DOING TIME IN NURSERY:
NAVIGATING THE RULES AND ESTABLISHING A 'LIFE'

Word count: 88,489

Jane Marlow
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
University of East Anglia
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
September 2014

ABSTRACT

This is a study of a privately owned, publically funded nursery for children before they start school. It was instigated by a desire to acquire a detailed understanding of the nursery, in terms of the actions of adults and children, at a time of rapid expansion in childcare provision to support working mothers and disadvantaged children in the UK.

Field notes collected primarily through observation over a two year period, in an ethnographic manner, form the core of the material contained in this thesis. They are presented to illustrate the 'everyday' actions of adults and children. A range of theoretical ideas, associated with a social constructionist perspective, are used to offer a possible interpretation of the meaning or significance of these commonly occurring patterns of behaviour. Initial analysis highlighted the controlling actions of adults. As the study progressed, it became evident, as others have noted in similar contexts, that young children were able to develop and define a relatively distinct life for themselves in the confined and constrained environment. Later stages of this study revealed the way in which individuals created, as was intended, relatively unique but, possibly, limiting forms of existence.

Specifically, this information maybe of interest to early childhood students and practitioners working with young children but the intention was to make this material accessible to a wider range of interested parties. It is hoped that those who read it will give some thought to the relevance or desirability of this type of experience for children, before they begin school in the UK, while acknowledging the localised features of the context, the author's background and assumptions as well as the limitations attributed to the chosen methodological approach.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

'Landscapes can be deceptive. Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a
setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their
struggles, achievements and accidents take place'
(Berger and Mohr, 1997: 13).

This quotation appears at the very beginning of a small book, first published in
the 1960s, about an English country doctor and the community he served.
Positioned as it is at the top of a right hand page at the beginning of the book,
the eye is drawn to the quote as well as a 'grainy' black and white photograph of
a rural landscape. The extract contributes to the sense of place conveyed by
the photograph. Bound by hedges, a succession of hills and a river, the
dominant geographical features effectively define the parameters of the place in
which daily life for the doctor and his patients takes place.

A sentimental, 'modern' construction of childhood - the time between infancy
and emerging adulthood, has created a life for many children in the western
world that is different and separate from that of adults and each other.
Marginalized places, referred to as 'islands', with specialised objects, have been
designed for modern children ostensibly to nurture, educate and protect them
from harm. Beginning with the creation of primary schools at the beginning of
the nineteenth century, further adult regulated spaces were created symbolizing
middle class ideals regarding a 'good' childhood (Gutman and De Coninck-
Smith, 2008).

This is a study of one of those 'islands'. Called a nursery it is representative of a
national intention to contain young children and supporting adults within an
institutionalised environment, for increasing amounts of time, to meet the needs
of working mothers (Corsaro, 2000). Rather than the hills, hedges and river of
the natural landscape, a series of manmade features formed the geographical
limits of this place and ideological ideas, rooted in the past, framed the 'nature'
of the childhood experience. But given the procedures required to protect and
safeguard young children in the United Kingdom, other features 'hid' from many
the common or taken for granted daily actions of children and adults in this type
of context. While this thesis may be of specific interest to students of early
childhood and those working in the early years' field, the purpose of this work is
to communicate to a wider audience my interpretations of some of the salient
features of human life in what has become a common but marginalized social
situation.

1

In keeping with a tradition established by the Chicago School of Ethnography as exemplified in such works as William Whyte's (1981) *Street Corner Society* and, more recently, Mitchell Duneier's (2001) *Sidewalk* and Richard Lloyd's (2005) *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Post industrial City,* I set out with the intention of producing a depiction of everyday life devoid of 'complex, abstract theoretical language' (Deegan, 2001: 14). Like those described as 'core Chicago ethnographies' (p11), the two acclaimed contemporary texts draw upon complex ideas associated with a number of discipline but communicate these ideas in an accessible form. Duneier's work illustrates the way in which the individual can be represented in an ethnography. Richard Lloyds's work, on the other hand, focuses on the changing nature of the social environment in relationship to the development of a neglected area of a city and is presented in a chronological form. Both are notable for their straightforwardness and seem to fulfil an aspiration to both represent 'voice' and provide a text that others would feel 'like reading' (Spencer, 2001: 443).

It may be the case, that ethnography should be assessed by the 'clarification it offers' rather than the 'amount of undigested information' (Spencer 2001: 445) but I began to appreciate the benefits of using theoretical models to effectively distancing myself from a relatively familiar situation as well as encourage a more nuanced understanding of the possible meaning of human life. It also became evident that some forms of life made more sense than others and the kind and degree of interpretation that was possible varied according to the aspects being examined, the limits of my theoretical knowledge and ability to articulate my thoughts in clear, comprehensible language.

My interpretations, which form the chapters of this thesis, were based on notes gathered during an extensive period of field work and selected, developed field notes, the raw material of this work, are included within subsequent chapters so that reader is able to place the interpretations within the context and circumstances within which they were formed. But, with the possible exception of purely descriptive comments relating, for example, to easily observable physical features, these are a form of interpretation themselves. The reader, as well as the adults and children associated with the Nursery at the time, may have been drawn to other aspects of life and could have reach a different understanding of the meaning of these identified events. Nevertheless, I believe I have presented at least plausible interpretations of everyday life perhaps most accurately portrayed where aspects of life can, initially, be most easily described.

The setting selected for this study was a Montessori nursery, established in 1990 to provide, primarily, a formalised educational experience for children between three and five years old before they started school. It was a relatively recent business venture, associated with a respected, well known farming family who had diversified to maintain financial viability and create opportunities for their own children. Owned and run by the farmer's daughter, the Nursery is conveniently located on the edge of the family's working farm at the end of small, quiet village but within a short distance of significant major roads, a train station and a local town. Signage in the local area, as well as on the farm boundary, directs current and prospective clients to the Nursery. Advertising is selectively used to attract business but personal recommendation appeared to be the source of most new customers. Revenue provided by the state for funded three to five year old children was supplemented with fees paid by parents for younger children and additional hours.

Officially, the Nursery was defined according to its registration status with the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). In very broad terms, the nature of the setting and the activities that took place there were determined by this status. At the time, the Nursery was registered by Ofsted as a 'non-domestic' premise to provide both care and education for a maximum of 24 children, at any one time, from birth until the August following their fifth birthday (Early Years Register), and the care of children from birth to 17 years old (Childcare Register). The care and education of children between birth and five years old, as set out as requirements in the new Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum[1], formed the main work of the Nursery every day. An After School club provided daily care for a small number of Nursery aged children as well as school aged children who were known to the Nursery. Although a particular educational philosophy historically influenced the pedagogical approach used in this Nursery, other ideas increasingly found favour.

The Nursery generally accepted children from six months old but the majority were between two and four years old. Most children, as part of local policy to support financial viability transferred, with associated early education funding, to

---

[1] The Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (DfES, 2007) provides a statutory 'framework' for those who provide care and education for young children.

classes in local schools at the age of four rather than remain with the Nursery until they were five. Children were predominantly, but not exclusively, white and associated with professional families. Attendance for some children was for a relatively small number of hours as their mothers were able to balance work and family life in order to spend time during the working week with their children. Some mothers worked from home or were employed on a part time basis.

Even though children started and left the Nursery at different times, a weekly pattern of attendance in terms of total numbers, as well as individual children, provided a level of consistency across the school term but not the school year. Determined by parental demand, fluctuations in numbers during the day, with the maximum numbers of children being present between 9am and 3pm, complicated the overall situation especially as small numbers of children began the day before 9am and were collected by their parents after 4.30pm. Daily numbers of children, reflecting parental demand for childcare, determined a required, legislated and graduated, rather than standard, level of staffing relating to numbers of children within specified age ranges at any one time. In addition to the owner, who also managed the setting, up to four other adults were deployed at any one time to supervise and support children.

The day-to-day 'work' of the setting was undertaken by members of staff but the Manager supervised this work and provided additional support where and when she believed it to be necessary. As the so called 'registered person', she was ultimately responsible for maintaining children's safety and security when they were in the Nursery's care. The challenge for the Manager was to organise the deployment of staff, in relation to a financial framework dependent upon the receipt of core funding from the Local Authority and fees from individual parents, while complying with a set of national standards[2], established to provide a minimum set of requirements for the care of young children in situations outside of the home environment, in relationship to a variable pattern of attendance.

---

[2] A set of legal requirements and statutory guidance which 'cover safeguarding and ensuring children's welfare, staff, premises, environment and equipment, organisation, documentation and reporting' (DfES, 2007).

As a privately owned setting, within the dominant private, voluntary and independent sector (PVI)[3], the Nursery functioned, by necessity, as a commercial business. Income was derived from the fees received or charged, at an hourly rate, for the time that children spent in the care of the Nursery. Financial outgoings included the heating and lighting of the building, its maintenance, and the refurbishment and replenishment of a vast range of resources typically used to support children's learning and development. The four full-time and one part-time member of staff were paid more generously than others in the sector but some supplemented their modest income by providing parents with an informal baby sitting service.

Maintaining the financial viability of the setting, in relation to a range of ever increasing expectations, associated with national and local priorities, was a principle concern. The focus for the Local Authority, whose 'duty', as imposed by the Children's Act (2004), was to improve outcomes for children and young people (from birth to 19 years old) in relation to the ambitions of the National Children's Plan and the Every Child Matters Outcomes Framework (DfCSF, 2009), was to narrow the gap between those who thrive and those who experience difficulty. In line with the National Children's Plan to reduce the inequalities experienced by some children and young people, and to use measures to prevent, rather than protect children from harm, the Local Authority's focus for its Children's Trust Partnership Plan was on supporting those children who were deemed to be at risk. The largest proportion, and therefore presumably the focus for the Authority's work, even though they made up a relatively small part of the whole, were those children considered to be living within 'hard pressed families' and those who have a 'troubled home life'. At the time, the county had one of the lowest percentages of children between 0 to 19 years of age in the United Kingdom. Although there were identified areas of disadvantage, on the whole it was believed that most children thrived. Areas of deprivation were said to be confined to the principal towns and coastal areas of the county rather than the more rural parts. There were relatively few children living in the county from migrant families or a black/minority background but the achievement of boys, as measured at Key Stage 2, was lower than that of girls (Shire County, 2009).

_____

[3] The range of early years settings are categorised as either belonging to the maintained or private, voluntary and independent sector. The later is commonly referred to as the PVI sector and represents provision associated with childminders, pre-school playgroups and private nurseries. School based nurseries make up the maintained sector (Mansell, 2010).

Consequently, the more detailed and specific priorities that were established by the Local Authority, in relation to the Every Child Matters framework[4], represented measures to support those children who were deemed to be in greatest need. Although the Nursery was required to operate within this 'climate' of policy it was not clear how significant such an agenda was for the children who attended this early years setting, given that it draws from a rural, relatively affluent part of the population of this county. That's not to say, however, that some children may have been regarded as members of 'hard pressed families' or associated with a 'troubled home life', but that it seemed less likely. The focus upon the underachievement of boys appeared more relevant.

Being privately owned, the setting received funding for eligible children based upon their attendance, whereas settings from the maintained sector were funded for available places. As part of a national and contentious move toward the use of a new single funding formula[5] for all early years provision in the maintained, as well as the private, voluntary and independent sector (PVI) sector, the setting began to receive an hourly rate of money from the Local Authority related to the highest qualification level of staff who spent at least 90% of their time working directly with children. Although the highest level of qualification, held by the Manager, was at Level 4 (Montessori Diploma), she was unable to confirm that 90% of her time was spent directly with children. Consequently, she claimed at the Level 3[6] rather than the Level 4 rate. What, at the time, was a local solution to a national policy to improve the overall 'quality' of the PVI sector, through parity in funding, was, unfortunately, having limited impact.

---

[4] The Every Child Matters framework is a set of underpinning requirements being used as the basis for the inspection of current provision in both the maintained as well as the private, voluntary and independent sector (DfCSF, 2010).
[5] 'The Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF) is intended to support the extension of the free entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds, as well as to address inconsistencies in how the offer is currently funded across the maintained and PVI sectors. This will help to ensure that decisions about funding for maintained and PVI providers are transparent, and based on the same factors. While funding levels and funding methodologies do not have to be exactly the same for all providers, any differences must be justifiable and demonstrable' (DfCSF, 2009).
[6] These are qualifications that are considered to be at 'A' Level (Level 3) standard and the first year of an undergraduate programme (Level 4). In this specific case, these are vocationally related qualifications which are held by the Manager and Deputy Manager.

This core funding was provided by the Local Authority directly to the setting, upon receipt of the necessary documentation, for those children who were between three and five years old, starting from the term after a child's third birthday. At the beginning of the study, funding was provided for individual, identified children within this age group for 12.5 hours of what is described as 'early education'[7] each week. This increased to 15 hours each week in September 2010, for a variable number of weeks which equates to school terms.

The sum received for each funded child (£3.02/hour) was considered, by the Manager and owner, to be insufficient to meet the overall running costs (£4.00/hour) even though a 'block allowance' was being paid 'up front' by the Local Authority in lieu, it would seem, of a reduction in a basic subsidy and withdrawal of a fund for resources. It was also less than that currently being received by other similar PVI settings in adjacent Local Authorities. Fortunately, the shortfall in funding could be met, therefore the viability of the setting maintained, through higher fees charged directly to parents for additional hours, the attendance of children under three and those school aged children who form the associated after school and holiday club. Since then and, to some extent, in response to a national requirement to employ a graduate leader by 2015, the owner and a member of staff have gained higher level (Level 4) professional qualifications.

For the purpose of this study, early years settings (nurseries, children's centres, pre-school) were regarded as marginalized, controlled places where many young children spend time before they start school. While seemingly of benefit to adults, not necessarily children, previous contextual studies of children and their childhoods have recognised both the localised nature of the constructed and structured childhood experience within a more global context and the agentive behaviour of children. There are, however, very few studies of situations where young children and supporting adults spend time.

Modifying belief systems in response to imposed local and national requirements, adults constructed an experience based on a current conception

[7] Early education is the term used to describe the experiences provided for children and inspected by Ofsted, to meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (DfES, 2007) for children from birth to five years of age.

of a 'good' childhood. Using instances of 'everyday' (Horton and Krafti, 2006) actions, I initially detailed the most apparent, observable characteristics of this 'island' – the way in which adults in this early years setting structured the prepared physical environment, organised routines and planned their interactions to reflect what appeared to be a developing conceptualisation of the *majority child* (James et al, 1998). In so doing, the setting contributed to the social construction of a contemporary childhood which, besides its temporal and generational nature (James and James, 2004), can be defined in relation to the time spent in and experience of an institutional setting before the start of compulsory schooling. Daily life for children remained fairly consistent throughout the time of the study – starting and finishing times, time for lunch and rest – but changes to the environment and associated routines reflected the gradual acceptance of views associated with a dominant early years' community who have embraced socio-cultural ideas as the basis for the construction of young children's experiences. Children's experiences were contained and constrained as well as supported by the structural characteristics of the Nursery but, as others have found in similar situations (Markstrom and Hallden, 2009; Einarsdottir, 2007; Gallacher,2005; Smith and Baker, 2000), children acted with agency throughout formulating experience which had not been planned by adults. These were strategic actions used by generally compliant children to adjust to the situation, deliberately avoid involvement in certain adult planned activities and include or exclude certain other children. The depiction includes a range of unique structural characteristics but it would seem that the children's response to these features may have universal relevance.

At the beginning of the study, artefacts and principles associated with the Montessori Method provided an evident, principally instructional type framework for children's experience within a formally arranged space. Most of a limited range of commercial toys were 'side-lined', as if they were insignificant, to an uninviting room (the playroom), only available for children's use at certain times. To maintain commercial viability, the setting was required to implement a play based curriculum for the under fives and adapt the environment to accommodate a younger age group of children. A range of Montessori resources continued to be available for instruction and children's use but these materials were subsumed within a vast array of commercial type toys which became generally available to children throughout the day.

I started the study with some understanding of the Montessori Method but details in most general early years texts are rare and limited to brief, historical descriptions. At the time, I was unaware of the extensive texts, still in print, created by Maria Montessori herself as well as those written by a few of her devoted 'disciples'. Informal observations of a limited number of nurseries using the approach and conversations with practicing adults had provided some information about this Method. I was aware of how the practice was frequently associated with wealth but had originally been established for groups of disadvantaged children. Many in the early years' community, who hold dear to a play based pedagogy, were openly critical of the didactic approach commonly associated with the Montessori Method. I suspected, however, that others knowledge of Montessori practice was similar to my own - acquired through limited reading and occasional observations of practice. Though world-wide in extent, including associations with a number of diverse countries in the western and non-western world, there are very few academic studies (Cossentino, 2005) of either the Montessori movement or approach.

At the outset it became clear that the Nursery could be regarded as neither a 'typical' Montessori nursery nor truly representative of early years' settings in more general terms but it did provide an example of two contemporary characteristics of UK society. Firstly, children's common experience of a childhood that includes time spent in an 'out of home' environment before the start of compulsory schooling and, secondly, childcare and education being predominately supplied by the private rather than the state sector. Provision of specific resources, use of certain rituals and affiliation to one international group of Montessori practitioners, marked the setting as a Montessori Nursery but children were permitted to use the didactic materials in playful as well as intended, structured ways. As a day care setting for young children it provided, as do other similar settings, opportunities for children to rest and sleep as well as spaces for activity. By the end of the study, the development of a predominant play based culture suggested that the setting had become similar to many other early years settings but use of the Montessori materials, both initiated by children as well as directed by adults, was retained.

Gradual but continued changes to the physical environment involving the re-arrangement of resources, addition of new materials and the creation of an additional space were a constant distraction. I endeavoured to remain focussed on the established intention - understanding the world of the child in an adult constructed environment - but could not ignore the effect of these changes on

the 'life' of this early years' setting. Changes associated with the implementation of a national curriculum for the under fives and, seemingly, a willingness to accept contemporary ideas regarding the way in which young children learn and develop.

The chosen examples are, perhaps, unsurprising everyday features which may well appear mundane but their re-occurrence suggested that they were typical characteristics of this setting. By choosing, exploring and explaining such events, I attempt to emphasise the very nature of possibly unremarkable but not necessarily uninteresting, forms of life. My claim is that the research provides important details, given the commonality of the institutional experience, of 'the everyday' of a neglected group occupying an unfamiliar situation. Instances that represent what appeared to matter, what was done and what happened to children and what they did, form the substantive basis of this work. As such, the work might, generally, be considered to represent a small contribution to a field of the social sciences which has 'demonstrated' the profound importance and inherent interest of everyday matters (Horton and Kraft, 2006). Specifically, this is an educational study, over time, of young children's experiences in an institutional context before the start of formal schooling.

This work may be a helpful resource for students of early childhood who, in my experience, have been initially confused by the diverse nature of provision or challenged by national expectations with regard to standards of quality. Hopefully, through its focus on the everyday, the study will also be of interest to a wider audience who might use the text to clarify misunderstandings or assumptions regarding the nature of this aspect of many children's young lives. However, a central tenet of this work is a supposed relationship between the actions of adults and those of children. Adults clearly constructed, in line with a modified ideology, a changing but consistently structured type of experience for children but children's actions may have been symptomatic of other 'outside', as well as 'inside', factors.

2   GETTING TO KNOW THEIR 'LIFE'

At the beginning of this study it was recommended that I read *Boys in White* (Becker et al, 1977) the seminal study of student culture in an American medical school. Dutifully, I attempted and managed to read part of this book but unfortunately, at the time, failed to fully see the significance of this work to my own study of a children's nursery. The book was literally placed back on the shelf and the ideas relating to such things as study design and theoretical and methodological commitments, so I thought, metaphorically to the back of my mind. But, during a tortuous period wrestling with what I found to be incomprehensible ideas associated with unfamiliar disciplines, in order to put together this chapter, it became apparent that the book was more influential than I had first thought. It was a relief to return to an accessible, understandable text and an explanation which resonated with the methodological approach I had chosen to adopt.

To quote, the aim of the American study was to 'discover what medical school did to medical students other than giving them a technical education' (p17) as the original interest was how students, as members of the medical school, acquired a view of what it is to be a doctor. I set out with a similar, broad intention. I was interested in the preschool child and wanted to find out what it was to be a preschool child and how this understanding was attained during daily life in an institutional environment.

Like those who studied the American medical school, I proceeded on the basis that I did not know what I was likely to discover and was committed to using methods that would allow for the discovery of phenomena whose existence I was unaware of at the beginning of the research. Adopting, broadly, an ethnographic approach I gathered information about the daily life of the nursery using, primarily, participant observation during a lengthy period of field work in order to try and understand how the immediate and wider context informed the actions of the participants. I assumed that 'human behaviour is to be understood as a process in which the person shapes and controls his conduct by taking into account (through the mechanism of "role taking") the expectations of others with whom he interacts' (Becker et al, 1977: 19) and believed that as another human being, who had been subjected to similar socialisation processes, I could, to some extent, put myself in the position of the 'other' and make sense of those actions. To use Clifford Gertz's (1973) term, his definition of ethnography, I was involved in an interpretative act of 'thick description' but

recognised that 'what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to' (James, 2001: 9). I was drawn to and attempted to represent what seemingly mattered to those I studied: matters that were important, of interest, concern or created tension. However, what I was probably able to document was 'children's agency and represent children's culture and learning processes' in an highly adult regulated environment rather than 'children's perspectives per se' (Warming, 2011: 40) especially given the difficulties of 'interpreting the intense and ephemeral play activities of young children from and for an ethnographically orientated adult perspective' (Richards, 2011; Back, 2007; James, 2001; Rosaldo, 1993; Thompson, 1990 Davies, 1982).

I had not worked in a nursery but I was familiar with certain aspects of the situation. As a tutor supporting early childhood students in further and higher education, I had acquired some understanding of preschool 'life' but from a distance and with a particular perspective in mind. Knowledge of the situation had been gleaned from observations when I visited students on placement or at work and their subjective reports regarding, in particular, what they did or did not like to do in relation to the provision of learning activities for children. But, as I have since come to realise, this awareness hampered rather than facilitated an in-depth sociological understanding of the situation.

It was evident from my own observations, as well as the perspective of some of the young post-16 further education students, that the term early years' setting represented a range of diverse and complex situations. At the time, these places were structured by adult workers to provide early education and care according to an apparent affiliation with either a play based or a predominately school-like approach. For example, some of the students explained how they enjoyed the relatively informal learning experiences offered by voluntary providers but many felt more secure in nursery provision when an overarching structured, learning environment was more typically arranged. Children were encouraged to play freely in many of the voluntarily run playgroup settings but nurseries, whether associated with the private or maintained sector, often provided various levels of controlled, structured activity. Play, at the time, in some of these later types of situations appeared to be an adjunct to a formalised experience - to be accessed when supposedly more important work was completed. Confident students, who were used to children and enjoyed playing with them, often found the playgroup experience rewarding and

enjoyable but they were normally the minority. The majority of students preferred the school type experience where a trained teacher, who was in charge, would arrange and require a student to work on one of a number of specific tasks with a small group of children. Young students, in all situations, were often and, possibly, unfairly criticised for being unable to 'take initiative'.

Similarly, during visits to students in either their placement or work situation, I had discovered how particular pedagogical approaches (HighScope, Steiner and Montessori) had given rise to distinct and variable forms of practice. Many settings, however, used an eclectic mix of methods said to be associated with a range of educational thinkers and nationally developed standards, originally created to acknowledge the expertise of unqualified early years' workers, acted as a benchmark for programme content and the assessment of student capabilities stimulating, on the other hand, a degree of conformity. Originally developed for further, and extended to provide the basis of vocationally orientated higher education programmes of study, these standards represented requirements associated with generalised beliefs regarding the way in which young children should be cared for and educated. Simplistically, the standards informed the creation of a structure that was typically being provided in certain situations to support children's care and education. The principle but possibly unsurprising idea was that children should be provided with a range of easily accessible, safe and developmentally appropriate activities within a carefully supervised environment. Although a number of standards could be applied to a wide range of practice, irrespective of the philosophical idea that had informed development, in some instances students modified their practice in order to comply with standardised requirements. Modifications may well have been appropriate or associated with the 'challenge' of interpreting difficult sets of standards which, by their very nature, are devised to embrace a range of different situations. Yet I recall the way in which some practitioners reluctantly but consciously changed aspects of their practice in order, chiefly, to obtain qualifications which were necessary for the inspection authority.

As well as maintained, school provision for young children in nursery or reception classes attached to schools, a number of private, voluntary and independent groups had also been established to both care and educate young children in situations that were equally isolated from the adult world. Experiences relating to work with both relatively young inexperienced and experienced mature students suggested that the situations were both variable in relation to what adults and children do and difficult for an 'outsider' to

immediately comprehend. The overall situation was further complicated by the specific pedagogical approaches that some settings chose to adopt but there was an expectation that all would conform to a standardised set of requirements.

It was with this practical background that I began to study one early years' setting. From my perspective, there were evident differences as well as similarities in the way in which 'life' was conducted in early years' settings but I came to realise that what I had seen or been told about may not have been typical. With a mindset firmly established in the developmental psychology tradition and an interest in the provision of early education, it was some time before I was able to see the situation from a sociological point of view. As I read more widely I began to give due consideration to alternative ideas and perspectives presented in texts from a range of related disciplines. Most notable was the idea of social constructionism and various studies that illustrated both the controlling nature of institutional life and children's active, agent abilities.

As explained by Berger and Luckmann (1967), 'everyday life and the knowledge arrangements, habits, norms and values it contains' can be regarded as social constructions, 'maintained by the social interactions and the language we share with our fellow human beings' (Thornberg, 2007: 404). I initially positioned children 'as vulnerable and in need' rather than as 'active and competent. (Clark, 2005: 489) but the social constructionist perspective recognises that individuals, including children, actively build and create their social worlds. Rather than being passive objects of socialisation, 'children interpret, organize and use information from the environment and in the process acquire or construct increasingly complex skills, knowledge and intelligence' (Lash, 2008:34).

I was motivated to present a balanced view, for a wide audience, of daily life for the child the nature of which appeared to be determined by their ability to not only contest or challenge adult power but the power exercised by other children. But, as Loftsdóttir (2002) explains in order to account for the impact of the relationship between the research and the researched, this is a view that has been derived from 'somewhere' rather than 'nowhere'. I was clearly influenced by the work of others and the perspective they adopted as well as familiarity with the situation.

The Nursery I studied was easily defined by its physical structure - a building of a small number of rooms clearly demarcated within the landscape, according to those who attend - the adult and child participants - as well as an allegiance to a particular approach. Initially, it seemed only necessary to consider the actions that took place within the obvious local, physical context but it became evident that the Nursery was closely connected to the immediate area and practice, by choice as well as necessity in some cases, was influenced by both local authority policy and ideas associated with one London based Montessori organisation. As Hammersley (2005) explains, there are some who would argue 'that we cannot understand what goes on within particular institutions unless we can locate these within a larger picture' (p6). Consequently, I believe it was necessary to extend the boundaries of the investigation, at the beginning of the study, to consider the nature of these outside influences which, in part, had been imposed upon as well as constructed by the adult participants in order to access support, funds and demonstrate compliance with externally inspected requirements. For much of the time, children and adult actions were viewed within expected and defined spaces but, similarly, there were notable if infrequent occasions when children, accompanied by adults, ventured beyond the walls of the setting into the immediate and local area.

As I believe is clear from the first of the following chapters, I began this study comfortably documenting the most obvious aspects of the adult construed physical, material and temporal environment believing that these structural characteristics were manifestations of social facts that determined collective and individual actions. Given my background, this was a relatively straightforward task and provided a way of initially addressing and illustrating how I believed a childhood was being conceived and enacted at that time. Ideas from a number of disciplines, particularly the sociology of education, that emphasise children's agency in the construction of identity and difference in the school setting, challenged a presumption based upon a 'becoming' child. In essence, I was encouraged to view the child not as the 'becoming', associated with the traditional socially developing model of the child (James et al, 1998) but as a 'being'. A view clearly held by geographers, who have become interested in children as 'social actors' (Holloway and Valentine, 2000a), as well as sociologists who have considered the spaces where childhood is constructed, contested and redefined (Holloway and Valentine, 2000b).

Geographical studies of childhood were initially useful as they, unlike studies from other disciplines, provide evidence of a relatively recent interest in the

physical, social and imaginative aspects of the 'diverse' spaces, places and landscapes inhabited by children. Some have considered the meanings children associated with these geographies and, significantly; others have emphasised the influence of external, powerful forces especially in relation to what children are 'supposed' to do. The geographical interest, whether the focus is on the home, the street or the institution, has been centred on the extent, richness and significance of the child's socio-spatial experience (Philo, 2000) in a range of adult regulated (Vanderbeck, 2008) places for 'playing, living and learning' (Holloway and Valentine, 2000b). They include studies of the places of childhood in urban and rural locations in both the minority and the majority world but there are few studies of UK marginalized, collective childcare institutions even though these have become common, significant places of childhood.

Of particular note for this research were studies of out-of-school care for children between five and twelve years old (Smith and Baker, 2000) and pre-school provision in Scotland (Gallacher, 2005) and Sweden (Markstrom and Hallden, 2009) as they identified the manner in which children were able to act within a highly structured and controlled environment. Despite the inequitable distribution of power between adults and children, children attending out of school provision were able to modify adult provided activities, control the way in which spaces were used and structured and take ownership of parts of the spatial environment. However, children's ability to contest and redefine their play spaces was dependent on gender, age and ethnicity. Stereotypical notions of childhood, as expressed in the actions of adult workers, supported younger children's but inhibited older children's attempts to redefine the social space of the out of school club. Consequently older children, who were viewed differently by adults, as 'devils' rather than 'angels', developed a perception of the space as a place for younger children (Smith and Baker, 2000).

Boys and girls attending the out of school club made claim to different parts of the physical environment creating 'gendered divisions of space' but their ability to control the way in which spaces were used was dependent upon approval from female workers. Requests from girls were viewed more favourably and adult notions of equality of opportunities were applied when workers wished to prevent boys' attempts to take over space, being used by girls, to play football. Boys interpreted these actions as women protecting the 'interests of girls' rather than attempts to control them as children. Children from ethnic minority backgrounds had limited power in the out of school environment when the majority of children were white. Opportunities to contest tokenistic

representations of their culture were limited by the control exercised by adults. Ethnic minority children felt out of place in clubs without ethnic minority workers and conceptualised the space as a place for meeting and spending time with friends rather than engaging with particular activities.

Although there has been an emerging interest in the location and distribution of children in social places and spaces, studies of early childhood geographies, which might have formed a model for my own work, are rare. Said to be thought of as a 'largely inconsequential' phase of childhood for study, associated with developmental incompleteness and methodological challenges, young children have generally been viewed in relation to adult needs (the provision of care) rather than their use of public spaces (Gallacher, 2005).

Starting with the sociological premise that young children are capable of adjusting their behaviour in order to satisfy personal goals, Gallacher's study of a Scottish nursery considered the manner in which toddlers (between two and three years old) attempted to appropriate and reconfigure spaces created and controlled by adults. In a way that was familiar, adults established order in the nursery so that children became 'good moral citizens'. They partitioned children by age into separate rooms, timetabled the use of shared, functional sites for use by one age range at a time and timetabled activities within the toddler room to structure and order children's sense of time. Adults positioned within the interrupted panoptic structure of the toddler room surveyed the scene to maintain the integrity of functional sites and promote rather than impose discipline through children's supposed internalisation of the educational 'gaze'. Examples of children's behaviour from this study illustrate the co-existence of two 'intricately intertwined' worlds: the world organised by adults to control and order children and a peer culture or 'underlife' that emerged in relation to the established rules and routines of the toddler room.

Pre-school is a common experience for Swedish children and consequently a significant part of children's normal childhoods. Established by the state, pre-school attendance in Sweden is believed to be in the best interests of children, their parents and society as a whole. The collective needs of children are accommodated within an adult controlled, institutional environment of supposedly stimulating activities rooted in ideas of a good or ideal childhood. Ideas associated with a belief in the 'free child' and 'free play' are difficult to realise as there are few opportunities for individual access to either private time or space. In a similar manner to the Scottish study, analysis of data collected as

part of an ethnographic study of two Swedish pre-schools (Markstrom and Hallden, 2009) broadly seeking to determine how children, parents and professionals were 'doing' pre-school, also revealed how children were agents in the development of their childhoods within the institutional settings. Children functioning within a highly structured physical and social context of routines, events and interactions used a range of identifiable strategies (silence, avoidance, negotiation, collaboration and partial acceptance) to influence and shape their everyday lives and hence contribute to the construction of their own, individualised childhood within the collective childhood established through the routines and practices of the pre-school institution. The examples provided to illustrate this phenomenon suggest that this agent ability is associated with three, four and five year old children rather than the full age range (one to six years) of children studied.

In summary, the following chapters represent an evolving interest and understanding of life in one early years setting where power was exercised by children as well as adults. I began by investigating the structural nature of the nursery - the evident physical and social characteristics - before attending, as others have done, to the way in which selected children were able to oppose or challenge adult expectations. As Howard Becker and his colleagues who studied the medical school had done, I felt that the children's earliest experiences in the nursery could be particularly decisive. While, in most cases, the children seemed unable or unwilling to contest authority as evident within both the temporal routines as well as the physical structure, further investigations revealed the way in which children created relatively unique forms of self as well as a distinct children's culture.

Practical challenges and ethical issues

I began this study aware of some of the practical difficulties and ethical issues associated with contextual studies of social situations. As others have noted (Flewitt, 2005); these become particularly significant when vulnerable individuals, such as children, are studied in naturalistic situations. In accordance with the University's policy, I submitted a short report to the School of Education and Lifelong Learning Ethics Committee outlining the proposed study as I saw it at the time. This report and an accompanying set of permission documents explained the procedures I planned to use to gain informed consent, preserve anonymity and maintain confidentiality. The Committee approved the plan presumably confident that the research was unlikely to cause harm. Looking

back, I appreciate how procedures established with the best intentions in mind can only ever provide a very loose ethical framework for the conduct of what became a very unpredictable form of research. As Rossman and Rallis (2010) explain, 'procedural rituals are manifestly insufficient for the moral challenges of ongoing and evolving research with people' (p39). Nevertheless, I believe I operated with integrity, mindful of the possible consequences that my presence and actions could possibly have upon the children, the adults and the important relationships that adults commonly establish with parents as part of a shared responsibility for the care of young children. Given that adults are necessarily cautious of adult intentions and possibly uncomfortable with the presence of an observer, who may be inclined to critically evaluate aspects of their practice, gaining access to an appropriate setting was the first of a number of challenges I faced.

As a result of my professional role, I had developed contacts with senior members of staff, in a number of diverse settings, who were either students themselves or supporting others with their studies. Those I initially approached appeared to be willing to accommodate my project but I later became concerned about a possible conflict of interest given my relationship with them or certain members of their staff. In one situation it became extremely clear that a junior member of staff, who was a student, was concerned about my proposed presence. She had raised objections but felt obliged to comply with the owner's wishes.

The setting I eventually chose was an unfamiliar but relatively convenient situation being a short travelling distance from home. It seemed sensible, in order to create anonymity, to choose a situation beyond my local area which I was not associated with. I knew the owner of the setting as she is a personal acquaintance but with the exception of some brief conversations regarding her own studies, with another institution, I began the study unaware of the particular situation. I was not known to the parents, their children or members of staff. I am grateful for the owner's assistance. Without her necessary permission and therefore access, I would have been unable to even begin the study. She was clearly motivated to support my studies and chose to openly discuss pertinent issues. At the time, she was reluctant to comply with standardised requirements in order to secure funding from the local authority.

Morally, as well as procedurally, I was obliged to consider the ethical issues associated with my proposed study of a social situation. Drawing upon

information obtained from various published ethical guidelines, I recognised the need to inform and obtain permission (consent) from human participants who might be concerned about my intentions and mindful of their responsibilities regarding the protection of either their own or others young children. My intention was to make observations of adults and children in a relatively confined space so it was evident that contact with children would be inevitable. Perhaps more controversially, I planned to use photographs and video images to supplement written accounts of everyday events. Gaining permission from relevant adults (the manager, members of staff and parents) initially seemed straightforward but I debated how I might realistically gain direct approval for my presence from groups of extremely young children. The intention was to investigate and then present my own, adult perspective of the situation but I was aware of contemporary beliefs regarding the rights of children, as established by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), to be consulted when matters affect their lives. There was no intention to influence or alter behaviour but I anticipated that the presence of an unfamiliar adult, especially at the outset, might possibly have some impact upon both adults and children. I assumed that time would ameliorate the possible effect of an unfamiliar adult.

I considered the possibility of gaining permission from children themselves as not only do they have the right to be consulted about matters that affect their lives but contemporary post structural perspectives view the child as a 'competent thinker and communicator' (Harcourt and Conroy, 2005). Consequently, I did not wish to presume that children were incapable of either understanding the nature of the research or unable to articulate their views but I doubted my ability to truly inform young children about an imprecise, unpredictable process (Flewitt, 2005) and, therefore, their ability to determine and articulate what was in their best interests. Besides the difficulties associated with communicating in an understandable language, an informed decision is dependent upon an appreciation of the whole research process: what is expected of participants and potential risks, their right to withdraw at any time, what happens to the data and how the results will be used (Einarsdottir, 2007; Harcourt and Conroy, 2005). However, exemplars provided by the literature, in relation to studies where the child's perspective was sought (Harcourt, 2011; Flewitt, 2005; Harcourt and Conroy, 2005), illustrate ways in which children's permission has been obtained prior to and during the conduct of focussed studies of individual and small groups of children. Children from two years and eight months old would seem to have been 'competent and capable

contributor'[s] (Harcourt and Conroy, 2005: 568), in one to one situations. They provided informed consent at the outset when explanations were provided by student researchers but the possibility of misunderstanding (ibid) and the effect of differential adult and child power relationships (Einardsottir, 2007), on the right to participate or withdraw, have been acknowledged.

A 'stereotypical' method (Harcourt and Conroy, 2005) - the smiley/sad face approach - might have been used to obtain permission from all the children at the outset but I realised that even if I was able to explain the project in language that they understood, the reliability of the information could be questionable. Contemporary sociological ideas emphasise the way in which children themselves affect as well as are affected by different situations. It was possible that choice, of a sad or smiley face, might have been dependent upon either a child's wish to please or preference for a sad or happy face rather than a clear, considered judgement. Given the age and nature of such young children and the fact that I was an unfamiliar person, I decided to rely on parents and the adults, who know and work with them on a daily basis, to make a considered choice about what was 'best' for individual children. Though not necessarily ideal, adopting this approach seemed most likely to avoid the possibility of the project being unknowingly jeopardised by the children or creating a dilemma if the wishes of the parents were different to those of their children.

As part of this essential ethical process, I provided adults with written details of the project, the approach I was proposing to adopt and the way in which information was to be used. These details, including the planned use of video and audio equipment to record actions and words, appeared to be sufficient as the majority of parents and practitioners unquestionably approved the project proposal.

I recall, nevertheless, the challenge of communicating the information in a clear, confident but accurate manner especially as my intentions, given the inductive interpretative approach I was planning to embrace, appeared extremely vague. A short resume of my professional background, including the fact that I had been 'cleared' to work with children, became part of the information sent to reassure parents that I was a 'safe', responsible citizen. Parents were asked to speak to their children to explain who I was and what I was intending to do. A short briefing early one morning at the beginning of the study may have nullified or lessened the concerns of members of staff but I was aware of a possible obligation to conform to their employer's request. In hindsight I realise that I

could have provided a 'safe' (Flewitt, 2005) opportunity for staff to express their concerns and possibly say no but it seems unlikely, even in this procedure had been used, that employees would contradict the wishes of their employer who had, effectively, approved the project. At the time I communicated a precise intention to observe what adults rather than children do.

