\Parent orientations information  
exchange\expectations,

1

0.01%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**Tree Nodes\Parent orientations\information  
exchange\language

3

0.15%

1

**Node Coding**

0.65%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**Tree Nodes\Parent orientations\information  
exchange\observe

3 0.13%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**Tree Nodes\Parent orientations\information  
exchange\outcomes of sessions

1 0.02%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**Tree Nodes\Parent orientations\information  
exchange\parents share ideas and information

10 0.48%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\Parent orientations\parent courses

2 0.52%

**Node Coding****References****Coverage**

Tree Nodes\Parent orientations\speakers

2 0.12%

**Total References****300****Coverage****0.60%****Total Users**

# Appendix 1c Questionnaire Coding Summary Report;

## How does your programme work to address parents' roles in encouraging children to select persist with and reflect on the activities they do?

**Generated:** 01/12/2010 22:53

### Coding By

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Initials</u></b>
in7974	MN
<b><u>Total Users</u></b>	1

### Internals\Survey data summary

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
---------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------

Tree Nodes\select persist reflect q3\advice offered, ps encouraged to sit back, observe, let children lead,	1	0.06%
---	---	-------

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
---------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------

Tree Nodes\select persist reflect q3\arts, crafts, fine motor, physical play	9	0.37%
--	---	-------

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
---------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------

Tree Nodes\select persist reflect q3\children play with peers select own activities	3	0.14%
---	---	-------

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
---------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------

Tree Nodes\select persist reflect q3\continu for SHARE, parenting puzzle,	1	0.03%
---	---	-------

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
---------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------

Tree Nodes\select persist reflect q3\don't fit 3	1	0.06%
--	---	-------

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
---------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------

Tree Nodes\select persist reflect q3\join in at song, story and tidy time	6	0.29%
---	---	-------

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
---------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------

Tree Nodes\select persist reflect q3\only give advice if requested	3	0.15%
--	---	-------

<b><u>Node Coding</u></b>	<b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>Coverage</u></b>
---------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------

Tree Nodes\select persist reflect q3\promote playing together and list benefits of this and benefits of play	6	0.44%
--	---	-------

1

**Node Coding****0.30%****Total References            33****Coverage                      0.20%****Total Users**

## Appendix 2

### Sample Observation

#### Ahmed observation

#### *Descriptors*

Ahmed 15 months, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

1.

As soon as they arrive mum asks if the water activity is still going on Mum helps Ahmed to find an apron and to put it on. He stands by a pan that an older child has placed a water wheel inside and mum holds his hand and guides him in pouring water from a small blue cup over the water wheel. Ahmed smiles broadly as the water flows over the wheel making it spin around. Mum continues to support this for several minutes and then Ahmed continues to spin the wheel using his hand. Ahmed struggles to reach inside the pan to the shapes and containers inside he takes the shapes and passes them to his mum. She asks for the star and draws his attention to the star by holding it out to show him saying good boy. Ahmed seems to share the connection between this word and the yellow star shaped pastry cutter. "Star chaieya" [can I have the star please] Ahmed picks out the star again from a red bowl next to the pan. "Cross chaieya.... Hexagon chaieyya says mum as he hands her other objects and she shows and names them back to him.

"Ahmed Star chaieya star"

"Star" says Ahmed handing his mother the star

"Good boy", she says enthusiastically and smiling

There are several shapes in a red bowl that mum offers to Ahmed and she asks him to pick objects from the bowl which she guides "square dad oh" [pass the square], hexagon dad oh, cup dah doh,, Ysme[this thing] da doh as Ahmed passes the objects from the bowl and drops them into the pan. Again, when she says "star dado" Ahmed selects the appropriate shape and she smiles and says good boy. Missed she says as the objects that Ahmed is dropping back into the pan misses and lands on the floor he picks up the cup and gives it a tentative lick

"Ne ne [no no]" says mum. Ahmed cannot now reach the objects in the bottom of the pan and martin helps her to move the pan to a chair so Ahmed can see inside. Another child has started playing on a piano and Ahmed pauses to look for where the sound is coming from. Mum holds a blue cup and Ahmed takes objects from the pan and places into the blue cup.

2.

Ahmed hears the sound of the push-a-longs moving in the outside yard he moves over to the nearby door and watches

"Brrrrm bruum bruum... ba ba ba"

"car janeo?" [Do you want to go in the car?] "car jaeo" [go to the car] "chello" [lets go]

"Baba" [daddy] says Ahmed Yasmeeen comments that he is always saying daddy at home.

Mum helps Ahmed out of the apron and into his coat and outside he sits on a ride on quad bike waiting for it to move pressing the handle and pushing a little with his feet

but not very seriously. Mum explains that his father bought him a motorised quad bike and she thinks that she is waiting for it to move.

“Ahmed iska batieah” [sit in this one] mum holds open the door a larger car which she says he liked last week when she pushes him along in it. He stays sitting in the car only briefly before getting a skittle from the boot of the car, he climbs out of the car and pick out another skittle from the boot he shows them to mum and she smiles he then walks in a circle around the yard tapping the skittle together. He moves back towards his “bang bang” she says and he offers them to her she takes one and taps it gently against the other skittle that Ahmed is still holding. He takes the second skittle back from his mum and walks around tapping both skittles together as before. This is repeated twice more and then he moves in through the door followed by mum still holding the skittles and he continues tapping the skittles as mum greets one of the other mothers and Ahmed continues to tap the skittles and look around at what is happening in the room. Martin says he has seen Ahmed playing with the skittles and says it looks like a fun game and holds out a hand asking for a skittle Ahmed passes him a skittle then takes it back. He continues tapping the skittles together talking to himself. Mum finishes talking and stands the skittle up that Ahmed offers “come on, ... kieya hay? [What is this] one two wee as Ahmed knocks the skittles over. “one two, one two skittles wee” mum stands them up again “niche karo! [Knock it down] Ahmed knocks it down and mum stands them up again “wee niche karo” this is repeated several times and Ahmed kneels down and then crawls along with one skittle and gives it back to mum to stand up.

3.

Ahmed watches as one of the children rings the tidy up bell and their mum then passes Ahmed the bell to ring. He holds it close to the bell giving a muffled ring but tires again holding the handle and upon getting a better sound rings the bell several times, eventually giving it to mum. Mum responds to the question how conscious is she of using more than one language says she does it deliberately because they are away from family but wants him to be able to talk freely with relatives that she uses Urdu and English and Punjabi his father a Gujarati speaker uses English. She knows from her own childhood that using several languages isn't a problem and she is not particularly conscious of the detail of what she says speaker

4.

Ahmed sits sensibly and independently at the table during snack time with the other children looking at the adults and children around him as he eats and drinks without close supervision

5.

Ahmed sits on his mums knee at story time carefully looking at the other mothers around them and then at the story book being read to the group after a while he notices Ryan's with a toy in front of him and he slides down to look at the toy. His mum calls him back and settles him and then he tries to move towards the toy again but stops as the toy is taken away. He looks around the circle of adults and children carefully from the centre of the carpet. He looks at one of the babies crying. With the rhymes, he is much more focused on Yasmeen, who is leading the rhymes. He joins in very carefully and deliberately with twinkle twinkle little star and the wheels on the bus from his mother's knee.

### ***Taking an interest***

Ahmed is comfortable to participate investigating activities with his mother sometimes Joining her ideas and sometimes his own. He also likes to see what others are doing.

### ***Being involved***

Ahmed is happy to become involved in the activities offered by mum he is comfortable to separate from mum ant snack time and eager to be part of the story time group with mum.

### ***Persisting***

Ahmed sustains and develops play in partnership with his mother with both the water and skittle activities

### ***Expressing ideas***

Ahmed responds confidently to the questions posed by his mum offering objects and gestures. He is starting to use a few words and sounds to make points more clearly.

### ***Taking Responsibility***

Ahmed works with his mother to take some activities in the direction he wishes but also pleased to follow his mum's suggestions.



## Appendix 2a

### Ahmed observation

#### Descriptors

Ahmed 15 months, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

1.