In my absence before the start of the field work, the manager acted as the 'gatekeeper' distributing information, answering questions, possibly re-assuring adults and reminding parents of the need to return consent forms. I needed parental permission to proceed, recognising that I had no automatic 'right' to the actions of their children. Fortunately, the majority of parents willingly provided permission for their children to be observed. Some parents, who had presumably given some considered thought to the proposal, were not prepared to sanction the use of video and audio equipment and two parents chose not to grant overall permission. One parent voiced concerns regarding the safe storage of the information I was proposing to gather. Refusal by two parents was thought to be associated with the need to protect children from scrutiny during a time when families were experiencing certain difficulties. It was clear that these parents were determined to act independently of the nursery. They seemed to view the proposal as an unnecessary invasion of the child's or, by default, their own privacy. Observations of children, including the use of photographs, had become a standard aspect of pedagogical practice in this and many other early years' settings but this had been challenged by those who appeared concerned about this type of formalised practice with children under five years of age. Less confident parents may have felt obliged to give permission in order to sustain relationships with the nursery and individual members of staff. Others may have been prepared to place their trust in the owner of the nursery who had agreed for the study to proceed. Clearance to work with children may, however, have been the most significant factor.

By necessity, obtaining parental approval was an on-going aspect of the project which I had not anticipated. Children left at the end of each term usually transferring to local schools as they became four years old. New children started at the beginning of each academic term. Consequently, I was always an unfamiliar figure to a small number of children and observations were delayed or re-arranged in order to comply with the ethical requirements I had set. I began each observational visit mindful of who could/could not be observed and was cautious when using a small hand held video camera, with a protruding lens, to avoid recording the actions of children whose parents had not given

permission for them to be observed or observed in this way. In certain situations, I sought permission from children at the time when taking photographs of them or of work they had completed. I became instinctively aware of and respected certain types of non-verbal communication which seemed to indicate refusal. On the whole, children were willing to be photographed, wished to see the resulting image and requested that they use the camera. On odd occasions, individual adults as well as children appeared to remove themselves from my field of view.

In retrospect, I might have adopted a different approach and used alternative methods to support informed consent and children's participation in the research process. Previous studies have demonstrated children's capacity to communicate their views and opinion regarding issues that affect their lives as well as a mismatch in the actual and observed childhood experience (Harcourt, 2011).

Methodological approach

Historically, as I have indicated elsewhere, research has been conducted on children as 'becomings' associated with pre sociological and transitional models of the child to determine, primarily, their levels of development and competencies (Einarsdottir, 2007). More recently, in acknowledgement of the 'being', agent child (Ebrahim, 2011; Qvortrup, 2004) and children's rights as set out in the United Nations Convention (1989), researchers have devised various ways of involving children in their research and considered how listening to children can be successfully achieved (Pascal and Bertram, 2009). Methods recognise the importance of listening to children to gain an understanding of their learning, lives and experiences (Harcourt and Einarsdottir, 2011; Warming, 2011). In addition to traditional research methods, a range of child-focussed techniques (photographs, videos and pictures drawn by the children themselves) were used to determine the nature and the meaning children attached to activities within an out of school club (Smith and Baker, 2000).

An Icelandic study *with* two to six year old children (Einarsdottir, 2007) possibly provides a model for the way in which the perspective of a younger age group of children can be obtained. Taking a post-modern view, as well as ideas associated with the children's rights movement and the new sociology of childhood, children were deemed to be capable and knowledgeable beings operating as social actors within a socially constructed childhood space. A

range of research methods, 'to suit their competencies', were used to 'shed light' on children's perspective with regard to their temporal life within the space of the early childhood setting. Seemingly acknowledging difficulties associated with obtaining first hand accounts from the very young attributed to Thorne (2008), as well as a belief in children's ability to provide reliable and valuable information, group and individual interviews involving the use of visual images were designed to access children's opinions - what they did, what adults did and should be doing and what they enjoyed. Listening to children's voices is considered to be a useful, if challenging starting point which may, in fact, be a rhetorical rather than an empowering device. In certain adult defined situations, children may be able or willing to 'exchange message-like thoughts and intentions' whereas in others they may not (Komulainen, 2007). It has been suggested that children's lived experiences must be understood in association with adult perspectives (Pascal and Bertram, 2009) and the asymmetric, adult to child power relationships occurring in the spaces they occupy (Bae and Winger, 2008 in Harcourt and Einarsdottir, 2011) as these will determine not only what and who is heard but also the impact of children's views (Mannion, 2007).

As illustrated above, various participatory methods, underpinned by the rights agenda and conceptions of the child as a being rather than an adult becoming, have been 'uncritically' (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008) used with the aim of accessing children's, rather than adult's, perspectives regarding aspects of their lives. Allied to the two key principles of the New Social Studies of Childhood movement, children are studied as subjects, rather than objects and research is focussed on the geographical, historical and social situated 'peculiarities and specificities' of individual childhoods. Based on the epistemological assumption that children are best placed to know about self and those of a similar identity (other children), the movement advocates children's involvement in the research process. Considered in this way, children are said to be empowered and act as either researchers or participants in the research process thereby contributing to the creation of knowledge about self and influencing the conditions in which they live. Such a perspective would seem to assume that children are only able to exercise agency in research when adult designed participatory methods are deployed yet the field of childhood studies recognises the way in which children actively shape the world around them. An alternative view, which defines power in relation to action rather than as a commodity, also posits children as capable participants possibly operating in a number of unexpected ways beyond the control of the researcher or methods used.

Similarly, current interest in children's involvement in the research process may be connected to governmental concerns regarding their welfare and the regulation of conduct to ensure the 'future well-being of the population'. Such an emphasis positions children as 'adults-in the making' rather than the beings advocated by the New Social Studies of Childhood.

Using methods associated with ethnographic childhood research, I sought to study, holistically, the 'lived lives' (Clark and Moss, 2001) of children in a situation which has become a common experience of childhood without recourse to participatory methods of research which might have constrained children's actions (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). As such, it stands apart from a number of contextual studies of young children. Studies which would seem to be exerting control over children and contributing to the regulation of childhood, allegedly with children's best interests in mind and an 'anti ethical stance' associated with the use of adult designed participatory methods. I feel confident that children participated in this research contributing to knowledge about themselves without the use of these types of technique. At times children were passive as well as physically active. Some actions, enacted through passive or active behaviour, were clearly intentional, deliberate decisions whereas others appeared to represent performances of habit.

As noted elsewhere (Warming, 2011; Thorne, 2008; Clark, 2005), the research literature provides few examples of young children or infants perspectives. Similarly, methodological debate regarding the way in which the standpoint of infants can be gathered is limited (Warming, 2011). More typically, adults have created spaces and time to observe infants in order, for example, to support professional development (Monti and Crudeli, 2007) provide advice to others (Adamo, 2001), uncover the possible reasons for children's difficulties (Dennis, 2001) and detail children's coping strategies (Adamo, 2001).

Data collection – tools, procedures, issues

Unobtrusive participant observation is considered to be a particularly suitable method for collecting data about young children with limited oral and written language skills and various manuals provide instructions in the use of the technique (McKechnie, 2000). Similar to the psychoanalytical technique (Rustin, 1997), used for educational purposes, the researcher deliberately remains apart from the behaviour of interest, to minimise any observer to observed status effects (McKechnie, 2000). While the aim is to remain, 'as far as possible',

remote from the situation, studies of family situations illustrate the way in which the observer's presence has made a difference. Individuals have presented a selective image of self and observers have unintentionally become part of a complex, not necessarily positive, system of personal relationships. In some cases, the observer's presence has created anxiety while in other situations the 'reflective space' has provided a form of support for isolated mothers (Rustin, 1997). Effects seemingly can be lessened with the use of 'good' data collection strategies and careful scrutiny of data (McKechnie, 2000).

Participant observation was the method chosen to document the social geography of a Scottish nursery (Gallacher, 2005) and identify strategies used by young children to gain control and produce social life in early childhood centres (Ebrahim, 2011; Markstrom and Hallden, 2009; Alcock, 2007; Rutanen, 2007). In the Scottish case, the researcher attempted to work with, rather than compensate for, generational issues by adopting a 'non-authoritarian adult role'. Appearing as an atypical, less powerful adult allowed her to 'glimpse' aspects of the peer culture, from which she believed she would have otherwise been excluded and extract details from adults, when questioned, that they may have taken for granted. Other researchers (Kelly-Byrne, 1989; Cosaro, 1985) have adopted a 'least adult role' acting childlike in an attempt to access and participate in children's everyday lives. They have played with children, submitted to adult authority and relinquished adult associated authority and privileges (Warming, 2011). As others have noted (Pole, 2007), current understandable concerns regarding paedophilia and the need for child protection safeguards may deter or prevent adults (but especially male researchers) from creating such a close, personal research relationship with young children.

Having been accustomed to making observations of students in practice and supporting undergraduate use of the technique in small scale research projects, I was familiar but not necessarily skilled in the use of this type of qualitative approach. Previously, I had mainly used this kind of technique in a predetermined manner with the focus being upon the actions of the adult rather than the children. The purpose of these observations was to provide student practitioners with comments, for personal reflection, on the nature of their practice. In those cases, children and adults had often been stationary or movements were confined to a relatively small area. I anticipated that children in this situation were likely to be active for much of the time.

Of the four theoretically possible roles available (Gold, 1958), I adopted the role of 'observer as participant' at the beginning of this study to acquaint myself with the situation. Intentionally, I placed myself at some distance from certain events but, given the confined nature of the space, was always relatively close to both adults and children. Characteristically, I watched from an inconspicuous sitting position in an attempt to minimise any possible impact on the actions of adults or children. Mimicking to some extent the actions of familiar adults, who regularly used observational methods for assessment and reporting purposes, I chose to create short written field notes and take photographs of children's behaviour. Certain children were evidently fascinated and possibly distracted by my recording tools: a notepad, an unusual pencil and a digital camera which recorded both still and moving images. If left unattended, as others have noted (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008), children 'appropriated' my tools, as they had my body, choosing to use the pencil to make marks on the notepad and demanded that they use the digital camera for their own purposes.

> *Three of the children were particularly interested in the video camera. At times it became difficult to use it or images became blurred. S spent sometime exploring the 'features' of the camera and trying to work out the relationship between what she was seeing on the screen and the source of this image. Placing the camera on the table with the view finder at 90 degrees to the camera and table helped her to use it more independently. She discovered the off button and repeatedly used this to turn the camera off. B displayed a similar interest, continually and sometimes inconveniently, wanting to see the images in the view finder. Those children who used the camera found it difficult to press the picture button and hold it down the required length of time.*
> Field note, November 2008

Within a short time I was able to modify my position as I gradually became more comfortable with the situation and seemed to be accepted by the community. I behaved in the manner of the 'participant observer' (Gold, 1958) switching between times of comparatively formal, as opposed to informal, observations dictated by the situation and various daily events. Taking care to use common strategies, I became involved in certain activities when I perceived that assistance would be helpful. For purely practical reasons, formal observations were taken whilst sat in one place and usually some distance from the 'action'. Moving through the spaces at other times, I informally noted points of interest and engaged in conversations with children and adults.

11.15

As another adult began to pass coats to children, who had assembled in the carpeted area, there was some discussion about who might be the owner of a bright green coat. In response to brief instructions from the adults, some of the children arranged themselves into pairs of boys and girls. I helped one or two of the children to fasten their coats attempting to use strategies to increase their independence before taking hold of L's (3) hand and joining the 'procession'. One adult was at the front; another adult was at the back of the line.

Field note, April 2009

Early incidents may have been 'managed' by the children, as well as the staff, as individual children seemed to understand the overall purpose of the visits and reacted to either my presence or their understanding of my role as a researcher or investigator. On my very first visit to the setting, when I was unfamiliar with the situation, the eldest girl effectively demonstrated what supervising adults expected of her. One after the other, she chose to use two structured activities well within her capabilities before going off to play with other children.

In response to the practitioner's instruction to 'find something from the shelves', E (4 years old, oldest girl in the setting), walked to the open shelves and selected two baskets which had been placed one on top of the other.

Field note, November 2007

Adults were understandably 'uneasy' (Gold, 1958) at first possibly conscious that they should be behaving in an expected manner but accepted and encouraged a participatory role. They were used to sharing the spaces with visiting adults, including students from a local high school, who were expected to become active rather than passive participants. I had become accustomed to working *with* students, rather than telling them what to do, and hoped that this experience would prove useful. This effort to present a picture of conformity became evident when adults were responding to questions or supporting children with structured activities.

'This is called a Binomial Cube and you carry it like this. Would you like to take it to the table? Do you want to sit this side, can I sit this side?' E (adult) writes notes.

'Lets look what we've got inside. Special way of taking out. You can have a go'.

E removed the top from the box with hinged sides. She 'took down' one side and then carefully picked up each shape/piece (small cubes and cuboids with red, blue and yellow coloured sides) within the box and placed these to the right of the child leaving a gap between each piece.

'This is how we put them back in.'
Field note, 26 November 20007

My aim, as expressed elsewhere, was to record the normal, routine actions of adults and children. Rather than recording so called 'natural' behaviour, some of the previous examples would seem to suggest that I may, in fact, have promoted the emergence of new or unusual phenomena. This, however, seems unlikely to have been the situation in all cases. Children were immersed in an environment of objects from which they were encouraged to choose from and then manipulate in a mainly playful manner. Rather than being representative of a new phenomenon, I believe that this example is confirmation of an existing pattern of behaviour. I was new, my 'tools' were new but children were accustomed to choosing from the vast range of objects presented to them within the physical environment. I and the tools that accompanied my presence may simply have been viewed by children as additional, available objects from which they were permitted to choose.

Interestingly, at the end of the study, a young girl behaved in a similar manner. It had been sometime since I had visited the setting. I was an unfamiliar adult sitting on a chair holding a small notebook. I was ignored by a young girl as she passed close by within a confined space but she momentarily touched the notebook with her fingers. It was as if she 'needed' to explore its nature but the notebook was insufficiently engaging to maintain her attention for more than a few seconds. Such behaviour, often associated with children under the age of two, could be explained in a number of different ways. It may represent an instinctive need for sensory exploration or an expression of conformity - she was doing what she was expected to do - or a means of possibly trying to gain my attention. Other examples, the one involving an older girl and another illustrating a pattern of discourse used by individual members of staff, appeared to be stage managed. It was as though they wished to present a favourable, responsible image of self.

Looking back, I eventually assumed a familiar, comfortable and safe mode of observation in order to conform to the setting's expectations regarding adult behaviour. At the time, I would have preferred to have adopted a blended ethnographic type of role, as others have used (Pole, 2007), believing that this would have been a more useful way to gain insights into the life of people in defined situations. I was aware that full participation, as either an adult or a child, was not feasible or ethically permissible and I discovered that this would not have necessarily been a desirable approach to adopt. To all intents and purposes, I consequently remained somewhat a stranger within the situation. In some respects (gender, ethnicity, possibly fitness or familiarity), I might have been mistaken, by parents or visitors to the Nursery, for an adult worker.

Being a white, English female of a similar size I had much in common with the adult workers and the Manager of the setting. I had accumulated a number of years of experience of working with young children but primarily in the maintained rather than the private sector. On the other hand, experience of supporting and supervising students may have set me apart from the adult workers who could be identified by a simple, practical uniform not worn by the Manager. As I mention elsewhere, procedures designed to protect and safeguard young children facilitated overall participation but complete involvement in the day- to-day life of the setting was understandably constrained by these requirements. I was able to observe, from a distance, some of the routine, intimate care routines used by adults when caring for young children but deliberately avoided, in order to protect my integrity, involvement in or the close observation of these delicate tasks. Though I was familiar with the general pedagogical principles associated with caring for and educating young children, I had limited 'hands on' professional experience or a vocational qualification relevant to either the age group or use of the Montessori materials and method. Rather than a hindrance, these differences created useful barriers preventing the development of inappropriate, intimate relationships with members of staff. To some extent, I was able to remain detached from the situation so that I could at least attempt to interpret and explain events from a relatively impartial position.

In hindsight, I consider that my body was both a fieldwork tool as well as a form of 'fieldwork baggage' (Pole, 2007). It was through the actual experience of negotiating and experiencing the spaces of the Nursery that I initially began to understand the scale of the place, the layout, places and materials of significance and the routes that were used by children and adults to negotiate

obstacles as well as move from one area to another. As a result I began to appreciate the day-to-day organisation, use and reorganisation of space and was reminded of both the energetic physicality of young children's experience and the physically demanding nature of the adult role. In an attempt to accurately document their experience in relation to the structured environment, I looked for opportunities to sit or crouch at child level alongside individual and small groups of children at tables or with larger groups of children on the floor. Fortunately, I was usually able to 'perch' on certain surfaces (child-sized chairs and a ledge), which became uncomfortable after a short while and, in a similar manner to the female workers, squeeze between children's bodies usually at the periphery of a group assembled on the floor. Naively, perhaps, I 'threw caution to the wind' placing myself in possibly vulnerable, challengeable but necessarily visible positions in order to gain evidence of children's experience reassured by the protection provided by permissions (from parents and the owner of the setting) as well as the necessary clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). In certain situations, size (and a certain lack of flexibility) became an obstacle either preventing or making it difficult to enter certain available or invited spaces which were being used or had been created by children. Modifying body posture, I attempted to 'get down' to children's level when responding to their requests, when instigating informal conversation or acting as an adult helper so as to minimise power differentials. Much of my time, however, was spent observing situations from either a sitting or standing position; 'towering over' individual and groups of much smaller human beings.

Generally, I seemed to be accepted by the community (adults, children and their parents) as another, interested and possibly helpful adult. Children's responses suggested that they typically perceived and accepted me as an additional, convenient adult helper. Adults, who had been made aware of my professional background, seemed to regard me in number of different ways: as a teacher, possible expert and, perhaps more significantly, as a potential critic. Conversations at the beginning of the study seemed to suggest that I was a useful source of information. Controlled access implied that there were certain times when practice may not necessarily have been of the quality they desired and, consequently, did not want to be viewed.

Daily access was negotiated with the Manager. In most cases, my wishes were accommodated but there were exceptions when an initial request was refused. At first, refusal seemed to be associated with the planned absence of the Manager but the possible overbearing presence of a number of other additional

adults on a given day became the expressed, common reason. In addition to my own studies, those of students mentioned elsewhere, the setting at the time was providing an experience for an adult who was planning to adopt a young child. Advisors from the local authority visited the setting and additional, specialist adult expertise was used to supplement children's experience. Familiarisation visits were made by parents with their child before agreed sessions began.

For much of the time I was able to act as a 'non-authoritarian' adult watching other adults and children without overseeing or taking responsibility for their actions but this title appears to represent an unrealistic characterisation of the different types of general and exact social roles an adult researcher is likely to adopt in such a situation. At certain times, I might have been perceived by some, though not all, children and adults, as more childlike. I chose to become involved in the playful actions of some children and sat with groups of children when adults were leading group activities. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that the children viewed me as one of them especially as adult members of staff behaved in a similar manner. At the beginning of the day, I provided a lap, a place of comfort, if other adult laps were unavailable. During the day I was a convenient source of help when a number of children needed help with dressing for the outdoors or assistance with the completion of a difficult task. A passing comment from an adult member of staff did suggest that I was considered to be one of them even though I was unable to assist with children's personal care and seemed to have different expectations regarding what some children might be able to do. As a guest within the setting, I felt compelled to behave in the way that adults expected and act as a role model for the children. For much of the time, I was able to maintain a non-authoritarian persona but there were odd occasions when I felt obliged to intervene. I became attached to some of the children and protective of the staff whose work I judged to be physically and emotionally demanding.

During primarily a two year data gathering period (between 2007 and 2009), I made numerous visits to the Nursery (40) when children and adults were going about, what I understood to be, their normal lives. Visits were arranged to ensure coverage of different times of the day, including key transition times, each day of the working week and most months of each academic year. Typically, I began observations early in the morning (often before 9am) before the majority of children had arrived and finished mid afternoon in order to capture the behaviour of parents and children at the beginning and end of the

day. I followed and watched individual and small groups of children during these times when they were constrained within small spaces and also as they freely ranged between indoor and outdoor spaces. I became interested in how they used various materials on their own, alongside or with others. On some occasions, I shared relatively confined spaces with children for the whole of a visit as it was either too hot or too cold to go outside. I listened to and recorded some children's conversations, initiated contact and responded to their interactions. Similarly, I watched and engaged adults in conversation while they supervised areas, delivered planned activities for small groups of children, completed paperwork, changed nappies, fed and comforted children and encouraged individual children to sleep. I sat in close proximity to children when assembled as a group: at the beginning of the day, before lunch and during the early afternoon period of quiet time. On some occasions I shared stories with children, played games with them and joined in their group singing games. I sat with small groups of children when snack was organised as an activity for the whole group at a set time each morning and afternoon. During lunchtimes I sat alongside some children and occasionally helped and encouraged individual children to eat the food that had been provided. As an additional adult, I accompanied children on walks around the farm, within the small village and on outings to the parish church and a local tourist attraction. I briefly made contact with a few other adults, typically children's parents, at the beginning and end of the day and during organised visits. Overtime, I developed an appropriate rapport with individuals and groups of children responding to their requests, as another adult helper, for both attention and help.

The data includes records encompassing a wide time span but the majority of accounts represent identified events which occurred during the daily period of funded education for three and four year old children between 9am and midday. With a few exceptions on certain days, the children remained within the setting over lunch and departed during the middle part of the afternoon. During the study, I became sensitive to non-verbal language which implied a request either by children or adults for time, space or privacy which I sought to respect.

For the most part, the written notes include accounts of observed actions. They represent the discernible, everyday behaviours of selected children and adults at specific times of the day which are presented to represent a personal understanding of their experiences. In most cases, children were operating individually or in very small groups of two or three seemingly unaware of being observed. Adults were solitary but evidently working in association with each

other. Some accounts also include conversations between adults and children but children's emerging language is notoriously difficult for the unfamiliar adult to understand and may, therefore, have been inaccurately recorded. Other significant sounds associated with children's apparent happiness or distress, were noted. Brief references were made to certain smells and the feelings that given events evoked.

Participant observation, a tool which has its origins in ethnographic and sociological studies of populations (Paterson et al, 2003), provided a relatively consistent yet flexible research tool through which I was able to capture information about human behaviour (adults and children) in a natural context on a number of different occasions. I might have chosen to ask participants to explain what they do and why they do it but in addition to the difficulties associated with making myself understandable to a group of young children and interpreting their non-verbal as well as verbal responses, I was unsure that I could rely on what 'people' said. I attempted to immerse myself in the culture through regular visits over an extended period of time and adopted, primarily, one 'general role' (Kluckhohn, 1940) - an adult helper - to promote acceptance by the group but I intentionally remained, to some extent at least, an outsider looking in. While skills developed as a mother, teacher and tutor provided access to the role of the adult worker and, to a lesser extent, the manager, full participation within this small community and, therefore, a comprehensive understanding of their life, was limited by mechanisms in place to safeguard children, an inability to adopt a child-like role and the community's awareness of my overall, investigative purpose. Nevertheless, I believed that data generated mainly from participant observation, rather than direct questioning, was more likely to produce a richer portrayal of what life for children in this social situation was really like. However, this may not necessarily have been the case as steps were clearly taken, by both adults and children, particularly at the beginning of the study when I was unfamiliar with the situation and attempting to build trust, to ensure that socially and culturally acceptable ways of being were seen. I had identified myself as a researcher (through the introductory information provided), began to behave as one (using a notebook, pencil and camera) and was seemingly viewed as such by both adults and selected children. As the study progressed, adults and children appeared to form a modified image of my role. I was still the researcher but in certain situations I became useful - another pair of hands - but as I participated to a limited degree in the life of the setting I could only realistically and effectively 'sample' the actions of some children who, unintentionally, began to represent the actions of the whole group.

For the most part, the observational data illustrates the more obvious acts of a group of children who happened to be present on the days that I visited the setting. Fortunately, an inability to completely immerse myself in the situation provided a necessary social distance to consider the interrelationship between a local situation, whose value appears to have been ignored or dismissed and a more global agenda concerned with the development and extension of before school provision. However, having 'carved a [specific and feasible] place' (Lohman, 1937) but avoiding particular allegiances (Viditch, 1955), I may not have been able to portray an unbiased view of the local situation. Unlike a stranger, I was and was known to be relatively familiar with this context and consequently unable to exploit the situation from a position of total ignorance. Adult workers were understandably reticent when directly approached for information and, without exception, unprepared to offer a personal opinion. From a community as well as a personal perspective, becoming an adult helper, for some of the time, was a comfortable, acceptable and plausible role to adopt. Children, who were familiar with changes in staffing and the presence of unknown adults and increasingly, I suspect, unclear about my intentions, seemed to accept my presence and brief but common forms of adult involvement. Through my own experience, I was able to obtain a relatively vivid but incomplete picture of the adult's role and a related impression of children's behaviours. On the whole, interpretations are meanings I have ascribed to the actions of adults and children from a position of observer as well as participant.

There are notable omissions in data which is characteristically couched or prefixed in uncertain terms. My intention was to use observation and participant observation to avoid preconceived notions and record the habitual, unremarkable activities of adults and children but it seems that I may have naturally focussed on the more unusual, the relatively rare, the most noticeable and that which could most easily be recorded (Lohman, 1937). Behaviour during quiet time, a period immediately after the mid day meal, is one of the most obvious examples in which I appear to have selected those that were socially marginal to act as a 'bridge' (Vidich, 1955) in order to achieve an understanding of this particular social situation. Whereas the majority of children appeared to accept the situation - they slept or lay quietly - a small number did not. In reality, I was able to record the actions of a small number of children, possibly because these behaviours at the time appeared more obvious and possibly more interesting, rather than the larger number. That's not to say, however, that the majority complied with the established requirements. Rather, it is a possible reflection of the limitations of the method when used in a group

situation. Inevitably, choices have to be made not only about who or who should not be observed but also about the type of information that is recorded. In other situations, I instinctively used my own experience and knowledge of the situation as the 'bridge' to gain an understanding of the data.

On many occasions but especially during times of transition when a number of children were moving in unpredictable ways, I made fairly instantaneous decisions not only about where to look but also what and how to record. While these observations were dependent upon the ethical requirements I had established and informed but not necessarily determined by the themes that began to emerge, practical issues had to be considered. On the one hand it was feasible to attempt to record a 'thick' description of a stationary, individual child when they were engaged in an clearly identifiable form of behaviour but it soon became apparent that a relatively 'thin' or overarching view of a number of children's behaviours, compounded by a tendency to work alongside rather than with each other, was all that was normally possible even when a form of short hand was used. Typically, periods of compiling notes in the field were interspersed with times for movement, checking, reflection and discussion when significant behaviours may have been missed and further choices were made regarding what and what not to observe.

Besides the information gained through observation and participation, photographic evidence; single, quickly taken images, which became an indispensable aid, were a reminder of what had happened when my notes were indecipherable or inadequate but they could only offer a narrow snapshot of obvious actions. Video distracted children's concentration potentially providing once the tedious and time consuming business of translation was completed, an extremely detailed but not, necessarily, a meaningful record of children's actions. Both methods were useful additional tools but I initially assumed that the community would behave naturally in spite of the artificial environment. It soon became clear that technology, as well as human presence, may have stimulated unusual forms of behaviour the emergence of which I attempted to minimise by frequent visits over a two year period but each of these visits had to be planned in advance and approved by the owner of the nursery. I have, however, concluded that while I may have created the 'right boundary conditions' (Kroes, 1994) for the expression of these behaviours and, by implication, related phenomena, it seems unlikely that involvement would have created the specific characteristics of particular behaviours which I believed were a 'natural' consequence of or a reaction by capable individuals to the

constructed and structured environment. As the study progressed, it became defined but also constrained by certain identifiable phenomena. As described in the following section, I used these characteristics as though they were tools to both analyse data and determine, to some extent, the direction the study took.

Ethically, I was limited to studying an identified but changing sample of children and restricted in some cases to recording their actions as short written notes. While I was not obliged to do so, I made considered judgements about what I was prepared to make public and what I felt should remain private. During the principle data gathering period, spanning over two years, I made frequent visits and consequently recorded numerous incidents which were developed into many pages of mainly descriptive text. A relatively small proportion of these extracts were selected to illustrate a point of view and where these have been used these 'snippets' of action may fail to sufficiently convey either the behaviour or the specific context in which the information was recorded. My ultimate goal was to interpret as well as describe the cultural practices but these may not always have corresponded with the interpretations of either adults or children and I have come to accept that these actions may well represent what individuals in a local situation 'can do' rather than what they 'would like to do' (Lohman, 1937) as well as what they were happy to reveal. While I endeavoured to check my interpretations with adults and the repetitious nature of children's behaviours seemed to mark them as being realistic and significant, I did not attempt to determine the meanings children associated with these events. Consequently, this work might be viewed as a personal and subjective account of my experience as a socially marginalised (Viditch, 1955) participant observer rather than an objective report of daily life.

Data analysis

Using an approach similar to that described by Becker (1958), data was systematically analysed whilst in the field as well as when the field work had been completed. Having adopted participant observation as the major method of investigation it afforded, according to Becker et al (1977), a number of opportunities. Not only was I able to discover what things were important to the people I was studying but could also 'follow up the interconnections of those phenomena' (p23) and develop and revise models of the organisation and its processes by incorporating phenomena that were encountered on subsequent visits to the field.

As the first step in a staged process of data analysis, I began by noting the occurrence of identifiable events. Subsequent analytical phases were used to explore the nature of these events in more detail and determine their frequency and possible distribution. An initial writing up stage was used to collate ideas and explore the connections between related phenomena. A final writing stage drew upon theoretical ideas to consider the significance of these findings in relation to what is known about these events. By way of an example, a following account illustrates the method used.

Selection and definition of events and phenomena

Beginning with brief observational notes recorded in the field, fuller descriptive accounts were developed more or less immediately after each visit. Using still and video images to prompt memory, I experimented with different ways of extending field notes into detailed accounts. Eventually, I chose a very simple, chronological approach with incidents recorded in association with the time of the day. Adding an overall title to the account as well as sub-titles for individually timed incidents acted as an initial form of analysis as did comments (in comment boxes) at the side of the text.

These comments proved to be useful pointers identifying, as they did, that an event had occurred or a phenomena existed. In an iterative manner, they influenced but did not necessarily determine the phenomena I chose to investigate on subsequent occasions as other interesting events often, unexpectedly, occurred. The following instance involving three individual children, who, to different degrees, were reluctant to be separated from their respective parents, prompted further consideration of the way in which children behaved on entry to the Nursery. Though some children were evidently disturbed on entry, it initially seemed that a number of children were not. I assumed that separation from a parent or carer was the cause of this anxiety but also began to look for other possible reasons for this distress.

> 08.50
> *W (3) was upset when separated from his dad but he was easily distracted and quickly settled down to play with toys from a box close to N and J. Soon after this, the noise from another crying child could be heard which was noted by a number of children as well as adults.*
> Field note, September 2008

It became clear that other children displayed less obvious, recurring patterns of behaviour on daily entry to the Nursery. These repetitive and varied actions were specific to individual children but characteristically involved the use of objects. Some of these transitional objects had been brought from home; the setting made others available to the children.

Frequency and distribution of phenomena

Having identified the existence of two apparently contrasting phenomena, distress or comfort on entry to the Nursery, I investigated the commonality of these conditions. At the same time, I noted the way in which adults responded to children's distress. I discovered that distress was 'typically' associated with a number of boys who, irrespective of their age or time spent in the Nursery, were reluctant to be separated from a primary carer at the beginning of the day. Girls appeared to be more accepting or more comfortable with the situation but some immediately chose intimate contact with a member of staff. Adults consistently used selective strategies, based on their knowledge of individual children, to reduce children's distress. Some of the older boys, generally between three and four year of age, arrived carrying objects from home. Other children, again mainly boys, used objects provided by the Nursery in repetitive, predictable ways. Conversations with members of staff confirmed that separation from a parent or carer was difficult for some children and that certain children displayed unique behaviours on entry.

Construction of social system models

Analysis of subsequent data revealed a range of coping behaviours. Although a minority displayed obvious forms of distress, others relied on the presence of other children, supporting adults or objects to ease the transitional process. A few children chose to find a quiet space in which to dwell for a few moments. On the whole, adults deployed effective strategies which seemingly reduced children's anxiety and supported eventual adjustment to the situation.

Final analysis and the presentation of results

During the initial reporting stage, I began to consider the role of objects in children's adjustment to the social conditions of the Nursery. At the beginning it appeared that children were unable to influence the nature of their experience. It soon became clear that with help from primary carers, who, presumably,

either supplied or agreed that objects could be used, that they could act independently to support daily adjustment. Whilst the primary purposes of their behaviour would seem to have been adjustment to the processes and procedure of the setting, it became evident that objects were used, in some cases, to gain acceptance from other, seemingly dominate children. The literature provides evidence of children's use of objects as the means by which they learn to 'fit in' with organisational requirements. I have been unable to find supporting evidence which links object use with the need to 'fit in' with other children.

While acting as a participant observer is 'likely' to have determined what I saw (Vidich, 1955) within the Nursery and hence the data collected, final interpretations as presented in the following chapters have clearly been influenced by the theoretical ideas I have chosen to adopt. Although developmental theory has been used as a set of core ideas to explain certain underlying phenomena, alternative ideas have been deliberately used to emphasis the social and cultural aspects of children's experience.

Influential factors

Each chapter contains a number of extracts of extended field work data structured around identified ideas. Conscious of the need to preserve the anonymity of the setting and individual participants certain formalities have been applied. The setting is referred to as a nursery in a shire county. Field notes contain the names of individual children and adults but extracts from 'developed' accounts included within this more public document contain alternative names or initial letters. Numbers in brackets alongside a child's name or a letter represent, approximately, the age of the child at that time. In most cases, adult actions are deliberately represented as collective accounts to protect individual identity given they made up a small staff team. Photographic evidence of children has been included if identity has not been revealed.

I have attempted to explain the systematic manner in which data was analysed during and after the field work period but it seems necessary to recognise factors that contributed to the identification and focus upon specific phenomena. For instance, I was aware of the significance of studies of maternal attachment and how these ideas have generally been used to both support and criticise early childcare. Other studies have investigated whether early childcare increases the likelihood of children developing subsequent behaviour problems.

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project - a large scale longitudinal research study on the effectiveness of education in the early years - has been used as an 'evidential base' to guide government policy regarding the characteristics of effective practice (Sylva and Pugh, 2005). Significantly, the EPPE study reaffirmed the overall impact of pre-school education on children's development in addition to demonstrating enhanced benefits for disadvantaged children especially when childcare experience started 'early'. Quality, as measured using a particular indicator, was demonstrated to be related to the level of staff qualifications. Teaching, the provision of an instructive learning environment and interactions described as 'sustained shared thinking', proved to be significant characteristics of effective early years practice. The Foundation Stage Curriculum and associated guidance (DfES, 2007), incorporating requirements for the youngest children, became the framework for all practitioners working with young children. I was aware of the underpinning, inclusive philosophy of this curriculum to provide 'unique and individual experiences' for children and the on-going debate regarding the needs of boys who were being outperformed by girls in core curricular subjects at later stages in their education.

Consequently, what appears at first to be a purely subjective choice of foci was founded upon theoretical knowledge, mainly linked to developmental psychology and an awareness of certain, contemporary issues associated with young children's early education and their care. I became concerned about children who were distressed at the start of each day assuming, initially, that this was a problem associated with strong attachment to a primary carer giver. Certain children, who displayed more obvious but not necessarily inappropriate forms of behaviour, also became the focus of my attention. I was interested to establish whether a requirement to develop sustained interactions with individuals and groups of children was a feasible strategy in a situation which was dominated by the need to care as well as educate a dependent group of young children. Many of the accounts relate to older, active boys. Few are associated with girls or those who demonstrated 'quieter' forms of behaviour.

In an attempt to review the validity of some of my findings I sought adult opinion during unplanned, informal conversations to verify my interpretations of phenomena relating to individual children. Given my association with the Manager and academic background I may have been perceived initially to be the more powerful if not the most knowledgeable one. It appears reasonable to suggest that the adult members of staff may have been influenced by this

presumed position but I have no evidence to suggest that this was in fact the case. Part way through the study I provided the adults, who had appeared to become concerned about how they were being represented, with a preliminary account of some of my findings. Similar feedback was provided to parents.

The significance of certain characteristics, whether associated with adults or children, was determined by their re-occurrence. So, for example, there were a number of occasions when individual children were disturbed after separation from a parent at the beginning of the day. I observed adults using similar strategies to comfort children and there were several occasions when individual children repeatedly used what appeared to be 'favourite' resources in similar ways.

I had acquired permission to study a number of children but it was impossible, as they were effectively encouraged to be active and independent for much of the day, to study all the children at any one time. It was possible to select an 'incident or event of interest' to focus upon at the beginning and end of each day involving a small number of children. As daily attendance increased I focussed on groups of children returning where possible to individuals once they had settled on a self-chosen task or were sat at tables to eat a snack or lunch. I was free to move and therefore follow children as they moved within the available interconnecting spaces but I deliberately refrained from making observations of children and adults when care routines were being completed in private spaces.

During a period of between two and three years I observed and documented the life of one early years setting with the aim of establishing what adults and children do. The intention of this focus was to collect neutral information but it became clear that the data may well have been 'tainted' by my own personal interests and the motives of the principal 'active' participants. I deliberately became involved in the situation to gather information and understand the situation primarily from the adult worker perspective. Conscious of the need to maintain a level objectivity, I refrained from involvement in the more informal aspects of the situation.

Informed by philosophical ideas about the social construction of reality and an assumption that a view is from 'somewhere' rather than 'nowhere' the following six chapters are illustrative accounts of this 'island'. They are based on field notes collected during a sustained period of involvement with the human

participants of this privately owned, publically funded early years' setting originally established to provide educational experiences for three to five year old children using a specific pedagogical approach.

Using Goffman's frame analytical view point, Puroilla (2007) attempted to account for 'how and why' Finnish early childhood educators 'behaved, interacted and organised themselves in particular ways' (p33). As she explains, different sociological traditions emphasise either macro level phenomena (groups of people, social structures and societies) or micro level phenomena (face to face conduct, self-identity and individual subjective experiences) but some theoretical ideas make a link between the individual and society. While Goffman was 'mainly interested in studying micro-level phenomena', he contended that contextually dependent frames 'serve as an interface between the individual and the community' (p34). Social reality and everyday social life are pre-constructed and become evident to each individual via frames.

As an initial step in attempting to understand what was going on in the Nursery, the first of the following chapters explores how the Manager and owner of the Nursery 'put to work' the frames that organise the practice of early childhood work. Although frames are powerful in patterning people's understanding and action in social life, their power is not absolute. The Manager actions were evidently influenced by but not determined by these frames. Similarly, she was unable to determine the actions of others but stimulated a number of possible ways of acting. I begin by considering the controlling nature of the socio-spatial practices before exploring children's experiences at the boundary between their private and public worlds. Subsequent chapters emphasise the various ways in which some children attempted and attained a degree of control. By way of a summary, the final chapter considers the manner in which the childhood experience in this nursery was constructed by these frames, or what others have described as dominant discourses (Dahlberg et al, 2006), structured by adult practitioners and modified by capable young children.

3 SPATIAL TACTICS

Government has been described as the 'conduct of conduct' but, as 'conduct' can be ascribed with a number of meanings, a possibly more useful, although simple, definition is 'any attempt to shape with some degree of deliberation aspects of our behaviour according to particular sets of norms for a variety of ends' (Dean, 1999: 10). The definition presupposes that the act of governing is a rational or calculated activity - a form of thinking - associated with how things are or how they ought to be (p11). To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others' and it does so, in part, through the introduction of new discourses – new mentalities – through which subjects will take themselves up as the newly appropriate and appropriated subjects of the new social order (Davies and Bansel, 2007).