As soon as they arrive mum asks if the water activity is still going on Mum helps Ahmed to find an apron and to put it on. He stands by a pan that an older child has placed a water wheel inside and mum holds his hand and guides him in pouring water from a small blue cup over the water wheel. Ahmed smiles broadly as the water flows over the wheel making it spin around. Mum continues to support this for several minutes and then Ahmed continues to spin the wheel using his hand. Ahmed struggles to reach inside the pan to the shapes and containers inside he takes the shapes and passes them to his mum. She asks for the star and draws his attention to the star by holding it out to show him saying good boy. Ahmed seems to share the connection between this word and the yellow star shaped pastry cutter. "Star chaieya" [can I have the star please] Ahmed picks out the star again from a red bowl next to the pan. "Cross chaieya.... Hexagon chaieyya says mum as he hands her other objects and she shows and names them back to him.

"Ahmed Star chaieya star"

"Star" says Ahmed handing his mother the star

"Good boy", she says enthusiastically and smiling

There are several shapes in a red bowl that mum offers to Ahmed and she asks him to pick objects from the bowl which she guides "square dad oh" [pass the square], hexagon dad oh, cup dah doh,, Ysme[this thing] da doh as Ahmed passes the objects from the bowl and drops them into the pan. Again, when she says "star dado" Ahmed selects the appropriate shape and she smiles and says good boy. Missed she says as the objects that Ahmed is dropping back into the pan misses and lands on the floor he picks up the cup and gives it a tentative lick

"Ne ne [no no]" says mum. Ahmed cannot now reach the objects in the bottom of the pan and martin helps her to move the pan to a chair so Ahmed can see inside. Another child has started playing on a piano and Ahmed pauses to look for where the sound is coming from. Mum holds a blue cup and Ahmed takes objects from the pan and places into the blue cup.

2.

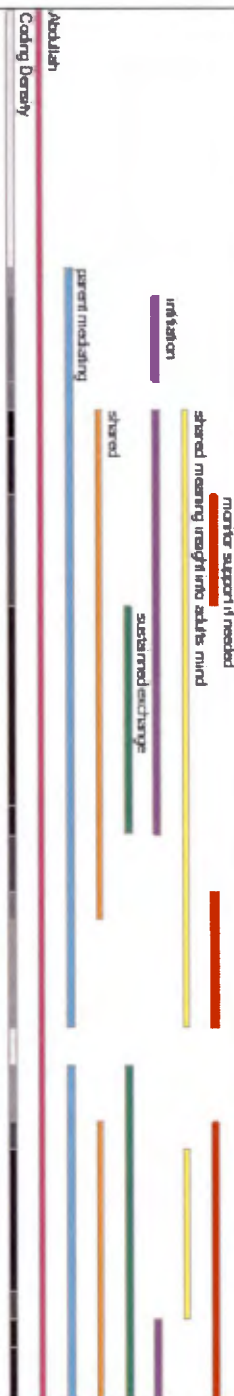
Ahmed hears the sound of the push-a-longs moving in the outside yard he moves over to the nearby door and watches

"Brrrm bruum bruum... ba ba ba"

"car janeo?" [Do you want to go in the car?] "car jaeo" [go to the car] "chello" [lets go]

"Baba" [daddy] says Ahmed Yasmeen comments that he is always saying daddy at home.

Mum helps Ahmed out of the apron and into his coat and outside he sits on a ride on quad bike waiting for it to move pressing the handle and pushing a little with his feet



“Ahmed iska batieah” [sit in this one] mum holds open the door a larger car which she says he liked last week when she pushes him along in it. He stays sitting in the car only briefly before getting a skittle from the boot of the car, he climbs out of the car and picks out another skittle from the boot he shows them to mum and she smiles he then walks in a circle around the yard tapping the skittle together. He moves back towards his “bang bang” she says and he offers them to her she takes one and taps it gently against the other skittle that Ahmed is still holding. He takes the second skittle back from his mum and walks around tapping both skittles together as before. This is repeated twice more and then he moves in through the door followed by mum still holding the skittles and he continues tapping the skittles as mum greets one of the other mothers and Ahmed continues to tap the skittles and look around at what is happening in the room. Martin says he has seen Ahmed playing with the skittles and says it looks like a fun game and holds out a hand asking for a skittle Ahmed passes him a skittle then takes it back. He continues tapping the skittles together talking to himself. Mum finishes talking and stands the skittle up that Ahmed offers “come on, ... kinya hay? [What is this] one two wee as Ahmed knocks the skittles over. “one two, one two skittles wee” mum stands them up again “niche karo! [Knock it down] Ahmed knocks it down and mum stands them up again “wee niche karo” this is repeated several times and Ahmed kneels down and then crawls along with one skittle and gives it back to mum to stand up.

Ahmed watches as one of the children rings the tidy up bell and their mum then passes Ahmed the bell to ring. He holds it close to the bell giving a muffled ring but tires again holding the handle and upon getting a better sound rings the bell several times, eventually giving it to mum. Mum responds to the question how conscious is she of using more than one language says she does it deliberately because they are away from family but wants him to be able to talk freely with relatives that she uses Urdu and English and Punjabi his father a Gujarati speaker uses English. She knows from her own childhood that using several languages isn't a problem and she is not particularly conscious of the detail of what she says speaker

Ahmed sits sensibly and independently at the table during snack time with the other children looking at the adults and children around him as he eats and drinks without close supervision

Ahmed sits on his mums knee at story time carefully looking at the other mothers around them and then at the story book being read to the group after a while he notices Ryan's with a toy in front of him and he slides down to look at the toy. His mum calls him back and settles him and then he tries to move towards the toy again but stops as the toy is taken away. He looks around the circle of adults and children carefully from the centre of the carpet. He looks at one of the babies crying. With the rhymes, he is much more focused on Yasmeen, who is leading the rhymes, Joining in very carefully and deliberately with twinkle twinkle little star and the wheels on the bus from his mother's knee.

## Appendix 2b Interaction Coding Tool Node Summary Report For all 12 observations

**Project:** Scaffolding

13/07/2010 08:47

### sustained exchange

**Created On** 02/01/2009 10:43 **By** MN

**Modified On** 05/09/2009 23:27 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 12

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs
Document	12	28	7,050	157
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>7050</b>	<b>157</b>

### anticipate

**Created On** 12/03/2008 10:27 **By** MN

**Modified On** 03/09/2009 13:44 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 4

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs
Document	4	6	1,306	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1306</b>	<b>23</b>

### connect

**Created On** 12/03/2008 10:28 **By** MN

**Modified On** 05/09/2009 23:27 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 9

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs
Document	9	17	3,030	85
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>3030</b>	<b>85</b>

### focused

**Created On** 12/03/2008 10:21 **By** MN

**Modified On** 03/09/2009 13:44 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 11

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs
Document	11	24	5,520	103
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>5520</b>	<b>103</b>

**intersubjectivity**

**Created On** 12/03/2008 10:30 **By** MN  
**Modified On** 05/09/2009 23:27 **By** MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 11

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	11	25	6,560	118		
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>6560</b>	<b>118</b>		

**minimal**

**Created On** 12/03/2008 10:25 **By** MN  
**Modified On** 05/09/2009 23:27 **By** MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 10

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	10	24	5,393	120		
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>5393</b>	<b>120</b>		

**open**

**Created On** 12/03/2008 10:10 **By** MN  
**Modified On** 05/09/2009 23:27 **By** MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 12

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	12	37	8,547	170		
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**parent mediating**

**Created On** 05/03/2008 13:49 **By** MN  
**Modified On** 05/09/2009 23:27 **By** MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 13

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	13	44	11,208	192		
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**polychronic**

**Created On** 12/03/2008 10:29 **By** MN  
**Modified On** 03/09/2009 13:44 **By** MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 6

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	7	9	1,172	29		
Total	7	9	1172	29		

**practitioner mediating**

**Created On** 05/03/2008 13:50 **By** MN  
**Modified On** 03/09/2009 13:44 **By** MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 10

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	10	22	4,944	96		
Total	10	22	4944	96		

**reflect**

**Created On** 12/03/2008 10:26 **By** MN  
**Modified On** 03/09/2009 13:44 **By** MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 9