Studies of the 'conduct of conduct', often referred to as governmentality, have identified the underlying rationalities of practices designed to shape the actions of individuals and populations as well as enable individuals to govern their own and others' behaviours (Pike, 2008). During the time of this study, the overall operational efficiency of the Nursery continued to act as a 'code which rules ways of doing things' (Foucault, 1991: 79 cited in Huxley, 2006: 771) but different 'truths' (Davies and Bansel, 2007), mentalities or rationalities, provided justification for changes and modifications to the 'fields of action' (Foucault, 1994 in Davies and Bansel, 2007).

Having adopted the perspective of social constructionism, I came to regard the Nursery, the whole, as a 'depository' of 'political rationalities' (Hultqvist, 1998) that had determined the social function of early childhood education. Similarly, I viewed the Nursery's related system of interrelated and divided spaces, containing various material items, as a local translation of certain 'truths'. They were understandings that acted as an initial layer of governance (Ailwood, 2008) steering particular conceptualisations of 'the preschool child'.

As Barbara Beatty (1995) explains in her account of the development of early education, the idea of extra familial programmes for the young, differing from those for older children, has a long history. Perhaps, most significantly, it was during the seventeenth century when, according to 'Philippe Aries and other modern scholars', childhood was first conceived as a 'unique life stage requiring special care and treatment', that certain protestant ministers, philosophers and educators began to advocate and develop more 'child-centred, naturalistic

approaches to education and child rearing'. But these pioneers, involved as they were in the education of children from affluent parents, promoted and supported education inside rather than outside the home. It was to be the early part of the nineteenth century before the first institutionalized extra familial educational programmes were developed by social reformers, possibly with self-interest in mind, for children of the poor, rather than the rich. As infant schools they were 'intended for and first used with children from the lower classes' but 'upper-class European parents soon began to think' that this provision 'might benefit their own children'. Infant schools were opened for affluent children but there remained a general consensus that although experiences outside of the home would benefit 'young children from poor families', it was unclear whether similar experiences were 'good for children from higher-class backgrounds' (p1-2).

Besides an early opposition to schooling young children outside of the home, Barbara Beatty (1995) draws attention to a number of recurrent themes about early education that have continued to this day. As well as emphasising the potentially damaging effects of excessive education, naturalistic tropes have been used to advocate educating the young child in a particular way but there have been some differences in how and what was hoped would be achieved. Of those who might be regarded as the earliest pioneers of early education, John Locke (1632-1704), for instance, was intent on raising a self-governing 'civilized, rational English gentleman' whereas Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) wished to develop 'an unfettered, natural citizen'. None the less, both emphasised the importance of informal experiences which, when taken up at a later date by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's (1746-1827), became a model for extra familial schooling. A model based upon a 'truth' that the child can learn through the manipulation of objects on their own or in association with others.

This chapter begins by considering the rationalities underpinning the development of the whole before examining how spaces and materials represented certain notions of what children are, can be and should be. As Huxley (2006) explains, a number of academics from the field of education, as well as other disciplines, have drawn upon various facets of Foucault's (1991) notion of 'governmentality' to illustrate how the individual is socially constructed by specific regulatory techniques (Holligan, 1999). Power was wielded upon the general liberal assumption that 'the child has two affiliations: on the one hand, the world of culture, and on the other, that of nature' (Hultqvist, 1998: 92).

Social function - supporting maternal employment

'The Nursery', as it was commonly referred to by staff, parents and children, was established in November 1999 as a privately owned Montessori Nursery. Its short history is representative of unprecedented political interest and subsequent expansion in 'out of home' preschool provision for children in the UK during the last fifteen years. At the end of the twentieth century, provision for children under five in the United Kingdom was considered, at best, to be 'fragmented and ad hoc in nature' (Alexander, 1995). In 1997, when a labour government was elected, there was an 'uneven patchwork of many kinds of early education and care services particularly outside urban areas. Around 1% of children had access to centre-based childcare' provided, for the most, by the private and voluntary sector' (Penn, 2007:194). A small proportion of UK local authorities primarily provided part time nursery education for vulnerable children. Private and voluntary provision was available in some areas but children's attendance was determined by parents' ability to pay. In response to the absence of nursery education, or to supplement this form of provision, 'many' local authorities reduced the school starting age from five to four (Penn, 1995).

Even though the view commonly held by the early years' community was that early education was a cost effective approach, as children would perform better at school, justification for the cost effectiveness of nursery provision, put forward by the European Commission Childcare Network, was based on the premise of immediate rather than future benefits. The European aim was to provide women with equality of opportunity: a mother would be able to continue in employment, at their position in the workforce, after the birth of children. In response to this aim, a number of European countries established care and educational services for children from 'any age up to five or even six or seven years'. Access to or continued maternal employment would seem to have been the primary aim, but the development by these countries of national and local educational frameworks is said to reflect a comparable belief in the social as well as educational benefits of early education. In 2002, the Barcelona Council called for European Union states to provide, by 2010, extensive childcare for children: 90% of those between three and the statutory school starting age; 33% of children under three (West et al, 2010).

The introduction and later extension, by a Conservative government, of a nursery voucher scheme (1996-1998), marked the beginning in expansion of

provision for children before the start of formal schooling in the United Kingdom. Parents of 'eligible children' were able to use the vouchers to 'purchase' a free part time pre-school place for their children from a range of providers (West et al, 2010) but the majority of parents were still required to pay. The labour government replaced the voucher scheme with firstly an entitlement for all four year olds (1998) and then all three and four years old (2004) 'to a free part time nursery education place for the three terms prior to compulsory education' (p159). Funded places were initially for 12.5 hours each week, 38 weeks of the year. In September 2010, the number of hours was extended to 15 hours each week with an expectation that these hours would be 'flexible' (DfE, 2010). Provision is now available for some 'targeted' 2 year olds (Lloyd and Penn, 2010).

Reports published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) between 2000 and 2006 emphasised the redistributive benefits of universal services for young children and the financial advantage to the state of increasing maternal employment. Recommendations provided by the OECD - childcare tax credits for working mothers and disincentives for single mothers - provided direction for the labour government (Penn, 2007). Although a report issued by the Education and Training Directorate of the OECD 'argued that a privatised system of childcare whereby mothers bought the childcare they preferred, would almost certainly lead to an increase in social stratification' (p193), increased supply of childcare has been provided by the private rather than the public sector. A National Childcare Strategy was established in the UK, with support from significant politicians, which reflected continued influential feminist demands for childcare places and a shift in labour policy to reduce individual reliance on the welfare state.

Rather than expanding discretionary part-time local authority provision, the labour government developed strategies (Sure Start and Children's Centres) to support children in poverty and relaxed the regulations so that nursery education for four and then three year old children could be provided by a range of other providers so long as a prescribed, regulatory curriculum was followed. In 2006, approximately 78% of the nursery market was provided by the private, for profit sector with the corporate share ('chains' of nurseries), compared to sole traders/partnerships, being slightly larger. The voluntary and public sector each provided another 11%.

Childcare places have expanded but numbers of mothers in the workforce are not significantly greater (Penn, 2007). In 2009, child poverty in the UK remained at a relatively high rate (Lloyd and Penn, 2010) and a number of nurseries had closed (Penn, 2007). There has been an unprecedented interest in early years' services in recent years and an associated expansion of provision but high quality remains associated with certain maintained sector providers where qualified teachers are employed and resources may be pooled (West et al, 2010). In 2005, 80% UK pre-primary children (three and four year olds) were in education but public expenditure (0.4% GDP) was relatively low compared to many other member states. By 2009/2010, 95% of three and four year old children in the UK were 'benefiting' from some form of early education (DfE, 2010).

Supported but evidently constrained by European Union funding for the development of redundant farm buildings, financial help from her family as well as various physical parameters relating to its location, the owner converted an old, single storey, brick built cart shed and adjoining barn to provide a 'suitable' space and place for this early years' setting. Commercially, the Nursery was well positioned to respond to the needs of an expanding market stimulated by government policy aligned to Gidden's view of a 'future orientated social investment state' (Penn, 2007). At a time when provision for children in the local area was limited to, mainly, voluntary informal provision, the managing owner, initially chose to supply and meet demand for a relatively formalised educational experience for three to five year old children.

Maintaining financial viability, in an unevenly funded market, given the requirement to provide a substitute home reproducing, as closely as possible, the maternal model of care (Dahlberg et al, 2006), was an on-going concern. Parents may have been able to pay but the availability of funding for four and, later, four and three year old children ensured a steady stream of guaranteed but, what was considered to be, insufficient state revenue. This funding, described by West et al (2010) as 'a quasi-voucher with a set value (determined at a local level)', was paid by the local authority, who were responsible for ensuring that there was sufficient provision for parents in their area. Other forms of funding for early years education and care became available for certain working parents on a low income, single parents and those in education and training. Direct support was also available from employers in the form of childcare vouchers which, up to a certain value, were exempt from tax and national insurance contributions. Although now abandoned, a requirement at

the time to employ 'a new category of staff' (West et al, 2010) – the Early Years Professional (EYP) - also caused some anxiety. Nevertheless, the Nursery maintained financial viability, presumably through receipt of additional fees for additional hours of care and some fund raising, during a period of 'considerable turnover of providers, and abrupt closure of nurseries' (Penn, 2007).

Situated, as it was and still is, alongside an attractive old farmhouse and within a complex of traditional and modern farm buildings, the Nursery offered and continues to offer its clients, adults not children, a particular branded product and service delivered in a unique, 'natural' location. On cold or wet winter mornings, the situation could appear quite drab but the presence of moving as well as stationary farm machinery and the possibility of glimpsing one of the more unusual animals (pigmy goats and woolly pigs) provided points of interest for adults as well as children. As well as the site for a farm shop, the immediate area also provided a potentially idealistic and useful resource. Occasional visits were arranged for the children to see the range of animals kept on the farm and to purchase fruit from the farm shop. The nature of the 'product' and its association with a local, respected farming family became known to those in the local area and although advertising was selectively used to attract new business, personal recommendation appeared to be the source of most new customers who were drawn from the surrounding rural community. Overall, the 'natural' location may have acted as a useful selling point but certain, consequential conditions, especially during winter months, had to be tolerated or ignored.

Although visibility from the road was obscured by the farmhouse and its front garden, the Nursery was clearly signposted off a narrow road and located within a short distance of significant major roads, a market town and a train station with a direct service into London. As well as proximity to significant travel networks, providing an adequate, safe and convenient parking space accessible to parents (usually mothers), who were either on their way to work or dropping older children at local schools, was evidently an important business priority. An area of the farmhouse garden, immediately opposite the entrance to the Nursery, was a handy place for parents to park but shared use of this small space created difficulties for the occupants of the farmhouse. At a later date, a hard surfaced parking area, accessed via a farm track, became a useful but possibly less convenient specific space where both parents and staff were permitted to park. This parking space was also limited and congested at the beginning and end of each day but it could be discreetly monitored from within

the Nursery building. As well as providing an effective and relatively 'safe' boundary between the Nursery and the working part of the farm, parents using this area could avoid the characteristic pot holes, inevitable puddles of water and muddy patches created by heavy machinery that used the adjoining farm track. Nevertheless, as the following example is intended to illustrate, some parents, burdened with a child, or children as well as a number of bulky items (lunch, water bottle, change of clothing, special toy), were prepared to accept certain difficulties, even when they were able to park close to the building, so that their child or children could be part of this particular type of experience. In some cases, parents were carrying younger children while ensuring that an older child safely reached the Nursery.

> *Glancing out of the building towards the car park, I happened to notice a large vehicle (people carrier) parked extremely close to the building. Once she got out, I realised it was one of the parents – the mother of the triplets. Leaving two of the children secured within the vehicle, the parent removed the third child from the car and carried her the short distance into the building. She physically handed the child over to one of the junior members of staff before immediately retracing her steps and collecting the other two children (one in each arm) from the car. On returning to the building, the parent was greeted by another member of staff who, seemingly more aware of her plight, took one of the children from her.*
> Field note, November 2008

Social function - balancing education and care

At the beginning of this study (November 2007), the internal space of the Nursery had been simply arranged as a number of interconnected rooms at ground level distinguishable by layout, materials and the associated functions that these afforded. The two main public rooms, referred to as the classroom and the playroom were, as the identifiers suggest, deliberately arranged as formal and informal spaces – one for learning and the other for play. By necessity, each of the two principle indoor rooms fulfilled a number of predetermined but related functions that shaped the conduct of adults and children. Although of a comparable size, in terms of floor space, these rooms looked, felt and were regarded rather differently. While the low ceiling classroom, at the front of the building, frequently seen by parents at the beginning and the end of the day, was a generally warm but dimly lit rectangular space, the other significant space at the back of the building, with its higher

ceiling and larger areas of glazing, was brighter but often felt cold and distinctly uninviting when not being used. Practically, given the predominantly durable floor surface, this second room was a more suitable environment for craft type activities but especially those involving water, glue and paint. But covered, as it was, with a durable area of laminate flooring, the classroom could also be easily maintained and kept clean in the event of inevitable accidents involving food or bodily waste. Each room was predominately a hard, durable space but small, designated areas were 'softened' with less resilient furniture and furnishings.

THE BEGINNING
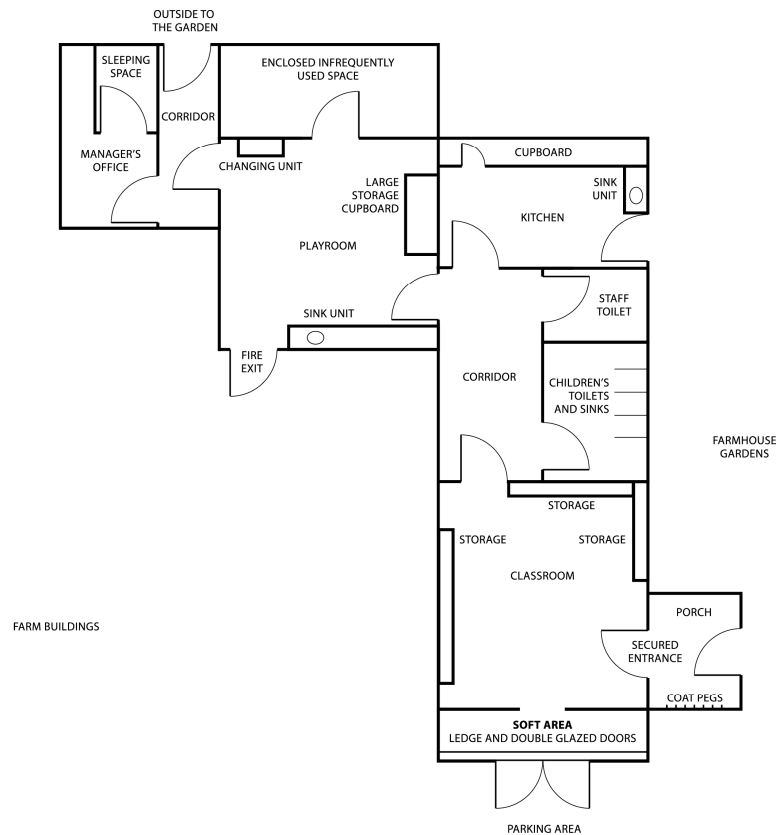
Indicative of the adopted philosophical approach, much of the 'work' of the Nursery, at this time, took place in the first of these two public spaces. Although popular with the children, access to the playroom was limited and tightly controlled by adults and used for what were regarded as inferior types of activities. Other rooms were essential ancillary 'caring' but less visible spaces for relatively independent, mobile three to five year old children and supporting adults who inhabited the constructed and structured spaces for a few hours each day. Small 'back' regions - a staff toilet and a kitchen primarily and occasionally used by adults for the preparation of simple foods - provided adults with brief moments of privacy. Similarly, a relatively invisible area of child-sized

toilets, located adjacent to the principle room, allowed for and encouraged children to take personal responsibility for individual actions.

Changes in spaces initially accommodated the needs of a few younger, more vulnerable children. The floor of the staff toilet was commandeered as space where children wearing nappies could be individually changed with difficulty but some degree of privacy. A space at the back of the building, adjoining the office, provided a quiet place for a child to sleep in a cot. The office, tucked away beyond an infrequently used playroom, was a private place for the Manager's administrative duties but it also provided a space for confidential meetings with parents and other professionals. Part of the farmhouse garden, accessed from the rear of the building, was used as an outdoor space but mainly during summer months.
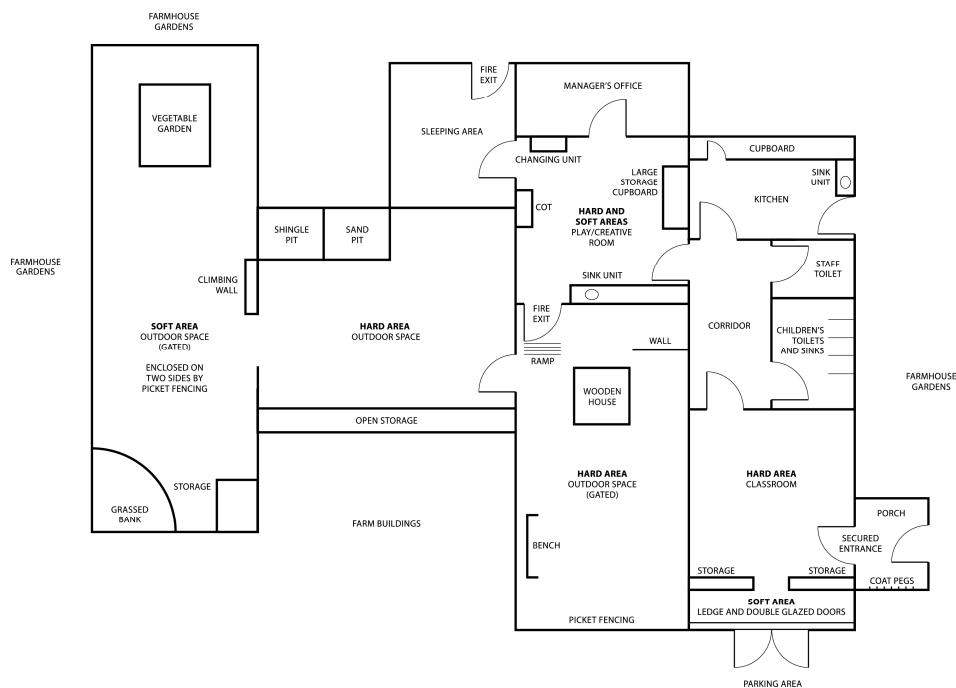
Evolving in parallel with a heightened political interest in provision for young children and, seemingly, a changing perception of what a 'good' childhood means, the second of the principle rooms, now known as the creative room, achieved greater importance. Part of the car park became a temporary outdoor space before three contrasting dedicated but linked areas, accessible from the second room, were created for children's outdoor activities throughout the day.

In contrast, increasing numbers of younger children, some as young as six months old, necessitated the creation of additional, safe 'caring' indoor spaces. A narrow corridor at the back of the building, previously lined with shelves storing outdoor clothing, was modified to provide a confined space for two cots arranged one behind the other in an area adjoining the Manager's office. Attempts were made to soften the sleeping space and create a 'homely' feel using drapes of fabric hung from the back door and the ceiling above the cots.
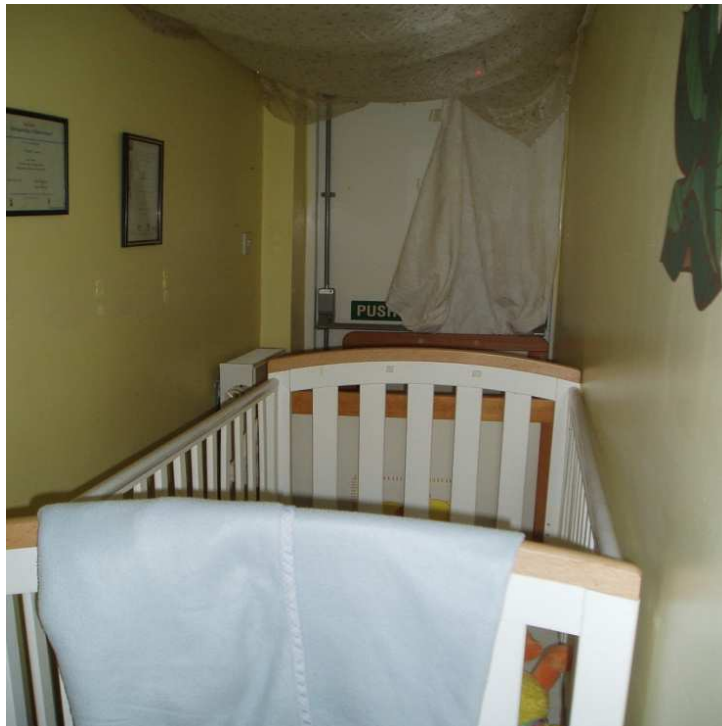
A dedicated space off the informal room arranged to accommodate children (one behind the other) who may need to sleep at any time.
December 2010

When the Manager's office was relocated to an underused area, the sleeping space was extended to match increasing demand. The kitchen, a room where children had been prohibited from entering, on safety grounds, temporarily, by way of an experiment, became the place where children were served a morning snack. With the exception of the sleeping areas, which were monitored by intercom, spaces were carefully managed to minimise risk and ensure that children could be viewed by adults at all times. For much of the time, adults and their actions were clearly visible to both children and other adults.

Maintaining operational efficiency in a highly regulated environment

Besides being the main entrance used by members of staff, children, parents and visitors to gain daily access in and out of a secured area, the porch was arranged to fulfil two other essential, organisational functions associated with

children's daily movement between a private and public life. It was evident, from the row of labelled hooks on the left hand side, that it had been set aside as a space for mass storage; storage of clothing and various belongings deemed, by the Nursery, to be necessary for the time children spent in this institutionalised environment. As well as a coat, items commonly referred to as 'belongings', usually included a bag of essential personal items and, 'hopefully', a change of clothing.

A corner of the porch area adjacent to an internally secured door where children's belongings are stored on labelled pegs at adult height. Bags containing a range of items are hung on pegs or left on the floor. As well as individual names, photographs are used to help recognition.
May 2008

Parents were expected to supply these set items and, rather than children, to hang or position them on or beneath a hook, designated by name and photograph, for their child. There was evidently an intention to individualise the process but whether or not parents had made these so called necessary 'things' available was clearly visible and on 'busy', winter days these shared pegs were overloaded with coats, hats and bags. The aim, as evident from the height of the pegs, was to make these standardised items readily accessible to members of staff, rather than children, throughout the day and, hence, contribute to the efficient operation of the service. Similarly, 'docile' parents conformed to the

imposed requirements by placing their child's lunch, brought from home, in a large fridge/freezer immediately to the left of the door. While the primary intention was, presumably, to ensure that food was safe to eat later in the day, the process evidently supported the work of the Nursery as well as the needs of the individual child.

The porch also acted as an information point for parents contributing to the maintenance of order desired by the Nursery to demonstrate compliance with 'powerful' external discourses enshrined within national requirements deemed to protect children from unknown adults and hazardous practices. Named photographs identified legitimate, 'responsible' adults and their associated role (the Manager, Deputy Manager and assistant members of staff) and, by default, those who were not. A range of notices and documents related generally, as well as specifically, to the care of young children while attending the Nursery. In particular, a folder of policy documents informed parents, if they chose to view them in sight of others, of the procedures members of staff were expected to adhere to in given situations and, in certain cases, what they, as parents, were also expected to do.

This was evidently the 'public' but, as illustrated by members of the owner's family not, necessarily, the most convenient entrance to the Nursery. An insecure kitchen door at the rear of the Nursery building was frequently used by the owner as well as certain members of her family who were seemingly able or permitted to circumvent the rules. It was a particularly handy access point for the owner's mother who provided a hot tea for some of the children. At certain times, direct access to the Nursery could also be gained through one of the outdoor gated areas off the main parking area but this was locked and manned by staff when children were using the area.

Clearly known to a number of the children, I assumed that the owner's mother was a frequent visitor. Her intentions appeared to be at least two fold: to monitor the activities of the Nursery and provide the adults, particularly her daughter, when necessary, with emotional rather than physical support. Known, as were members of the family, to many in the local community, her presence possibly provided parents with additional confidence regarding the quality of care being provided by relatively young members of staff.

Although the small porch was the official point of entry in most cases, the daily life of the setting began in the adjacent (classroom) space once access had

been achieved. Invoking their responsibilities to maintain children's safety and security, the Nursery controlled access to the first room through a secured, half glazed door. Partially visible to those on the other side of the door, parents and visitors were regulated by the standardised entry procedure. Using the security pad at the top of the door beyond the reach of small children, parents and visitors announced their arrival to those in the classroom. A member of staff, effectively 'policing' the door, decided on whether or not entry should be allowed. Once inside, the 'responsible' person in relation to legally imposed welfare requirements, the Manager of the Nursery in this case, ensured that parents, staff and visitors used the established registration procedure. Thus the Nursery was able, if need be, to demonstrate compliance with legislated staff to children ratios and provide a record of attendance in the event of a fire or an accident.

Social function - preparation for formal schooling

This first room, the 'classroom', was dominated by a large display board covering the full length of one of the two longest walls.

Summertime labelled display of children's work on wall opposite main entrance with open shelving beneath containing specific Sensorial Activities. *November, 2008*

Positioned at a height clearly visible to adults, rather than children, as they entered the room from the secured door, the board displayed information about certain themes or topics, either completed or being studied, which conveyed a narrow or fixed conceptualisation of certain facts. By implication, it also communicated the overall purpose of this room.

While early childhood education and care can be constructed in multiple ways (Wong, 2007), the early childhood institution has been framed or socially constructed as both a 'producer' as well as a 'business'. From this modern perspective, the child is considered to be a 'unified, reified and essentialised subject' who can be 'viewed and treated apart from relationships and context' (Dahlberg et al, 2006). The job of and challenge for the institution is to enhance children's development and prepare children 'ready to learn and ready for school by the age of compulsory schooling' (p44).

Children's individual rather than group work, created with adult support, was carefully arranged alongside words of explanation within the three sections of the display. As such, this display of named children's work appeared to announce to all 'visitors', including parents, the achievements of identified children and the technical ability of the adults to provide a quality, childhood experience. In a school like way, the displays emphasised the way in which an activity had been used to support the development of children's knowledge of a specific subject area rather than the development of either skills or artistic appreciation. In a similar vein, commercially prepared posters relating to facts about a range of subjects, which seem too advanced for children of this age, were also displayed in this area. Carefully written or word processed labels modelling a particular, possibly, 'correct' writing style, marked the location of specific resources or activities within the overall space.

Self-governing, individual child

Rather than the teacher directed practices characteristically associated with other levels of education, preschool pedagogy is seen to be both child-centred and invisible. Traditionally, early years' practice has been constructed based on the assumption that 'young children learn best through their senses – that they learn by 'doing' in interaction with the environment around them' (Gallacher, 2005:7). Historically, ideas about learning have focussed on either the importance of the interaction between the individual and the material environment or the individual, the material and the social environment. More recently, the learning environment has been conceived, by some, as an educator in its own right not simply in terms of the concrete environment but as a 'total' environment with social, cultural, discursive as well as physical characteristics. Learning in this later case is said to 'occur in the relations between people, and between people and 'things' (p9).

Having chosen to be governed by a pedagogical approach, aligned to the Montessori Method, a 'scientific pedagogy' (Montessori, 1912: 69 in Hultvqvist, 1998)*,* the initial task for the managing owner was to design an overall space which supported this approach. Central to the Montessori approach is a belief that children are born with an underlying, inherited intellectual structure which unfolds and develops, over time, in a fixed manner. Montessori claimed that the 'absorbent mind' - a unique and effortlessly powerful capacity to acquire human abilities and skills - provides the 'labour and materials' needed for intellectual growth. This theory claims that differences in intellectual development are associated with the child's (and consequently the 'absorbent mind's') exposure to varying cultural stimuli at each stage of the structure's unfolding. Montessori proposed an order for the development of human skills and abilities characterised by 'special, transient sensitivities to certain categories of stimuli'. The assumption being that the environment should support and nurture individual development in response to periods of sensitivity. Consistent unchanging arrangements are thought to be a necessary context for children's development at this time (O'Donnell, 2007).

Tables positioned in groups in the classroom to provide a flat top where children could and were expected , as modelled by adults, to sit to use a range of materials. *May 2008*

Seemingly bearing some of the characteristic features of the centres developed for children by Maria Montessori (the Casa dei Bambini or Children's Houses), in a deprived district of Rome, at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Kramer, 1978), the classroom had been arranged, for the most part, as a formal space. As this approach relies upon the observation of natural behaviour and the use of specific materials to support and develop 'natural [human] tendencies' (O'Donnell, 2007), specific sets of Montessori apparatus, providing stimuli for sensory, mathematical, language and cultural development, had

been arranged on individual units of low, wooden open shelving around the perimeter at one end of the 'ordered' classroom. The fundamental principle, as described by Montessori, is 'the 'liberty of the pupil – liberty as shall permit development of individual spontaneous manifestations of the child's nature' (Montessori, 1912: 69 in Hultvqvist, 1998) through children's independent access to and active engagement with these prescribed, didactic (teaching) materials in structured, rather than, playful ways. Similar to many primary schools, the formal, 'hard', layout implied an expectation that children would be grouped as well as sedentary for much of the time and involved in specific, adult determined learning activities. But groups of child sized tables and chairs, had been deliberately positioned in proximity to shelving units, to provide the flat surfaces necessary for the intended, concentrated use of these materials. Larger, heavier objects (Long Rods, Large Pink Cubes and Brown Stair Rods), belonging to the sensorial group, had been placed and were used on the floor.

A number of outwardly simple pieces of graded apparatus made up individual sets. Each set had been manufactured from natural materials, primarily wood, to exacting technical specifications to stimulate both a specific manner and order of use and the self-assessment of achievement.

A sensory activity using yellow knob-less cylinders[1] characterised by differences in height and diameter.
November 2008

The four rectangular wooden blocks known as the 'Cylinder Blocks', for example, were precisely drilled to create sockets for one of ten closely fitting wooden cylinders, varying in diameter and/or height, with a small spherical knob, for handling, on the top. Whereas the first of these (Block 1),

[1] One of the sensorial activities designed to support children's understanding of differences in height and diameter.

distinguishable by colour, contained cylinders of a constant height but decreasing diameter (from left to right), the next (Block 2) cylinders decreased in both height and diameter. Block 3 cylinders decreased in diameter and increased in height and Block 4 cylinders were of the same diameter but decreased in height. A corresponding box of 'knob less' cylinders, to be accessed when proficiency had been achieved, was associated with each of the knobbed Cylinder Blocks.

Exemplifying the intended ordered, focussed and controlling nature of the approach, each piece of Montessori apparatus, one of each type within each set, had its own dedicated place on a shelf within a storage unit or an area of the floor. Labels and photographs above each unit indicated where and the way in which resources on each of the shelves should be positioned. Relative positioning was significant as in some cases each piece is thought to contribute to an understanding of associated concepts. Exercises provided both increasingly complex but ordered challenges and, theoretically, opportunities for children to explore previously unexplored sensory experiences.

> *This area also contains wooden cylinders, described as 'shakers', containing a range of different materials, small wooden blocks (cubes and cuboids) within folding wooden boxes and boxes of 'Thermic' and 'Baric' tablets. The 'Thermic' tablets are small rectangular shapes made from different materials which appear hot or cold to the touch; the 'Baric' tablets are similar shaped pieces of wood of minutely (to the adult) different weights.*
> Field notes, November 2007

The spatial arrangement of materials, flat topped tables, vacant floor areas and other spaces within the classroom, signified the owner's commitment to this explicit and focussed learning approach. Adults, governed by the approach, prepared the environment in accordance with Montessori principles and, by so doing, sought to govern the conduct of children. Similarly, children governed their own conduct. Once they had become familiar with the procedures, they were expected to choose appropriate materials, use them on flat surfaces provided or available and return them to storage units immediately after use. The ultimate educational aim of the approach was to support children's understanding of discrete differences and patterns of difference in perceptual quality (Gettman, 1987). Although there appears to be some doubt as to

whether 'training of the senses would refine the intelligence generally', as claimed by Montessori, current value is usually associated with the way the materials are believed to prepare children for later mathematical and language work. Primarily, this is preparation for activities whose purpose is to help young children become familiar with the properties and symbolic representation of numbers from one to ten and support the concurrent development of early writing and reading skills based on the initial development of the child's speech (Gettman, 1987).

Dominated by an obvious delineation into hard and soft areas and the allocation, within these spaces of specific pieces of familiar domestic and educational furniture (low tables, chairs and associated storage areas), the classroom was a highly ordered but, nonetheless and necessarily so, an adaptable environment. The arrangement of furniture (tables, chairs and storage units), together with the various displays on each of the four walls of the classroom, contributed to the overall sense of order and purpose that the Manager desired. However, adults, acting as substitute parents in this case, attempted to make the space seem homely, child 'friendly' and welcoming by displaying children's work and setting aside areas where children could be relatively comfortable but the arrangement and furnishing of different spaces emphasised an overwhelming, business priority. The principle aim was to use the physical and material conditions to create, maintain and 'sell' an efficient childcare service that supported maternal employment and prepared or made children 'ready' for school. Achieving this aim was dependent upon parents, as well as children, acting in independent and expected ways.

> *A gap between the bulky wooden drawer units, at the other end of the classroom, provided access into a 'cosier', softer carpeted area beneath a set of glazed doors overlooking the car park.*

> *Cushions and carpets had been stacked in one corner; the child-sized chaise lounge occupied a space on the opposite side of this area leaving a large uncluttered space in the middle.*
> Field note, April 2010

Labelled with individual children's names, two large heavy, wooden units served to support a number of related functions. Symbolically, the units represented an intention to manage both children and parents and for children and parents to manage themselves. Each of the labelled drawers acted as a small private

space (a deep drawer) where children's personal belongings could be separated and safely stored apart from those provided by the Nursery. Favourite objects brought from home, possibly an album of photographs of family members, examples of work they choose to keep as well as shoes or slippers, sweatshirt or jumper were stored in these individual spaces. Acting like 'pigeon holes', for storage, as well as a channel of communication, the drawers were used as a receptacle for printed information that the Nursery wished to pass onto children's parents. Children were expected and encouraged to use their allocated and identified spaces, as needed, to independently store personal belongings but adults often supported them with this process. It was assumed that parents would 'check' their children's drawers on a daily basis to retrieve information and presumably reduce the pressure on these spaces but drawers quickly became full and overflowed damaging the contents when attempts were made to open and close a drawer.

Placed, as they were, at one end across the rectangular shaped room from one wall to the other, the units created a robust, physical boundary defining comparatively 'hard' and 'soft' spaces and the types of activity that were likely to be possible in and around each of these areas. On one side of the drawer units was the formally arranged classroom and, on the other, a carpeted area partially enclosed by the drawer units, two walls and double glazed doors overlooking the hard surfaced parking area. The top provided a useful additional storage space for items provided, primarily, for adult use (tissues, register) and a place where some children could independently access their own water bottles. A few books had been selected, relegated and consigned to the top of one of the units after, allegedly, mistreatment by younger children – they had torn pages. Other, valuable and fragile items (CD player and tapes) were stored on the high window ledge out of children's reach. For a number of parents, the units represented the normal limit of their movement, when leaving or collecting their children, into the classroom and the Nursery as a whole.

An intentional, small gap between the units was maintained as an access point into and out of the soft area. Carpeting and cushions in the soft area provided children with some comfort at any time but principally during specific times intended for rest and sleep. Restricted movement and individual actions were possible in much of the classroom space but this 'cosy area', at the brighter end of the formal classroom, provided a confined space where a large group (children and adults) could be assembled and contained.

In addition to the bright wall displays, soft furnishings and a place for children's personal belongings, pot plants and a pet rabbit added a certain amount of interest, 'colour' and softness to what was understandably a necessarily functional environment. Being both a 'working space' and a thoroughfare for all - children, parents and staff - particular areas of the classroom could become quite grubby even though staff and children were required to change into indoor shoes. The initial priority was to ensure that the place was accessible as well as safe and secure. Risk was regularly assessed, using a formalised procedure, broken items were removed or repaired, areas were wiped down with a disinfectant cleaner and children were supervised by maintaining required adult to child ratios.

The classroom had been set out for formal individual and group activities but this made it a practical space for group meals and rest. At the time, the play room had been arranged to provide space for children's playful and creative activities but this became a base for younger, relatively immobile, children as their numbers increased.

A modified environment providing space for children to eat lunch.
April 2009

Promoting the social child

With the introduction of a national imposed, standardised curriculum for the under fives and associated funding for the education of children between three and five years old, the Nursery became accountable to the state, as well as parents, for the spending of public money to meet predetermined aims. Although based upon play, the Montessori community confidently claimed that the statutory requirements could be met using their approach to learning

(Montessori Education UK Ltd, 2010). Early years' settings were required to create 'enabling' environments (DfES, 2007); a term coined to emphasise the importance of providing a supportive emotional, as well as a physical context (indoors and outdoors), responsive to the needs of individual children. Ensuring that the space was suitable for children from *birth to five* years of age and the development of practice associated with an apparent post modern perspective, became an on-going challenge that gave rise to the rearrangement and development of new spaces. Whereas the modern perspective, concordant with Montessori practice, views the child as an individual entity, the 'postmodern' perspective decentres the child, 'viewing the child as existing through its relations with others and always in a particular context' (Dahlberg, 2006: 43).

At first glance, furniture and materials within the playroom, later renamed the creative room as though it had achieved a higher status, appeared to have been organised in a contrastingly haphazard way but closer inspection revealed aspects of order within this space as well as the classroom. Although different in terms of philosophy, as exemplified in the layout and the selection and allocation of resources, both were representative of powerful psychological notions of what constitutes a proper childhood (Dahlberg, 2006). A notion which positions 'the child' in deficit and in need of support to acquire those capacities associated with normal, adult functioning. In a similar yet contrasting way to the classroom, the playroom provided children with access to a wider range of materials and activities. Strangely, their conduct became governed by a 'freer' approach. Playful contact with other children seemed more likely in this room but the inherent educational purpose of this other child-centred space was less apparent.

A zoned environment of hard and soft spaces and associated resources was created to fulfil a number of related operational functions. In a contrasting manner to the classroom, designed to facilitate the use of the specific Montessori materials, this space was arranged to support children's playful use, with others, of a wider range of familiar resources. Tables representing certain prescribed forms of play were arranged around the periphery of the room leaving a space in the centre of the room for movement. On one occasion, the surface of a table had been partially covered with tubs of a malleable material (Playdoh) and plastic, pastry cutters. Other tables were the location for a range of small 'world' objects (buildings, animals and people) and a semi-secluded corner space contained a wire shelving unit full of children's, picture type books. On a number of occasions, a central table was prepared with resources

(typically paper, pencils, glue and paint) for a prearranged, 'adult focussed activity[2]'.

Table allocated and prepared for 'adult-led' activity. *January 2009*

As well as the floor, low tables and storage units divided the space and indicated where children were expected to be and what they should be doing. An open shelving unit containing the Montessori practical life resources[3] acted as a useful room divider separating a potentially messy area (sink and access to the outside) from a comparatively cleaner and soft area where immobile, younger children could be segregated and safely contained. Another low unit, placed on this soft, carpeted side behind the open shelving unit, intentionally provided low storage for tactile resources and one long, accessible flat surface for children's use. Although the larger of the two areas, bulky upholstered furniture supplied to provide some possible comfort and a cosier, home like environment for the youngest children, reduced the available floor space but indicated where care was to be provided. Similarly, two travel cots supplementing the sleeping arrangements in a small adjoining room and a specific unit determined where children would sleep and where they would be

---

[2] Activities for children have been traditionally classified as child-initiated, child-led and adult-led or adult-focussed (CWDC, 2008). The adult may use the activity with the aim of supporting the children's knowledge of a subject or the development of certain skills. In this case, most of the activities involved paint, glue and paper. Overall, the aim was to support the development of manual dexterity but chiefly the fine motor skills needed for holding and using a pencil to write.