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	9	18	3,955	97		
Total	9	18	3955	97		

**secondary parent mediating**

**Created On** 02/04/2008 14:34 **By** MN  
**Modified On** 04/01/2009 22:15 **By** MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 5

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	5	8	1,809	44		
Total	5	8	1809	44		

**shared**

**Created On** 12/03/2008 10:19 **By** MN

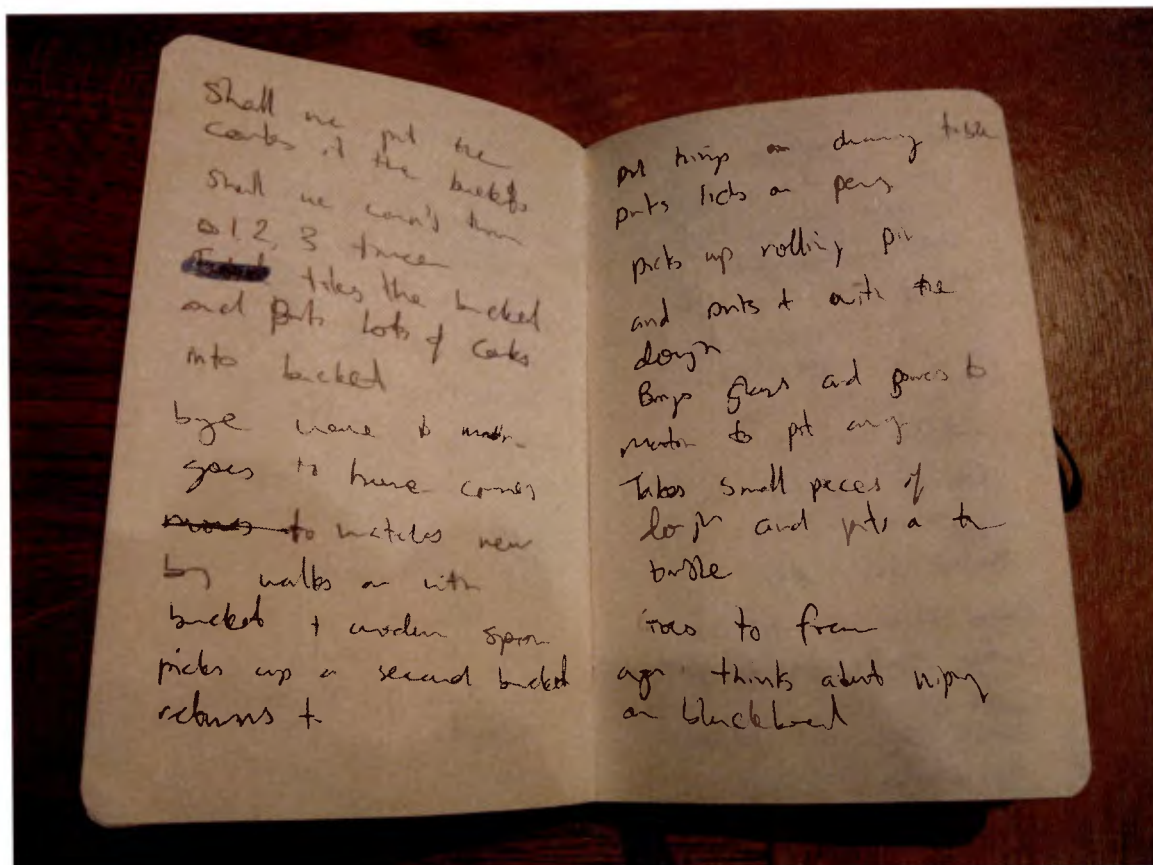
**Modified On** 05/09/2009 23:27 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 11

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	11	32	6,855	162		
Total	11	32	6855	162		

## Appendix 2c An extract from a notebook observation





### Appendix 3 Permission and Outline for Parent Interview

#### The exchange of information between parents and professionals regarding pre-preschool children's learning.

Dear parent or guardian,  
 Thank you for considering whether to participate in this research.  
 This research is an exploration of carer and toddler groups' shared views on shaping children's attitudes to learning. A key aim of my research will be to explore how cooperation between professionals and parents with might help to improve children's learning.  
 I am seeking your permission to observe your child playing within the group and then discuss their learning with you and discuss your views on participation in the group.

**I will not share your individual details or those of your child with anyone else. To wider groups I will only summarize your views and make them anonymous. I will check my observations of the child with you and seek your permission to use them in my writing. I would also like to discuss my observations and your views about your child with the practitioners in your group.**

**I would like to take photographs to help illustrate the activities that your child is interested in.**

**I hope that our discussions may be useful to you and I hope that this research will help to draw attention to this important area of children's learning.**

Many thanks for your help.

**Martin**

I \_\_\_\_\_ give my permission to allow Martin Needham to record observations of my child \_\_\_\_\_ that may be used in an anonymous way to help others consider how young children's learning develops. I also give permission for photographs of to be taken for discussion within the confines of the group.

I understand that I will be able to approve the observations made as an appropriate account.



I am also willing to discuss my views on my child's learning with the same understanding that I may withdraw from the research at anytime and ask for records of observations, photographs and interviews to be deleted.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
date \_\_\_\_\_

Please also sign here no if you give permission for approved records of activities, interviews and photographs to be used in educational lectures. With the understanding that photographs will not be made available in electronic or published forms without further permission being sought.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_



**Name of your programme/group** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Your name (you can leave blank)** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Relation to child (you can leave blank)** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Male/Female** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Contact number (optional)** \_\_\_\_\_ **First half of Post code** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Your highest qualification** \_\_\_\_\_  
*How long have you attended the group?* \_\_\_\_\_

### Parental Interview outline

**Discuss the learning story developed of their child in relation to a particular episode observed in the course of the previous session.**

What is the value of the activity that the child was engaged in?

How does the activity fit within the child's wider interests?

How does the parent seek to support the child's interests?

How does the parent believe the sessions helped the child?

Does the parent think that the setting has revised their view of supporting their child's learning? How?

**Many thanks for your help.**

## Appendix 3a Sample Parent Interview

### ***How do activities fit in with your child's wider interests?***

***Are there things that Ahmed does here that he doesn't do at home?***

The water play was one thing, obviously I do water play with things at home and the water went absolutely everywhere and obviously because of my condition expecting any time I can't do many things with him at home that are activity based, you know running about going out and stuff but I do try and do activities with him at home. Once you haven't you are really a small child then you are confined to small space aren't you? There's the living room and our garden's not huge either so I also want him to see other children as well he doesn't get much chance at home.

### ***Why come to the group?***

I bring him here mainly because I want him to do activities that you can't do at home like the water play activities and many of the activities that they have during the summer. He's an only child at the moment. I take him to my relatives, I want him to see children more frequently and he doesn't have any brothers and sisters at home. I mean he enjoys it as well. I've seen children who are quite clingy to their mothers and I don't want him to be like that I want him to be very independent to be

able to sit down on his own amongst other children. It is amazing sometimes I'll do things and he'll copy me straight away and other times I'll encourage him and he won't want to do it because he doesn't want to do it. They like to take things at their own pace don't they in doing things. Yeah I mean ideally it's better to do things in the playgroup that he can't do at home I can do reading at home, I can do rhymes and stuff, I do like doing activities with him, I'll sit down and I'll we'll make a frog for instance that is one to one this is a big group isn't it he needs to be able to play both ways. I do a story with him at home I realise he probably listens more attentively to me at home cause I'm speaking to him directly when he's in a group he won't sit so attentively he'll just like look at the other children he won't look at the book specifically he looks at objects randomly. And he won't listen to the story. I take him to the library to the Tuesday group as well and he is the same there he won't sit and listen to the story he is too interested in what the other children are doing. You've probably noticed that when he is in a group he likes to look around he is constantly looking around at what other people are doing. And he probably thinks oh mum tells me a story this is not so interesting I have heard stories before

### ***How do you see your role at the group?***

I think I am more in like a support role really, support. I need to guide him most of the time through activities they take less notice of their mums and their carers and more notice of teachers if their teachers ask questions they'll probably look around I do try and provide it [support] but I also do try and play with him as well with activities I use the opportunity to like spend time with him as well.