[3] Montessori practical life resources are, as they suggest, a range of activities to support the development of independent life skills. They include, for example, activities to develop fine manipulative skills for pouring and transferring. Some are precursors to the development of an appropriate pencil grip for writing (Gettman, 1987).

changed. A small secluded space in one corner of the room formed the only desirable 'hiding' place for a small number of older children.

Open area of the less formal room arranged as a specific, separate space behind two, wooden storage units. Provision is accessible at floor level or child height and supports children's independent use. Low unit acts as a flat topped space where children may choose to use the resources. A cot against the right hand wall is available for young children to sleep when required. *December 2010*

Beside the division into various, visible spaces, relating to officially designated curricular strands and the perceived of needs of young children, the room was characterised by the abundance of resources, considered to be developmentally appropriate, to support playful learning. Most of these materials were familiar, typically plastic and sometimes garishly coloured commercial toys standing, by appearance alone, in direct contrast to the specifically honed, primary coloured natural materials (mainly wood) associated with the Montessori approach. Those that bore some resemblance to the Montessori materials – they were made from wood and produced in subtler shades – had an evident, possibly limiting functionality associated with promoting movement, care of the self and children's involvement in certain domestic, recreational and work like activities.

Components of a wooden train set (stored in plastic box, top right).
April 2009

This profusion of paper, card, fabric, wooden and plastic objects of various shapes and sizes clearly created opportunities for a number of children to be involved in similar activities but there were consequential operational difficulties.

Carpeted floor space in the play/creative room 'littered' with a number of different toys
April 2009

The number of necessary entrances, to an office and a small dedicated sleeping space, the outside area and the corridor leading to the classroom, restricted the area available for storage. A large floor to ceiling cupboard which provided substantial and necessary storage, within and above it, proved to be inadequate and it occupied a considerable amount of space along one wall. Unlike the specific, well made and clearly identifiable storage units provided for a number of the Montessori materials, a variety of containers were used in a haphazard manner, for the storage of these resources, usually incomplete,

beneath or on top of various surfaces but not on open shelves. Other materials were stored in more accessible, vacant spaces: on specific shelving units, beneath a unit and in plastic boxes beneath a length of work surface either side of a deep sink. Window ledges were used for further, additional storage.

A 'writing' area for two children arranged within the informal space. Montessori practical life resources are stored on adjacent shelves.
December 2010

A notable exception was the ordered storage of the Montessori Practical Life resources on open shelving at child height.

> *The 'practical life' area contains a number of transfer activities (basket with decorated, wooden eggs; pom poms and tongs; sponge and dishes; jug; funnel and bottle; dishes with shells and spoons). Also within this area is a sewing activity, pegs, life cycle puzzles, button sorting and a small, pink suitcase with doll's clothes. Dressing frames hang from the wall. Child sized cleaning implements are suspended on a purpose built stand.*
> Field notes, November 2007

These individual activities, repositioned because of their relevance for younger children, were intended to promote manipulative skills, self-development and care of the environment in a way which reflected the dominant customs and habits of predominantly white, middle class families. The assumption was that children would be motivated to do 'what they see adults all around them doing each and every day' using child-sized but realistic materials (Gettman, 1987).

Practical Life Activity – jugs and sponges provided to transfer water. *November, 2008*

It was clear that the adults were using the space and deployed resources within this room to afford a particular and contrasting or complementary childhood experience to that provided by the classroom space. Adults had determined what children could possibly do based, primarily, on the need to comply with statutory requirements and the perceived needs of vulnerable and innocent young children. Hence they were able to secure necessary funding held by the local authority, as well as maintain and promote their business. While the space promoted access to a wider range of resources and contact with other children, opportunities for movement were limited.

The competent 'democratic' child

Concerns regarding children's 'lack of physical exercise, rising levels of childhood obesity and lack of connectedness with nature' have been addressed by specifications, within curriculum frameworks, for the adoption of informal play based approaches to children's learning in the outdoor as well as the indoor environment (Maynard, 2007: 305). Common justification for the use of the outdoor environment is that such a space provides under achieving boys, in particular, with opportunities which fit their style of learning; a style of learning (kinaesthetic) which is dependent upon the use of large or gross movements which may not be possible if the indoor space is limited. The expectation being that much of the curriculum can be effectively delivered through the development of an 'enabling' outdoor, as well as an indoor environment, of defined areas of learning, and that access outside should be 'freely' available at all times.

As well as identifying the benefits of using the outdoors, a number have acknowledged the practical (including potential risks) challenges and ideological difficulties of adopting a child-centred, vaguely defined approach in school rather than early years' settings (Maynard, 2007). From an adult perspective, outdoor spaces provide opportunities for various forms of play, related aspects of holistic development (Holmes and Procaccino, 2009; Aasen, Grindheim and Waters, 2009) and a valuable context for the acquisition of democratic values 'through participation with adults and children in their chosen activities' (Aasen, Grindheim and Waters, 2009: 5). However, there is no clear guidance on how the outdoor area should be used and little is known about what happens in this type of environment (Waller, 2007).

The original outdoor play area set out within the large farmhouse garden. This area of grass and bare soil was mainly used during summer months. *May 2008*

Ad hoc, chosen access to the original outdoor area was not feasible. Children had to be escorted into and out of the area; an adult had to accompany children back into the building if they needed to use the toilet. In winter months, between October and February, the area was infrequently used as it became '*very muddy'* and the setting had received complaints from parents about the state of their children's clothes. To compensate, as well as provide adults with an opportunity to rearrange the classroom for lunch, children were taken as a group for a walk around the farm during winter months.

In order to fulfil a requirement to ensure that children could 'freely flow' between inside and outside spaces, the setting addressed the issue by temporarily using an area of the adjoining car park before creating a dedicated outdoor space to replace the original garden area which was principally used during dry, summer

months. Accessible from the playroom down a ramp, the outdoor area in this particular nursery eventually became a space of three, unique linked parts designed to promote a range of adult desired, child-centred active outdoor or 'messy' experiences whatever the weather. The first of these parts, an open space with a level but hard concrete surface, overlooked the parking area, other areas of the farm and the woolly pigs in the distance. Two walls of the Nursery building, the timber clad wall of the second space (another converted farm building) and a gated fence at the front, enclosed and defined the parameters of this space. While the apparent intention was to create an informal space suitable for children's large independent, physical movements, the available area was restricted by various man made structures: the central wooden house, a covered tank, a wall, a ramp from the play/creative room and the door that links this area with the second, connecting and covered, outdoor space.

Wooden hut acting as an 'island' within one of the three outdoor spaces.
June 2009

The second, covered outdoor space had been created from the conversion of another smaller, redundant farm building attached to the rear of the Nursery. Characterised by the cold concrete floor and white washed walls and dominated by two large, deep timber framed pits, the space promoted children's independent access to and shared use of specific, possibly 'messy' or potentially hazardous materials, in a semi-contained space. A lidded, wooden storage box separating the pits contained a range of plastic buckets, spades and toy vehicles supplied to facilitate the shared collection and transfer of sand, in one pit and shingle, in another. Each *deep* pit provided sufficient space for three or four children to sit as well as successfully, for the most part, containing the two types of materials. The far side of the space acted as a necessary

71

thoroughfare to the two adjacent outdoor spaces, a storage area and an additional space for pretend play.

Recently converted farm building providing central, covered outdoor space and a link between two other areas.
June 2009

Soft grass, including a small, raised area or mound, was a contrasting, characteristic feature of the third space. Fenced and gated on two sides and bound by walls on the other two, the area overlooked but was divided from the rear of the farmhouse garden. Seating for a few children at a table and bench seemingly acknowledged the possibility that children might need or prefer to be inactive. In summer months this provided a convenient spot where children could collect to sit and eat a snack in the outdoors. An area of soil, given over as a small vegetable garden, symbolised an attempt to involve children in small scale gardening and impart the importance of a healthy diet. A simple wooden climbing frame attached to one wall, as well as the small mound, provided limited but safe opportunities for children's vertical as well as horizontal movements.

When I began this study, I came regard the classroom as the dominant, most significant space and the playroom as a secondary, inconsequential room reflecting not only the owner's affiliation to Montessori principles but her initial scepticism regarding the value of play-based approaches as preparation for formal learning. Positioned as technician and substitute parent, as well as entrepreneur, the owner of the setting structured and ordered the spaces to maximise the efficiency of the operation and secure a profit in relation to statutory requirements regarding the health, safety, security and education of groups of young children. The rooms were necessarily large, to accommodate the numbers of children and supporting adults, impersonal and possibly alien,

practical spaces. Toys, books and games may have been familiar items, in unfamiliar spaces, but young children were unlikely to have seen or had access to certain items within the range of Montessori resources. As there was a deliberate attempt to ensure that the Practical Life Resources (the equipment that normally provides children with an introduction to the Montessori approach) were culturally representative, these items may have been familiar to most children. Over time, the classroom area was supplemented with additional but similar, mainly wooden resources but these appeared to be less durable than the Montessori apparatus that could only be obtained from recognised manufacturers at some considerable cost. A less expensive and more abundant range of more familiar, relatively inexpensive resources - paper, pencils, rulers, scissors and cutters - were provided in a recognisable storage space - a three draw wicker unit placed conveniently close a large group of table and chairs where a number of children could sit or stand. Where space permitted, larger materials could be used either directly on the floor or on carpet squares retained for this purpose. Materials, not for children's use - some were small, potentially dangerous objects for young children - were stored either on the Manager's desk in one corner of the room, or on one of two high window ledges. A computer, a tokenistic representation of contemporary society, was occasionally used by children at the Manager's desk to access online educational games.

The existence of an additional, informal space (the playroom that became known as the creative room) and the creation of additional (outdoor) spaces which became more significant as the study progressed, displayed an apparent acknowledgement of the possible benefits of other ways of learning and, by implication, a different view of what 'children are, can be, and should be' (Hultqvist, 1998: 92). Accountable to the local authority, who were responsible for the expansion of childcare to support female employment and address social inequalities, when funding for three to four year old children became available, the owner was 'persuaded', having sought advice from the Montessori organisation to which she was affiliated, to incorporate elements representative of a dominant play based approach considered to be suitable for a younger age group of children. Targeted funding was used to extend the range of available resources and hence facilitate the incorporation of ideas associated with another 'truth' but the setting also bought additional Montessori resources designed for use with younger children in order to become an accredited Montessori nursery.

Compliance with dominant play-based discourses ensured that the Nursery continued to maintain economic viability, through the receipt of a consistent core of income, administered by the Local Authority on behalf of central government, for three to five year old children. Children were provided with more 'freedom' but this was a spatial tactic, enacted through a neoliberal mode of governance, to create highly individualised, responsible subjects (Davies and Bansel, 2007) in accordance with the UK government's desires and demands for its future citizens. The retention of an alternative, didactic learning approach implied an initial intention to resist, if not contest, dominant discourses but, economically, the Nursery appeared unable to abandon an approach that had required considerable initial investment or sever a link to an active, national organisation that provided quality judgements, through accreditation, as well as advice, guidance and support. Additional, mainly play based, materials were bought at a later date with government funding and a modified form, of what might be seen as a radical approach, was retained.

Spaces were created as an initial layer of government to shape the conduct of adults and children in this early childhood setting. Stimulated by contemporary government policy but particularly a necessity to comply, in order to secure funding, with the introduction of a standardised curriculum, the environment was modified to promote a less formal, collective style of learning and accommodate a younger group of children. Nevertheless the whole, as well as its component parts of clearly defined, predetermined and compartmentalized spaces and various materials, remained a representation of ideological ideas, rooted in the past, for the extra familial education of young children.

4 LEARNING TO FIT IN

Transition is the term characteristically used to indicate the changing contexts of an individual's educational experiences over a life time. It is said to represent a socially regulated time of intense and accelerated development demands and a shift in one identity to another (Lam and Pollard, 2006). Often related to age, transition, as a process as well as a point in time, encompasses both movements within and between situations. The start of formal schooling has typically been regarded as the first educational experience for most children. Stimulated by social policy, promoting maternal employment and concerns regarding disadvantage, the home to pre-school experience in the UK has, for many, become the first transition in children's educational life 'beginning', possibly, when children are a few months old. There is an increasing view that it is essential for children to spend a large part of their early childhood in a day-care environment where they can acquire experience of being part of a collective (Kampmann, 2004). But, as Corsaro (2000) explains, high quality early childhood education is needed not only to enrich the lives of young children but also to address the economic problem of global ageing.

A nationally imposed curriculum established for the education of the under fives would seem to suggest that pre-school is a situation in which children begin to understand what 'school is like' and how they are required to 'behave as pupils' (Lam and Pollard, 2006). Children may, however, become accustomed to a 'distinct culture' associated with the informal as well as formal nature of the pre-school educational phase and develop a unique pre-school, rather than, pupil identity. In fact, the difficulties experienced by many children when moving from early childhood education to primary school (Yeboah, 2002) would seem to suggest that this is the case. In some situations, the notion of transition as a movement between two contexts is complicated by diverse care arrangements which may include children's attendance at more than one setting and various family arrangements which imply that home is not necessarily one place.

While much has been written about the importance of an effective transition to school, there is limited, specific information regarding the home to pre-school transition (Hare and Anderson, 2010) especially in relation to the experience of babies and toddlers (Brooker, 2006). Attention remains focussed on children's transition from home to school, whether directly or indirectly through a kindergarten type of experience, but the literature reflects some interest in children's movement from home to a pre-school environment in European

countries (Meltzer, 1984; Blatchford et al, 1982) and Japan (Hendry, 1994) as well as from pre-school to school (Yeboah, 2002). An unpublished study reported several stages in children's social adjustment to an unfamiliar situation. Eventual contact with other children, which was clumsy at first, was encouraged but preceded by an interest in objects (Blatchford et al, 1982).

Traditionally, the experience of starting child care has been investigated as a process involving separation from the mother and adjustment to a new social setting (Hare and Anderson, 2010; Dalli, 2000). In keeping with current early childhood discourse regarding the rights and capabilities of young children, contemporary concerns are, however, centred on the nature of the child's actions and their perspective and ability to act as agents within a socially structured environment where a certain level of 'discontinuity' (Lam and Pollard, 2006), between the home and educational context, is likely to exist. Psychoanalytical interpretations of young children's behaviour may provide a useful understanding of how children 'function at the interface of structure and agency where personal agency is shaped by conscious and unconscious factors' (Elfer, 2001:1). Sociological ideas associated with the theory of symbolic interactionism similarly propose that the individual is a 'knowing' actor during socialization. Rather than passively fitting in, the human actor is regarded as a reflective self who, through a process of collectively constructed self-awareness, is able to plan, organize and carry out his or her own courses of action (Jenks, 1998).

Two relatively recent small scale observational studies have considered the transitional experience from the children's perspective through analysis of children's behaviours and interactions with adults, peers and their environment (Thyssen, 2000; Dalli, 2000). The former (Thyssen, 2000), explored the child's life during the early part of day care as a system of relationships with objects, adults and other children. On arrival with their mothers, who acted as a 'secure base' (Wittenberg, 2001), children explored the Danish day care centre in an exact manner indicating a desire to interact with new things and develop new social relations. Adults became important persons developing or initiating 'lively mutual interactions' around objects, as well as providing brief emotional support, but little attention was paid to supporting children's joint activities. The second of these studies (Dalli, 2000), provides an interpretation of children's experience at the start of child care as stories of their developing relationships with adults in the centre. Subsequent analysis, using a number of different theoretical perspectives (social constructionist, attachment theory and

temperament theory), revealed the manner in which children were learning to fit in, the importance of a primary caregiver and the influence of personality on ability to settle.

The beginning of each day in this Nursery - the daily transition - was marked by a distinct and similar pattern of significant adult regulated cultural behaviour. This behaviour was devised to support a smooth, quick and safe transfer of responsibilities at an uncertain, unpredictable time when the Nursery was exposed to its paying public. Physically, the adult workers maintained proximity to the group but, generally, created an emotional distance between themselves and individual children. There were standard procedures in place to ensure that parents were greeted and children were safely received but adults needed to be flexible in order to respond to the feelings of individual children, some of whom, initially, showed signs of distress. In the main, the responsibility for integration or exclusion was attributed to children themselves. On the whole, children were not only expected to control themselves but were expected to do this without, explicitly, being told to do so. The great majority of children made choices and established ways of being within a remit of adult predetermined possibilities as if their actions were harmonious with their own wishes. Those unable to make these self-initiated choices were unintentionally marginalized as if they had excluded themselves. Some parents, aware of the difficulties children faced, were encouraged and attempted to facilitate daily transition involving separation, adjustment to and incorporation within the institutional environment.

'Settling in' arrangements

Standardised 'taken for granted' (Dean, 1999) practices, devised to enable adults to exercise authority over the child, in order to support children's movement to the preschool situation, draw upon a limited but dominant range of ideas. Analysis of studies using psychoanalytical theory, attachment theory and the study of temperament, has suggested that children need to develop a strong relationship with a mother substitute and learn the rules of a culturally distinct group (Dalli, 2000) as previous ways of behaving may be inappropriate for the new environment (Lam and Pollard, 2006). Adjustment, which is dependent upon temperament, is an individual psychological response but involves the development of social relationships with adults as well as children. This empirical emphasis has led to the development of national standards and the subsequent creation of 'settling-in' arrangements for babies, toddlers and young children in order that they may become accustomed to a new environment, form

relationships with new caregivers and accept the temporary departure of a parent or carer (Brooker, 2006). But, as Goffman's analysis of the destructive effects of the institution on the individual reminds us, intake procedures designed to facilitate batch handling can deprive the person of symbols of past identity and status. Management practices are created to ensure that all the 'inmates' actions, response and relationships are exposed to public view and subject to institutional control and supervision (Watson, 1982 in Brissett and Edgley, 2006).

Conceptually, transition has been understood from a socio-cultural and social constructionist perspective in relation to ecological and developmental models or frameworks of transition. Of specific note is Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. This pre-supposes that children's development is dependent upon not only the experiences associated with each individual setting that children encounter (home, nursery, school, childminder's house etc) but also the links between each of these situations. Consequently, settling-in arrangements also typically include practices designed to establish and maintain links with the home in order to gather or share information about children. A parent or friend, acting as a partner in the process, may be present for the first few days of a child's transition (Brooker, 2006).

Attendance at this early years' setting normally began after an accompanied visit (parent with their child) and an unaccompanied, trial session (child without the parent). As orientation visits they were a controlled introduction, for the parent as well as the child, to the characteristic features of a possibly unfamiliar predetermined environment and its associated culture. While government rhetoric, as articulated in curriculum documents of the time, emphasised the importance of collaborative relationships with parents, communicating an ability to confidently and competently care for the needs of a group of young children was the settings priority. Exercising their authority, the setting shaped this initial experience in line with legislated requirements, allied to theoretical perspectives outlined above and below, to maintain credibility in relation to external quality measures and consequently garner the trust of fee paying parents.

Established by the Children Act (2006), the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum became a mandatory requirement for all schools and early years' providers in September 2008. As a set of legally bound, universal standards for children's learning and development, purportedly in place to assure parents that their children would be safe and the setting would help them to succeed

(DfCSF, 2008), they governed the Nursery's actions. Similarly, Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage, subsidiary non-statutory information, was used to implement various welfare and educational requirements in relation to four seemingly straightforward underpinning principles (DfES, 2007). The four principles provide a 'supportive context' (Oates, 2010), acknowledged and achievable using the Montessori approach (Montessori Schools Association, 2008), within which the requirements for children's learning and development 'should' be met. Essentially, the assumption is that children are strong, capable and unique individuals who learn in different ways at different rates. Learning takes place within an 'enabling environment' that includes the establishment of positive relationships with adults. However, the focus for the curriculum is to get children ready for education and increase the attainment of children from deprived backgrounds (Oates, 2010). Current ideas, reflected in the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum[1], as well as guidance provided by the Montessori community, recognise the importance of children's parents. Parents are seen as children's first educators. Children's learning and development 'benefits' when practitioners work with parents (Montessori Schools Association, 2008).

As Jools Page and Peter Elfer explain in their paper, '*The emotional complexity of attachment interactions in nursery'* (2013), current thinking proposes 'that young children being cared for away from the home' are capable of and 'need to feel securely attached to one or two special adults' (p 555). Generally speaking, this perceived need for secure early attachments[2] has been enacted, in practice, by what Hoffman (2007) describes as a 'triangle of care' (Brooker, 2010). Small groups of children are assigned to work with a particular member of staff throughout the day and that member of staff is expected to develop

---

[1] A review of the curriculum had been instigated (July 2010) by a new government in response to apparent criticisms regarding its prescription, emphasis on formal aspects of learning (literacy and numeracy) and expectations that were believed to be beyond the reach of most children (Oates, 2010).

[2] Current ideas emphasise the importance of children becoming attached or developing a close bond with an adult figure. Originally attributed to Bowlby (1950s), who developed the theory soon after World War Two, it has been used and possibly misused since then to reassure mothers of the benefits of either staying at home or returning to work. It is thought that this bond provides some form of protection for the child, enabling them to cope with stress and develop social relationships. Previously associated with the mother or primary carer and child, children are now thought to be capable of developing useful attachments with a number of adults. This theory provides justification for the adoption of a key person approach in early years' settings. The key person, a practitioner, is required to become 'attuned' to the needs of individual children.

relationships with the children's families. Known as the key person approach and role, this has been a mandatory requirement for all years' providers since the implementation of a national curriculum for the under fives in September 2008. Failure in some situations to implement this approach has been attributed to anxieties regarding children's safety, concerns about close physical and emotional contact with young children as well as parent resentment if staff became too closely attached to the children in their care (Page and Elfer, 2013).

In this Nursery, children were assigned to both individual members of staff and collectively to the Manager of the setting who, primarily, took responsibility for the development and maintenance of relationships with all parents. Members of staff were identified as the 'key worker', rather than the 'key person', for designated groups of children and responsible for the regular assessment of a group of children and associated record keeping. Staff increasingly became involved in the development of working relationships with parents but the Manager continued to act as the first point of call in most cases especially when quite complex financial issues, regarding the payments of fees and claims for government funding, needed to be resolved.

The accommodation of children irrespective of age, according to Montessori principles, within a series of connected spaces was the expressed reason for the adoption of a modified key worker approach. Unlike many settings (Powell and Goouch, 2011), babies under 18 months of age, who were relatively few in number, were not confined to 'baby rooms' but, theoretically, integrated with other children. Softer 'home-like' spaces were created as a 'base' for the younger children but they were potentially 'free', as were the older children, to occupy all areas. Such a system, what might be regarded as 'multiple indiscriminate care' (Page and Elfer, 2013) may, however, have been an institutional defence mechanism to protect or prevent staff from developing close interactions and emotional links with individual children. Symbolically, the mechanism may also have communicated and emphasised the importance of mothers as 'primary caregivers' in children's lives.

Paradoxically, the modified arrangements met statutory requirements and ensured a degree of consistency in care. Children encountered different adults on certain days or parts of their day/days of attendance as members of staff were employed in relation to legally required child to adult ratios, varying according to age range, typically for an extended period of hours for four, rather than five, days each week. Although children did not, necessarily, become

'attached' to one particular member of staff, they became accustomed to and known by all members of staff irrespective of their working patterns, daily fluctuations in numbers and the fairly rapid turnover of staff. These arrangements may, also, have been indicative of the possible importance attributed to the development of peer, rather than adult, relationships. Another plausible interpretation was that children were assumed to be capable – capable of 'settling' themselves without adult support and, if necessary, seek support from an adult of their own choosing.

Remarkably, perhaps, brief and limited 'settling-in' practices generally provided parents, who may or may not have had a choice, with the confidence to entrust their children to the setting's care. In reality, confidence in the capability of this particular early years' setting, was probably dependent upon the child's response to the unaccompanied visit and positive feedback from the managing owner who may have reassured parents that a certain level of distress was a natural phenomena. Further reassurance was provided by a publicly available inspection report which rates settings as satisfactory, good or outstanding. This particular setting has consistently been rated as good.

As part of the institution's controlled programme of induction, significant personal information about the child was collected from parents for pragmatic reasons rather than, necessarily, to develop links with the family as socio-cultural developmental theory proposes. Although seemingly satisfactory for most parents, limited information was provided about pedagogical principles but particularly the purpose of the Montessori approach. To demonstrate compliance with legislation and promote continuity of care, the setting gathered information about home child-rearing practices, health and dietary requirements as well as who should be contacted in the event of an emergency.

Separation and adjustment

Daily transition for parents, as well as their children, was an arduous physical as well as an emotionally demanding process. As well as unloading children (strapped into car seats) and belongings, parents needed to safely negotiate a number of tangible objects between the car park and the Nursery building. In addition to cars, belonging to other parents and members of staff, the end of the area was an access point for agricultural machinery. A gate, in the right hand corner of the car park, marked a relatively narrow entrance, often obscured by parked cars, required opening and securely closing to protect other parents and

their children from moving traffic. At the main entrance to the Nursery, care needed to be taken when stepping down into a limited area of paving in front of the outer, wooden door. The outer door required opening, and possibly closing, before children's belongings were hung on personalised pegs; a relatively straightforward activity at the beginning of the day when the porch was free of clutter but more complicated when the space was shared with a number of others. Outdoor shoes were replaced with indoor shoes or slippers before signalling or using the password provided to open the inner door. Members of staff often saw parents coming and assisted them by opening the door and, in some cases, provided guidance regarding expected procedures.

> *Another parent (male) arrived with a new child. He seemed unfamiliar with the Nursery routine and requested some guidance.*
> *'Shall I take her shoes off?'*
> *'That goes in the fridge out there.'*
> *'Sign in here.'*
> Field note, November 2008

Children arrived at the Nursery at a pre-agreed time that was convenient for their parents and were quickly left in the care of the Nursery. 9am was the starting time for most children and the majority of children had left by 4pm. On some occasions, a few children stayed until 6pm while others left at midday. As articulated during a brief conversation between two children (a two year old boy and a three year old girl, time at Nursery often coincided with time when 'mummies', as well as 'daddies', were at work. In some cases, mothers worked from home.

Most children arrived with their mothers but sometimes with other adults (father, grandparent, aunt, family friend or employee) denoting complex patterns of care created by some parents in order to fulfil their working obligations. In most cases, the setting established consistent and stable triangular like relationships with the child and their mother. More unusually, regular contact was maintained with the father or grandparent.

As children were usually enrolled for a specified number of hours and days each week, time at Nursery could be planned by parents as a consistent pattern of commoditised out of home care. In the case of 3 to 5 year old children, hours

funded by the state[3], paid via the local authority to the institution, to promote maternal employment and support disadvantage, came to represent a period of core, potentially inclusive and publically accountable curriculum time. In contrast, additional hours for 3 to 5 year old children and all the hours that babies spent in the Nursery, were available to those who could afford it and were often bought by parents to correspond, presumably, with their working hours or availability of other forms of care. The tax system, as well as benefits provided by some employers, as incentives or rewards for their employees, provided some parents with further financial support to cover costs and facilitate participation.

Although the number of days and weekly pattern of attendance was generally consistent for each child, children were expected and became accustomed to sharing their daily experience with a changing group of unfamiliar children between six months and five years old. Total numbers of children varied from day to day as did the number of children under and over three years old and comparative numbers of boys and girls. From the outset, children were expected to operate independently with various others sharing the attention provided by relatively few adults. As in many other day care settings (Page, 2013), the owner and members of staff in this nursery were typically young women whose capacity, generally, to deliver high quality childcare has been questioned by critics of non-familial care (Boyer et al, 2013). An older, married woman with grown up children, who acted as the Deputy Manager at the time, provided a level of maturity parents seemed to desire. These adults were paid by the state and individual parents to take 'care' of and educate young children on behalf, generally, of other working women. Their ability to do both was informally scrutinised by the managing owner, her family and parents. As a collective enterprise, the adults were formally monitored by the Local Authority, the Montessori St Nicholas Charity and the state in connection with statutory, curricular requirements.

Being contained with others in a confined space was the more usual, immediate experience for children at the beginning of their daily session. At this time of the day, when adult resources were fluid and relatively scarce, procedures were devised and enacted to ensure that the Nursery complied with a legal responsibility, enshrined within the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (DfES, 2007), to protect children from harm. Children were dropped off and

---

[3] This refers to government funding of 15 hours/week for all 3-5 years old.

gathered together in the carpeted area, in a school like manner, where they were supervised by a junior member of staff while they, effectively, waited for the rest of the children to arrive. As well as acting as a group holding space, the designated area became a place for greetings and the exchange of information (children and adults), early activities and as a viewing point out onto the car park. From this point, the children, as well as the adults, could watch 'others' arrive and their parents depart. Separation from a parent at the beginning of the day appeared to be a very straightforward process for most children and most children complied with the process of containment at the beginning of the day, immediately and perhaps automatically joining the group in the carpeted area as they arrived for a formal start to the day.

For a small group of children who arrived relatively early, on at least four days each week, the process was less controlled and, potentially, a more intimate experience but staffing levels were generally low and this was the time when a number of necessary ancillary, rather than fundamental, domestic like tasks were normally completed. Final preparations were often made to the physical environment; associated administrative tasks, indicative of the volume of paperwork that constituted part of the everyday life of the settings, were undertaken and meetings were held. One adult, typically a junior member of staff, was usually allocated responsibility for the supervision of the 'early' children. While the least qualified and least professionally experienced, they consistently demonstrated a high level of confidence and technical, caring but emotionally distanced competence seemingly unperturbed by the multiple duties they were expected to accomplish. Practically, however, it was not always possible for the adults to monitor children's actions and what was learnt may not, necessarily, have been desired or deemed, by adults, to be acceptable behaviour.

> *It was 8.30am when the first of three children arrived. As was expected of him, the first child, a lively mobile boy, separated from his mother without any visible signs of distress. In comparison, a second child, a less mobile boy, was upset and clearly unable to control his emotions. The 'duty' practitioner, provided some physical support but within minutes her attention was directed towards another boy. Arriving in the arms of his mother, the third child required a different form of support. Taking the child in her arms, the member of staff quickly realised that the child needed to be changed.*

Responding to and prioritising her actions the practitioner, carrying the youngest child in her arms, addressed the other two boys and encouraged them to move with her to the playroom so that the youngest child could be changed on a unit in the far corner of the room.

It was probably the eldest, liveliest and more physically stable boy, who first 'spotted' one of the 'favoured' objects - a chunky, brightly coloured four wheeled, musical push along toy with a large front face of buttons and pictures. Noisily and frantically he began to push the toy, successfully negotiating various obstacles, within the available but limited space.

At first, his sustained and repetitive movement covered a relatively short distance between the practitioner stood at the changing unit and a closed door to an adjoining space. Whether by accident or design, each of the movements resulted in heavy contact with the door. After a short while, a different trajectory of movement was adopted. This time, the toy was pushed to the opposite side of the room, with a similar amount of force, into a storage box beneath the large area of work surface.

The younger of the two children stood and watched. Within moments, he had selected the second of the push along toys, a simpler segmented design reminiscent of a caterpillar, and began to copy both the movements and sounds of the older child. Fortunately, as there were no other children in the room, there was sufficient space for both to push their toys across the room. The practitioner was busy changing the younger child.

Carrying the baby in her arms, the children followed her into the kitchen area where she began to use the microwave to heat food. Nestling the baby on her hip, a process of removing, stirring and replacing the food in the oven was undertaken until she was satisfied that the food was at a suitable temperature for the baby's consumption. One of the older boys returned to the classroom area. The other, the eldest, remained with her. His request for help with a pair of yellow framed plastic goggles, signalled by his attempts to put them on his head, was initially recognised and responded to. Further attempts at seeking support went undetected but he solved the problem for himself.
Field note, July 2010

It has been argued (Powell and Goouch, 2012) that 'multiple voices exert an influence over baby room practice, disempowering the caregivers and reducing their capacity to' (p113) operate in the best interests of babies. Seemingly drawing upon familial practices, associated with responsibility for the care of younger siblings, as well as routines established by the Nursery, the younger members of staff successfully managed the multiple needs of children. In a Foucauldian sense, it was as if, in Osgood's (2013) words, they had been constructed and shaped to provide 'sensitive mothering' (Boyer et al, 2013). They automatically and adeptly provided some 'aspects of love and care' (Page and Elfer, 2013), offering comfort, changing children and managing behaviour. Practices, particularly in the case of babies, previously provided in the home and associated with familial care.

The children seem to respond positively when part of a smaller group at the beginning of a day. Generally, they remained in close proximity with each other under the supervision of one of the Nursery Assistants but the expectation was that they would occupy themselves. At this time of the day, older children were in direct contact with younger children whose presence they acknowledged and accepted. It was as though older children, in some cases, rather than mothers, who acted as an emotional prop providing younger children with a 'secure base' from which they could interact with new things and develop new social relations. Unknowingly, older children acted as models or leaders socially constructing expectations regarding appropriate ways of behaving. Through demonstrating what was expected and the way in which resources could be used, they supported the adjustment of other children who were unfamiliar with the situation. As found in another study, an initial interest in objects preceded eventual contact with other children (Blatchford et al, 1982).

On most days, the Manager was on duty at the beginning of the day. As the Nursery's viability was evidently dependent on the continued satisfaction of parents and the maintenance of a local reputation in a competitive market, the Manager made time to personally greet the parents of each child. Establishing and maintaining appropriate relationships with parents and possibly a range of other family members, jointly involved in the care of a child, was evidently a fundamental, as well as a challenging, aspect of the setting's work. Contact was an opportunity to garner trust and used as a strategy to facilitate the development of reciprocal relationships so that parents would willingly divulge information relating to their children and become receptive to ideas formulated by the Nursery. Some situations required a firm yet sensitive approach and the

use, as advocated by Rodd (1998), of sophisticated interpersonal skills to resolve difficult, potentially conflicting and possibly commercially damaging situations.

> *A parent (mother) arrived to drop off her child but one of the adults realised that the child had conjunctivitis. The practitioner explained that it would not be possible to leave the child because of risk of infection to the other children and the adults. The parent had apparently noticed the problem in the car. A notice had been placed on the entrance door requesting that parents keep their children at home for at least 48 hours after they have been ill.*
> Field note, January 2008

By positioning herself close to the password-secured main door, through which the parent entered from the outside via an insecure entrance porch, the Manager communicated her presence and availability, checking both who had arrived and with whom. She ensured that it was the parent who accepted responsibility for the registration of their child and, hence, their safety at this point, by placing the child's name and time of entry in a designated book. A similar procedure (the time of departure was recorded) was used when the parent or a known carer collected the child at the end of their session. As such the Manager signified an intention placed upon her, as the 'responsible person' by curriculum requirements, to safeguard and promote children's welfare through the development and maintenance of collaborative relationships with parents. Realistically, she was intent on ensuring that the Nursery was privy to situations that might influence the behaviour of children while they were at the Nursery.

On a daily basis, information generally 'flowed' from the parent and was used by the setting to support the child but some parents clearly 'took it upon themselves' to discretely monitor the situation when leaving and collecting their children as well as make the Manager aware of various situations. On one occasion, a mother openly, once the child had been removed from the situation, expressed concerns about the 'nightmares' her child was experiencing attributing this problem to her own personal difficulties. Another parent, who was on her way to work on the same day, was unwilling to depart until she was confident that her son, who had swallowed a marble early in the morning, was 'happy' and would be monitored by the Nursery. Continued attendance for the majority of children, up until the beginning of school, suggested a generally

acceptable level of satisfaction with the commoditised care and provision provided. Convenience and concerns about disruption and the impact on the child may, nevertheless, may have deterred parents from making changes part way through the pre-school period.

Characteristically, the children entered the Nursery in a reticent fashion and seemed to take some time to become their livelier selves. There were notable differences but boys seemed less able to cope with the daily transition arrangements. Some were reluctant to separate themselves from their parent openly demonstrating, in varying degrees, their 'separation anxiety' in the form of cries, tears and a determination to cling or hang onto a part of their parent's body. In some cases, it was necessary for a member of staff to intervene, to 'prise' the child away from the parent, so that the parent could quickly depart, before using certain strategies to comfort, calm or distract the child. The context varied according to the child but typically those who were distraught desired individual, adult attention. On one particular occasion one of the boys arrived with his father and was unwilling to be separated. As a diversionary tactic, the child was encouraged to produce a card for this father. Even though the initial experience for any one child on a given day could be distressing it was, generally, short lived. Girls generally, not exclusively, appeared to be less anxious than the boys but some sought and were consoled by immediate proximity to one of the adults.

> *One of the older girls was the first to arrive in her mother's arms. The staff begin discussions with her mother seemingly concerned about the child's health - she had been coughing and both her and her mother had had a number of sleepless nights.*
>
> *The mother began to leave but the child was reluctant to be parted. A promise of breakfast and a choice of cereal proved to be an effective strategy. The child willingly followed one of the other members of staff to the kitchen returning with a bowl of cereal. She sat down at a table with an adult alongside. Her mother had departed and was on her way to work.*
> Field note, May 2008

The majority of the children, and particularly those who were familiar with the Nursery and its staff, quickly controlled their emotions and involved themselves in some kind of activity normally on their own or alongside other children.

John, initially and perhaps playfully, clung to his mother before he was
quickly distracted and moved. He chose and then shared a book about
vehicles with an adult.
Field note, September 2008

Adult presence was limited but evident as they often sat on the carpet or on the ledge beneath the window to supervise rather than become involved in children's actions. Practitioners were clearly responsive to the physical needs of children but what was less obvious, even though humour was used, was whether more attentive, reciprocal caring practices with babies, in particular, were or could consistently be used. A study of practitioners working with babies in dedicated baby rooms (Powell and Goouch, 2012) suggests that the actions of adults in this Nursery may have been influenced and controlled by their own concerns, especially in relation to child protection issues and others' demands and not, necessarily, a reflection of what they believed to be in the best interests of children. Findings from a 'single intensive nursery case study' (Page and Elfer, 2013), illustrate the way staff, 'adopted a largely intuitive approach' based upon 'personal experience rather than a body of theoretical knowledge' (p564) when developing attachment interactions with young children. However, evidence from this study of a large children's centre, acknowledged how difficult it was to provide 'consistent, reliable and sensitive interactions in a systematic and consistent way' (p560).

Emotionally, this was a particularly difficult time for adults, as well as children, as they felt powerless when individual children remained distressed for some time after the start of the day. For example, they were unable or unwilling to provide children such as Beth, unusually one of the girls, rather than one of the boys, with the continuous adult attention they seemingly craved.

09.30
Beth (2) was sitting, inactive and on her own on a mat on the floor at one
side of the classroom. A set of large Pink cubes which had been used by
another child had been left in front of her. She smiled as I approached her
even though the Manager had expected her to cry. Once encouraged, she
began to build with the blocks copying the way I had demonstrated to
another child.
Field note, April 2009

On the face of it, given the number of routine as well as 'extreme' separations that children will commonly have experienced before beginning child care, it was difficult to account for individual differences. Children's ability to settle would 'seem [generally] to depend' upon a number of variables relating to parenting style, as children are said to retain memory traces of good experiences, children's previous and current experiences of 'beginnings and endings' and certain organisational and management characteristics of the new context (Wittenberg, 2001).

Anxious behaviour, while upsetting for adults as well as children, would seem to be a possible, if not inevitable, reaction when a child separates from their primary care giver. As Beth's behaviour could be said to have demonstrated, distress or separation protest is indicative of a primary need to maintain proximity to another human being occurring when the child begins to recognise objects as distinct items. It was not, in Beth's case, a response to a fear of strangers.