**You use two languages quite a lot; how conscious are you of the use of language?**

I started doing it consciously at first because I want it to be important in his life. Communication skills are like vital specially being an Asian child and then he is trilingual as well, we've got like three languages at home and I like really wanted him to be able to distinguish between the different languages and everything so I started just really wanting to do that but once I started it all just came naturally for me I have always tried to put communication top of the list, I've noticed he can understand both languages at home and because I have seen the change in him like he can understand I try to emphasise it more and more. It started off consciously and once I know that he has grasped it now he knows what I am talking about then everything comes naturally. I want him to be a good communicator what ever he does its like trying to find a balance you don't want to push him too much but then I do want to really really encourage him what ever he learns that is fine whatever he doesn't learn then that's just the way he has learned basically. I don't know many other people in a similar situation. I have a friend and she didn't speak any English to her daughter none whatsoever and sometimes I look at her daughter and she finds it really difficult to understand English she looks at you blankly if you say what is this. I don't want Ahmed to be like that and focus on just one language and because they are young they are like sponges aren't they. They can absorb a lot of information I've taken like totally the opposite approach and I've said I'm not going to do that with him

**Do you have opportunities in a mosque or religious community?**

I don't go to a mosque it is for older children not for babies I take him with me but he doesn't like get an opportunity to meet other children. I take him to my sister's house and they only speak Arabic and they only speak Arabic with him and she thinks he will learn Arabic and I am like how many languages am I expecting him to pick up their must be a limit. She like say things to him in Arabic like sit down and he does what she wants him to do it's like physical expressions and the fact that you direct them to sit down don't you and say sit down and he'll listen but then I think maybe he is picking up the language at the same time and but the fact that she gives him

***How do you believe the sessions have helped your child?***

[in your 30's] Because you have been in that sort of educational environment you know what kind of skills are vital for him to grow up in for instance I want him to focus on communication because I myself know that I want him to be an excellent communicator because it is really important as he grows up.

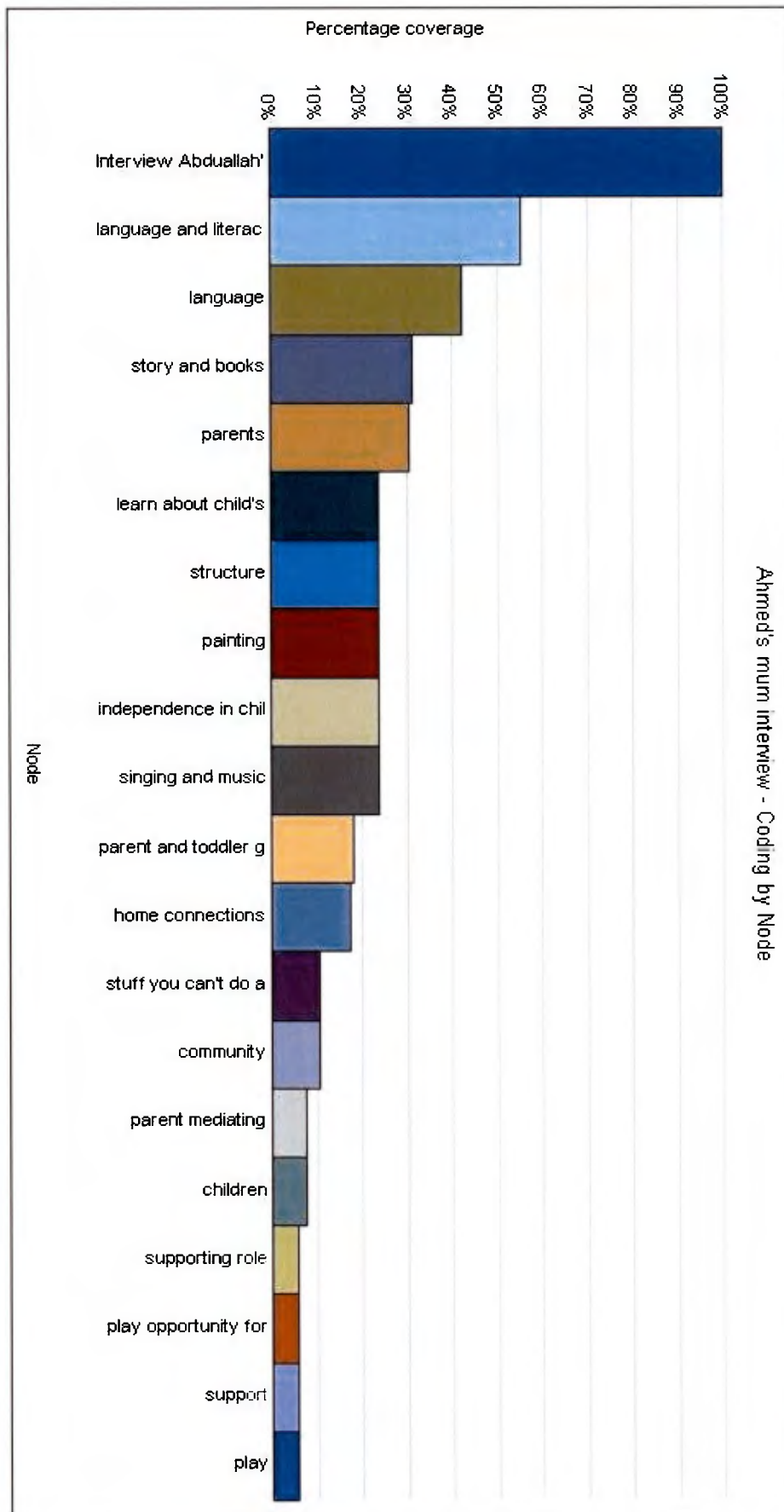
I don't know if it is relevant but I try to work to an educational programme at home it's like a preschool programme where I do certain things with him because I've got quite a lot of time now before the baby comes I've got some time now I'll teach him as much as I can spend some time with him because when the baby comes it will be difficult

***Have you revised your views about your role as a result of attending sessions?***

***Have you been to any other groups?***

I take him to the library group on a Tuesday they do a story and then they do some rhyme and then they do an activity then song time he sits sometimes during story time it depend on the kind of story it is I try to make it as interactive as possible he can't sit still and listen to a story you have to involve him he is at the age where he likes to feel involved. As you noted last week he saw a boy with a toy and he was more interested in the toy than the story so I sat him on my lap and he was ok but he was still not focused on the story.

### Appendix 3b The codes applied to the example interview



## Appendix 3c Parents' Purposes Node Summary Report

Project: Scaffolding

13/07/2010 10:11

### Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\Activity

<b>Created On</b>	13/07/2009 17:08			MN
<b>Modified On</b>	14/07/2009 16:55			MN
<b>Users</b>	1			
<b>Cases</b>	5			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>Referenc</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b>Paragraphs</b>
Document	9	16	2,067	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2067</b>	<b>72</b>

### Tree Nodes\activity\attendance and starting new parents

<b>Created On</b>	31/07/2008 08:10			MN
<b>Modified On</b>	08/08/2008 08:20			MN
<b>Users</b>	1			
<b>Cases</b>	3			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>Referenc</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b>Paragraphs</b>
Document	3	4	331	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>21</b>

### Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\behaviour

<b>Created On</b>	05/03/2008 15:49			MN
<b>Modified On</b>	14/07/2009 16:16			MN
<b>Users</b>	1			
<b>Cases</b>	7			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>Referenc</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b>Paragraphs</b>
Document	10	16	1,667	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>1667</b>	<b>31</b>

### Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\chat

<b>Created On</b>	13/07/2009 17:06			MN
<b>Modified On</b>	14/07/2009 16:58			MN
<b>Users</b>	1			
<b>Cases</b>	6			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>Referenc</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b>Paragraphs</b>
Document	9	11	927	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>927</b>	<b>26</b>

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\concentration**

**Created On** 20/03/2008 14:52 MN  
**Modified On** 06/08/2008 08:00 MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 1

Type	Sources	Referenc	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	2	2	195	3		
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>3</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\confidence boost for child**

**Created On** 13/07/2009 17:05 MN  
**Modified On** 14/07/2009 13:30 MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 1

Type	Sources	Referenc	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	2	2	207	6		
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>6</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\develop encouragement and support**

**Created On** 08/08/2008 08:09 MN  
**Modified On** 08/08/2008 08:09 MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 1

Type	Sources	Referenc	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	1	1	118	15		
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>15</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\discussion as purpose**

**Created On** 14/07/2009 08:32 MN  
**Modified On** 14/07/2009 12:37 MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 3

Type	Sources	Referenc	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	3	5	1,199	60		
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1199</b>	<b>60</b>		



**Nodes\activity\purpose\healthy habits**

<b>Created On</b>	18/04/2008 13:47			MN
<b>Modified On</b>	18/04/2008 13:50			MN
<b>Users</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>Cases</b>	<b>0</b>			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>Referenc</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b>Paragraphs</b>
<b>Document</b>	1	2	173	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>2</b>

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\heuristic exploration**

<b>Created On</b>	06/08/2008 08:10			MN
<b>Modified On</b>	14/07/2009 16:46			MN
<b>Users</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>Cases</b>	<b>5</b>			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>Referenc</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b>Paragraphs</b>
<b>Document</b>	8	15	2,231	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2231</b>	<b>54</b>

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\independence in child**

<b>Created On</b>	15/03/2008 22:56			MN
<b>Modified On</b>	14/07/2009 13:29			MN
<b>Users</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>Cases</b>	<b>9</b>			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>Referenc</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b>Paragraphs</b>
<b>Document</b>	14	27	3,097	82
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3097</b>	<b>82</b>

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\interaction**

<b>Created On</b>	13/07/2009 17:03			MN
<b>Modified On</b>	14/07/2009 12:41			MN
<b>Users</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>Cases</b>	<b>4</b>			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>Referenc</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b>Paragraphs</b>
<b>Document</b>	4	6	1,135	68
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1135</b>	<b>68</b>

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\language and literacy**

**Created On** 20/03/2008 15:36 MN  
**Modified On** 14/07/2009 16:52 MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 7

Type	Sources	Referenc	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	9	13	2,475	65		
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2475</b>	<b>65</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\learn about child's social abilities**

**Created On** 01/08/2008 07:28 MN  
**Modified On** 14/07/2009 12:34 MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 6

Type	Sources	Referenc	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	6	9	1,051	26		
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1051</b>	<b>26</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\learning for parents**

**Created On** 13/07/2009 17:04 MN  
**Modified On** 14/07/2009 16:39 MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 5

Type	Sources	Referenc	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	7	7	585	9		
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>9</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\memory creation**

**Created On** 15/03/2008 22:58 MN  
**Modified On** 18/04/2008 13:16 MN  
**Users** 1  
**Cases** 0

Type	Sources	Referenc	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	2	2	175	2		
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>2</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\mixing**

Created On 01/08/2008 07:15 MN

Modified On 12/07/2009 23:12 MN

Users 1

Cases 6

Type	Sources	Referenc	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	6	10	604	11		
Total	6	10	604	11		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\parent confidence**

Created On 05/03/2008 15:49 MN

Modified On 14/07/2009 09:00 MN

Users 1

Cases 4

Type	Sources	Referenc	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	6	9	1,093	64		
Total	6	9	1093	64		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\parenting**

Created On 05/03/2008 15:49 MN

Modified On 14/07/2009 16:39 MN

Users 1

Cases 3

Type	Sources	Referenc	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	7	10	1,195	46		
Total	7	10	1195	46		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\play opportunity for child**

Created On 13/07/2009 17:00 MN

Modified On 14/07/2009 16:46 MN

Users 1

Cases 6

Type	Sources	Referenc	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	7	13	1,567	39		
Total	7	13	1567	39		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\prepare for school**

**Created On** 13/07/2009 16:59 **By** MN

**Modified On** 13/07/2009 17:00 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 5

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	5	6	366	6		
Total	5	6	366	6		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\promote development and wellbeing**

**Created On** 13/07/2009 22:40 **By** MN

**Modified On** 14/07/2009 12:23 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 2

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	2	2	201	7		
Total	2	2	201	7		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\relaxation therapy purpose activity**

**Created On** 01/08/2008 07:22 **By** MN

**Modified On** 13/07/2009 23:23 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 3

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	3	3	403	3		
Total	3	3	403	3		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\science knowledge**

**Created On** 18/04/2008 13:11 **By** MN

**Modified On** 18/04/2008 13:12 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 0

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	1	1	25	1		
Total	1	1	25	1		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\sensory**

**Created On** 18/04/2008 13:08 **By** MN

**Modified On** 14/07/2009 16:30 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 1

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	3	3	302	3		
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>3</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\social for parent**

**Created On** 20/03/2008 15:08 **By** MN

**Modified On** 14/07/2009 09:00 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 5

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	7	10	811	41		
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>811</b>	<b>41</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\structure**

**Created On** 05/03/2008 15:51 **By** MN

**Modified On** 14/07/2009 16:46 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 2

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	6	10	1,562	11		
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1562</b>	<b>11</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\stuff you can't do at home**

**Created On** 05/08/2008 07:27 **By** MN

**Modified On** 10/07/2009 23:42 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 1

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	1	2	142	2		
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>2</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\support learning**

**Created On** 31/07/2008 07:57 **By** MN

**Modified On** 14/07/2009 16:53 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 9

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	11	13	1,921	59		
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>59</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\purpose\to have fun**

**Created On** 01/08/2008 07:42 **By** MN

**Modified On** 14/07/2009 12:27 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 5

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	5	11	925	27		
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>925</b>	<b>27</b>		

## Appendix 4 Sample Practitioner Interview

Discussion week 2 Kay, Bea, Anne 23/6/08

Discussing Iona's observation Martin outlined how Iona interacted with Grace's play with the cylinders in the water. Commented that although literature might say children are ego centric they actually seem to be very aware of others.

Kay they do watch what other do, yeah all the time definitely and it can and it can send them in a completely different direction to what they had already thought about doing, can't it. If they are not completely involved in what they are doing and they see someone else with the floating balls and things they will 9 times out of 10 I would say imitate and continue with what the other person is doing.

I find that a lot with paintings especially on the easel in Nursery there is room for two so you've generally got two children doing at the same time, but you'll see them watching each other and what marks they are making and they tend to imitate each other's and they end up with very similar pictures paintings. Where as if a child had been there on their own it probably wouldn't have looked anything like that. They defiantly have an impact on what the other children are doing.

(M) the other word that is used a lot is parallel but this doesn't seem fair because it suggests they don't touch each other's activity.

K) and A) agree

K) She spent a long time in the water didn't she?

M) yeah and in the toilets

K) She loves the taps doesn't she, she always has done hasn't she [Anne agrees] she comes to toddler group on a Wednesday morning and I bet she spends most of the time wet through

M) Do you use schemas?

K) We've done a little bit of training haven't we on schemas.... We don't really discuss it that much with parents do we?

B) No not really

K) We do discuss patterns of play with parents don't we? [b agrees]

b) and it was linked in quite well

K) So I mean Maisy from today I wouldn't be surprised if it is more trajectory and rotation with Maisy. But that is only from watching her in different groups and she loved the climbing frame outside didn't she. [b and a agree]

M) Refers back to Iona's interest in moving handfuls of objects between places and people. Mentions her steering the activity away from mum's suggestion to count the corks and refers to Trevarthen's point about two year olds seemingly pushing parents away.

K) Isn't Trevarthen the one who talks about a dance of reciprocity? Between like and adult and a child (martin agrees) I find that is really interesting that you think that they should take on board what you say straight away but once the brain has processed everything they don't do they it can be 2, 3 even longer sometimes before they....parents do expect them to do it straight away. It s quite interesting cause... some parents do and some parents don't

B) Yeah I...some are different

K) J is quite happy for Maisy to explore and go off on her own and to be this inquisitive, confident, independent learner that we want her to be. But she has had two other children come through the centre so she...