As Schaffer and Emerson (1964) explain, there are considerable individual differences in both the intensity of the special relationship and the time when this occurs but children usually show attachments to certain individuals when they are between nine months and one year old. Attachment theory, which proposes that a close relationship with at least one responsive and reliable adult is vital for healthy [emotional] development (Fahlberg, 1994 in Daniel, Wassell and Gilligan, 2010), suggests that separation anxiety can be attributed to an insecure parent/child relationship.

The mother may be the focus, not necessarily the first 'object' of this early social behaviour, but children can form a number of attachments of different intensities with different people. Close relationships typically become focussed, after an 'indiscriminate phase', on specific individuals. Being left with others during the indiscriminate phase (up to six months old) is unlikely to provoke protest but changes in a child's health or general well being, such as associated with pain, illness or tiredness may create or intensify proximity seeking behaviour. Prolonged periods of absence from the attachment object, such as the mother, or the removal of temporary increased social stimulation, due to the presence of additional carers, may have a similar impact. The intensity of this distress, in some cases, as the adults in this nursery demonstrated, can be reduced by increased stimulation (Schaffer and Emerson, 1964).

Conceptualising transition as a 'parallel', rite of passage (Lam and Pollard, 2006), involving movements and supporting practices within the home and the new context, provides a further, possible explanation for the difficulties some children faced. Children construct, through their early experiences and interactions, a 'fully formed and multifaceted personal identity' (Brooker, 2006) that reflects the family's 'unique' (Brooker, 2008) beliefs and behaviours. As children begin to commute between home/homes and the new context, or even contexts in some cases, they are required to maintain dual or multiple, social identities. Where family values and practices are similar to that of the new context, understanding how to act and what to value would seem to be a relatively straightforward, presumably unconscious process requiring a minimum degree of adjustment or effort. A study of the transition of four year old children from home to a group setting demonstrated the way in which the beliefs, practices and expectations of the home shaped children's attitude to their new setting and consequently their ability to settle (Brooker, 2006).

The notion of rites of passage provides a way of understanding children's transition from home to kindergarten as a process of context and social status change whereas socio-cultural theory can be applied to consider the way in which children actively respond and adapt to a new environment (Lam and Pollard, 2006). Psychoanalytical interpretations of children's external behaviours aim to provide an account of a young child or baby's emotional experience from their perspective (Elfer, 2001). These understandings relate, for example, to the feelings a child may associate with being left in an unfamiliar, nursery situation (Wittenberg, 2001) and the underlying anxieties of a young child coping with life in nursery alongside a change in family circumstances (Dennis, 2001). The 'message' from a study of a one-year-old child's egocentric, adaptive behaviour at the beginning of his time in an out of home context (a crèche) was that children, raised in an 'atmosphere of love and trust', may not necessarily be prepared for the 'rough and tumble world' of the institutional context. Initiated by the actions of another young child, the case study child began by adopting a tribal, defensive mentality to cope with separation from his parents and a gentle upbringing. Within five months the child had 'recovered'. He passively submitted to adult requirements, showed respect for others and used equipment in imaginative ways (Meltzer, 1984).

In the case of Beth, it was as if she eventually 'recovered' but there was a time, when she was relatively immobile and seemingly powerless to alter her circumstances, that was evidently distressing. Short periods of adult attention

seemed to comfort her but she remained distraught for some considerable time as if reacting to the loss of her mother's presence. She appeared happier once she had gained a degree of mobility but sensibly, perhaps, chose to distance herself from the frantic or the 'rough and tumble' unpredictable activities of groups of children when still unsteady on her feet.

09.00

With the exception of Beth, who spent most of her time watching from the edge of the hard surface outdoor area, the younger children seemed to be very content playing on their own with apparently limited awareness of where or what the other children were doing unless another attempted to take or use their chosen vehicle. A number were unable to pedal but they confidently used other ways of propelling their vehicles within the space. Some used their vehicles as support, with legs on either side, while they 'walked' around the area. Others used both feet in unison on either side of their vehicle to 'bounce' around the space.
Field note, 30 April 2009

The reasons for Beth's distress were not immediately obvious. It seemed that she began to appreciate what was expected of her and less concerned about her mother's absence but was disturbed by an inability to take control of her own actions or influence those of others.

09.55

Beth was standing in a restricted space between shelved storage units on one side and a large area of tables and chairs on the other. A group of older children, who had quickly established themselves when they discovered that a cooking activity had been planned, were sat at the tables helping a member of staff make cakes. They seemed to be unaware of Beth. There was no effort to include her even though she was effectively standing alongside the group, a tactic deployed by other children when they wished to be accepted. Beth was unhappy, isolated and passive seemingly pleading but unable to vocalise her wishes.

She eventually became distracted by the materials on an adjacent open shelf and began a period of haphazard exploration. It was behaviour that I had seen from other children of about the same age which has often led to items, as in this case, being scattered across the floor. She seemed to be trying to communicate her desire to join in with the group but the presence

92

of the older children (who were effectively acting as a physical barrier) were
making it very difficult for her to do so. I may, however, have misunderstood
her intentions. She could have been trying to indicate that she was unable
to do what was expected of her as the table space, which she might have
used, was being occupied by a group of older children. Was she simply
asking for adult help? The materials - mathematical activities - did not to
appear to be appropriate for her use
Field note, 30 April 2009

On one hot summer day, it was the weather rather than the situation that
caused initial discomfort. Once she had 'cooled down', she became active. In
this case, there were no obvious physical barriers preventing her participation.
She had become much 'steadier' on her feet and the sensitive, caring actions of
other children as well as an adult, provided direction which promoted, confident
participation. By this time she had begun to be able to use simple language to
communicate her thoughts if not her wishes.

10.00
It was hot. Beth, compared to the other children, seemed particularly
uncomfortable. Once she was encouraged to stay in a small patch of shade
(near one wall) and her hat was removed (by an adult) she appeared more
comfortable. Mimicking the actions of the adult as well as other children,
who had been making marks on various surfaces, she began to 'paint' with
water and a thick paint brush. Her language – 'water' and 'paint' - was
understandable.
Field note, July 2009

Within a year, she had become familiar with the environment and, unlike others
(a group of boys), could be trusted to behave in accordance with the rules.

08.30 – 09.00
'We are going to play outside today. You played nicely yesterday.'
'We are getting breakfast ready for E and J.'
'Is mummy walking today?'
'Would you like to collect something to play with from next door?'
'Can you do the door?'
'Come straight back.'
'Did you choose a dolly?'
Field note, April 2010

When viewed as a rite of passage, children's transition from home to child care may be considered as a regulated process whereby the individual eventually attains 'a new social status in the new world' through a process of separation, transformation and incorporation. Ritualised practices facilitate the symbolic as well as status passage of the child from one socially, as well as physically defined position (the child at home), to that of another (the child at nursery or pre-school) through a period of uncertainty and eventual adoption of a new social status in a new context. The beginning of this process is assumed to be initiated in the home as parents prepare their children for the impending passage. Pre-entry or transitional programmes are designed to separate the child from the parent and communicate new expectations about how to behave as an individual within the new context. Although represented as a linear framework, previously conceptualised in relation to a child's transition from home to kindergarten (Lam and Pollard, 2006), an apparently more formal, school like context, the idea does acknowledge the probable individual and variable nature of the three stage passage.

One might readily assume that a child's reluctance to be left at the start of the day and subsequently join a group of children is an understandable, emotional response associated with separation from a familiar, primary care giver. If this is the case, it would seem reasonable to suggest that over a period of time, as children develop and become used to the situation, they will adapt and accept other adults, whether individually or collectively, as their 'temporary' carers. This would seem to be the situation for many children but even those who have previously appeared to be 'settled' have desired, on occasion, focussed one to one support from a caring adult rather than sharing a confined space with other children. In some cases, children would clearly have preferred to have been elsewhere.

08.15 – 08.45
After some discussion, Laura's (4) mother began to leave. There was some initial reluctance from Laura but she was soon distracted by one of the adults with the promise of some breakfast and a choice of breakfast cereal. Laura was taken off to the kitchen and soon returned with a bowl of cereal. She sat down at the second table, alongside another adult, before beginning to eat her breakfast.

Shortly afterwards, Matthew (4) and his mother appeared at the far end of the room presumably having entered the Nursery from the side rather than

the main door. There was some initial reluctance but Matthew seemed
happier, compared to previous occasions, for his mother to leave him.

At one point he asked if she was going. She explained, 'I will pick you up
after tea'.
Field note, May 2008

Previous experience of group care, even though it had been experienced elsewhere, appeared to be significant. In comparison to Beth, one child immediately seemed comfortable within the environment presumably due, I assumed, to the fairly standardised layout of the environment and familiar expectations. He was willingly and able to choose, as expected, both spaces and resources to use seemingly unaware and untroubled by the proximity of a number of other children in a relatively confined space. What he did not appreciate was an implicit rule, associated with the Montessori approach, regarding what I will refer to as the temporary ownership principle.

As I have described elsewhere, use of the Montessori materials is a scripted, symbolic process which involves the controlled removal, use and return of materials to an allocated place on an open shelf. Returning the materials to their identified place indicates their availability for another's use. In similar situations a circle drawn on the floor may act as a 'holding bay' where materials may be left for further use rather than immediately being returned to the open shelf. Besides an intention to promote independence and respect for the environment, the procedure, which was not necessarily adhered to in all cases but internalised by the children, minimised potential conflict.

The situation I recall was a passing yet seemingly significant moment. A small suitcase, filled with items of clothing (part of the Practical Life materials), was being used by two girls as part of their pretend play. Momentarily, the suitcase was left unattended and quickly removed by the new boy. An adult, having seen the event, quickly intervened and returned the suitcase to the girls who, it was assumed, as they had not returned the item to the open shelving, wished to continue using it.

Incorporation

There were exceptions but older, mobile children, often temporarily confined within a small space, became accustomed to the restricted freedom at the

beginning of each day. Regulating their behaviour, in adult expected ways, children sat or acted quietly together, within the carpeted space, seemingly enjoying each other's company. Small numbers of children at this time supported the development of intimate relationships with other children as well as members of staff and, as the Manager suggested, 'it's when friendships are made'. Some parents evidently supported the development of certain friendship groups making arrangements, such as 'overnight stays' to ensure that their children had contact with selected, other children outside of the Nursery context.

The carpeted (cosy) area, a space at one end of the classroom, had special significance associated with children's arrival, separation and incorporation. As though mimicking the actions of adults, some of the children sat on the ledge of the double glazed doors and exchanged greetings at the beginning of the day. Others created their own 'cosy' space or 'island[s] of intimacy' (Goldschmied and Jackson, 1994) within the carpeted area using the cushions or small carpet squares provided. When children were standing on the sill, there was a clear view of the car park area. From this vantage point, children could choose or were encouraged to watch their parents depart. Jack, a three year old child, who had arrived with his mother early one morning, immediately made his way to the carpeted area, climbed up onto the sill beneath the glazed doors and as he watched his mother walk to her parked car waved and was heard to say, 'Bye. My Mum's gone in'.

What was particularly significant was the way in which 'items', deliberately provided by adults - possibly a box of musical instruments, a train track or a marble run - stimulated, engaged and occupied, small, sedentary groups of children in expected ways. Placing themselves alongside each other, possibly to gain some comfort, the children became actively engaged with objects that reflected their current interests often repeating this behaviour on a daily basis over a period of time as if attempting to obtain or demonstrate a degree of self control.

I then recall realising that Louise (3) was attempting to manoeuvre a large, plastic storage box between the main table and another small set of tables to the right. She had managed to carry the box the short distance from the carpeted area to this point but was unsure how she could negotiate the space. I noted from where I was sitting, at the other end of the table, how she attempted to lift the box but its size and weight seemed to prevent her

from doing so. In response to my suggestion, she asked the child to move closer to the table. With some help from an adult, she successfully moved the box to the place I presume she had intended - a relatively small space on the floor to the right of where I was sitting but in front of the door to the corridor which leads to the kitchen, toilets and second room. The box stimulated the interest of other children. They may have recognised the box and knew what the contents were, as they immediately collected around LA and the box on the floor.

As Louise began to remove the coloured pieces from the box, I realised that the box contained the pieces that are used to make up a 'marble run'. She began to take control, issued instructions ('Here you go' and 'Don't fit on there') and made statements about what was hers ('That's mine') whilst the three youngest children and another older child, who had arrived at that point, stood over and watched what was happening. I recalled at the time how popular this activity was, how small numbers of children were able to co-operate with each other when building a run but find it much more difficult to share its use especially when other children wished to be involved.
Field note, March 2009

Those who had recently developed mobility were some times seen roaming throughout the room momentarily but indiscriminately investigating, as they came across them, the range of objects placed on open shelves within this room. Younger, immobile children who were sat or placed in the carpeted area were 'occupied' with a basket of objects or specific activities deemed to be safe, potentially interesting and of benefit to children's development. They were encouraged to explore these items either through the fleeting interactions of a member of staff or the more sustained actions of older children some of whom also found them engaging. Unfortunately, the older children's interest in these objects and activities could result in specific items being made unavailable to the younger immobile child as they become 'scattered' across the area or hidden, sometimes deliberately, beneath other objects.

Objects brought from home conveyed apparent significance for individual children. In addition to acting as an important concrete, cultural link between 'life' at home and 'life' in the setting, objects seemed to fulfil a number of other, not necessarily, recognisable functions. Distinct objects, such as blankets and soft toys, were comfort objects that could be 'cuddled' by children and,

seemingly, of particular significance when children were possibly attempting to adapt to and contend with a different routine.

Joseph (3) arrived at the Nursery with a member of staff rather than one of his parents. He was carrying his comfort blanket and looked tired. As soon as he arrived, he seemed to be in disagreement with the other children. It seemed that he was unwilling to fit in with their play. He thought that an adult, who is his key worker, might be able to help him.

'I want that train. I want that train.'

After several unsuccessful attempts to become included in the play, Joseph isolated himself from the group, lying for some short time on the cushions at the corner of the carpeted area. He then began building with a set of large, wooden rectangular shapes while a small group of children played, co-operatively, alongside him with the trains and train track.

Joseph continued to find it difficult to join in with the play of the other children and to share the toys in the outdoor area. He became attached to one wheelbarrow and was unprepared to share this with others. At one point he decided to 'store' the wheelbarrow beneath one of the slides whilst he was not using it. Two leaves collected from the walnut tree were for 'mummy and daddy.'
Field note, September 2008

Other, familiar objects may have minimised personal emotional discomfort but they were also used in a social manner - to become noticed, gain acceptance from certain members of the social group or negotiate a place within the hierarchy.

Suddenly, Robert (3) arrived in the carpeted area wearing a yellow, plastic safety helmet on his head, a rucksack with a handle on his back and a book in his hand. He dropped down to his knees, onto the carpet immediately in front of where I was sitting and began to show me the book which was about different kinds of tractors and fittings (eg fork, digger).

The other children became interested in his belongings but he was unwilling to share some of the items with certain children.
Field note, July 2008

Some objects functioned as rewards, given by a parent, for children's co-operation during transition and sometimes 'gifted' at the point of daily separation. It was a seemingly, significant act in the following example when the child was required to adapt to a change in arrangements.

> *Alice (3) arrived on this occasion with her mother. I have often seen her being dropped off and picked up by her grandmother. She was carrying a coloured 'Slinky' (a coiled piece of plastic coated wire) still in its wrapper which an adult helped her to open.*

> *Alice sat on a chair to my left and began to explore her 'Slinky'.*

Objects stimulated another child's interest as well as a competitive type of banter about the relative merits of an individual's possessions.

> *Cooper (boy) (3): I like that. I won't break it.*
> *Alice: That's mine.*
> *Cooper: I just want to see.*
> *Cooper: Let me see, that's big, that's bigger.*
> *Cooper: I don't want one of those.*
> *Alice: I've got different colours (pointing to the colours of the object).*
> *Cooper: And red and green. Lots of green.*

> *Cooper turned his attention towards the 'junk' that other children had begun to play with.*
> *Cooper: I want one.*

> *Ashley (boy) (4) attempted to sit on the chair which Alice had briefly vacated. In a way similar but more direct than that used by Cooper, he began to show an interest in the 'Slinky'.*

> *Alice: I was sitting there.*
> *Ashley (boy): Can you give me that? I'll give it back. I promise. I'll be your best friend.*
> Field note, December 2008

Children shared their experiences of certain events and aspects of home life with other children. As if attempting to bridge the divide between their experiences of life within the home and that in the setting, they brought in

'precious' objects which they initially played with but were reluctant to share with other children. Children used objects to effectively 'boast' about what they owned. The setting accepted and accommodated this desire even though unlabelled objects from home evidently created certain challenges for the staff.

> *Rose and Colin (an older girl and her younger brother) (4) (2) arrived much later, as is their usual pattern of attendance, with Rose carrying delicate items wrapped in kitchen paper inside a sealed, plastic box. These items proved to be Nativity Figures which her grandfather had given her. One of the adults closely supervised the child, directing Rose to and then sitting alongside her in the carpeted area of the classroom. Using the long, thin box provided as a stable, Rose carefully placed, one by one, each figure inside the box. Once she had tired of this activity, Rose's figures were wrapped up before being returned to their box and then placed on a high window sill well out of reach of the children.*
> Field note, December 2008

Once children have been handed over, children's safety and the care of objects brought from home became the setting's responsibilities. Generally, the setting's operational effectiveness was dependent upon individual parents ensuring that objects brought from home were appropriate; that they were safe, hygienic and sufficiently durable for use by groups rather than individual children. Precious items or those consisting of a number of small pieces, had to be closely monitored by staff as they can be easily broken and were a potential hazard to young children. Nonetheless, objects brought from home had clear additional benefits for the child which the Nursery was instinctively keen to exploit. In addition to providing adults with potentially useful information regarding children's current interests, objects, whether from home or available in the setting, acted as a stimulus for sustained periods of interaction with adults or other children.

> *Nina (U2), one of the younger girls, stood in the carpeted area of the classroom watching while an older boy, Joel (3) and an adult were sharing a book. She began to explore certain resources within the home corner (opening the door of the toy microwave and prodding bags which were hanging from the corner of the unit) but was distracted when Joel began to kick a ball.*

Glancing towards another adult, as if seeking approval for her planned actions, she walked towards and placed herself next to Joel. Joel was attempting to remove a large, plastic box full of toys from beneath a table. He began to address one of the adults.

Joel: Can I take this out? Can I take this out? Nina is not moving out the way.

Nina knelt down next to Joel and the box of toys and watched as he removed items from the box. She removed a plastic toy vehicle glancing up at me (again, as if looking for approval) as she did so.

Joel began to play with items from the box (a plastic train and carriages), - talking to himself as he did so.

Joel: These go down and these go up. Toot toot.

Joel continued to play with the plastic train, now singing to himself as he did so. Momentarily, he broke off his play to chase a fly he had noticed on the carpet and then return to his play before leaving this to 'climb' the window ledge to see what was parked in the farmyard.

Joel: Look, tractor!

Nina began to play with the toys that J had left on the carpet. Joel joined Nina and re-arranged the toys as Walker arrived with his dad. Even though Walker was upset when separated from his dad, he was easily distracted and quickly settled down to play on his own (but close to Nina and Joel) in the carpeted area with toys from the box.

Soon after this, the noise from another crying child could be heard. Joel had remained on the window ledge looking out at the car park. Nina was at his side.

Joel: Who's this? He's crying.
Field note September 2008

The older boys displayed an ability to share scarce resources, take turns and co-operate with a few others. Younger children could be excluded from the play

of the older children but it was time when they tested the effectiveness of their involvement strategies as well as what is or is not considered acceptable.

Martin (4), one of the older boys, began to watch over Rab (3) who had removed a number of items, including a toy metal detector, from his rucksack. This captured everyone's attention (adults and children) who were unable to tolerate the high pitched sound coming from the toy.

Rab was, surprisingly, willing to share his belongings with some of the children but not others. Somehow or other Martin, who had just arrived on the scene, managed or was allowed to use the metal detector toy whereas other children were not.

Conner (3): Shall I have one as well (asking Rab)?
Rab: No!
Rab: The 'big boys' can do it. Only he can play with it (referring to M and the metal detector).

Other children have repeatedly used 'objects' in individual, unexplainable ways.

One of the girls had already arrived and was, according to the Manager, behaving in a way she expected.

'She always does first thing. She does every time.'

The child was standing inside a child-sized kitchen unit on the left hand side of the carpeted area, beneath the double glazed doors, watching what was happening. I could see her head and part of her shoulders above the hole where the washing bowl or sink would have been. The washing bowl was on the floor in front of the unit
Field note, December 2008

At some point, transitional objects were usually discarded by each child. Some children remembered to place objects in their allocated drawer for safe keeping but some needed to be reminded of this expectation. Even though objects were unlabelled, adults were normally able to recognise which object belonged to which child but children occasionally went home with another's possessions. In some cases, children were extremely reluctant to part with their comfort objects;

behaviour which caused tension between parents and the Nursery with both parties believing that they were acting in the interests of the child.

With a focus at the beginning of the day on the transfer of responsibilities from the parent to the setting, adults shaped children as though 'willing subjects of liberal government' (Davies and Bansel, 2007). Adults, under the guidance of the managing owner, who was governed by statutory requirements, were preoccupied with ensuring and maintaining children's safety and security. With the greatest number of children arriving at one starting time, the ability of adults to offer emotional support to individual children was constrained. Wherever possible, members of staff used a range of personalised procedures, what might, possibly, be described as a form of 'professional love' (Page, 2008 in Page and Elfer, 2013) to support individual children who were reluctant to be separated from a parent and join the group.

For a number of children, daily passage was a relatively smooth journey. They became accustomed to the distinct culture of the situation (Yeboah, 2002) modifying patterns of behaviour and dispositions, shaped during primary socialization, in order to competently conform to the pattern of practice established for this specific social 'field'. Some appear to have been endowed with 'a certain field-relevant [cultural] capital' (Chudzikowski and Mayrhofer, 2010) that facilitates an individualistic approach to adjustment. While most children adjusted, more or less immediately, a small number of individual children remained upset for some considerable time. It was as if they were confused by the 'meaning, values and modes of operation' of the new 'world' (Meltzer, 1984) or distressed by the forced separation from a parent.

It became clear that younger children, who were part of a mixed age group of children, benefitted through proximity to older children. Through involvement with and observation of the actions of older children, who could be said to have been acting as the more knowledgeable others, possibly a substitute parent, they quickly developed the independent behaviour that the setting expected of them. In studies of older children (Docket and Perry, 2013), children who experienced successful transition to primary school and from primary to secondary school identified the value of older siblings and buddies who were able to provide support as well as advice and guidance about the new social situation. 'Their expertise helped to provide a bridge between the worlds of home, or preschool and school, and their actions established their roles as brokers between the different contexts' (p359). As Trevarthen (2004 in Page

and Elfer, 2013) has argued, 'while characteristics of secure attachment can explain anxiety inhibiting or security facilitating exploration, attachment theory does not explain the enthusiasm for co-operative exploration with friendship groups' (p555). Boundary work - children's adjustment to and incorporation within this Nursery situation - was a process of social construction and reconstruction by adults (including parents) and the children themselves.

Interacting, mainly in non-verbal ways, older children communicated adult expectations which were taken up and reproduced by younger children. The development of a modified, key worker approach, said to be associated with the arrangement of children as a mixed age group, while demonstrating compliance with external requirements, further emphasised the importance placed upon the individual child to secure and use available support from adults or other children. Adults distanced themselves, to some extent, from those most intimate, affective child-rearing 'aspect of love and care' (Page and Elfer, 2013), traditionally associated with the home and family. By so doing, they affirmed the primacy of the mother-child attachment, promoted the development of respectful, professional relationships with parents and reduced the emotionally demanding aspects of their daily work.

Standardised practices, established for pre-entry and daily transition, communicated to parents, the settings expectations regarding their behaviour as well as their children's. The practices, reflecting hypothetical socio-cultural ideals regarding the importance of a link between the home and educational setting, encouraged parents to divulge key, personal information about their children which might, for instance, be needed in the event of an accident. However, there was an intention to promote two-way communication in order to enhance the quality and continuity of care. Some parents, seemingly aware of the difficulties children might experience during daily transition, established consistent patterns of care, actively created friendship groups for their children and supplied desirable objects.

Objects brought from home, as well as those available within the Nursery and unique behaviours, were used by some children as if they were navigational aids deployed to seemingly cope with the change of situation, separation from their parent or, possibly and more importantly, to promote interaction, inclusion and/or acceptance by a dominant other. There were exceptions but boys were typically associated with objects and certain girls sought reassurance through close contact with an adult. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, children who had been

associated with the setting since they were babies, regularly attending for a specific number of days each week, were most able to take control and make the necessary daily behavioural and identity adjustments but this developed over time. It became more complex when a number of carers shared the daily responsibility of delivering the child to the setting. As the Manager concurred, a 'difficulty to settle' or comply with institutional expectations was associated with the child's pattern of attendance or changes in home circumstances. Children who consistently spent three or four consecutive full days in the setting appeared to settle more easily than those who attended for fewer days each week particularly if attendance was spread across the week. Daily adjustment was not necessarily related to age or familiarity with the new contextual situation but girls seemed more resilient and, possibly, more amenable than boys.

5 NORMALISING ROUTINES

> 'we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually,
> progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of
> organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts etc'
> (Foucault, 1977 in Gordon, 1980: 97)

As declared by Curtis and Carter (2003), pre-school educators 'don't have
children sitting at little desks but we regulate time and routines, remind them of
rules, and surround them with uniform learning materials. We may not ring bells
or have long hallways to walk down, but our programmes for children are
organised around schedules, standards, checklist, and assessment tools' (p1).
The everyday life of this Nursery was constructed around a number of these
routine practices and recurrent events (Alasuutari and Markstrom (2011) which,
together, acted as mechanisms of socialisation and enculturation to promote
group harmony (McLaren, 1986) and standardised involvement (Doucet, 2011).
Routines were a structural manifestation of everyday life (Thornberg, 2007) but
also productive in 'shaping the conditions by which moral regulation [was]
experienced' (Bailey and Thomson, 2009: 211).

Based upon Foucault's idea that the distribution of bodies in space and over
time can be viewed as a discourse or the means by which power is exercised
(Bailey and Thomson, 2009), this chapter considers how the routine (micro)
practices collectively framed everyday life and brought to life the 'normal' child.
Each section considers the nature of the socio-spatial activity, the strategic
function/s that these afforded and the way in which explicit and implicit rules
attempted to support and/or reinforce the creation of the 'ordinary' preschool
child.

Producing the self-regulating, respectful 'normal' child

At the beginning of this study in November 2007, the whole day (Figure 1) was
clearly divided into distinct 'events' and a number of associated necessary but
time consuming periods of transition. The morning session, originally devised
for groups of three to five year old children, revolved around periods of
instruction in predetermined visible spaces arranged according to whether
children were required to work individually or as individual members of a group.
Set 'caring' times were established for children to use the toilet and wash their
hands as well as consume a mid-morning snack.

Figure 1
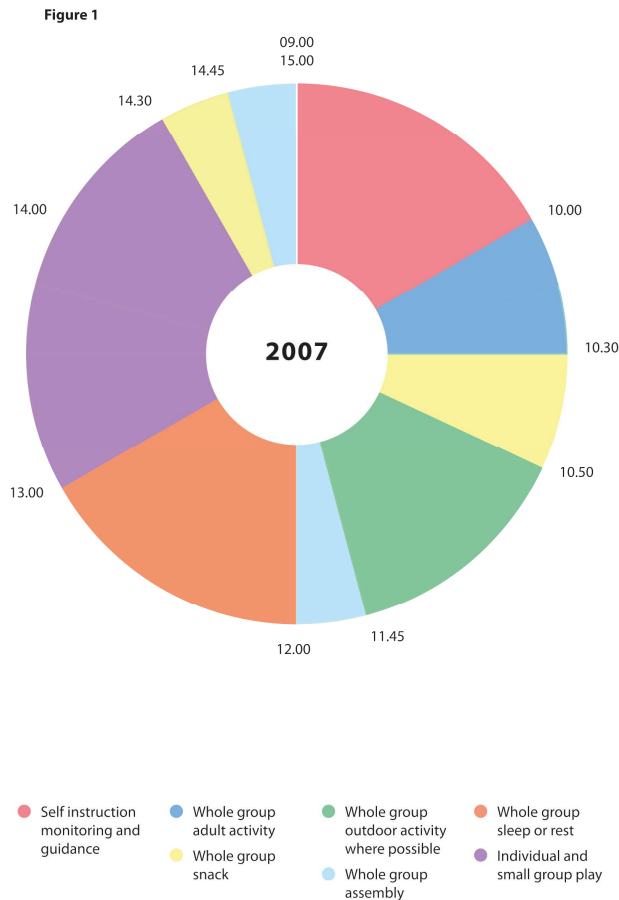
Characteristically, a precise instruction from an adult to *'Find something from the shelves',* after self-registration, was a signal that marked, at about 9am, the beginning of what was then referred to as the 'work cycle'. Operating initially with self-interest in mind, each 'normal' child was expected to regulate their own behaviour. They were required to independently select one of the Montessori activities from an open shelf, carry this activity to a table or area of floor and use it. Implicit within this statement was an expectation that children would make considered choices but they were limited by the supply and availability of materials. The unstated theoretical expectation required children to differentially select materials that had previously been introduced by an adult as a 'presentation' and use these in a standardised manner but this 'agreement' was not strictly enforced.

Although phrased as a clear instruction ('*Find something from the shelves')* to which the majority of children responded in the expected manner, a number typically chose and were allowed to continue to engage in more playful type activities some of which were also stored on open shelves. Individually they selected resources and returned to the large table at the end of the room where

107

they sat to use the self-instructional materials. A few moved to the adjacent room to either play with a limited range of toys or complete an activity planned, resourced and led by an adult. Use of this second room (known as the playroom at this time), generally a cold, unfriendly area, was minimal and seemed to be discouraged. When compared to the more formally arranged classroom, with clearly designated places for the storage of particular items, this second room quickly became untidy. A statement provided by the Manager at the time - '*the children had little respect for the materials or overall environment'* seemed to illustrate a connection between respect and the desired, ordered nature of the Montessori approach.

Adults were expected to monitor children's use and record what they could or could not do before introducing a new material as the 'next step' in the child's learning. An intention to examine a child's ability was marked by a simple question which implied that the child had a choice – he/she could either accept or reject the offer even though the younger members of staff, who were assigned as key workers for a given group of children, were expected to complete one observation for each key child each week.

> *One of the Assistants asked a child if she could 'do something' with him. The 'doing something' was an assessment of his ability to name colours. Using one of the specific resources, the box containing a number of wooden small cards wound with different coloured threads, the child was asked to name the colours.*
> Field note, May 2008

As the Montessori apparatus was used both as a teaching resource as well as an assessment tool, the adult's intention was not always clear. It was evident in this situation, however, that the adult could have used the information gained to propose ways in which the child's abilities might be enhanced. Given that each piece of structured apparatus is part of a pre-determined programme of development and learning and associated with established direct and, possibly, indirect aims, it is possible for the adult to both deduce what the child is able to do and identify the 'next [learning] step' (DfES, 2007). Consequently, the programme can be used by a relatively inexperienced adult. Planned assessments, which together with spontaneous observations (commonly referred to as 'wow' moments by the early years community), formed a developmental record of progress reported to parents within an on-going auditable document referred to as a learning journey.

Texts, such as that by Gettman (1987), provide detailed information about how materials should be presented as a 'The Three Stage Lesson' but handwritten notes, prepared by the Manager, were available for members of staff, who had not completed specific Montessori training, to use as a guide. In essence, the three staged process, involves the initial naming of the activity, a demonstration in use and an opportunity for the child to complete the exercise in the same way. As a controlling and normalising mechanism, the instructions provided a benchmark for monitoring and examining adult as well as children's actions. One of the early Practical Life activities - an activity 'to teach the child how to pour and how to use a sponge' – was 'presented' in the following way. Ostensibly, this ritualised activity supports the development of hand eye co-ordination, fine motor skills and the transmission of the 'goods' or 'virtues' of Montessori culture: concentration, coordination, order, independence and respect (Cossentino, 2005). Typically, activities were presented from left to right to represent and emphasise the expected, western writing orientation.

> This would be an individual presentation. The teacher would place the apparatus between themselves and the child and say, "This is a pouring exercise". She would then lift the left hand jug and pour the water into the right hand jug. When the jug was empty, the teacher would pick up the sponge and carefully wipe around the spout of the pouring jug. She would then place the jug down, pause, and then pick up the right hand jug and repeat the sequence with the right hand one. Once finished the teacher would place the tray in front of the child and offer him a turn.
> (Laurie, undated)

More complex activities required adults to use a scripted pattern of verbal as well as non-verbal behaviour. In the following example, one of the children had selected and placed the Spindles number activity on the table immediately in front of where she was sitting. The activity consisted of a wooden, rectangular box with ten, numbered compartments (0 to 9) and a wicker basket containing a number of pencil sized, wooden rods or spindles. An adult joined the child (sitting on her left) and began to 'work' through the activity to promote a connection between concrete materials and an abstract notion. Gesticulation was employed by the adult to direct the child's attention and emphasise 'facts'. When the number increased beyond 5, the child began to loose interest and the exercise was concluded by the adult.

'Spindles back in the basket'

(Pointing to the 0)

'0 means nothing, zero means nothing'

'Can you get me one spindle … one on the table?'

'This is two'

(Pointing to 2)

(Counting on the table one, two)

'Pick them up. Put two spindles in number 2'

'Can you pick up three (seems to attempt to pick up three together)?'

'One, two ….'

'Can I have one more?'

'One, two, three, four …'

'This is 5 - we need five spindles'

(Laid out on table and counted one, two, three, four, five)

(Child picked up and put into number 5

'Would you like to put the spindles back in the basket?'

Field note, January 2008

Demonstrating respect for the collective, each child was required to return the activity to the specified place on the shelf after use so as to make it available for another. To facilitate this process, materials were deliberately arranged as clear sets on open shelves at child height. Clearly demarcated in some cases by recognisable containers that 'housed' small component parts of activities (light weight plastic tray, an old biscuit tin, straw baskets) these materials could be relatively easily and independently accessed by young children and carried to an adjacent table. Each set had its own place on a particular shelf, alongside another or between two other sets but with clear spaces between each set of activities to ease removal and minimise possible damage. Small, coloured pieces of felt material stored with and used as mats in association with activities that were not 'bound' by identifiable containers, enabled children to create distinct, segregated working areas in order to reduce disturbing or conflicting contact with other children in relatively confined, shared spaces.

Originally developed for the 3 to 5 year old age group, the effectiveness of the daily routine, as a means of maintaining institutional order and promoting group harmony, was dependent upon children supporting adults with the upkeep of the environment. Although children were expected to be responsible and self-sufficient and return certain materials (the Montessori resources) to their particular storage places after use, a specific, 'tidy up' time (10.00 -10.10) had

to be set aside for maintaining the environment. Very few children automatically returned either the Montessori materials or more general resources to their dedicated storage places. It was the adults, with some help from the children, who contravened the explicit rule and regularly collected these materials before returning them to the shelves.

Producing and reproducing the docile, responsible 'normal' child

Later periods in the morning, with the exception of outdoor play on certain occasions, were characterised by predetermined, objective driven adult structured large group activities devised to maintain care as well as support learning. While grouping provided the context for the activities, children were positioned as individuals but spatially and temporarily arranged and contained as a group dominated and controlled by an adult. Grouping facilitated the transmission of individual but similar forms of knowledge, safe access to an outdoor experience and the provision and delivery of a mid-morning snack and a mid-day meal. Together with the scripted pattern of behaviour learnt when an adult demonstrated use of the Montessori materials, the hierarchical procedure communicated a particular, acceptable manner of interaction which was taken up by children and reproduced in their interactions with others.

At about 10.10 each morning, individual activities were curtailed to make way for a short period of adult structured and directed group activities. On one such occasion, children were divided into two and arranged as two separate, differentiated groups around sets of tables at each end of the room. Governed by the generational order and an implied presumption of participation, one group sat and listened while an adult 'leader' explained how a ruler and a pencil should be used to create 'train track' on small pieces of paper. With support, the children were able to draw two horizontal straight lines along the length of the paper and then use smaller vertical lines, in a repetitive manner, to divide the section into five. While the possible response was limited by the prescribed nature of the set task, the children were provided with a choice of pencils ('*What colour would you like*?) and adults promoted trust through a certain degree of controlled closeness (Alasuutari and Markstrom, 2011) by acknowledging individual effort (*'Well done, look at that; Wow, that's brilliant!').* Supported counting ('*One, two, three, four, five*') implied and intention to promote children's self-confidence as well as ordinal and cardinal number knowledge. Once

completed, these 'train tracks' were added to adult created 'mountain shapes' and attached to one of the large display boards for parents to see.

Another activity located on a smaller table at the other end of the room, illustrated a similar subordinate characterization of young children and a school like arrangement to facilitate the transmission of knowledge. The purpose of this activity was to help children to recognise and name shapes. Individually, rather than collectively, children were shown a shape (eg trapezium), asked to repeat the name, draw round it on a particular page and complete the writing of the shape by joining up the dots. When a child was asked, *'Can you say quadrilateral?'* and he replied, *'No'*, it seemed to represent an attempt, at least, to resist or challenge the generational order.

'Snack time', as one child stated when asked to explain what happened next, followed the short period of adult structured activity each morning. From a nutritional perspective, children in the Nursery were perceived to need a mid-morning snack and a drink. At the time, much was being said or written about in the popular media regarding the importance of a healthy diet as a means of combating the growing occurrence of childhood obesity. While policy was mainly directed at older children and the reintroduction of nutritional standards for school meals, the National Fruit and Vegetable Scheme (2000) provided children between four and six with a free piece of fruit and/or vegetable every day (Pike, 2008: 416). But food has a symbolic as well as a material significance. In addition to providing 'sustenance, food and food practices can initiate interactions, relationships and serve, in an instant, as confirmation of trust, belonging and caring but they are also indicative of class -based contested moralities concerning what is or is not appropriate behaviour' (Punch et al, 2010: 229).

Typically, an adult prepared a morning snack in the kitchen area out of sight of the children while other adults encouraged children to tidy the spaces by returning resources to their designated storage places. Less frequently, individual and groups of children were encouraged to assist with initial preparations and serving of food. The child knew where some resources should be stored but they returned others to inappropriate places. Consequently, it fell upon adults to complete much of this work to ensure that the mid-morning snack was served and eaten at approximately the same time each day. The intention was to ensure that a current conception of a 'healthy' daily snack was

provided for the group without compromising the dietary requirements of individual children. Fruit and milk, followed by a sweet biscuit, was consistently chosen for all but the youngest children. 'Sweet' tasting vegetables and savoury biscuits were occasionally offered but not necessarily desired or consumed by all the children.

In preparation for snack time, children were instructed, in a 'roundabout' way (*'Can we go and wash our hands?'*), to use the toilet and wash their hands before distributing themselves, as though members of a large family, at one of two sets of tables. In some cases adults sat with the children at this assigned time but, more typically, they stood around the periphery overtly monitoring children's actions. Distanced from children, but visible to the managing owner adults were able to take a momentary social and refreshment break but they remained attentive throughout concerned as they were with providing an efficient, safe and orderly service and instilling certain social graces. Children, who were occasionally reminded that they were expected to sit at the table, were constrained by the seating arrangements but able to socialise with a few other children who they may have deliberately chosen to sit with or next to.