B) She is well aware of the way it works the way we work

K) but if somebody hasn't had that experience before like in the last lot of PEEP parents thinking of Regan and Emma in particular she was very much no he does as he is told and he does as I ask him. Yeah you know but after 4 or 5 weeks she started to let him explore a bit

b) She started to back off a little bit.

K) let him do more on his own and more what he wanted to do.

M) With Maisy I thought it was interesting at the end the climbing on the table and you (Kay) suggesting you put the things away together.

K) She's definitely into all, I don't know from what you've seen today but I would say definitely up and down and walking back and forth and that ties in with the scarf you were doing [throwing up for Maisy to catch and throw back] go from place to place but always back to base sort of thing.

M) The house was very much base and then she went off

K) to the climbing wall and then back to the house.

A) Oh that's interesting

M) My issue with schema is that you can put stuff out but where does it go from there it is hard to see how it ties in the developing language. With Iona You could put groups of things out

K) so she wanted lots of things, that is more like the heuristic play, ensuring where ever she is there is quantity of things because if there was only one then she would be pretty upset wouldn't she if she couldn't get



When you discuss this with Kate, her mum she'll probably come out with all the different things they are doing at home and actually they are very similar things aren't they so if she is grouping everything at home and things like that, then it's looking at how we extend her learning and support it isn't it. And I think that is the most challenging part isn't it. We might set something up for her and she might not go for it at all did she like containing as well though because she likes bags doesn't she Iona? No Maisy likes bags Maisy likes to put things in bags and take things from one place to another it's like transporting things isn't it Maisy. I'm not sure about Iona.

M) Iona it was baskets, baskets of corks, crayons, trucks, a colander perhaps in the water to put the float balls in?

K) That's like the heuristic play, what did we have last week... corks... so if we perhaps if we put something different out

M) and the Tamarind seeds.....

M) the other angle on things is talk and so the thing with schemas for me is uncertainty about where they are leading [explained Maisy's play with the treasure box in the house] she is almost ready for that step into imaginative play and you Anne were saying about Cinderella and Jane you had the thing with the mop and Cinderella

K) She is like the same age as Emily

B) She came up to me a couple of weeks ago in toddler group and she asked me to put the shoes on. And that is how it is in the story she has to put the glass slipper on.

K) Oh yeah. It is more imaginative. She is into all the animals and everything now and wanting to be creative and imaginative

A) also in Toddlers she is into pretending to put make up on you with the make up out of the treasure baskets, and you put the beads on and you're going out and you ask her where you're going

M) Yeah for parents I think that is an easier step to make compared to schema

K) Yeah that means something doesn't it

K) Yeah I've noticed she'll say I'm going so and so, I'll be back in a bit, she's got really good language, but it is language with meaning

B) She knows what she is saying yeah and she knows what she means

K) She knows what the language means doesn't she, you know I'm just going to so and so, I'm just going to the toilet. I think the other day she got the pushchair she was in a group and I walked through, she had got the pushchair and the beads around her neck and she said I'm going shopping I'm going to buy a loaf of bread and again she went up into that corner and back so that is back and forth isn't it. But it is how we extend it isn't it. Unless you think the environment is rich enough at the minute

maybe we need some new things because they tend to go for the same things maybe when they are confident with them we should make changes

Do you think we should put things in the water we can see what happens it is just us enhancing it might not go anywhere, we can provide things so they can transport things from one place to another. There's lots of things that she can group together isn't there. How about if we did something like placing and arranging you know on the table just cover the table in black paper and have a bowl of sequins? And then different, some of the silver containers just dotted around to see what happens really and not use the glue, the parents like the glue but sometimes it is nice to be able to mover it around. We got a boy, Oliver, who comes to the Wednesday afternoon group and he has to get everything in place first so until he's got it where he really wants it the other week he started around the edge and worked his way into the middle it was fascinating to watch but he didn't like put a spot of glue on until he had finished and he got frustrated cause some bits weren't stuck down because he couldn't remember where he put the glue so we could put balls in water again but perhaps try something different over here on this table.

K) It went well this morning didn't it?

B0 yeah it did go well.

k) We didn't have as many parents who were missing?

M) Jack?

K) Jack he came for the first week

B) and there was another little girl as well.

M) You didn't get any more insight into what the jack story was?

[There is brief discussion about where a referral might have come from and Anne volunteers to find out more. And they resolve to follow up two families from the initial week]

K) I really like the way they got outside it is just a shame we can't do that every week.

B) and the parents were very supportive, sometimes within the session they are not supporting them as much. Out there they upped their game a little bit they were right there with them.

K) We did make it explicit though didn't we with the safety stuff you know it is their responsibility even though we would be out there it is important

B) You know what to do then don't you. You know what you can and can't do as a parent.

K) If you are not used to it, it can be quite scary can't it? You're thinking what can the children do, what can they touch, what can't they touch? But it was nice

A) I was watching Jane out there, she on the first attempt at going down the slide banged her head, cried wanted to come down, got reassurance from mummy, second

attempt banged her head {on the bar] didn't cry. Third attempt didn't bang her head when she got down to the bottom she went yeaay!!

K) Shows pride in accomplishments! Bless her. But that took her two times to realise that that bar is there and I'm going to bang my head on it.

A) Yeah

K) Anything else room this morning? Songs and rhymes went well didn't it?

A) Yes that went well

k) They all join in well with that don't they, we need a new bubble machine though, playdough is always popular isn't it

M) The glitter was very popular with Alicia and grace and Maisy when they first arrived

A) and then Farzan

K) They have come on haven't they?

B) They let them do the painting which I don't think they would have done.

K) I think the parents have moved on

B) Yeah that is what I mean; they let them explore a little bit more now

K) But also I haven't heard the negative language it seems to have stopped at least today

B) and the raised voices

K) But whether that is the children as well feeling more comfortable within the environment, exploring and the parents feeling more secure as well. They don't feel like they've got to shout at the top of their voice anymore to get the children's attention.

{Discussed how one parent had moderated her comments and language during the session and how parents sometimes challenged inappropriate behaviours among each other]

m) Parents seem quite focused compared to other groups not many off children conversations?

K) Come to our Wednesday afternoon sessions cause they are a bit at the minute aren't they 'cause you never have two the same. We've got a click of them at the moment and they are just sitting right on that sofa.

A) or they'll just sit on the couch and use the session to have a break while the child plays

K) but that might be their only break and there is only three or four on a Wednesday afternoon. And unless their children get really unruly which is unlikely to happen because we wouldn't let it. It is alright for them to sit there. One is heavily pregnant and is due anytime so you can't expect

A) It is about moderation and having woman to woman time

M) There was a nice thing in the discussion time about chalks and reasons why it would be good to use the chalks outside because the children enjoyed them and they could do bigger things and mess didn't matter.

K) They all gave something tat their children could enjoy doing in the end, they seemed to enjoy that large mark making with paint didn't they

B) Yeah Alicia and Grace

A) Alicia is really into paint anyway

B) and even though the aprons weren't out their parents still let them explore cause I said oh I've forgotten the aprons they just oh its too late now. And when I took them out they did put them on but it didn't seem to make a difference to the parents. Which I thought was quite nice that the experience was more important than the clothes

M) Do you have objectives in mind for the peep discussion bit?

A) Suppose to have

B) Yeah we're supposed to have but we are really struggling with planning.

K) We're struggling with time for planning

B) There's just not the time for planning is there? 'Cause with this group we need to plan for that talking session, it's nice to have a plan something that you can just glance over to

K) Yeah it's nice to have something down on paper

B) But we're sort of doing it off the cuff aren't we

K) Can you tell?

M) Well no not really the last session I saw you do was very good

K) If you saw it before you would probably be able to tell the difference. It is it needs to be discussed with senior managers because everybody is so... straight after this your into another group or whatever the last few weeks one of us has always had to go

out to do the shopping for the groups we've got tomorrow cause we are all involved in those groups. There's always something

B) Yeah

K) 'Cause if you really want it to go well

B) Yeah because it can be really good quality can't it

K) It will still run in September we'll need to do questionnaires and feedback

M) It is good not to be over planned and to involve the parents as you do

B) Quite a lot of the feedback we have had is not being told how to be a parent

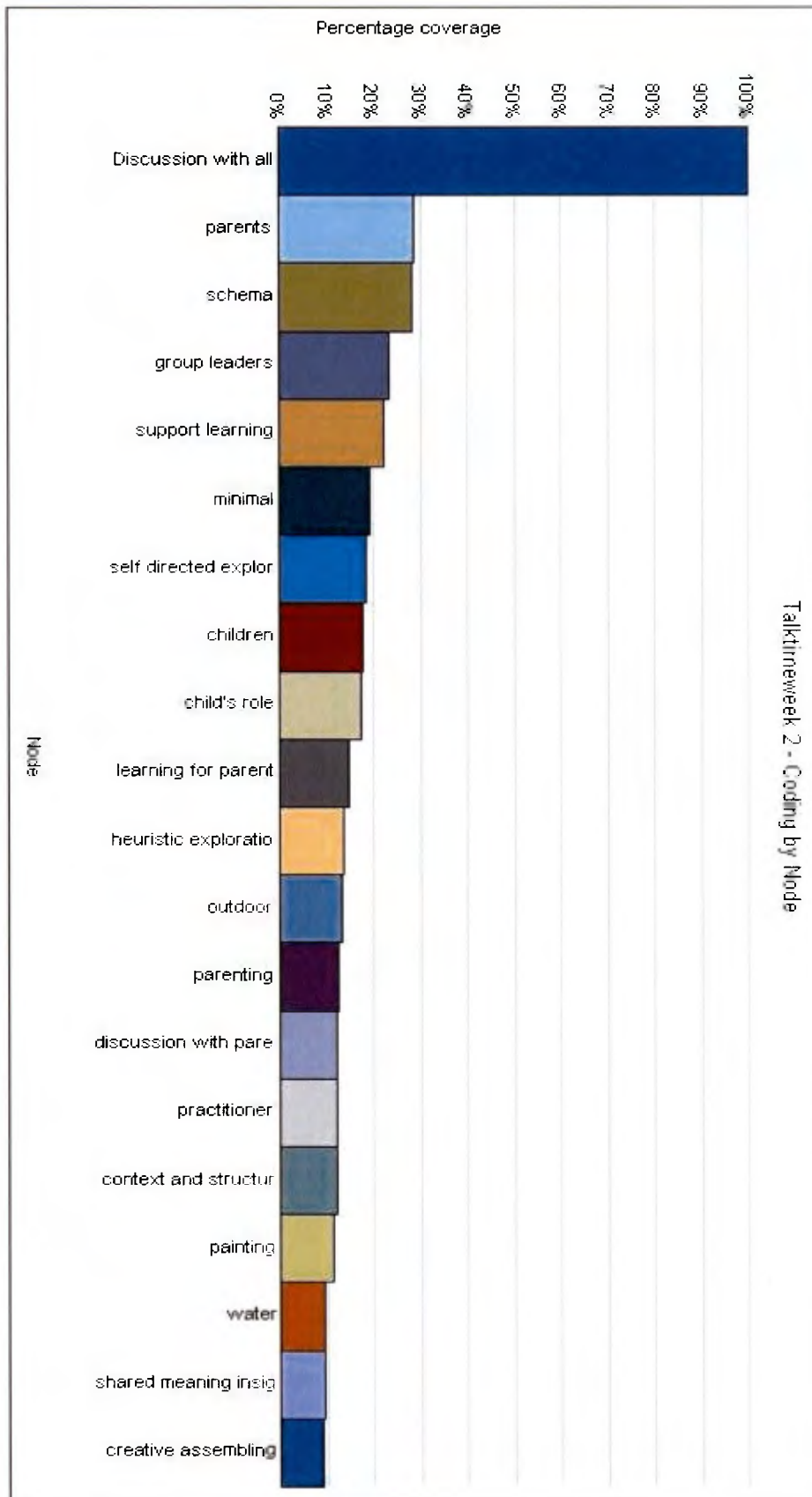
A) Very positive isn't it

M) Will the same families carry on in September?

B) They tend to move on in their own time don't they?

K) they may not come back if they are off to nurseries, they might Join nursery peep groups but they never move on as group which is fine we will invite we've got waiting lists and things and we've got letters that will go out across the whole centre to give everyone the opportunity to Join

## Appendix 4a



## Appendix 4c Practitioners comments relating to community; Node Summary Report

**Project:** Scaffolding

13/07/2010 10:13

### Tree Nodes\activity\community\context and structure

**Created On** 01/08/2008 07:03 **By** MN

**Modified On** 08/08/2008 08:18 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 3

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs
Document	3	7	1,333	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1333</b>	<b>40</b>

### Tree Nodes\activity\community\contrast to parenting groups

**Created On** 13/07/2009 22:50 **By** MN

**Modified On** 13/07/2009 22:51 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 1

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs
Document	1	1	318	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>32</b>

### Tree Nodes\activity\community\discussion with parents

**Created On** 08/08/2008 08:16 **By** MN

**Modified On** 14/07/2009 12:40 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 5

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs
Document	5	14	3,202	191
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3202</b>	<b>191</b>

### Tree Nodes\activity\community\environment

**Created On** 15/03/2008 22:51 **By** MN

**Modified On** 31/07/2008 08:04 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 1

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs
Document	4	6	700	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>10</b>

**Tree Nodes\activity\community\parent and toddler groups**

**Created On** 18/04/2008 13:34 **By** MN

**Modified On** 14/07/2009 16:43 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 9

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	13	19	2,666	56		
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>2666</b>	<b>56</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\community\PEEP**

**Created On** 13/07/2009 22:55 **By** MN

**Modified On** 14/07/2009 12:37 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 5

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	5	12	2,344	112		
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2344</b>	<b>112</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\community\staff background**

**Created On** 14/07/2009 16:41 **By** MN

**Modified On** 14/07/2009 17:04 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 2

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	3	3	290	4		
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>4</b>		

**Tree Nodes\activity\community\type of parents attending**

**Created On** 13/07/2009 22:42 **By** MN

**Modified On** 14/07/2009 16:22 **By** MN

**Users** 1

**Cases** 2

Type	Sources	References	Words	Paragraphs		
Document	3	9	830	25		
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>830</b>	<b>25</b>		



## Appendix 5 Ethical Approval Submission

1. Name(s): Martin Needham

Supervisor(s): Liz Brooker

2. How may you be contacted? (address, telephone and email)

[M.Needham@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:M.Needham@wlv.ac.uk)

3. Into which category does your research fall (circle one):

MA                      M.Sc                      M.Phil                      Ph.D                      Ed.D.  
(give title of course)  
M.Phil/PHD

4. Provisional Title of Project:

**Fostering co-constructing and scaffolding partnerships in parents-with-their-children groups in the west midlands. Considering the learning trajectories of 2- year olds.**

5. **PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS giving full details where necessary:**

a) What are the aims of your project and/or your research questions?

The aim of this research is to investigate the relationship between the early years practitioner and parent in support of the child's learning trajectory in parent-with-their-child groups. There has been a rapid increase in provision of groups that parents attend with their pre-preschool children, aged 1 and 2, as a forum for introducing the child to wider social learning situations. While some of these settings offer a primarily social forum others aim to influence the way the parent interacts with their child in support of the child's dispositions to learning, offering explicit or implicit guidance on supporting the child's learning. This research seeks to explore how academically described effective interactive exchanges between adult and child, compare to, might inform and might be informed by the triadic relationships between parent, practitioner and child in 'toddler groups' that seek to promote effective interactions. Notions of scaffolding, co-construction and metacognition have been chosen as a focus since research has identified these as key aspects of quality in effective practice with young children. The research will consider the transition of the parent child learning partnership from a home context into an organized context. The research will seek to capture reflections on the induction

of parent and child into this cultural process to explore how the learning partnership adjusts to the new context and to reflect on what this indicates about the participants' perceptions of this process. The research seeks to explore the elements of cultural expectations, power relations and discourse analysis that interact to shape this transition. What makes this transition of special interest as an early step in the educational process is the joint involvement of parent and child so that it may influence the child's response to an educational figure from outside the family and also the interactions between parent and child outside the toddler group.