> *As the children prepared for snack on one occasion, Lucy (4) found a seat in the middle of the largest set tables and with arms outstretched across the back of two adjacent chairs, announced that she was saving the seats for two of the four year old boys. Seemingly keen to preserve the setting's ethos, a younger member of staff, who was standing nearby, overheard her and responded, 'No. They can choose'. Some further conversations took place between individual children about where they were going to sit with one child stating that 'I want to sit next to you!'*
> Field note, May 2008

Starting at about 10.30 each day, the beginning of snack time was marked by the 'presentation' of food and milk but some children preferred water or drinks brought from home. Small cartons of milk, supplied by the state for children under five, were distributed by identified, responsible older children. On one occasion, it was Jack's (4) 'duty' to hand out the small wax coated cartons to children sitting around the larger group of tables. He served his friends and those he knew first, leaving those he did not know or the younger children until last. Access to milk in miniature cartons required children to initially remove a small, cellophane wrapped straw attached to the side of the carton before

creating a hole for the straw by piercing the carton with the sharp ended straw. The portion size appeared too big for some children and straws were easily bent or flattened. Consequently, spillage and a degree of unnecessary waste seemed inevitable as children attempted, as expected, to help themselves or chose not to drink the whole carton of milk.

Food consisted of a standard, predictable selection of pre-prepared fresh fruit: banana, plum and apple, possibly dried fruit (raisins) and, occasionally, less desirable vegetables (pepper, cucumber) assembled on two plastic chopping boards as either whole or large pieces. Apples were cored and cut into large pieces, bananas were peeled and oranges segmented in order that children could feasibly use a 'safe knife' to cut off a smaller piece. Adopting the learnt routine, children attempted to use one of the two serrated knives provided to cut off a piece of fruit but some found this more difficult than others and attempted to eat whole pieces of fruit. Most were successful but some found this more difficult and adults intervened when children attempted to eat whole pieces of fruit reminding them to cut a piece or provided specific, instructions to promote self help.

> *'You need to cut it. Can't just bite it'.*
> *'Move the knife backwards and forwards'.*
> Field note, January 2008

Some were reassured that there would be sufficient for them but an explanation, *'they needed to wait',* was an explicit reminder of an important snack time rule. Children were required to consider the needs of the group well as their own.

Once the fruit had been consumed, children were then offered a biscuit from a tin. When Daniel (4) was asked to *'Hand out the biscuits'.* He seemed to misunderstand the implied instruction as he removed a biscuit from the tin and gave this to Louise (4). He was then asked to *'Take the tin'* and with help from adults, who provided instructions, was encouraged to take the tin to each child so that they could, as was required, select a biscuit of their own choice.
As well as adults, children were monitored and reprimanded by older children who competed for selection to perform simple, responsible tasks that modelled adult expectations regarding group behaviour. At the beginning of the study, jobs were allocated when children self-registered at the beginning of the morning. One child was chosen to distribute milk and biscuits at snack time and

others were chosen to feed the rabbit, the fish and water plants. On one occasion, one of the three year old girls was given the task of handing out small, decorated cakes made by the owner's mother. As she moved around the table and the children took their cake, she insisted that each child respond with the 'required' pleasantries of please and thank you. Her younger two year old sister seemed unsure about how she would or could eat the cake seemingly challenged by its size and confused by the fact that it was contained within a paper cake case. She watched how another child removed his paper case before eating his cake and repeated this behaviour. On another occasion when children started to create a simple game, involving the passing of a green counter that had been left on the table, they were also reprimanded by the same older child *('You are not allowed to play at snack time')* in a manner seemingly mimicking what she had previously heard.

Lunch was regularly eaten at midday and typically proceeded by a period of outdoor activity (between 10.50 and 11.30 am each day), when conditions allowed and a short period of time when children were, once again, contained as a passive group. The unstated purpose of confinement in this case was to remove children from the classroom space and 'free up' adults in order that they could rearrange the room ready for children to eat their lunch. While the classroom was tidied and furniture was repositioned and supplemented so that children and adults could eat lunch, children were assembled as a group to listen to a story or sing a few familiar songs.

After unusually hasty preparations, including children being required to use the toilet and wash their hands in small groups at this predetermined time, the children were distributed around areas of small tables and chairs. The evident adult focus was ensuring that the children ate their lunch rather than encouraging social interaction. While they patiently waited to be told when they could eat, some children organised their food and talked about what had been provided for their lunch *('I've got ham sandwiches')*.

Each child's place at one of the table areas was defined by: a plastic plate and a themed, generally gendered personal lunch box or bag. At item of food - in most cases a sandwich - was selected by an adult and placed on each child's plate. The rest of their lunch was left in each child's individual box or bag. Bodily placement, which was accepted by the children, was used to separate individuals, reduce possible difficulties and promote responsible behaviour. As a

disciplinary pre-emptive strategy it also seemed to reassure children as well as ensure that help, where necessary, could be easily and efficiently provided by adults who strategically positioned themselves around the outside of the area to provide help or survey particular children. The majority of the children were quickly able to find their allocated places sitting down in front of their recognisable, themed containers and drink bottles often next to their 'friends'.

Talking about ('I've got ham sandwiches') and organising before patiently waiting to eat their lunch. *January 2009*

Much to her dismay, one of the four year old girls could not. Her lunch had been packed in an unfamiliar square shaped, unmarked plastic box which may have originally contained either margarine or ice-cream. Choice, in terms of place or position, was not available nor was the order, generally, in which lunch was expected to be eaten.

Irrespective of whether children were hungry or not, most were required to begin eating their lunch at midday. Most of the children were provided with a cold lunch but some food needed to be reheated. Typically, their meal consisted of a sandwich with a variety of fillings, which a member of staff chose for them to begin with, a potato snack, fruit and yogurt. In some cases, sandwiches were cut into small, manageable sized pieces for small hands and mouths but some were not. Several of the children were able to eat for themselves but a number of younger children needed help with feeding. Adults monitored what each child had eaten and checked the contents of the children's lunch boxes or bags to persuade or ensure that each child ate what had been provided. In this case, it

116

was the responsibility of parents, rather than the Nursery, to provide a sufficient, healthy meal and symbolically demonstrate 'good' care but children did make decisions about how or how much to eat.

A period of adult imposed rest and relaxation between 1 and 2pm each day normally marked the end of the morning and the beginning of the afternoon session. When I arrived at 12.55 one afternoon in September 2008, I was surprised to discover that the children were still finishing their lunch. Ten of the children were sat around the large table at one end of the room and another child was sat in a highchair but within minutes the majority, in response to the Manager's instruction had removed their shoes, placed these in their personal drawers and moved to the 'mat' (carpeted area) for what was known as 'quiet time'. The Manager and Deputy Manager began to clear the area. Tables were cleaned, furniture moved and the floor was swept. Two of the three year old children, possibly demonstrating their aversion to the standardised procedure, remained at the table to 'finish' their lunch. A child in a highchair was slowly 'finishing' her lunch.

The children appeared to understand what was expected of them at this time ('lie down and remain quiet') but a number of children were reluctant to rest, preferring to have contact with each other or manipulate particular, accessible objects. Eventually, even though there was some degree of movement within and outside of the area, as children independently went to the toilet, one or two of the children fell asleep on the floor. One three year old child, holding his comfort blanket, fell asleep with his head on a cushion; another fell asleep in a buggy. The other children rested to some degree but did not fall asleep. Throughout this period, the adult continued to remind all the children of what they were expected to do but it was evident that some of the children, in compliance with parent's wishes, were expected to fall asleep and others were not. John had been taken to 'bed' at the beginning of this time. One she had finished her lunch, Gail was 'put to bed' in a cot.

Conditions were not ideal for sleep but large cushions and carpet squares provided a degree of comfort as well as the feasibility of demarcating identifiable spaces where individual children, as part of the collective, were expected to at least rest, if not sleep, for about an hour each day. Adults were on duty at this time to supervise the activity but this was a comparatively restful time for some of them as well as the group of children. In exceptional circumstances, children were removed to the second room because they *'didn't*

like quiet time' or *'because they couldn't settle in the classroom'* or, if they had already slept at an earlier time, to quietly continue with self-chosen activities.

At the end of 'Quiet time' (2pm), the children were usually instructed to '*Find something from the shelf/shelves'*. A few children selected 'something from the shelf'. Others typically chose to remain, unchallenged, at the far end of the mat and play with alternative materials such as the child-sized, plastic cookware. Part way through the afternoon the children were, once again, gathered together to eat an afternoon snack.

In a similar manner to the start of the day, a procedure was enacted to ensure the safe departure of children with the group's needs, once again, taking precedence over those of the individual. During this potentially insecure period, as the secured door was opened and closed on numerous occasions, children were typically collected and contained, briefly, together in one room (the classroom) and one space (the cosy area beneath the double glazed windows) in advance of the arrival of parents. Distracted, possibly, by a story or a group activity they waited whilst being supervised by at least one of the practitioners whose number decreased in relation to the declining numbers of children. Other adults, remaining on duty to fulfil regulated adult to child staff ratios, completed necessary domestic type tasks: cleaning, tidying, removing and repairing broken items and making ready the various areas for the following day.

On arrival through the password secured door, often facilitated by a member of staff even though parents were provided with the code, adults made time to greet individual parents to relay information about their daily experience. When Elizabeth's (3) father greeted her affectionately *('Hello Tiddles'*), while he was collecting her belongings from a personal drawer, one of the adults attempted to provide some information *('She seemed a bit tired this afternoon'*) but this appeared to be un-important and was not discussed. Adults ensured that children left the premises accompanied by a known parent and that the register was signed with their time of departure.

Unlike the start of the day, the end of the day appeared less remarkable. In some cases, older children who had become engaged in activities with another were reluctant to leave but most children greeted their parents, as soon as they saw them, with unmistakable joy and were keen to leave the premises more or less immediately. Delays were common especially when unlabelled belongings could not be found. For a few children, the routine continued with a period of
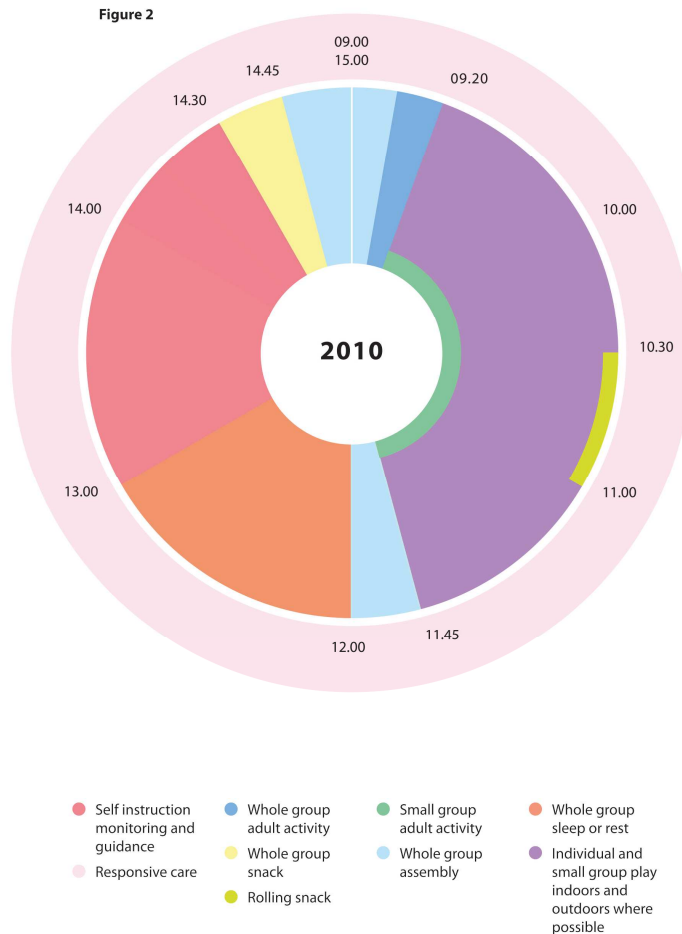
118

free play alongside a small number of older children who had been collected by a member of the nursery staff from local primary schools. Together and for a short time, these children made up an after school club. A cooked tea, eaten together, was made available for these children. One or two, who may have started their nursery day at 8am, regularly left the nursery between 5 and 6pm each evening on their days of attendance.

Producing the docile, self-regulating 'normal' child

While, in some respects, the characteristics of the afternoon session remained similar, by the end of the study the morning was less divided and there were fewer transition points (Figure 2). With increasing numbers of younger children, with established but variable patterns of sleep and feeding, the Nursery was required to provide a more responsive, individualised pattern of care. Children were assembled at the beginning and end of each morning session, mainly for adult convenience, but the revised routine provided children with an extended period of self initiated and self-regulated activity. The introduction of a 'rolling', rather than a group snack, emphasised a similar intention to provide children, within the adult formulated routine, an opportunity to make decisions and exercise choice.

Typically, the formal start to the day began with the noisy arrival, at 9am, of the majority of children and their confinement within a small space at one of the classroom. While children were not normally expected to sit and listen, they were gathered together, in a school like manner and held as one large group in the small, carpeted 'cosy' area at one end of the classroom. There were times when a register was taken but, for the most part, this act appeared to be a temporary holding procedure when adult numbers were limited. Although not explicitly stated, the procedure clearly communicated an adult desire to create a semblance of order at a relatively chaotic time. By implication, children were required to respect the generational differential and do as one was told in order that adults could do what they believed to be best for them. Typically, one adult, who could clearly view the assembled group, adopted the role of superior or leader at the front. Other adults, usually sitting with the children, were available to offer individual children attention and comfort but they also demonstrated and thereby regulated behavioural expectations for the start of each day.

Figure 2

Legend:
- Self instruction monitoring and guidance
- Responsive care
- Whole group adult activity
- Whole group snack
- Rolling snack
- Small group adult activity
- Whole group assembly
- Whole group sleep or rest
- Individual and small group play indoors and outdoors where possible

Children were usually retained as a supervised group until the necessary numbers of adults, as well as expected children, had arrived. On some occasions, the start was marked by a more gradual arrival of individual children (with their parents) some of whom, by now, were between a few months and four years old. Some children chose to sit or rest in this area whereas others immediately became active on their own or in association with small numbers of other children. Rather than functioning as members of a group, expected to operate in a collective manner, children acted independently but predictably in close proximity to each other. Resources provided by the setting, or items brought from home, provide a range of stimuli for their play. Activity was severely restricted by the confined space and actions were repeated by some children on subsequent days of attendance.

One or two children regularly arrived at other specific, agreed times each day and there were occasions when children were unexpectedly late. The initial experience for children who arrived at a pre-arranged time later in the morning was rather different. Essentially, they were expected to fit in with whatever was

happening but, in reality, this usually involved unrestricted, not constrained, access to materials available within the overall environment. With some notable exceptions, planned later arrivals quickly settled into the routine for the day.

A less formal, less organised start to the day – an occasional occurrence - seemed more responsive to the interests or needs of particular children. In this type of situation where individual children, possibly with self-interest in mind, were given some freedom within a relatively small, confined area they could provide others with effective emotional support.

> *Jack (3) approached another child while he was still standing near the entrance door and tenderly invited him to play ('Let's play ..'). The invitation was repeated before the two children began to race and chase each other, picking up items of plastic 'picnic ware' as they moved, until they were gently reprimanded ('Oh, we don't throw things honey') for inappropriate behaviour.*
> Field note, November 2008

Promoting the development of the flexible, self-regulating decision maker

After a relatively short period of time (perhaps five or ten minutes), children were released from the confined environment to explore resources provided within the prepared environment. The adult structured routine each morning, including a limited but identified time when children were encouraged to use the Montessori didactic materials 'without interference' (Standing, 1984), was gradually superseded by an extended spell of unbroken 'free' choice. Children were provided with additional resources and, seemingly, became governed by a belief that children have a 'preference for an uninterrupted work period of two and half to three hours' (Lillard, 1997) in order that the setting could demonstrate its use and achieve accreditation from the Montessori community.

The idea, underpinned by a view that children are naturally curious, energetic and able to concentrate, proposes that children should be provided with sufficient time to use these skills each day to fulfil a desire to become engaged in increasingly more complicated tasks in order to satisfy their own unique agenda for development. It recognises the existence of a period of restlessness or unease, which may easily be misunderstood by the practitioner as inappropriate behaviour, before the child engages with the most difficult work and, finally, a time for contemplation. It is through this free, active involvement

during the uninterrupted work period that children are thought to become self-disciplined and acquire a 'love of learning' (Lillard, 1997) but this is an approach which has been described in relation to practice with the school aged rather than the pre-school child.

Although the uninterrupted work cycle is an idea associated with Montessori, the overriding purpose appeared to resonate with notions prevalent within the wider early years' community. Significantly, the general early years' field recognises that both nature and nurture may interact to determine whether children acquire and retain appropriate skills for learning. It is claimed that children are endowed with 'genetic gifts' at conception predisposing them to learning. Babies are recognised as being curious, energetic and receptive to information which enables them to make sense of the world around them. However, such a predisposition may be weakened if children fail to receive support and guidance (Katz, 1995 in Dowling, 2010).

Irrespective of the philosophical approach adopted, early years practice begins with the provision of an appropriate environment believed to be capable of supporting children's development. Ideologically, children spend most of their time engaging with materials of their own choosing but the nature of these activities may vary as does the perceived role of the adult. Current requirements, as established by The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, places a responsibility on all early years settings to support and guide children in order that they acquire or develop particular observable behaviours or dispositions. The expectation is that children will demonstrate a 'love of learning' (Lillard, 1997) - they will be excited, motivated and interested autonomous learners capable of concentrating and persisting with a task (Dowling, 2010).

The Manager and owner of this particular setting, who was affiliated to the Montessori St Nicholas Charity, provided an eclectic mix of provision which was said to recognise the views of other dominant thinkers representative of the perceived importance of play as a mechanism for learning. There were exceptions but a period of uninterrupted activity increasingly became the common feature of the morning routine in this particular early years' setting. Developed to provide choice in response to individual interests and encourage decision making, the uninterrupted period minimised the number of transition times when children were expected to assist with the maintenance of the

physical environment. Rather than children being directed to *'Find something from the shelves'* in the classroom area this period of exploration increasingly became an unbroken period of outdoor as well as indoor activity using a range of materials for most of each morning. A change which involved and was supported by the relocation of particular activities, development of additional spaces and the introduction of new resources and new practices to support the care as well as education of a group of children from 6 months to five years of age.

Believing in the overriding benefits of the familiar group snack to children's development and emphasising difficulties associated with the use of a rolling snack, the practitioners initially rejected the idea of introducing a more flexible snack time even though the procedure reflected policy in relation to children's rights and acknowledged the importance of providing time for uninterrupted activity. There were occasions when a group snack continued to be offered but a 'rolling' snack eventually became an established aspect of practice each morning. The need to *'to fit in with the three hour work cycle',* the Manager wished to re-instate, became the expressed reason for a change of opinion seemingly ignoring the problems *associated with 'wasted food, some children spending most of the morning sitting in the area and others who did not have either a drink or snack all morning'.*

An area of the classroom was initially re-arranged to provide a convenient, practical space between 10 and 11am each morning where small, rather than large numbers of children, at any one time, could sit together to eat a morning snack. A small group of tables immediately to the left of the main entrance door had been replaced with one rectangular table, arranged so that its longest side was butting up against the outside wall, initially became the defined space where snack was to be taken. Small, child-sized chairs which fitted neatly beneath the table had been placed on the three available sides - two on the longest length and one on each side. The implicit agreement being that children would choose, once they were made aware that the food was available, to sit and eat their snack at a time that was convenient for them. Ostensibly, by way of a compromise, a procedure for this rolling snack, similar to the one that was used for group snack, was developed and implemented to minimise disruption and promote desirable hygiene practices. Illustrations of the steps to be taken to complete the procedure were created and displayed to control as well as support children's independent access. The first illustration instructed children

to wash their hands; a subsequent diagram demonstrated how the fruit could be safely cut using the knives provided.

A small unit deliberately placed in the corner, to the right hand side of the table, containing a 'well' for a bowl and open spaces beneath both on the right and left hand sides was where children were expected to independently wash and dry their hands before taking snack. But adults remained responsible for preparing the food as well as overseeing the children while they ate their snack.

Snack attractively set out providing a small selection of fruit/vegetable, sweet and savoury biscuits and milk. Red, laminated instruction cards are displayed on the back wall. *November 2008*

At 10am, the 'Snack Trolley' was pulled out from the kitchen area and positioned immediately behind a small table providing seating for two children in the classroom space.

The contents of the trolley (orange segments and two large pieces of cucumber attractively set out on a plastic chopping board with a 'safe' knife, a tin containing a few biscuits and a basket of individual cartons of milk) were transferred to the table and left on the table until 11am. 'Leftovers' were removed from the table at the end of the allocated period, returned to the trolley and pushed back into the kitchen.

The area had been set up to encourage children to independently access their morning snack when they wished to but two orange laminated charts, positioned on the wall to the right of the table, communicated an adult intention to monitor the situation. Children were expected to remove their name from one chart and attach it to the next to show that they had 'had' their snack on that particular day.

Orange cards used to identify who has/has not taken snack.
January 2009

Subsequently, a similarly arranged area was used in the normally prohibited kitchen area as 'the' place where children could access their morning snack.

Small numbers of children were more closely supervised by one member of staff who was able to supply, assist and monitor children, while they were eating and drinking, in order to reduce possible waste. Some children were able to choose when to take their snack whereas others need to be reminded. Depending on the time that was chosen, this could be a social occasion but seating space was limited and their were fewer opportunities for older children to model expected behaviour and support younger children with this day to day task.

Paradoxically, concerns regarding children's inability to 'settle', within this 'freer' environment, promoted the introduction, in April 2008, of a daily yoga session. The intention was to use the yoga exercises with a range of recommended resources (candle, owl, string and bells) believing that it would be beneficial for all but particularly helpful for some children. Yoga had previously been available as an extracurricular activity for those children whose parents were prepared and able to pay. The paid sessions had been delivered at the end of the day (3pm) by a peripatetic yoga teacher but, as the children left the Nursery soon after the activity, the staff had '*not seen the benefits'*. By way of an experiment, children were retained within the confined area at the beginning of the day for an extended period of time and expected to conform to an established group pattern of behaviour. The Manager explained how they had previously attended behaviour management courses but the emphasis had always been about adult control. They, as if speaking on behalf of the staff, were hoping that this would '*enable children to take control of their own behaviour'.*

By 2010, access to an outside space became a normal part of this 'freer' childhood experience but the availability of outdoor activities continued to be controlled by the settings ability to comply with safety requirements, in terms of the numbers of adults needed in each of the major spaces, in addition to favourable weather conditions. An original fenced off garden area was an idyllic outdoor space but complicated welfare and safety preparations needed to move a group of children from the inside and outside were time consuming and laborious.

> *Preparations began at 9.20am to move the children from the inside to the outdoor area. It was an unusual time for this - a change of plan which was attributed to an expectation that the day would become sunnier and hotter. Taking responsibility for the children's welfare, the Manager firmly*

126

emphasised for the benefit, it would seem, of other adults as much as the
children, the importance of children wearing sun hats ('children who do not
wear their hat will have to come inside'), and the intended consequence of
non-compliance.

After toileting, washing hands and collecting appropriate footwear from the
porch, the children were escorted, carried or pushed in a buggy through and
beyond the back of the building to a gated area within the garden owned by
the Manager's family. The journey to the outside, a daily occurrence at this
time, began in the classroom with children collecting and changing their
footwear. This journey continued through the corridor, connecting the
classroom to the playroom, where children were required to use the toilet
and wash their hands before moving through and out the other end of the
playroom to another narrow space restricted by a floor standing, storage
unit against one wall. This was where one or two children stopped to gather
a sun hat and use the spare Wellington boots provided before the whole
group exited through the back door. One of the adults carried a register, a
box of tissues, a collection of sun creams and a mobile phone. Another
carried a plastic box of toys and a blanket. Health and safety was clearly the
most important, initial and continuing priority for the adults. Two members of
staff patrolled the area removing nettles that had appeared around the
perimeter while another two practitioners monitored children's actions.
Field note, May 2008

A temporary outdoor space, taking up part of the parking area, was more readily
accessible but children had to wait patiently while certain arrangements were
made to ensure that the area was safe and that various resources were
available for them to use. The development of a purpose built area, completed
in June 2009, theoretically provided immediate access from the second indoor
space and typified an intention to simplify the daily routine in order to extend
choice and minimise transition times. Nevertheless, adults still needed to
ensure that children were protected from the sun, the cold or the wet.
Necessary measures which, in addition to adequate levels of supervision,
reduced children's ability in reality to 'flow' independently between all areas at
all times.

Children waiting patiently to go outside via the double glazed doors at the end of the carpeted area. *April 2009*

Certain features during the morning session remained constant: the time when 'early education' began and ended, the time when snack (approximately) and lunch was made available. Greater choice of overall materials, across more freely available indoor and outdoor spaces, reduced use of the specific Montessori materials particularly among older children even though adults continued to promote their use, purportedly in response to children's interests, in a way which was said to mirror the Montessori philosophy of *'following the child'.* A significant period of time during the afternoon session when children had originally been free to 'play' became more extensively used to promote, monitor and examine use of the didactic materials.

Children used much of the 'uninterrupted' morning time to work individually or in association with a small number of other children but adult actions, both indirectly as well as directly, contributed to the childhood experience. With the exception of some group cookery activities, frowned upon even though they were extremely popular with children, adult devised activities were delivered throughout the morning session to small groups of children who were usually encouraged or cajoled, rather than forced, to participate. Characteristically, the activities were planned to support the development of specific knowledge and children's fine motor development typically involving the use of pencils, paper, scissors and glue in predetermined ways. 'Freer' activities, which the children enjoyed, were occasionally provided to allow children to respond individually in more abstract ways.

Two of the adults were sitting opposite each other at a small table in the play/creative room where the adult focussed activity was planned to take place. On this occasion, the children were expected to create a spider from prepared sugar paper shapes: one oval and eight thin, black rectangular strips. A number of the finished spiders, which were acting as a model, had been left on a surface near to this activity. The adults explained that this activity linked to the new topic of Nursery Rhymes and that these were 'Incy Wincy' Spiders.
Field note, January 2009

Adult focussed and supported activity in which children created spiders from prepared shapes of sugar paper
January 2009

At the beginning of the study in 2007, when the physical environment and morning routine had been structured to promote children's use of the specific, didactic Montessori resources, choice was restricted to a relatively limited range of resources. In addition to times for individual, self-regulated and concentrated exploration, the daily routine ensured that there were identified times for groups of children to eat, sleep, use the toilet and wash their hands. Collectively, the planned activities created a relatively consistent, rhythmic and harmonious daily routine which contributed, in association with the prepared environment, to the socially constructed, cultural context that children and adults became accustomed to. Opportunities for interaction with other children, as well as adults, occurred during planned periods of individual exploration and group work.

In keeping with the setting's intention to create an environment in which children could freely flow between the indoor and outdoor spaces, children were

provided with a more diverse experience. Children were consistently encouraged to choose but choice was gradually expanded to include, beside the structured Montessori materials, a number and variety of other resources believed to be developmentally appropriate for young children. In theory, the overall intention was to provide for a range of unique experiences to match the needs and interests of individual children within any one group. Evidently, actual experience was dependent upon what was chosen by adults as well as what was selected and used by children.

With increasing investment and the development of spaces (both indoors and outdoors) materials became more abundant and increasingly more diverse. Given that the introduction of a number of additional resources was based upon external recommendations and encouraged through targeted funding, as well as an internal audit of current provision using established scales, the apparent intention was to create a similar 'constructed' experience, at least within a local area, if not nationally, for all children between birth and five years of age. A policy based, presumably, on a responsibility imposed by central government on local authorities for children's achievements, in terms of curriculum outcomes at the age of five, as well monitoring use of public funds.

Invitations to engage with adult planned one to one or small group activities were also offered as a choice but children's responses were respected. When required to do so, children would assemble as a group and remain confined within identified spaces. Children placed their trust in adults participating in the various customary practices and generally adapted, as necessary, without any apparent concern, to modified procedures. Nonetheless, adults were flexible, responding in particular, to the basic needs of an increasing number of young children who desired attention, food, rest and required changing at unexpected times. Although adults functioned within a relatively consistent pattern of learning and care activities these activities were modified or suspended to accommodate children's implied and explicit requests as well as special and seasonal events. Spontaneous interactions with children were limited, often playful and created special relationships between specific children and supporting adults; structured one to one interactions between adults and children were mainly associated with use of the didactic Montessori materials. Transition points, during the day, were especially significant but these were reduced in number, overtime, in order to provide children with longer, uninterrupted 'work' periods for independent exploration alongside or with others each day.

Bernstein's explanatory framework – the pedagogic device – provides a model for explaining how 'discipline and domain specific expert knowledge is converted or pedagogised to constitute school knowledge' (Singh, 2002: 572). From this perspective, what counts as 'worthy' knowledge and skills is selected and authorised as educational content and transmitted with a related set of 'norms and values sanctioned and proliferated by dominant social groups'. As such, the pedagogic device is a condition for the 'production, reproduction and transformation of culture' but effectiveness is limited by linguistic rules and cultural and contextual influences which 'makes possible the transformation of power at various stages of knowledge production and acquisition in different ways'. Two distinguishable pedagogical forces are said to operate within the 'classroom' - denoted as instructional (ID) and regulative discourses (RD) - which, on the one hand, frames the selection, sequencing and pacing of knowledge within school subjects while the other translates the dominant values of society and regulates the form of how knowledge is transmitted. The two discourses are incorporated in such a way that RD always dominates ID (Wright and Froehlich, 2012: 215).

At the beginning of this study, pedagogical practice within this Nursery was characterised by a visible pedagogy associated with a focus on the transmission of specific skills and knowledge. By April 2009, the Nursery had established and maintained a time-space frame within which children became freer to explore and interact with whom they wanted for much of the morning session of funded early years' education. Nevertheless, children still needed to become accustomed to different social worlds and their associated but contrasting norms and competency demands that co-existed within the same compartmentalised physical space. There appeared to be a certain contraction of the 'world' dominated by adults and an increasing 'world' consisting of peers and peer relations reflective of the two enduring 'big ideas' that permeate thinking about practice in early years' education. Simply, these ideas represent a belief that children should be provided with 'ample opportunities to choose how to spend their time in the playroom' and play is the 'medium through which children learn' (Stephen, 2010: 18). Freedom to choose through the provision of multiple opportunities and a diverse range of materials is considered to be an essential element of high quality early childhood program. By freeing the curriculum from teacher authority, early childhood educators believe that they are assisting all children to become independent problem solvers and skilled, social negotiators (Ryan, 2005).

131

While changes to practice in this preschool situation, created an apparent illusion of freedom, children remained controlled by a hidden curriculum which determined who they were able to be as well as what they were able to do. Being and becoming social, as well as an independent decision maker, became key apparent expectations but significant aspects of the individualised Montessori approach were retained and remained influential. For pragmatic reasons, there continued to be significant times when children's self chosen actions were severely curtailed and they were required to passively conform to standardised group expectations. Participation in adult-directed activities was often phrased as though a choice but children were easily persuaded to work with adults. Somewhat strangely and rather contradictory, a self-registration procedure at the beginning of the day was replaced with a short period of 'safe' containment but this was in recognition of concerns and associated legislation to safeguard children in group care situations. Children were gathered together in a confined space at the end, as well as the beginning of each morning, so that the classroom could be re-organised to 'seat' children for their lunch.

Adults clearly decided and exercised their right to determine children's activities and children, as subordinate to their demands, conformed to the generational order. This was a social order that encouraged compliance with adult wishes which promoted certain inequalities evident in the power older children were able to exercise over younger children. Being able to manage on one's own and make choices were all-embracing principles but adults provided support and, in a similar manner to parents (Brennan, 2007), used affective and emotional displays such as endearments, teasing, fun, excitement and mock anger, often in association with 'rules', to diminish a child's action and emphasise their goals. Explicit rules were inconsistently used which, hypothetically, created confusion regarding which rules were in force, how they should be applied as well as, potentially, reducing children's ability to 'predict' what was appropriate behaviour in particular situations and how adults would react to either their behaviour or that of another child (Thornberg, 2007).

Interacting with other children became the core activity providing children with ample opportunity to develop a peer community but this social practice placed certain demands upon children. Increasingly, the normal child became expected to operate for an increasingly length of time as a competent, self-governing individual capable and willing, at least, to make connections with other children. Nevertheless, there remained times within the daily routine when adults governed 'children's time, space and bodies' (Ellegaard, 2004). At these times,

in a traditional, school-like manner, adults promoted the development of skills and knowledge and protected children's welfare by ensuring that children were safe and there were times to eat and rest. Emotionally, as well as practically, children were expected to be able to take care of self but this capability remained framed and supported by a generational order accentuated by the Montessori didactic approach. If needed, children were required to attract the attention and gain help from others but this was dependent on an ability to communicate clearly with children as well as a limited number of adults. As the Managing owner was heard to say on one occasion, *'we have been told not to intervene in children's play'*.

Typically, children became accustomed to and passively conformed to generally clear, if not explicitly stated, adult expectations irrespective of the time, activity or situation. There were times of 'freedom' when children were provided with and were expected to exercise choice but there were other times when children were expected to function as a member of a group in a relatively standardised manner. When given choice, children either operated as individuals, alongside others, or as a member of a small group; with behaviour dependent on children's interests and an apparent desire for inevitable social interactions in confined, controlled spaces.

The Nursery was dominated by routines that prescribed an acceptable way of doing things and, by default, what was not. There was a correct way, for example, to: enter and exit the Nursery; interact with certain materials, adults and other children; sleep or rest; eat a snack or lunch. Operating both spatially and temporarily, the routines provided children with 'secure and consistent knowledge' of 'who I am' contingent upon 'where I am' and 'what I am doing' (Bailey and Thomson, 2009: 215). But they also operated to enable adults and, at times, older children, to invoke a normative order by monitoring where children were as well as what, where and how they were doing. Those in authority could determine whether what was being done was satisfactory but, also, if it was normal. Explicit verbal statements ('rules') reinforced normalised expectations but these were reduced during the time of the study. In addition, there remained a number of less obvious 'prescriptions or prohibitions of behaviour', imbued within the recurrent events, that were meant 'to apply equally' (Hannikainen, 2007: 98 after Jordan, Cowan and Roberts, 1995) to all the children in the Nursery.

6   TOEING THE LINE AND CROSSING THE LINE

'Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised in here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between it threads, they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power.'
(Foucault, 1977 in Gordon, 1980: 98)

Unusually, a small incident provided an example of the explicit manner in which children were occasionally and openly reprimanded for flouting certain rules. According to Campbell (3), who was happy to act as an informant, he had slept during quiet time after lunch but Matthew (4) had not. Matthew (4) had been sent out to the Hall. As if to discourage others from committing the same offence as well as, presumably, humiliate the offender, the Hall was where 'naughty' children were temporarily displaced and, thereby, isolated from other children. In contrast, minor deviations or small transgressions in behaviour - what might be regarded as 'secondary adjustments' (Gallacher, 2005) - went unnoticed, were tolerated or generally ignored by adults but there were occasions when tension and conflict concerning individual and collective interests were not easily resolved. Older children, who had learnt to comply with common norms and values, provided adults with a power base which was utilised to inculcate and reinforce certain social expectations. In Foucault's words, they were the elected 'officers' (Allan, 1996) required to complete material tasks but also to provide a discrete, efficient and permanent form of surveillance as adults were unable to see everything 'perfectly' with a single gaze. But, as a group, they were the 'ones' who had acquired the necessary resources, or capital, to most noticeably 'bend' the rules as well as determine, who could or who could not enter a social field.

Commonly used expressions imply that young children are socially and intellectually insufficient and incapable. Young children may be categorised as the 'preschool child' or as the 'under fives' or 'under threes'. Even though Piaget's stage model of hierarchical development has been subjected to numerous criticisms, it continues to shape common sense understandings of the capabilities of young children and to inform childcare/early educational policy and practice. Consequently, early childhood has often been viewed as

'largely inconsequential, other than as a preparatory stage for adulthood' and studies have focussed on the 'care of preschool children rather than children themselves' (Gallacher, 2005: 244).

Sociological studies of childhood, inspired by the participatory rights of children, as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, have 'attempted to deepen our understanding of young children as agents in various aspects that characterise life in early childhood centres' (Ebrahim 2011: 121). Previous small scale studies of early childhood centres have considered the manner in which children countered adult attempts to structure playful and routine events (Ebrahim, 2011, Markstrom and Hallden, 2009, Alcock, 2007, Rutanen, 2007). When viewed as active, rather than passive, products of social structures and discourses created by adults, children have contributed to their own childhood experiences. Not only did they experience the institutional space but they influenced and shaped the way in which the space was used. Through their social practices (interactions and negotiations), alongside other 'actors in this arena', children co-constructed the preschool institution as both a place and space of childhood (Markstrom and Hallden, 2009).

A Finnish study (Rutanen, 2007) identified the manner in which a pair of two-year-old children (one boy and one girl) used sounds and non-verbal behaviours to produce a 'counter culture' in opposition to a teacher's attempts to structure a situation. They created their own 'give and take [non-verbal] game', rather than playing with materials that had been provided by the teacher, before inviting adults to join in with their games. Similarly constrained by physical space, children in the New Zealand study utilised a diverse range of verbal actions, concrete objects (including food) and their bodies, to play with rules around eating routines in a way that 'cemented their social togetherness' (Alcock, 2007). Children used strategies of silence and avoidance, negotiation and collaboration to gain control within the collective, controlled space of Swedish and South African preschools (Ebrahim, 2011; Markstrom and Hallden, 2009).

In accounting for or explaining how young children can be considered to be agents in an early childhood institution, Ebrahim (2011) draws upon Gidden's idea of structural duality. From this perspective, social structure is a not a fixed entity but created by people as a result of their social activities. Rather than being passive recipients of society's values and norms, individuals are viewed as active agents who use their knowledge to produce and reproduce social life.

Children, consistent with a view associated with the sociology of education, are considered to be 'rational, competent beings in their present location as children, not in comparison to adults' and 'childhood is seen as a structural space which children occupy'. 'Rooted' within this structural space, defined by activities, experiences and routines created by adults in line with their ideological ideals, knowledgeable children are able to draw upon aspects of structures for their own purposes but their ability to do so is dependent upon how they are able to 'perceive and understand their availability and the potential it has to help them to reach their aims' (p123). According to Bourdieu (Cheal, 2005), this is dependent upon a socially conditioned inclination to act within a structure of relationships characterised by the 'distribution of unequal amounts of capital of various kinds' (p155).

Visibility - constrains and empowers

Even though few could effectively 'peer' into the space, visibility was a characteristic feature of the Nursery. People associated with the Nursery (children and adults) were visible and their actions, structured by 'functional sites' (Gallacher, 2005) and routine practices, could be more or less seen and easily monitored by those who inhabited the space. But visibility evidently empowered as well as constrained actions.

In response to the practitioner's instruction to 'Find something from the shelves', Eleanor (4), the eldest child in the Nursery, walked to the open shelves and selected two baskets which had been placed for storage one on top of the other. One basket contained a few, solid decorated eggs; the other contained a number of small, soft bundles of coloured wool. The two baskets containing the eggs, woollen bundles and two pairs of metal tongs were then placed on a table adjacent to the shelving unit. Using one pair of tongs, the child successfully transferred firstly the solid eggs and then the woollen bundles from one basket to the other. As she was transferring the eggs, a practitioner began a dialogue with her asking her to name the colours of the decorated eggs and questioning her about the difficulty involved in transferring the materials using tongs. The child completed the activity in her own time before placing one basket on top of the other and returning them to the shelf where she had found them before selecting another activity. Using visibility to great effect, Eleanor demonstrated how to access, 'work' with and return a resource to its designated storage position in the expected way. She was clearly aware of her abilities, as well as the requirements, successfully completing this task before choosing another

activity which was well within her capabilities. Although she was evidently constrained by the expectations, she willingly complied and confirmed her status as one of the older, sensible children.