The research is exploratory seeking to document four case studies of different settings to develop an analysis of the exchange of information between the pedagogy of the practitioner and the "folk pedagogy" (Bruner 1996 ) or "doxa" (Bourdieu 1977) of the parent. In order to help judge the value of these case studies, they are to be set in context by surveying a sample of other parent-child sessions to examine the aims of toddler groups in relation to supporting parent-child learning partnerships. The survey will also explore the training of staff and their awareness of academic considerations of effective interactive learning partnerships. The study focuses on the concepts of metacognition, scaffolding and co-construction as conceptual tools associated with effective learning partnerships.

The aim at the outset of the case study investigations is to attempt to capture the nature of the competing doxa present in the parent-child settings. It is assumed at this stage that there will be differing views both between and within the parents and practitioners groupings regarding the nature of learning partnerships that would best serve the interests of the children in the groups. The aim is to capture the spoken and unspoken discourses about interactive learning partnerships as competing or complementary. The intention is not to see either the practitioner pedagogy or the folk pedagogy as superior, but to see how communication between different participants might be advanced or confused in the context of the activity. It is hoped that this may subsequently inform practice in such contexts.

### ***Research questions***

- To what extent are lead practitioners in parent-with-their-child groups aware of ideas of scaffolding, co-construction and metacognition?
- What strategies are a sample of groups employing to develop the interactive learning partnerships that exist between parents and their children?
- How do parents of children aged 2 adapt to the implicit and explicit discourse related to interacting relationships with their children?
- How do practitioners adapt their communicative strategies in response to their perceptions of parents' needs?

## **b) What is the design of your project?**

The project consists of two phases the first employs a primarily quantitative approach involving questionnaires to assess the range of parent-with-their-child groups available in the West Midlands. The second phase employs an ethnographic approach to explore interactions in four parent-with-their-child settings.

### **Phase 1 assessing the context.**

In order to inform the selection of case studies it is important to reflect on the nature of the provision available and since there is little research in this area an initial survey will be used to gain a picture of the type of sessions available to parents and the experience of those leading sessions. The survey will also explore the extent to which parent-with-their-child groups are aware of the importance of metacognition, co-constructing and scaffolding either implicitly or explicitly.

From personal experience of working with such groups and case studies the following typology, adapted from Epstein (Behring 2002), gives an indication of the range of possible organizational structures that will be encountered.

- Parents as students in a lecture scenario
- Parents learning through osmosis in a play scenario
- Parents as understudies participating in professionally led activities
- Parents as partners in joint activity
- Parents as managers of a play scenario consulting professionals

The survey will give an indication of the frequency of the different types. Likewise the survey will provide some insight as to the extent to which the concepts of scaffolding, co-construction and metacognition form part of the orthodoxy and heterodoxy of different practitioners.

The initial phase of research will therefore consist of questionnaires to sample of settings in order to be able to assess the context of parent and child groups more effectively. (See appendix A)

### **Phase 2**

Four case study settings will be identified and approached to seek permission to conduct data gathering of a more ethnographic nature. The intention is for the researcher to take on the role of a consultant worker in the setting gathering data to offer feedback on developing learning partnerships within the setting. Data collection will firstly involve observing children's interactions with the activities available in the parent-child setting in order to develop learning stories identifying the children's interests and learning dispositions (Carr 2001). The learning stories will be discussed and expanded in partnership with the

parent and practitioners over a series of sessions. Interviews with both parents and practitioners will investigate their perceptions of the pedagogies employed in the setting to try to identify the views of both groups with regard to the learning dispositions they are seeking to establish and the types of interactive partnerships that they are seeking to establish with the children (See Appendix B). It is presently anticipated that this process of data gathering would last from 6-10 weeks in each setting and that the settings would probably only meet once per week. Each session might generate 4-5 learning stories involving either individuals or small groups and the stories relating to individuals will interlink over the weeks.

- c) What data collection methods will be employed?  
(If a questionnaires/structured interviews/unstructured interview schedules/visual methods are to be used, a copy **must** be attached).

- d) Who are the participants?

Participants in phase 1 will be approximately one hundred professionals who lead parent-and-child settings. These will be identified through local authorities and contacted by telephone before being sent a written questionnaire appendix A.

Participants in phase 2 will be parents, children and practitioners in Parent and Child settings where the parents stay at the setting with their children. Children are likely to be aged 18months to 3 years.

- e) How will they be recruited?

See above for Phase 1. Case Studies in phase 2 will be identified through approaches to settings where practitioners are known to the researcher or have indicated a willingness to participate in phase 2 during the course of phase 1. Parents in the setting will be notified by flyer letters given out and the setting and by verbal briefing of the nature of the research and asked to indicate their willingness to participate in the project and permission to record in writing observations of their children. They will be offered written records of observations made of their children, which will be discussed with them as part of the research process. I intend to focus on parents rather than grandparents or other carers. If grandparents or carers are use then permission will be sought from parents or guardians.

- f) If participants are under the responsibility of others (such as parents, teachers or medical staff) how do you intend to obtain permission for the participants to take part in the study? (Attach letter or details of permission procedures.)

See (e) above and see letter in appendix B

- g) How will you obtain the consent of participants? We recommend that opt-in rather than opt-out procedures should be used wherever

possible.

See (e) above

h) What will you tell your participants you are doing?

Participants will be briefed that the research is comparing how ideas about supporting children's learning differ between parents and those working at the setting with a view to improving communication in such settings to the long term benefit of children.

i) Is there any possibility that participants might experience discomfort or Embarrassment during your study?

If YES what steps will you take to explain and minimise this?

Parents and practitioners might not be used to being observed and interviewed. Time will be taken to become known and get to know participants by operating as an assistant within the setting initially.

If NOT, why not?

j) How will it be made clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate at any time?

This is stated in the letter to both setting and parents. Sensitivity will be exercised throughout in terms of stopping observations if children or parents appear uncomfortable and by checking that parents are still comfortable and willing to proceed with the process prior to and at the end of the initial interviews.

k) Will you provide participants with information about the findings of your study?

[This could be a brief summary of your findings in general; it is not the same as individual debriefing.]

If YES, what form will this take?

Settings will be provided with a summary report on the findings of the research aimed to be accessible and relevant to their interests. Parents will receive feedback on the observations of their children and asked to contribute to the analysis of the observation. Summary reports provided to settings may be accessed by interested parents.

If NO, why not?

l) How will information obtained from or about participants be protected?

(Please read the Main Principles of the Data Protection Act.)

Personal details will remain confidential to the researcher and will not be passed to others without further permission being sought.

m) What steps will you take to ensure the secure storage of personal data?

Notes collected in settings and tapes of interviews will be collected in note books and stored in a locked box primarily stored within the researcher's home. Processed notes will be stored on data stick kept with other notes in lockable box. Electronic data will be stored on pass-protected computers.

6. Outline any other information you feel relevant to this submission, using a separate sheet if necessary.

Researcher already holds CRB check and has worked with similar groups as a researcher previously. The intension of the research is to identify settings which do address the issues of interaction being addressed and the intention of the project is to identify positive practice rather than identify an absence of awareness. It not the intention of the researcher to cause embarrassment to the settings by identifying poor or lacking practice. Areas that may be most problematic may be identifying differences in cultures of interaction on the basis of class but this will not be reported in anything other than anonymised forms. Parents will be asked for permission to use extracts from interviews and observations in publications but again it will be made clear that these will be anonymised.

#### **Notes and references:**

Behring (2002). "Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of Parent Involvement in Brazilian Early Years and Primary Education." International Journal of Early Years Education **10**(3): 227-241.

Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a theory of practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Bruner, J.S. (1996) *The Culture of Education* Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press,

Carr, M. (2001) *Assessment in early childhood settings: learning stories* London: Paul Chapman, 2001

Robson, C (2002) *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers* (2nd ed). Oxford: Blackwell. Has a helpful section on ethical considerations - – pp 65-71 (NB page references are for the 2002 second edition)