A child uses metal tongs to transfer sold wooden decorated eggs from one fabric lined basket to another. January, 2008

Another child, who also appeared to be comfortable in his surroundings, was initially reluctant to choose a resource from the open shelves but, after a further instruction from a significant adult figure, he independently chose a similar set of materials - a self-correcting balancing activity - before proceeding, with help from an adult, to use this in a prescribed manner. I initially assumed that there was a choice of materials available to him but this may not have been the case. There was a limited number and range of available materials and a number of other children had already selected what they wished to use. His hesitancy could have been associated with either an implied requirement to 'work' with materials, rather than continue with something he preferred to be doing, or the lack of what he believed to be a suitable, available space.

Of course, the instruction may not have been heard or the child may have considered that what was available was unfamiliar, too difficult, unappealing or even insufficiently challenging. Given that the materials were limited to one of each type and children's use, in theory, comes after adult demonstration, it seems reasonable to suggest that availability, familiarity, confidence and perceived ability to successfully complete the task may have influenced his initial behaviour. On the other hand, he may have preferred his own company rather than sharing a space with a number of other children and, effectively, two supervising adults. However, he eventually but reluctantly complied with the adult instruction by selecting the components of one, seemingly familiar activity.

137

Using the materials in the required way, the child successfully balanced the objects having willing accepted initial support from a knowledgeable adult.

09.00 – 10.00

In response to a reminder from one of the practitioners (the owner and Manager at the time) that he should, 'Find something from the shelves', a boy selected a plastic balance consisting of three component pieces: a stand, arm and two buckets together with a large, lidded tub containing a set of coloured Compare Bears of three different sizes. He expressed his concern about needing a chair to sit on (and presumably a space at the table) and the practitioner, who was working at the table preparing project books, explained that there was a space next to her.

The resources were placed on the table next to the practitioner and the boy began to set up the balance by placing the arm on the stand. He was reminded, by the practitioner, to make sure that the arm was balanced before attaching the two buckets; one at each end. Once the buckets had been balanced he started to fill the buckets (haphazardly) with the various sized bears. After a number of attempts at filling and removing the bears, the child balanced the two buckets.

Field note, November 2007

Unlike the child in the previous example, he appeared to be unaware or unwilling to return the resource and select another choosing instead to use the associated resources (Compare Bears) in a unique and playful manner. His behaviour seemed to suggest that his initial reluctance to *'Find something from the shelves'* was associated with a desire to continue with a self-chosen, potentially more playful, possibly less challenging, activity but visibility in the adult structured and monitored space had limited his actions.

The practitioner then encouraged the child to count the Compare Bears in each bucket. After a short space of time it became apparent that the child wished to sort rather than count the Compare Bears. When it was suggested that he could sort them into sizes, he chose to arrange them in a ring 'like Ring a Ring a Roses'.

I asked the practitioner whether it would be thought appropriate to respond to the actions/choices the child was making. The practitioner responded that

it would be and the child would then be directed to find other items/objects in the Nursery that were circular or presented as a ring.
Field note, November 2007

Small scale furniture formally and deliberately arranged in spaces in each room facilitated adult observations of children from 'on high' and from a distance but these same physical objects, as well as other human bodies, may have prevented children from seeing what was going on and reduced their capacity to use mutual visibility to generate power and act as one. The procedures severely curtailed children's field of action but, nevertheless, they were, to some extent, 'active agents' constructing a (small) part of their life under conditions that were not 'of their own choosing' (Cheal, 2005: 162).

As Marquez (2012) explains, Foucault's 'vague notion of resistance' appears to have limited value when attempting to explain the tactics used by individuals to 'escape' the imposition of certain identities in visible spaces. On the other hand, Hannah Arendt's idea of spaces as being spaces of appearance emphasise the value of visibility in public spaces. Instead of being subjugated to act, visibility empowers individuals to 'disclose their individuality' - to 'shine or even to acquire glory' before spectators in spaces where usual hierarchical inequalities are temporarily disbanded. Rather than the more straightforward possibility of viewing actions as either compliant or resistant, together these ideas provide a 'fourfold distinction between social spaces where: visibility generates power by enabling actors to act in front of spectators; spaces where visibility subjugates by compelling people to act before spectators; spaces where invisibility enables a person to escape observation even if only momentarily and spaces where invisibility marginalizes a person by preventing him or her from acting in front of 'spectators' (p11). Spaces that Marquez (2012) refers to as spaces of appearance, spaces of surveillance, private spaces and marginal spaces while recognising that 'visibility always constrains as well as empowers and invisibility always involves both an escape from unwelcome observation and some degree of marginalization' (p12).

While awareness of visibility in predefined spaces may have generally limited children's actions overt, stringent disciplinary measures were intentionally deployed by powerful adults to prevent or minimise children's ability to act in, potentially, more hazardous situations. Highly regimented procedures, used when children were prepared for and taken beyond the bounds of the Nursery building illustrated both the adults' onerous contractual responsibility for

children's safety at all times and children's familiarity with standardised procedures used to gain tight control in less secure situations. When required to do so; they waited patiently, chose partners and walked together in a line. Similar but less exacting procedures were used by adults to ensure that children ate and slept or rested at other predetermined times. These procedures established a structure of interaction, referred to by Bourdieu (Cheal, 2005) as a 'field', within which children used different forms of 'capital', to do certain things, if inclined to act. Even in this highly controlled environment, as the following example illustrates, some children were able to play with and around the rules.

At about 11.15, signifying an intention and an ability to mobilize coordinated group action, an adult fetched the cumbersome folded, double buggy from the kitchen area before carrying this along the narrow corridor into the crowded classroom area. I was wrong but immediately assumed, because it had become the norm, that the children would be taken for a walk around the farm to see some of the smaller animals or to the farm shop to buy items for their snack. A morning walk, when the Nursery was being rearranged for lunch, provided the children with an outdoor experience at a time when a garden area could only be used during drier summer months.

After lifting the heavy buggy over the set of tables and chairs, at the entrance to classroom, the adult carefully placed it, before unfolding, on the floor a short distance in front of the carpeted area where a small group of children had been assembled. Two of the younger children, a boy and girl, both under two years old, were willingly placed in the double buggy and safely secured with straps. After some consideration, the two heavy wooden storage units, forming one side of the carpeted area, were moved to create a wider central space directly aligned with the double door fire exit at the other end of the carpeted area. Having created the necessary space, the adult pushed the double buggy through the area stopping immediately in front of the sill at the base of the fire exit. Calling upon another adult to assist her, the buggy and children were lifted over the sill out into the car parking area. Once outside, the two children remained in the buggy, with the adult standing alongside, while the older children began to get ready.

Delayed momentarily while adults investigated who was associated with an unfamiliar green coat, the children then responded to a brief adult instruction and, acting in concert, arranged themselves into pairs of boys and girls behind the adult and double buggy. I helped one or two of the

children to fasten their coats attempting to use strategies, as expected, to increase their independence before taking hold of a child's hand and joining those who had already lined up behind the buggy. They had clearly done this before. One adult at the front led the way. Another adult, at the back of the line was well positioned to observe, monitor and contain children's actions. Both adults were wearing yellow, reflector jackets to ensure that the group was clearly visible to passing motorists.

As we left the building and turned left into the drive of the farmhouse, I realised that we would be walking through the village not around the farmyard. Walking behind the buggy being pushed by one of the adults, the children were escorted across the minor, infrequently used village road. Holding onto their partner's hand they slowly walked along the opposite side of the road so that they were facing oncoming traffic; stopping and stepping into the side, in response to adult calls, when a car was seen to be approaching. It then became clear that there was a purpose to this walk and that it had become a monthly planned experience for the children and adults.

*After a short distance, we crossed the road once again (so that we would once again be facing the oncoming traffic) and began to walk back towards the Nursery, on the opposite side of the road, stopping at particular houses to deliver copies of 'The Church Times'. Accompanied by an adult, children took it in turns to enter particular properties to locate the post box and leave the local newsletter. There were one or two exceptions. The children were not allowed to enter the garden with a large dog and, in one case, the letter box was found on the garden gate. As the adults remarked, the reduced number of children on this particular morning seemed to make this a feasible activity, from their perspective, concerned as they evidently were with children's safety outside of the confines of the Nursery. As one of the adults remarked, 'Each child **was** (emphasised to illustrate my interpretation of the statement) allowed one go, at least, at posting the material'.*
Field note, April 2009

It was noticeable how the children, who had acquired a particular set of dispositions, generally behaved in the way that was expected but a small number of boys, as if demonstrating their shared opposition to authority, utilised 'resources gained through social ties' (Cheal, 2005), to create novel ways to amuse themselves within the structured requirements enforced by supervising

141

adults. While still holding hands with their partner, they kicked the soil, jumped out of line or attempted to walk ahead of their partner. The boys produced or reproduced, seemingly in opposition to highly regulated adult practices, joint playful actions but these marked them out, in direct contrast to the other children, as the 'naughty' boys. Physically positioned, as they were, towards the back of the line and, therefore, invisible to others, they had no impact on the behaviour of the whole group but their actions could have comprised their safety and the safety of the group. The majority of children performed just as expected but what might be regarded as 'secondary adjustments' (Goffman, 1961 as explained by Corsaro, 2000: 93), displayed by a few, were evoked to challenge limiting organisational rules.

Whether it was snack time or lunch time, children were deliberately arranged within a designated space to similarly ensure that their actions could easily be seen and monitored by supporting adults. Overall, the procedure reflected the importance of providing a nutritional snack but the notion was deeply embedded in a dominant socialising discourse that determined when, where and how children were expected to act as well as what they should eat or drink. Theoretically, children were compelled to abide with specific rules and routines established for eating and drinking as well as what they should eat. Children both complied with and contested these notions. Most, not all, fruits and vegetables were usually eaten in the desired manner by obedient children but, sometimes, on the presumption that they would then be allowed a sweet biscuit.

Physically restrained by furniture and symbolically constrained by the routines, children often sat unoccupied at snack time for what seemed to be an inordinate length of time but they were able to create a small social 'space' for themselves – they enjoyed each others' company and entertained themselves with certain 'antics' seemingly to fill the time or impress other children. As noted in studies of older children (Daniel and Gustafsson, 2010), the social aspects rather than the nutritional aspects of snack time may have been 'at the top of children's agenda' (p265) but, as presumably became evident to children themselves, they were clearly visible to adults and this surveillance may have limited their field of action. Discussions between children about images on the milk carton were deemed acceptable by adults whereas other behaviours - playing with spilt milk on the table or blowing bubbles through a straw - were not the responsible actions of nursery citizens even if these types of behaviours were acceptable in other types of contexts.

Established by adults, desirable social behaviour at meal and snack time in clearly visible spaces was demonstrated and monitored by older children who, having been constituted as leaders by the prevalent regulatory procedures, were able to 'shine' in front of younger children as well as supervising adults. They showed patience, used common social graces and, as was illustrated one afternoon, willing to provide assistance even though this was not always accepted. Others, usually younger children, presumably conscious of the power differential and possibly able to recall situations when physical supremacy or delegated authority was forcefully or disingenuously used, appeared to be suspicious of the motivations of older children when they attempted to shape or influence their behaviour.

At 14.45 the children gradually children began to assemble at the large table for snack having helped to different degrees by tidying up and then washing their hands. They individually found a place to sit and once they were all present were asked by the Manager, one by one, if they would like 'a drink from their cup or a carton of milk'. One of the younger children, who had chosen a carton of milk, reluctantly accepted help from one of the older boys ('I'll do that for you'). Using his teeth, he removed the straw from its wrapper so that the younger child could push the straw into the carton of milk and use it to drink though.

One of the adults had been to the kitchen and brought through the trolley. On the trolley was her birthday cake which had been removed from its carton, cut into smaller pieces and placed on a plate. Taking individual pieces from the plate (rather than passing it around) an adult gave children pieces of cake and prompted them to say 'thank you'. One child, with limited expressive language, unable to escape the scrutiny of others, did not say thank you and was refused a piece of cake. Some of the other children (as well as adults), attempted to support the socialisation process by prompting her to offer the expected response but she did not. As she took a piece, she appeared to utter some comment to one child but the cake was removed by the Manager as she had not said thank you. By this time, one of the parents had arrived and similarly observed, from a distance, what was happening.

When one of the adults, aware of the parent's presence and presumably concerned about promoting a certain 'image' of the Nursery stated 'You probably think we are hard', the parent replied 'No' implying agreement with

and reinforcing the importance of children learning certain, common social
graces.
Field note, October 2008

'Action in the glare of publicity can [thus] be, in Foucault's language, normalizing' as it induces conformity rather than 'letting individuality shine through' (Marquez, 2012: 19). Normality at 'quiet time' (13.00), a period immediately after the midday meal, required children to be willingly gathered together within the carpeted area at the end of the classroom where they were expected to rest, if not sleep, but some resisted this practice prolonging their lunch to reduce the time they were required to conform to the established regime. Having just eaten their lunch, the room was unusually disorganised and temporarily 'littered' with food waste and associated packaging. Adults hastily attempted to remove debris, often scattered across two sets of tables, the floor and some chairs but some children performed as expected and lay in close proximity to the 'mess'. On some days of the week, when large numbers of a mixed age group of children were present, the area became congested with bodies with little room to move and every possibility of children accidentally jostling or stepping on another when they attempted to move. A number of the children needed personal or favourite 'comfort' objects, usually a blanket, before they were able to sleep and it was unclear whether this was an enjoyable, if possibly a necessary, experience for some if not all children.

Given the high level of oversight made possible through children's displacement, as well as containment in a confined area, few were able to resist or contest adult expectations without drawing attention to themselves. Those that did made small, hardly noticeable alterations to expected behaviours. In most, not necessarily all cases, children overtly displaying unacceptable behaviour were easily shamed.

In addition to children in the carpeted area, other children who had been
placed and restrained in buggies before the start of the midday meal were
encouraged to rest or sleep where they had eaten. The triplets had been
placed in a double (the two girls) and single buggy (boy) at one end of the
room; another girl and another boy, distanced to promote compliance, were
in single buggies at the other. Another child, who was lying on the edge of
the carpeted area with his head on a cushion, defining his individual space,
had partially covered himself with a blanket for, possibly, partial
concealment as well as warmth and comfort. There were items of uneaten

food around him. Unlike a number of other children he managed to fall asleep as did the children in the buggies. Two boys were taken to sleep in the small room.

Although they were relatively 'quiet' the children, as a whole, did not appear to be interested in sleeping. They remained contained in the designated area but proximity to each other provided children with opportunities to influence if not persuade others to act in particular ways. Adults encouraged sleep, through rocking and caressing, if individuals appeared to be tired or when the necessity for a 'sleep' was specified by a parent. Throughout this time, adults constantly reminded children, who were unable to escape visibility, that 'it's quiet time'. Characteristically, children who chose to occupy themselves in ways which did not, necessarily, meet the approval of overseeing adults secured the attention and possible admiration of other children.

Laura, the only 4 year old girl present one day, attempted to avoid visibility and resist the normalising practices by lying on her front with her arms resting on a cushion while facing and interacting with a group of older boys. She had learnt to be discrete but the boys, who were sat, rather than lying on the carpet, were more obvious. Visibility in this case, promoted play - play with objects (plastic toy trains/engines) and some discussions took place. One of the four year old boys, who had chosen to wear a pair of cream, woollen gloves spent his time 'looking after' his 'walkie talkie' ensuring that it was not taken by another and blatantly refused to comply with the normal requirement. The children were threatened with punishment (extra time) and instructed to return toys to a storage box.
Field note, October 2008

In so far as Foucault was concerned, visibility in spaces of surveillance enhances control and normalisation whereas visibility in spaces of appearance, an idea associated with Hannah Arendt, generates the possibility for collective action. Spaces of appearance provide an opportunity for individuals to 'escape the roles and rules that normalize and even oppress them in other social spaces, to disclose their individuality, and to begin something new - that is, to be "free" in the Arendtian sense of the term' (Marquez, 2012: 7). Similarly, shared intentionality, from Gidden's perspective, serves as a resource to groups of people wanting to influence social life (Ebrahim, 2011).

There were situations when groups of children were empowered to become involved in the construction of small but significant aspect of their everyday life. On one such occasion, when an adult was prepared to relinquish control, the whole group democratically elected to 'play with the train set' rather than 'doing yoga'. On another occasion, a group of children working cooperatively with each other were allowed to continue with their self-chosen activity rather than participate in the adult directed task.

> *09.00*
> *As a core group of three children began to set up the train track with the turntable seeming to have a significant place, various exchanges took place between the children relating to its readiness for play. Although it seemed that there were some minor difficulties when other children arrived such as a younger child breaking the track ('Look! T broke it') and sitting on the track ('She's sitting on the track!'), the children appeared to co-operate such that the Manager offered them a choice. 'Do you want to do yoga or play with the train set?' They agreed that they wished to play with the train set.*
> Field note, September 2008

Invisibility - escape and marginalisation

With few exceptions, the children complied with the expectation at the beginning of the day and remained briefly confined within the designated space. Their 'work' was watched over by supervising adults at a time when unpredictable action was necessarily suppressed through the 'technical use of power' (Marquez, 2012: 26). But disciplinary techniques are 'not perfect'. 'People who are rendered visible may, in turn, attempt to escape by deploying counter-techniques of invisibility'. However, 'normalized and compartmentalized subjects have very little ability to engage in collective action to challenge the rules to which they are subject and the roles they play, much less to create new rules and roles' (p23). To some extent, the children were 'free' to operate or labour as they wished but, as well as being visible, their movements were restricted by bodies, in a relatively small, partitioned space and a limited supply of resources. Daniel, a four year old boy, was a notable exception who consistently appeared to struggle with and/or accept adult domination unless visibility, rather than invisibility, conferred certain advantages. I viewed his decision to leave the carpet area where a group of children had been assembled as indicative of his resistance to being surveyed and controlled by normative expectations which were tightly linked to developmental outcomes.

These expectations required children to operate, at this time, as docile, self-regulating social 'becomings' in a visible space that was easily examined by supervising adults.

Distancing and maintaining a physical distance from the crowd, in order to evade the evaluating gaze of a small group of similarly aged boys, as well as supervising adults, appeared initially to be his apparent aim. The adults said, as though individual identity is a 'pre-given, unified, rational and encompassing unchanging perspective' (Duncan, 2005), that he had a preference for his own space rather than the company of other children. Allegedly, Daniel was unused to the company of other children and, it was assumed, unable or reluctant to share favoured possessions. 'People may enter [such] spaces already shaped by the relationships of power operating in other spaces. But much research by psychologists suggests that human action is highly situation dependent. The creation of subjects in previous spaces apparently does not result in permanent characters; we are not condemned to enact the same roles in every space' (Marquez, 2012:20). As an older, four year old child who had been associated with the setting for some time he may, however, have been 'shaped' by the dominant individualistic, Montessori philosophy and 'empowered to act in accordance with an identity prescribed by that discourse' (Duncan, 2005: 53) which promotes the development of independent, self-regulating but individual 'becomings'. In 2007, at the beginning of the study, the children entered the Nursery and used a unique self-registration system to indicate their arrival before individually choosing, within the classroom space; where to be what to do and who to be near rather than, necessarily, with.

Daniel became less obvious even though he was sitting on his own at one of the tables within the open space of the classroom. The majority of 'spectators', including supervisory adults, were occupied within the particular visible functional site and seemingly unaware of behaviours occurring beyond and behind their immediate area. It was as if Daniel became, relatively speaking, invisible and was able to escape observation and a compelling requirement to behave in an expected social way. Unchallenged, he had been able to choose a 'position' which facilitated agency but this form of self marked him out and reinforced others views of him as 'different'. Having temporarily escaped surveillance and the asymmetrical power relationships devised by adults, Daniel attained a measure of control over his own actions and, to some extent, those of others.

Comparative invisibility, from the gaze of adults and the majority of children, generated power which was utilised by Daniel, in a possibly undesirable manner, to control the actions of a younger child. He became a 'spectator' surveying and monitoring other children who, from his vantage point, were clearly visible as they entered the Nursery. Whether intentional or not, he invested in a social practice in an effort to gain a reward. The structure evidently acted both as a medium and an outcome – it enabled Daniel to establish and maintain control. He was able to defend his physical position, protect and use his belongings for personal gain and choose who he wished to be close to or interact with.

> *I first noticed Daniel sitting alone at one of the tables handling a set of 3D wooden shapes that had been removed from a red drawstring bag. The empty bag was on the table to his left. Demonstrating and drawing upon a common understanding of cultural expectations or 'habitus' (Best, 2003; Bourdieu, 1977) he began to build a 'house' like structure with wooden shapes: thin cuboids on each side and a wedge on the top. This simple shape was extended by placing a cube between the sides (two cuboids) and other blocks both to the side, front and back. His toy motorbike, which he had presumably brought from home, was pushed backwards and forwards along the table knocking over the structure which was immediately re-built. During this time, another child had positioned himself at the same table and appeared to be interested in Daniel's toy. Daniel seemed aware of this interest and began 'teasing' the child by firstly placing the motorbike near to him, withdrawing it and then placing it out of his reach. His response, 'That's mine', when he lifted the motorbike and placed it on the table to his left, symbolically reinforced his overt domineering manner.*
> Field note, April 2008

At a similar time, approximately a month later, Daniel was standing on his own between a shelving unit and a group of tables. Drawing, ostensibly, on rules and resources considered, according to Gidden's 'structuration theory', to be available over time (Cheal, 2005), he began to produce a similar form of conscious conduct.

> *Other children had gathered in the carpeted area but Daniel sat down at the table immediately in front of me with a manufactured peg board containing red, green, blue and yellow coloured two dimensional shapes which he had taken from the shelf. In no apparent order, he proceeded to remove the*

shapes with the whole of his right hand (in ones and twos) before assembling them as a pile of coloured shapes to his left. At the time, he was the only child sitting on this table. He was close to the door and could see who was arriving/entering the Nursery. Daniel (quietly) continued to avoid proximity to numbers of other children without infringing the overall rules or attracting undesired attention from controlling adults. While the majority of the children had obligingly conformed to an adult request and assembled together in the carpeted area, Daniel chose to isolate himself from the group and remained on his own. Possibly indicating a desire for individual rather than shared attention with an adult, wilful disregard for the limits imposed by adults or a determination to do what he, rather than what others wanted him to do, he chose to select and then engage with particular materials at the table where I had chosen to sit. He was occupied. He had found 'something' to do and was, therefore, operating within the bounds of a system, based upon choice, which he had become accustomed to. While his motivations were unclear, Daniel's apparent preoccupation with monitoring entry, facilitated by a haphazard form of engagement with a relatively simple task did, however, suggest that he was either looking forward to greeting a 'friend' or intent on evading a 'foe'.
Field note, May 2008

Self chosen isolation from the group was also an occasional response from some to cope with personal difficulties. Jack arrived one morning in a distressed state apparently disturbed by a temporary change of family circumstances and wished to retreat, if only temporarily, into his own private space. His parents were away and he was being looked after by his grandparents. On previous days he had often been found in close proximity to other children typically sharing the use of favoured construction toys that were unavailable that morning. An adult initially attempted to encourage involvement (*'Are you joining in Jack?) or,* possibly, enforce participation *('You're not playing. You're doing Yoga')* before respecting and sensitively responding to his apparent wishes by providing him with his comfort blanket.

A seeming desire for invisibility in visible spaces was a phenomenon associated with small groups as well as individual children. This reaction was most noticeable when children were grouped as one rather than relatively free to determine their own socio-spatial positioning. Certain boys, however, became conspicuous because of their reluctance to join in with the yoga type activities

but especially when sophisticated bodily control was needed. Gentle persuasion (*'Let's go and find a space on the mat)'* as well as more explicit direction (*'we are going to try something new today')* was used to encourage but did not necessarily guarantee participation. The majority of children may have felt compelled, because of the hierarchical inequalities, to take part. But these children, benefitting from shared interests or close proximity, were able as a small social group to resist participation and possibly avoid potentially difficult, as well as possibly embarrassing, situations in a public space.

> *At 9am, children began to make preparations for the daily yoga session by removing their shoes and lying on the flooring. As if attempting to avoid undue attention from supervising adults; three boys remained where they were - they were sitting beneath a book shelf. Two were holding a book; the other was not. All three were quiet and appeared to be occupied as they watched the other children perform the yoga exercises. Behaviour which went unnoticed or was ignored and accepted by supervising adults presumably because of its cultural appropriateness.*
> Field note, April 2008

The situation seemed to create a dilemma for these children. On the one hand they appeared to be interested in the new, novel activity but, on the other, reluctant to join in. As in previous examples choice, as a form of capital or a means of agency, was the mechanism utilised by boys, in particular, to avoid involvement in certain group activities and hence, to a degree, gain some control over their everyday life. Seemingly used to this established cultural norm, promoted by adults at other times, some children exercised this 'right' by deciding which activities they would engage with and which they would not. They were 'free' to determine when engagement began and how long this lasted.

> *When the children were asked to 'tidy up' ready for yoga in the carpeted area, two of the boys, Jack (3) and Daniel (4), were working alongside each other with the balance, buckets and a set of Compare Bears. Surprisingly, Daniel left the activity to join the yoga group. Jack followed a few minutes later. The materials were left on the table.*

> *One of the adults had sat on a chair at the corner of the large table near to where two other boys, Matthew (4) and Henry (4), had been standing. As they began to touch and re-organise her hair, she explained that they had*

150

behaved in a similar way the day before - they were getting her ready for a visit from the fire brigade. She encouraged the two boys to find something else to do - 'What shall we do?'

Rather than join in with the yoga activities, the two boys continued to engage with familiar, achievable 'fun' activities at a distance from but within sight of the main group.

Henry collected a wooden puzzle from the top shelf of the storage unit containing the set of plant and animal images and sat down next to me on my left. Use of these particular resources had become typical early morning behaviour for this child. He had selected a puzzle of a cow.

Henry removed two shapes at the bottom of the tray before standing up, turning round and looking over the shelving unit to the carpeted area. This was where the majority of the children had begun their yoga activities with three of the Assistants.

'Hi Jill, Jill'
(Referring to one of the Assistants)
'Fudge, what you doing?'
(Referring to the setting's rabbit)
'Hi Jill, Jill, Jill'
Yes, replied Jill
'What you doing?'
'I'm doing Yoga. I'd like you to come'

Henry turned round and sat back down in his seat adding further pieces to the puzzle - the back legs, udder and tail. He completed the cow puzzle before returning it to the top section of the storage container and haphazardly collected another - a butterfly puzzle. As he returned he glanced over to the carpeted area where the yoga activities had continued. Jill (the adult) was providing instructions - 'Feet in the air, feet in a circle'.

At one point, the two boys tried to subvert the attentions of an adult and possibly redirect the activity.

*Seemingly in response to an adult request, Henry and Matthew moved to
join in with the yoga activities.*
'Shall we go and make a sandwich?'
'No, we are rocking the baby'
(Referring to a particular yoga activity)

Whereas other children were prepared to try each of the activities and accept
adult support to achieve complex, stationary body shapes, the two boys were
not. However, they were interested in using their bodies to perform a simpler
but more vigorous activity (The Chopper) which they evidently enjoyed.

*The adult and two boys moved to the carpeted area where the yoga activity
was taking place. While the adult joined in with the activity supporting other
children who were attempting to make particular shapes with their bodies,
the two boys placed themselves under a nearby table where they remained
while the other children were taking part in the activity.*

*The boys chose to join in with the next activity (The Chopper) when it was
suggested that they were chopping wood for one of the adults. As the group
prepared for the chopper activity, they demonstrated their familiarity with it
by placing their hands together ready to make a descending movement.*

Unlike the rest of the group, the two older boys may have been unprepared for
the change in routine or reluctant to lose 'face' in front of adults and their peers.
They chose not to attempt some relatively difficult movements requiring
concentration and the co-ordinated action of various body parts. Behaviour, it
would seem, that may have influenced the behaviour of younger boys in the
group.

*During the Tree and Mountain Pose activities they (and other boys) crawled
and then fell to the floor when they were expected to try and stand still. The
Mountain Pose activity was repeated a few times presumably in the hope
that they would all conform and be able to stand perfectly still. The Tree
activity was particularly difficult for the majority of the children as they are
required to balance on one leg whilst the other is bent at right angles with
the foot placed on the upper part of the leg. A number of the children were
willing to try the activity and accepted support from the adults.*
Field note, May 2008

Adults intentionally constructed areas for children's role play (home/hospital corners or shopping areas) but children effectively defined their own 'places' by appropriating and utilising certain areas in possibly unexpected ways. In some cases, these were small and confined but obvious, popular places; in other cases they were not. Children became immediately visible when passively contained by adults in confined spaces but they were able to utilise other places, as though they were significant private spaces, to hide and harbour scarce or desirable materials, as though it was economic capital, in order to achieve a degree of control or dominance over others.

'Hiding' beneath a large area of tables and protecting objects transferred from the carpeted area.
November 2008

Spaces beneath furniture and between furniture and walls were commandeered by some children in indoor spaces to reduce visibility but the utilisation of certain natural and man made features in outdoor spaces illustrated how the children chose to use spaces to enhance as well as reduce visibility.

An area beneath a mature tree in the original, outdoor garden was a popular place where visibility was partially obscured by natural vegetation. A small house, located in the centre of one part of the newly created outdoor space, provided a kind of refuge where children could also temporarily escape surveillance by other children as well as adults but an adjacent area, confined by walls on three sides, where small number of children could sit on a low wall, became a visible meeting place for small groups of older children.

On one occasion, it seemed that a bench marking the furthest boundary of an outside area had become a chosen, logical stopping off point for a particular group. It was here (at the bench) that a select group of older children chose to take a rest and chat some distance away from but within sight of supervising adults.

> *09.00 – 10.00*
>
> *A group of older children more or less immediately formed a 'working group' and spent sometime running what seemed to be competitive races from the bench, at one end of the area, to a corner of the Nursery wall at the other. Initially these were running races but then became races using either the available vehicles to ride on or push across the space. Every now and then they used the bench as a stopping off or resting point with two of the children 'hooking' their toy wheel barrows under the bench and using the bucket part of the toy as a seat. Although Helen had not been a member of the group - it seemed as though she was attempting to find some way of being involved. She remained on the bench for a few moments but Jack immediately moved off to do something else.*
> Field note, April 2009

It was not clear, however, if the intention was to attract or repel attention and therefore, as Arendt contends, whether the actions were meaningful in the

sense of challenging or attempting to create different power relationships (Marquez, 2012.).

Without doubt the Nursery, through its arrangement of spaces and deployment of a regimented routine, was an obvious site of adult control but it became evident that 'different kinds of power' were appropriated for 'distinct sorts of human activity' that occurred in 'different sorts of spaces' (Marquez, 2012: 26). Visibility and containment in partitioned spaces were overarching, unconcealed instruments of adult control whose function became more evident when children were potentially less secure or during daily situations which were deemed to be more hazardous or necessitated some form of expert support from adults or older children. Children remained, generally, visible to required numbers of supervising adults throughout the day but when free to choose within a tightly regulated space they became less obvious and hypothetically capable of generating power through their mutual visibility. While the majority of children appeared to have acquired certain dispositions which compelled them to act in expected ways in spaces surveyed by adults, some were empowered by what Bourdieu describes as capital or possessions that gave individuals the 'ability to do certain things' (Cheal, 2005: 156). While this power was used for personal gain, it was also used to govern and exclude others.

Seemingly drawing upon their awareness of the institutional and generational order, children paradoxically positioned as vulnerable and, at the same time, capable individuals, conformed to expectations but also found ways of pursing their own interests. As Foucault (1977) contends, 'individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application' (Gordon, 1980: 98). For the most part, digressions during structured parts of the day were minor, unchallenged infringements or modifications of explicitly stated and implied rules imposed to safeguard, protect or nurture groups of children. Free time - the time when children were independently required to select from and engage with the vast array of materials available within a structured indoor and outdoor environment - supported the development of unique individual behaviours and interactions between small groups of children who could loosely be regarded as friends.

Procedures were reduced over time as the setting was obliged to develop a less regimented approach, through the introduction of a play based curriculum, requiring children to become responsible for greater decision making regarding their spatial positioning (where they were to be) and actions (what they were required to do). Rather than dismantling the dominant asymmetrical adult to

child relationships, the possible unarticulated aim of changes to pedagogical practices was to create relative freedom wherein children and childhood would be constructed as a space where all were treated as equals and the possibility for the emergence, as well as the imposition, of individual identity.

7 REPRODUCING AND PRODUCING 'LIFE'

Rather than viewing socialization as primarily a process whereby the individual internalises individual skills and knowledge it can be regarded as a collective, communal activity. Children do not simply internalize society and culture but produce and reproduce culture in innovative and creative ways (Corsaro and Eder, 1990). In line with Gidden's notion of the duality of social structure, this interpretive and reproductive perspective recognises the manner in which existing social structures constrain as well as enable the construction of culture. Children's agency from this perspective can be seen as a 'socioculturally mediated capacity to act' (Martin and Evaldsson, 2012: 54). During their interactions with others, children learn to 'manage the cultural expectations associated with specific communities of practice' (p54) and develop an understanding of what is and is not allowed.

In this context, creating and managing a relationship with 'things and facilities' was an initial and fundamental adult cultural expectation. It was what children were expected to do and what children generally did. While an interest in objects continued and became the focus of joint actions, with increasing age children typically sought contact and developed relationships with other children who, when perceived more or less as equals, could loosely be regarded as their friends. As part of their unique peer culture, some children eventually established, maintained and managed peer interactions using recognisable patterns of non-verbal and verbal interaction patterns taken from the adult culture. Quoting from Goffman's original text, Hatch (1987) explains that individuals can be regarded as social actors who create a performance during interactions to communicate 'the impression that they understand and comply with the moral standards that organize all civil relations' (p101) but established interaction patterns were both constraining as well as enabling.

Framing peer interactions within adult conceptions and regulations

As Thyssen (2000) tells us, while the experience of day care can be regarded as an issue of separation from the family and the family situation, it can be viewed as an opportunity for new activities and the development of social relations. Relationships can be directly established with other human beings or, indirectly, through the use of concrete or imaginary objects. In the case of the life of a young child, the objects may be the 'practical' materials used for their care (the changing mat, cot, feeding bottle) as well as the 'playthings' through

157

which a 'joint focus' is established with a caring adult. Things become 'elements' in the relationship between the child and adult but also of interest in their own right. As the child encounters other children and adults, such as in the day care context, outside of the home, the pattern of relationships is likely to become more complex. Within such a system, attachment 'appears as part of a *system of relations'* (my emphasis) involving emerging orientations to objects as well as other children and other adults.

By the onset of walking, often at the end of the first year of life, infant object relationships have become relatively sophisticated. Infants deliberately engage with objects for extended periods of time, juxtapose multiple objects and use objects in both purposeful and representative ways. As a preliminary form of social interaction, infants at this age regularly initiate object exchanges by showing and offering objects to adults. Infants (at 11 and 13 months) studied in the home environment spent a considerable amount of time in contact with objects and regularly shared these objects with their mothers. Walking, compared to crawling, infants were motivated to explore objects at a distance from their immediate surroundings and more likely to share these objects with their mothers (Karasik, Tamis Le-Monda and Adolph, 2011).

From the very beginning, children in this nursery orientated themselves to the 'meaning sphere' (Thyssen, 2003) of human physical and social life. While the 'life world of the child' (p590) consisted of humans (children and adults), the youngest, potentially most vulnerable, children were preoccupied with exploring the material aspects of the nursery world. Illustrating their knowledge and internalisation of cultural expectations, the children in the Nursery acted independently during adult predetermined 'free' time, characteristically 'roaming' throughout the environment before selecting and using materials of their own choosing. When instructed to do so, at other times, they were generally and willingly contained within a small space and encouraged to either rest or listen. Children sat at tables to eat a snack or lunch. They stood or sat at flat topped tables or sat, laid or knelt on the floor when using materials of their own choice. The children often used these 'things' and did 'things' in expected ways but involvement in pretence and novel ways of engaging with materials demonstrated the way in which the children contributed to the production as well as the reproduction of culture. Some adults inadvertently facilitated cultural production as well as reproduction.

Initially discouraged by the Manager, who seemed to be concerned about the children's safety, the children began to use a row of chairs as if they were seats on a bus. For most of the time, Rose (4) appeared to be the leader sitting at the front and acting as though she was the driver of a bus. Responding to both my own and the Manager's suggestions, the children continued with their activity pretending, as I had seen before, that the road was bumpy that they had a picnic and could see various things from the windows of the 'bus'.
Field note, September 2008

For large periods of time, the Nursery became the children's space for them to use and modify, within limits, as they wished and, consequently, potentially dangerous objects and adult possessions were, sensibly, stored out of children's reach. Montessori materials made from natural materials were retained and attempts were made to provide some comfort for the youngest children. Nevertheless, the children were 'surrounded' by and constantly made contact with an abundant array of rigid, materials that were typically representative of another time and a limited range of occupational opportunities. It was 'matter' (Jones et al, 2012) that was notable by the absence, as well as the presence, of certain objects. Such matter enabled children, theoretically, to play out their adult futures in a world devoid of objects that might, possibly, cause offence. While efforts were made to avoid violating the romantic, innocent vision of childhood by supplementing what was initially available with objects made from natural materials, the 'sacred garden of childhood' (p55) became characterised by an abundance of brightly coloured, manufactured plastic toys.

Though not exclusively so, hard robust materials were associated with activity whereas soft materials, as one might expect, were provided for rest and comfort. These were the physical objects of an everyday and a specific life usually identifiable by form, colour, material and the functional meanings that they afforded. Although not always apparent at first, children used many of these 'things' in accordance with meanings circulating within their wider social life rather than how was necessarily intended.

Rather than using the particular Montessori resources as they were expected to be used, one of the youngest girls chose to use her mouth, as if to explore one of the objects, before using her hands and face to examine another.

11.30 – 11.50

Nelly (1), a young child, stood at the shelving unit containing a selection of 'Practical Life' resources seemingly exploring a bottle and jug. Initially standing and then kneeling, Nelly grasped the bottle and then placed the end of the neck in her mouth. An object fell to the floor. She selected a rattan mat, unravelled it and placed this in front of her small face. After a few moments, Nelly left the area and resources (mat, funnel, ropes/threads and plastic shape) on the floor and returned to one of the adults from where she appeared to watch an activity taking place in the 'cosy' carpeted area.
Field note, November 2007

As Forbes (2004) explains, babies and young children instinctively use the senses (touch, taste, smell, hearing and sounds) to investigate and make sense of their world. With this dominant discourse in mind, both objects, the bottle and a rattan mat, had been provided for sensorial exploration as part of 'sets' of Montessori resources to promote the development of fine motor skills. But the actions of the child implied that she had assigned a different meaning to objects which, visually, bore some resemblance to those which, through use and demonstration, she had most likely become familiar. In the first case, the objects provided, a jug as well as a bottle, were to be used to transfer water from one container to another. In the second case, the rattan mat was for rolling and unrolling. An inherent 'drive' may have stimulated a haphazard engagement with the bottle and then a rattan mat but by placing the first in her mouth and the second against her face she seemed to be communicating a basic need for comfort, if not nourishment, rather than a desire to manipulate resources. It was unclear but she may have associated the form and possibly the colour of the rattan mat - a small, rectangular pale brown shape – with a towel or a small piece of blanket. Perhaps she was disappointed by the rough texture against her face and decided, instead, to seek comfort through proximity to an available adult where she stayed, momentarily, at a respectful distance from but within sight of other children and their actions. In comparison, a later example the same morning, involving the use of a magnet and paper clips, indicated that she had begun to be 'fabricated' (Jones et al, 2012; 50) into the social order and was beginning to perform in a manner corresponding to her age and expected stage of development.

11.50

Nelly stood in front of the shelving unit containing 'Practical life' resources. Using a large magnet firstly with one and then two hands, she picked up paper clips from a small, shallow tray.
Field note, November 2007

Remaining still and attending to an adult defined large group task for short periods of time was a cultural expectation but, clearly and not unexpectedly, it was a challenge for many children. These children could have been considered wilful but adult behaviour reflected an understanding of either the differing needs of individual children or age normalised expectations for their behaviour. In the following extract, when the children had been gathered together immediately after lunch, the child under two years old (Tessa) was allowed to continue exploring the materials in the sand tray whereas her four year old brother (Andrew), who was due to transfer to formal schooling, was expected to sit and listen to the story. He (Andrew) seemed confused and possibly irritated by the unjust application of a rule but most children readily accepted and complied with differential expectations when they were infrequently deployed.

12.30

The children had been assembled in the second of the two rooms while the classroom was being cleared and tidied after lunch. One adult was reading a story to a few children sitting on the carpet; another was sitting on the sofa with other children. A baby was placed on the sofa and then persuaded to sit on the carpet with other children.

Another child (Tessa) was standing at the sand tray holding a plastic spoon in her right hand. The sand tray contained a glutinous substance and a few small objects (boats) 'floating' in the material. Using the plastic spoon, she 'transferred' the substance from one place to another covering a cylindrical object found in a basket beneath the tray.

'Tessa. You need to come out of the glue.'
Tessa's older brother (Andrew) moves over to the sand tray.
'Andrew. Come and listen.'
'Why?'
'Because it's story time.'

As instructed, Andrew returned to the carpet. Tessa remained at the sand tray.
Field note, November 2007

When outlining his concept of interpretive reproduction, Corsaro (2012) explains that children are continuously participating in two 'intricately interwoven' (p489) cultures – the adult culture and their own. Cross cultural research, such as that comparing the differences in social interaction and play behaviours of preschool children in America and Korea has, in part, indicated that 'culture determines the nature, function and features of children's peer interaction' (Chen, 2012: 29). Structured by a belief, which was drawn upon as though it was a rule and a cultural resource, learning was fundamentally regarded as an innate characteristic of the child. The adults in this Nursery, as I have considered elsewhere, prepared the material environment and organised the day to enable children to act on objects and learn through their actions. It was assumed that the prepared, material environment, with its range of different resources, could potentially support the developmental needs and interests of each child. However, additional activities, justifiable by reference to socio-cultural ideas of learning, were usually planned and implemented by adults to support the development of specific physical skills and the acquisition of knowledge. It was during these pre-planned learning activities and routine observations, as well as group times, when children came into direct contact with further aspects of the adult culture.

'Would you like to do something with me?' typically marked an adult intention to initiate a planned form of interaction with individual children. While this cultural practice proved to be a successful strategy in most cases, a more direct approach was necessary to persuade a child to leave an activity he was evidently enjoying. The question was indicative of the 'emotional climate' (Salminen et al, 2014) the nursery endeavoured to promote whereas the statement was symptomatic of a day to day reality. Governed by regulations pertaining at the time, the adults used recommended observational methods to determine, in relation to a standardised set of chronologically presented developmental expectations and the materials that were available to them, what individual children could do and what they should do next. At the time, the adult, who was the child's key worker, was required to complete a set number of observations of each child each week. Children were normally provided with a choice and their decisions were usually respected but in this case the adult was prepared to entice the child with the promise of something more interesting in

162

order to achieve what she, rather than the child, necessarily desired. Positioned by the adult as less powerful, because of this cultural requirement to comply with a standardised form of assessment, the child seemed unable to resist. Although differing in levels of involvement, as well as emphasis and, possibly, value; both the self-initiated activity and the adult controlled task exemplified a systemised form of interaction with another: a contemporary resource (a laptop) in one case and a specific Montessori resource in the other. In both cases, human interaction was evident but minimal being deliberately restricted to that which was pertinent or necessary. The child had been helped to sit on the stool and access specific software programmes and then directed to engage with the Montessori resources before he could return to his self chosen task.

'Leon. Do this with me and then you can have a go.'

Reluctantly, one of the children (about 3 years old) agreed to leave the computer to work with an adult. He had been sat on the high stool in front of the setting's computer - a laptop - which is more frequently being used by children. The boy had successfully used the integral tracker to open and close small windows. I was impressed, as were others, by his determination and dexterity. He was praised but the possible significance of the moment in terms of his attitude to learning and physical development seemed to go unnoticed.

When the Number (Long) Rods had been set out in a prescribed way (as a stair) on the carpet, within a small space in the 'cosy area' at the end of the classroom, the child was asked to select number tablets, according to name, and place these up against the 'stair'. He was familiar with the first numbers, picking up the corresponding cards and placing them in the required way against the rods but became confused when asked to choose the number five.

As intended, the activity seemed to be a straightforward way of determining whether the child was able to associate the name of a number with its symbol. However, it was not clear why the rods had been arranged as a stair. In fact I felt it might have been very confusing as there was no clear connection between quantity, name and symbol. It was evident that the adult was using a standardised procedure similar to that I had seen in an instructional text. The details set out how the Rods can be used in a

progressive way to teach a number of skills. It seems that the arrangement
of the Rods is preparation for a subsequent task.
Field note, January 2011

Throughout the time of the study, children's experience was structured around but not determined by the use of Montessori didactic materials ideally, not always, previously introduced by an adult. As depicted in the previous and more clearly in the following example non-verbal, rather than verbal, communication provided the principle mechanism for this guided interaction. During these interactions, a foundational aspect of the discursive practice, adults demonstrated rather than explained what children were, carefully and quietly, expected to do. Children's actions were monitored and evaluated and conflict was avoided by implicitly communicating an understanding that children could exercise choice. Positioned, as they were, by standardised questions at the beginning and, theoretically, throughout the interaction, it was as if the children were in control but adults established and maintained the social order. When it did occur, adult language was restricted to friendly but, nevertheless, short questions or direct statements relevant to a particular stage of the predictable, exploratory process. In the main, children were active and co-operative but remained silent and submissive throughout.

09.20
An experienced adult, who was qualified to use the Montessori materials,
chose to work with Cameron (3). I was sitting at the same table with a
student and another child. Cameron collected one of the sets of graded,
knobbed cylinders from an adjacent shelf - a set of cylinders of consistent
height but variable diameter. When positioned 'correctly', the cylinders
reduced in diameter from left to right.

With the student sitting beside him, the child withdrew each cylinder from
the block in turn and placed them to his right in a random manner. The adult
explained that he should do this quietly and carefully.

The adult proceeded to demonstrate (to me and the student) how the
cylinders should be used. A corresponding set of red cylinders (without
knobs), contained within a box with a red lid, were taken from the shelf.
They had been stored on an open shelf alongside the set of knobbed,
graded cylinders the child had been using. Deliberately emphasising her

*actions, the experienced adult carefully removed the cylinders from the box
and placed them on the table.*

'Shall we see if we can arrange them in order?'

*Cameron attempted to arrange them as requested fitting smaller shapes
between larger shapes. He was unable to order these but had been able to
discriminate differences in diameter to order similar shapes when using the
self-correcting block.*

*The adult then built a tower with the red cylindrical shapes. A set of blue
cylinders, of the same diameter but different height, were removed from the
shelf.*

*'Perhaps you could build a blue tower next to it. Which is the tallest - blue or
red tower?'*

*Both the blue and red cylinders were put in their boxes and returned to the
shelves.*
Field note, April 2008

Utilising adult conceptions and regulations to gain control and facilitate group participation

Rather than a passive process of adjustment and learning, the interpretive
approach views socialization as an intentional act. According to this
perspective, information taken from the adult world is transformed and
reproduced by children to satisfy their own needs (Lash, 2008). Various studies,
but notably those by Cosaro and Rizzo (1988), Corsaro (2000, 2012) and Hatch
(1989), have identified the way in which young children have circumvented adult
rules that limited behaviour they enjoyed and valued. Described as secondary
adjustments, they operate as socialising mechanisms cementing relationships
between children and creating, over time, communities or friendship (peer)
groups with unique ways of being. Language is considered to be a key to
establishing and maintaining the friendship group as it enables children to
become involved in the group specific games and rituals, negotiate group
norms, establish an identity and resist adult rules.

In addition to attempts to contest adult authority, frequently through the use of
subterfuge, the approach-avoidance routine appears to be universally used by

preschool children to gain control over their 'fears, confusions and curiosities from the adult world' (Corsaro and Eder, 1990: 205). A simplified form of the approach-avoidance routine was evidently being deployed by some children in this Nursery to playfully address what may have been a joint concern.

> *At 10.20, some of the children were assembled and confined, as a group, in order that the main area could be prepared for snack time. As a story was being read by an adult, one of the boys (Chris) and one of the girls (Tessa) crawled across the carpeted area to a pile of carpet squares visible beneath a table abutting a wall on the edge of the space. Facing each other, while intimately engaged, the boy was hugging the girl; they laid their heads on top of the squares and began talking to each other. The involvement of two other boys provoked playful but exclusionary responses firstly from Tessa ('Nasty man! Get out! 'There. There's the nasty man! There's the nasty man!' 'It's a naughty man, go away') and then Chris ('Save me') when Allan pretended to roar as if a lion.*
> Field note, July 2008

While common resistance to certain adult rules forms a stable part of the peer culture, 'membership, participation and acceptance in the adult world' (Lash, 2008: 33) is also important to children. In her study of kindergarten children (5 and 6 year olds) in America, Martha Lash concluded that the children's peer culture worked in concert with, as well as in opposition to, an adult culture formulated to create a sense of belonging.

'Everyday interactions among children typically involve children invoking and monitoring rules to manage each others actions' (Cobb-Moore, Danby and Farrell, 2009). One morning during an early part of the study I noted the interactions that occurred between two of the girls. My observations began after the older of the two girls had claimed ownership of a small part of the carpeted area and a selection of identifiable plastic objects. Before the second child became involved, she had been jointly involved in using the space and these materials with an adult. It was as though they were having a picnic. The floor space was representative of a table or a cloth and the objects items of food, crockery and cutlery.

The carpeted space being used as a place for a child initiated picnic.
November 2008

We are told by Cosaro (2012) that when children collaboratively create pretend play activities that are related to experiences in real life they are not simply reproducing an actual conversation they may have heard. Instead, he contends that children, 'as young as two' (p488) appropriate information from the adult world to address their peer concerns but their actions are 'constrained by the existing social structure and by process of social reproduction' (p489).

Lucy was deeply involved in her role play but, with declining adult involvement, she was prepared to accept the presence and proximity of another who became a temporary and convenient, substitute playmate. Having identified the play space and selected certain objects, she was unwilling to relinquish her ownership rights. An understanding of 'appropriate' behaviour, indicative of implied rules embedded in behaviour modelled by adults in the Nursery, guided Lucy's initial actions. Using simple but understandable language, Lucy directed the actions and managed interactions in a didactic manner as though they were the staged exchanges between an adult and a child. But, as adults were occasionally seen to do and as she may have experienced, she monitored and evaluated actions before, unusually, utilising a more forceful discourse to direct actions and maintain control. Her apparent aim, by pointing out the mistakes, weaknesses and inadequacies of the other was to promote her relative status.

Rather than being an equal, the younger child was treated as a convenient, object – a controllable prop for her play. Aligning herself with a dominant aspect of the adult culture and borrowing aspects of adult scripted language, as if to increase her power, the older girl began by 'drawing' the younger child into her play ('*Shall we have a picnic?*') and, initially, seemed to acknowledge the other child's wishes ('*OK, put that in*') when she wished to place a plastic food item in the toy microwave on top of the kitchen unit.

167

As the play developed, Lucy became frustrated with the younger child's actions or inactions constrained, it seemed, by the cultural tools that were known and available to her and began issuing direct, persuasive instructions *('Put that in')* and what may have been interpreted as derogatory comments *('Not going there! No, silly')*. At one point, she attempted to redirect the play (*No, we're having a picnic, that's a drink as well*) but acknowledged her personal responsibilities *('Oh, don't tidy. Don't (tidy) my mess')* while encouraging the younger child's continued involvement *('Make some cakes. Make some cakes. Put it in the oven')* in her directed play.

Similar behaviour occurred a year later. Motivated by her interest, Lucy manoeuvred a relatively heavy object into a space where it could be used. The box, which other children seemed to recognise, contained the plastic component parts of a marble run. Once a number of children had arrived and attempted to join in, she voluntarily distanced herself from the activity choosing instead to operate on her own rather than in cooperation with other children. Like other children in similar situations, Lucy seemed unable to draw upon an alternative discourse. She failed to assert her authority and avoided potential embarrassment by withdrawing from the situation.

> *08.30 – 09.00*
> *This box seemed to stimulate the interest of other children, who may have recognised the container and knew what the contents were, as they immediately collected around Lucy and the item on the floor. As Lucy began to remove the coloured pieces from the box, I realised that the box contained the pieces that are used to make up a 'marble run'. She began to take control, issued instructions ('Here you go' and 'Don't fit on there') and made statements about what was hers ('That's mine') whilst the three youngest children and another older child, who had arrived at that point, stood over and watched what was happening. I recalled at the time how popular this activity was, how small numbers of children seem able to co-operate with each other when building a run but find it much more difficult to share its use when large numbers wish to be involved.*
> Field note, March 2009

While group times, typically used at transition times to instil social order, provided children in this context with limited options regarding how they could act, at other times they became accustomed to exercising 'free' choice within an environment that provided an abundant range of possible actions. Working in

accordance with adult regulations afforded both individuals and small groups of children acceptable opportunities to gain control. Although constrained, choice enabled some children to resist involvement in pre-planned adult devised activities and common, collective 'quiet' opposition to participation cemented relationships between small numbers of children. This was particularly obvious during the early part of the study when use of the Montessori materials was a clearly structured part of the morning session. At this time, a number of individual children voluntarily chose to repeat activities. In the first example, the beginning of one morning, an activity was selected by one of the older boys. According to one adult, it was expected and valuable, repetitive behaviour but it may, however, have been indicative of the child's unease - an attempt, perhaps, to avoid involvement in an activity that the child was unsure of or had perceived as being difficult, unachievable or possibly inappropriate for boys. The behaviour coincided with the time, within the daily schedule of activities, when this small group of boys were unwilling to join a group of other children who had been assembled for the early morning yoga activities. Similar behaviour occurred a week later. As one of the adults ironically implied ('*That's a surprise!'),* it was exactly what she had expected*.*

> *09.25*
> *As three of the older boys had chosen to avoid the yoga activities, they*
> *were asked to 'Find something to do at the table'. Henry collected a wooden*
> *puzzle from the shelved storage area. His key worker sat with him on his*
> *left. She selected the relevant control card from a drawer on her right. Henry*
> *began to places pieces from the tree puzzle on the control card beginning at*
> *the bottom with the root system.*
> Field note, 15 May 2008

With increasing age, establishing and maintaining contact with peers became the children's main preoccupation. Typically, according to Corsaro and Eder (1990), preschool children are concerned with 'social participation and with challenging and gaining control over adult authority' rather than attempting to 'gain control over the attitudes and behaviours of peers' (p202). Facilitated by proximity in space and abundance or scarcity of resources, children in this Nursery utilised their shared interest in identifiable activities to create socially cohesive groups.

In comparison to other materials, such as the didactic Montessori resources, deliberately supplied as 'one off' items for individual use, sufficient quantities of

basic materials (paper, pencils, crayons and scissors) were normally available for groups of children to use alongside each other at any one time. Although limited by immature speech, the children utilised gesture and bodily orientation, in association with the materials made available within the physical space, to create and do similar things together.

> *09.00 – 10.00*
> *A number of children chose paper and pencils from the cabinet, drew 'maps', rolled them up and carried them around the room.*
> Field note, December 2008

Throughout the time of the study, a number of children consistently chose to use these common materials, as though a 'local' requirement, to decorate, cut and join pieces of paper.

> *14.00 – 15.00*
> *Ginny began to use the scissors in the way I have seen her and other children use them to cut paper into smaller and smaller pieces. On this occasion, she was intent on cutting the paper into strips. The Manager confirmed that this is an activity that many of the children 'pass through'.*
>
> *I recalled seeing another child doing the same thing when I first visited the Nursery. It was suggested that there were a number of other, similar activities (or stages?) that children normally 'pass through'.*
> Field note, January 2009

Cutting sugar paper into smaller and smaller pieces.
January 2009

Such was the demand for these common materials that there were times when adults struggled to maintain the supply of paper and sharp pencils. Operating in close proximity to, not necessarily with each other, children used these materials to create original as well as similar objects. In some cases the children were clearly 'governed' by the Montessori philosophy whereas in other cases they evidently drew upon ideas from their wider social world.

09.00 – 10.00

There was considerable interest in the circle that Chris had constructed presumably because this was an unexpected achievement. I asked whether this was a Montessori activity. In response, I was directed to examples of children's work displayed on the wall above a unit containing various insert shapes. I was told that children were encouraged to use the shapes in a progressive manner. I assumed that while Chris was using an insert to make the circular shape, what he had produced was an individual, perhaps creative response, not a prescribed outcome, using a resource and tools that he was familiar with and able to use.

It was as if a common interest in one kind of activity, involving the use of similar, abundant resources was providing a foundation for the development of more obvious social relationships. However, the dominant individual ethos, as exemplified by Chris' actions and the response of adults, continued to prevail.

Ch's circle constructed by drawing around an insert, cutting it out and putting the pieces back together again. *March 2009*

Chris' achievement and my observation of one adult sharpening pencils (to replenish supplies) during this morning session, reminded me of the interest and pleasure children in this Nursery seem to gain from using paper and

pencils. Earlier in the morning I had been shown a piece of paper with a
drawing of a 'roundabout' and noted how two children had rolled paper into
a shape. Pretending to be fictional characters ('Shiver me timbers, I'm
Captain Cook and you can be the baby in Peter Pan'), the two children
began to use the shapes as though they were telescopes.
Field note, March 2009

Whereas abundance and continual replenishment of stationery materials stimulated individual and repetitive use of materials in similar ways, small groups of children successfully and, sometimes, creatively shared scarce or popular resources during independent, collaborative play episodes. Confident, articulate older children typically promoted their relative status by initiating, directing and controlling the nature of activities and influenced the behaviour of other children.

On other occasions, at the beginning of the day, I observed, in a similar way, how small groups of children worked alongside each other, often in a collaborative manner, sharing control, to piece together sections of wooden or plastic train track. But leaders also emerged and, generally, remained unchallenged in small group (two or three children) situations as others called upon face work rules to maintain the status quo. Henry, in the next example, a relatively confident and articulate child became the able technician, as well as the spokesperson for the pair, modifying the initial construction and clearly explaining its purpose. Although originally designed with a specific purpose in mind - collectively to support an understanding of small differences in the two and three dimensional properties of various materials and objects - children have characteristically used the range of Montessori resources in instinctive, inventive as well as what would seem to be fun and enjoyable ways. Matthew had clearly participated in the creative construction of the water tower and its associated features but whether in possible deference to his partner (Henry), or to avoid potential embarrassment to himself, he chose not to become involved in explaining the function of the structures.

09.35
Matthew (4) and Henry (4), two of the older boys, were sat at the same
table. They had constructed a 'water tower' (their words) using the
Montessori Sound Box apparatus - a small wooden box (cube) with an
accompanying, unattached blue lid and a number of sealed, wooden
cylinders.

The wooden box, acting as a base for the structure, had been positioned on its side. Cylinders had been carefully stacked one on top of the other to form a tower on the top of the box. Shapes from a puzzle had been placed inside the box. Henry, the slightly older of the two, responded to questioning. He explained how water would move through their structure to a 'pond and the sea beyond'.

After a few minutes, Henry decided that the lid from the box should be placed in front of the box. The cylindrical shapes were repositioned to create a system of 'pipes' taking the water out from the wooden box (from right to left) to a pond (the frame of a puzzle) and a corn field beyond (the blue top of the box). A blue pen top became a device for 'helping the water to go down'.
Field note, May 2008

Other objects, of a more general nature, also provided a focus for small group activities.

09.35
After a short period of fairly frantic, quite noisy outside play the children became much quieter. A group of older children (two boys and one girl), who had stayed together, made their way back inside. One of the group suggested that they could play football ('Let's play football'). They began to play with a small 'football' that Jack (4) had brought in from home. Surprisingly, this initially seemed to be acceptable (ignored or not seen).Two of the children positioned themselves in the space between the children's drawer unit as though they were goalkeepers as the other attempted to kick and pass the ball ('To me, to me Eleanor') before, to the annoyance of Eleanor, the boys stopped and sat together in the doorway of the main entrance to look at a leaflet advertising children's books.

For some reason or another (it may have been the level of noise) it was decided, even though there was a protest ('It's a soft ball') which seemed to go unheard, that the activity could not continue. Jack was told by an adult that the ball should be put back in his personal drawer. He did as requested quickly locating and then placing the ball in the identified space.

'Let's all hide.'
'Then no one will find us.'

'Found you.'

The removal of the football did not prevent the group from wanting to be together. They began to play 'Hide and Seek' with Jack initially being the seeker. In an excited manner he momentarily stood still, closed his eyes and counted very fast before rushing off to find the other children calling out, 'Found You!', as they were located.
Field note, April 2009

Conflict was relatively rare and primarily associated with the use of limited, desirable materials.

I recall one of the adults looking for the new box of dice and finding them hidden in a large roll of carpet. She seemed to suggest that one of the children had hidden them for later use.
Field note, November 2008

In the above brief but noteworthy example, the child had evidently hidden resources. At the time, the assumption was that he had hidden resources from other children rather than adults. Nevertheless, given adult responsibilities to protect children from harm, he may have wished to avoid the possibility of adult removal. This was a particularly significant incident as the size of the objects represented a safety hazard to young children who may quite instinctively 'mouth' items or mistakenly view small objects as items of food. As well as potentially dangerous, the child's actions could be interpreted as selfish. However, the Montessori approach allows children to retain resources until they choose to return them. At this point they communicate by returning them (ideally to the designated storage position) that the resource is available for others to use.

Adults re-enforce this rule. It is clearly enacted by other children and avoids potential conflict amongst groups of young children who may be unable to independently resolve difficult situations in a non-threatening manner. However, it is a rule which may be deemed to be unfair as enforcement may result in the exclusion of younger and less influential children.

There had been a conversation between two of the older children, Jack and Chris, who had been manoeuvring large outdoor toy vehicles in a restricted space. The conversation resulted in Jack 'saving' the tractor for Chris. Jack

hung on to the toy tractor while Chris dismounted in order to go to the toilet.
However, this did not prevent one of the young children, Laurie, from
climbing onto the tractor, sitting on the seat for a few seconds before
willingly climbing off. I assumed that this child was aware of the rules and
acted in response to both my presence and possibly the pleading glance
that Jack directed towards me
Field note, June 2009

While earlier studies have focussed on the manner in which children became
linguistically able and used language routines to become 'participating members
of a [the adult] culture', recent studies have focussed on the way children use
language to gain an understanding of or produce their own culture. Rather than
viewing children as passive individuals, replicating adult ways of living, they are
regarded as active beings capable of 'playfully transforming, actively resisting'
and 'reformulating social categories, such as friendship and gender,
appropriated from the adult world'. Actions, responsive to context, reflect
children's personalities and 'momentary goals and agendas' often related to
entry into and achieving power within the group (Kyratzis, 2004: 626).

Based on this premise of agency, the child-to-child interactions of five and six
year olds in kindergarten classrooms in the United States (Hatch, 1987) and
Italy (Corsaro and Rizzo, 1988) were analysed. Like Foucault, Erving Goffman
was concerned with discourse but whereas Foucault's research was directed at
'entire systems of thought', Goffman was interested in the complexity of
individual concrete social exchanges. But Goffman was not reporting individual
exchanges for their own sake. He was interested in understanding how people
were constituted, defined themselves and were understood by others during
such interactions. Starting with individual face-to-face exchanges, Goffman
developed an account of how such exchanges; using tone, accent, body
language, gestures, withdrawals and silences, as well as words, constituted
lives. While Foucault's ideas may be used to describe the emergence of
institutions and their formative structures, Gofffman's ideas attend to an
'understanding of how the forms of discourse become part of the lives of
ordinary people, or even how they become institutionalized and made part of
the structure of institutions at work' (Hacking, 2011: 278).

Applying, in the first case, Goffman's notion that individual self-concepts are
socially constructed identities, the children in the American study were found to
use identifiable adult-like rituals, when social interactions were 'disturbed', to

control the information expressed and promote and protect favourable impressions of self (Hatch, 1987: 1000). Using recognisable cultural specific discourse strategies that were refined and developed during use, children in the Italian situation shared knowledge and information, appropriated from the adult world, to address their joint concerns regarding the cultivation of friendship. Once established as a group, preschool children have been found to protect their ongoing play (space, objects and actions) from the intrusion of others. Children who desire entry into the group are persistent and overcome resistance by developing intricate access strategies (Corsaro, 1997).

The following example, a series of events initially involving three children (a girl and two boys) of a similar age, occurred early one winter morning at the beginning of the this study. It illustrates what were similar experiences for many children when the 'formal' part of the morning was structured to provide a dedicated time for children to use the didactic Montessori resources. On arrival and before the adult-defined, formal start to the day, children were allowed to operate freely within a designated space. Once the majority of children had arrived, they were expected to select and use the specific materials either at tables or on the floor.

It begins with a description of the regimented and compliant behaviour of one child (referred to as Alison) at the beginning of the day who, for a short period of time, had been the only child present before considering the efforts she and another made to share control and manage favourable impressions of self and the other in relation to the dominant adult culture. I recall the relaxed but nevertheless intense or concentrated manner in which Alison, under the watchful eye of adults, completed self-chosen, sedentary activities in a structured, predictable manner before then joining another child (a best friend at the time) in a freer, less precise form of play. Surprisingly, perhaps, given the evidence regarding children's preference for playing with same-sex peers (Fabes, Martin and Hanish, 2003) her dominant, seemingly favourite partner at the time was a younger boy. Play continued with this boy, as other children arrived, with other boys gradually becoming involved.

0830
Alison (4) was busy. She was independently and competently using scissors to cut out a shape she had drawn on a piece of sugar paper. Another child arrived with his mother (it may have been Moss) and was greeted by an adult, just inside the entrance, a short distance from where

Alison was working. Alison continued, uninterrupted, to accurately cut around the shape she had drawn. She was praised by another adult and asked to write her name ('So that we know who it belongs to') and place the shape in her drawer. The spare paper from her cutting was placed in the waste paper basket and the shape, as requested, in her drawer.

Alison collected another piece of sugar paper from the designated wicker drawer unit close to the table she was working at and, using her right hand and an efficient pincer grip, proceeded to draw another shape (from memory) talking to herself as she worked. Another child arrived (with parents) and was greeted. There was some light hearted 'banter' between the staff and parent/parents regarding 'pants'. Alison appeared to be deep in concentration but she presumably heard the comments about 'pants' as she responded with:

'Square pants.'
Another child (probably Moss) calls 'Alison, Alison - here!'

Alison collected a tissue and returned to the table continuing to cut and ignore what was going on around her. She placed the 'remnants' from her cutting in the bin and then showed one of the adults, who was talking to a parent, her work. The adult responded.

'Well done - beautiful cutting.'

Alison wrote her name on the shape while another child watched and asked what she was doing.
'What you doing?'
Write my name on it, replied Alison
Field note, January 2008

She (Alison) had clearly developed the necessary physical and intellectual skills to confidently complete the initial tasks to her personal level of satisfaction, was willing to comply with adult requests and knew what adults expected of her. An apparent, inherent desire to complete the activities and possibly gain adult recognition was sufficient to maintain her concentration even though another child was attempting to persuade her to do otherwise. The child was motivated to repeat the first self-chosen task in a similar manner, without an aid, even though the appearance of other children with their parents and her own needs

177

could so easily have distracted her from her work. She operated on her own within an emotionally supportive, appropriate but loosely supervised environment as well as modifying her behaviour in order to interact with another, familiar child in a more playful manner.

As was demonstrated by an adult in a preceding example, children are expected to use the materials individually in a precise, careful manner as they are teaching materials with an established purpose which, together, create a programme of structured instruction for holistic development. For example, the Cylinder Blocks, a set of self-correcting materials designed with the principal aim of developing children's ability to identify size differences, when used as the method dictates, require children to handle each cylinder by their knobs. Such handling, using a pincer grip, is thought to be a useful preparation for writing (Gettman, 1987). As each cylinder is precisely matched to only one hole and is a relationship that can be established through 'trial and error', children immediately become aware of their own achievements as well errors which can easily be remedied. Use of the materials, as many are self-correcting, is purported to promote confidence as well as competence but this is dependent upon the appropriate selection of materials and whether the child is developmentally 'ready' for the particular task. The initial actions of the child in the following example suggest that she had previously used shape insets or outlines from the 'Geometric Cabinet' (p84) when drawing two dimensional shapes. These may have provided the necessary support or scaffold for this child's development enabling her to successfully draw shapes unaided.

While Alison maintained some distance from supporting adults and spoken language was brief and infrequent, she sought and successfully achieved, by evident deference to the adult culture, a favourable impression of self. Inadvertently, through managing and controlling the impressions she gave off, Alison not only increased her self worth but also promoted an approving impression of the adult workers and their pedagogical practice. In other situations, children were unable or unwilling to complete tasks in expected ways 'playing with materials' as if to compensate for their lack of inexperience or ability. Significantly and in contrast to the impressions created by Alison, they promoted a less favourable view of the pedagogical practice but they appeared to be concerned with how they were being perceived and evaluated by their peers rather than supervising adults.

Children have a desire to be playful and to use, it would seem, their actions to represent current events. In this continuing example, a relatively short episode of a number of parts within the whole day, there was a point when Alison and another child appeared to be recalling an event (a plane crash at Heathrow airport) and using this as the context for their play. The children were evidently comfortable in each others' company - they were friends engaged in telling a story, using verbal as well as non-verbal strategies, which seemed to indicate what they jointly knew about a situation. It was play that emerged, rather than being planned for, but an initial conversation between the two children was unclear and it was difficult to record their dynamic non-verbal behaviour. A distinct shared discourse pattern did, however, emerge. Similar to that used by adults, when in conversation with both groups and individual children, this 'mutually accepted line[s] of behaviour' (Hatch, 1987: 102) appeared to bind the two children together and defined their interactive space. Another child, of a younger age, clearly wished to be included in the children's playful actions. In a manner similar to that noted by Corsaro (1997) in connection with his observation of a four year old American girl, he persevered with his actions eventually gaining entry and acceptance.

As if compelled to conform to expectations in order to stage an ideal form of self, the first child (Alison) completed an unrelated, individual task and returned resources to a designated storage area before enthusiastically joining her friend in a different space. According to Goffman (1959 in Manning, 1992), 'when an individual enters the presence of others', the group attempts to acquire information about the individual so that they will know in 'advance what he will expect from them and what they may expect of him'. 'Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him'. Similarly, the individual who presents himself before others may have particular objectives in mind but his motive is to 'control the conduct of others, especially their responsive treatment of him' (p129). When, as was the situation depicted by the following extract, participants are known to each other, individuals can draw upon previous experiences to predict the present and likely future behaviour of the other or others.

The following extract illustrates the way in which the two children worked to control and manage the impressions that each was forming of the other. It is a small extract during which each of the two individuals evidently used language, as well as other unidentified signs, to convey information in both its narrow and broader sense. It began, as if to avoid disappointment and/or embarrassment

for herself or her peer, should Moss have declined to participate, with a polite suggestion from Alison followed by a brief discussion. Alison had the upper hand and appeared to assume that Moss would be a willing playmate. But she proceeded with caution seemingly aware that 'many crucial factors' lying 'beyond the time and place of interaction' or 'concealed within it' (Goffman, 1959 in Manning, 1992:130) could influence the way in which Moss chose to behave. Prior to this episode, Alison had successfully presented her self to adults as a sensible, methodical child. The impressions given off during the subsequent event implied she was a kindly, carefree but also thoughtful individual. 'One' whom Moss would be keen to play with.

> *Alison placed the scissors back in the bucket, cutting in her drawer and ran to the carpeted area at the far end of the Nursery where she joined Moss (4) who had become a favourite companion.*
>
> *How about we …, suggested Alison*
> *Moss and Alison stood on the ledge, with their backs against the door, facing into the Nursery. A conversation began to take place between the two children some of which was audible, understandable and clearly attributable to the individual children but some was not.*
>
> *'Are you getting off the aeroplane?'*
> *'Jump off.'*
> *'Moss, watch me!'*
> *Oh you, that's clever, said Moss*
> *Look what monkey can do (hanging the monkey (belonging to Moss) from the horizontal exit bar of the door), said Moss*
> *'I can do it with …'*
> *Have you got your monkey? said Moss*
> *'But my monkey is at home.'*

The play theme continued through a series of further respectful and polite defensive moves that maintained and controlled the interactions. For a short time, roles seemed to be reversed. Moss, the youngest of the pair, became more dominant. He received compliments from Alison and made suggestions about how play should continue. At different points the communicative equilibrium was hijacked by individual interests in a toy monkey and its related capabilities (Moss), an unrelated nursery rhyme (Alison) and photographs of themselves and others (Alison). But these small digressions or 'social blunders'

were ignored and the other discretely refocused their joint curiosities in order, presumably, to preserve and protect face. Even though Alison conceded to Moss' interest in monkeys at the end, a question from an adult that may have been construed as a criticism, promoted the articulation of a mutually agreeable line of behaviour.

We going on the aeroplane to me? said Moss
'I havn't got big bed yet.'
(Alison singing Old MacDonald had a farm …)
The aeroplane is landing, said Moss
'All the gas on Alison and I want …'
Is the aeroplane going up? said Moss
'No, it's landing.'

Another child (Chris) (3) was watching but did not attempt to join in. The two other children (Alison and Moss) were momentarily distracted by photographs attached to the wall and windows.

'Moss, that's you.'
'That's me, want it Moss?'
'I can see Eleanor (child who had recently left the Nursery) there.'
'That's good.'
Both children moved to another part of the carpeted area.

'We have to wash the bowl.'
'The monkey wants to eat.'
*How about we both **be** monkeys? said Alison*

What are you guys up to? asked one of the adults
'We are playing aeroplanes.'
Field note, January 2008

Inclusion and exclusion

A younger boy (Chris) positioned himself near to the action and eventually became involved in the play. Observing from a short distance at first, as though he was a member of the audience and the other two children were performers on a stage, he became aware *('Look what Moss' doing')* of their actions . At an opportune moment, when larger movements seemed to 'free up' the interactive

space, Chris was rewarded for his tenacity and suddenly became part of the joint actions. Arriving as though he was late for the performance and seemingly unaware of the evolving nature and specific role requirements, as well as possibly lacking the 'expressive tools – words and appearance – which will convey to the audience the image they intended' (Pin and Turndorf, 1985 in Brissett and Edgley, 2006: 165), another child (Roy) failed to stage a convincing act and achieve what he may have desired. Although, ostensibly, in possession of a favoured object Roy, on this occasion, was unable to impress and was ignored by Moss.

08.55
'Look what Moss' doing.'
'Moss that was a big jump wasn't it.'
'Moss, are we getting down?'
You have to jump really hard, said Moss
'I will.'

Chris was watching, presumably listening.

'Moss, watch me jump.'
'OK.'
Moss collects the Long Rods from beneath a shelf.

Chris says, I'm sad.
Why are you sad? asked one of the adults
'I met someone with the ...'

Alison and Moss held two long (the height of the children) rods each, grasped one rod in each hand with each pointing down and one end touching the ledge.

'I think I've got a fish.'
'There's the water.'
'It's a fishing one.'
'Let's jump off the aeroplane.'
'Jump!'

You guys look as though you are going skiing, said one of the adults

'I'm going up/down the mountain.'
Chris followed laughing.

Shall we do that again? said Moss
Yes, said Alison

'I'm going up a mountain' (to one of the adults who was passing through the space)

Let's run down, said Alison
Chris was standing in front.

'Shall we do that again?'
Keep them on the mat (referring to rods being used as skis), instructed one of the adults.

'Let's run down. How about we put them in the aeroplane?'

Chris, help me. Chris is a ghost, said Alison acknowledging his presence for the first time.

Another child (Roy) arrived with his father.
'Moss, look what I've got today.'
Field note, January 2008

A second set of examples relates to a mobile, three year old boy (Louis) whose experience of this setting began immediately after he had completed an extensive period of overseas travel to visit his mother's relations in another country. In comparison with his contemporaries, Louis was unfamiliar with the situation and the expectations inherently associated with the material environment and the daily routine. An unfortunate, possibly misinterpreted, event involving another child (Paul), at the beginning of his time in the setting, may have contributed to his initial unease. It was a passing incident, lasting but a few seconds, observed by a junior member of staff. The event appeared to illustrate the desire of one child to make contact with another, who was a stranger at the time, as well as the impact that such an incident could have on another child's feelings.

Paul, a pre-verbal child at the time, attempted to make eye contact with Louis but failed to do so before resorting to a different form of behaviour presumably to gain the other child's attention, satisfy his curiosity or instigate some fun. Paul was reprimanded for his behaviour. He evidently pushed and continued pushing the other child but his motive was unclear. It was assumed that the act was intentional and unkind, as it upset the other child, rather than accidental and innocent even though Paul's movements were relatively uncoordinated at the time and the incident occurred in a restricted space. As objects were not involved in the incident, a reasonable interpretation, if innocence is assumed, might be that Paul was attempting to become Louis' friend.

Another child's involvement during a period of outdoor play, nearly two months later, seemed to be a significant turning point for Louis and possibly a group of similarly aged children who began to include him in their play. This later event had been preceded by a number of what I viewed to be frustrating attempts by Louis to understand and conform to norms of behaviour which had been established by children as well as adults.

> *Louis eventually realised that he was expected to take a piece of fruit from the plate. The piece he chose (an orange segment) remained uneaten. He was encouraged and attempted to eat the piece even though he appeared to dislike having the fruit in his hand and immediately withdrew from it once he placed it near his lips. In comparison, a biscuit was enthusiastically eaten.*
> Field note, April 2009

As Pin and Turndorf (1985 in Brissett and Edgley, 2006) explain, individuals are not necessarily successful when they attempt to present their ideal self and after a number of hesitant performances may eventually adopt one that 'they play best or one for which they are most rewarded' (p164). Louis continued to appear unhappy for some time seemingly unaware of or unable to chose a role identity consistent with the expertise of his peer group.

> *It seemed as though it was this lack of ability that was preventing him from behaving in the way that similarly aged children, who were familiar with the setting, were able or chose to do. With seemingly less determination and effort, Louis began to move his vehicle (a coloured 'trike') much shorter distances (in comparison to other children) in the centre of the area. Louis was sitting on the 'trike' in the expected fashion - facing forward with bent*

184

legs and feet either side. He moved the vehicle by rocking backwards and forwards in the saddle. As he began to move the upper part of his body forward, while holding onto the handlebars, he pushed his feet into the ground. As he pushed into the ground with each foot (heel first) on each side of the vehicle, he was propelled a short distance forward. In comparison to the movements of the previous two children, who were moving considerably greater distances in a short period of time, Louis' movements appeared laboured. Unlike the previous two children, he did not appear to be either as involved or enjoying the experience.
Field note, 30 April 2009

Eventually, he began to adopt a role identity consistent with that defined for him by his peers.

08.30
Lucy chose to collect a pink piece of sugar paper, a selection of crayons and a pair of scissors from the drawers of the wicker unit before sitting down at the same table immediately in front of me and with her back to the main entrance door. She seemed to purposefully create her working spacing, carefully placing the sugar paper down in front of her, flattening this out before laying the crayons above and slightly to one side of the paper.

Using a 'fist' grip, she grasped individual crayons in her right hand and began to create, using up and down movements, vertical coloured lines on the sugar paper in front of her. She began to cut off one, two, three and then four vertical strips adeptly using the scissors she had selected before then cutting individual strips horizontally into smaller pieces.

Louis held the pencil and made marks on the sugar paper in a similar way to LA before using scissors to cut a 'fringe' along the bottom edge of the paper.
Field note, 30 April 2009

Inclusion in the end, as I had observed in relation to other children, was not only dependent upon Louis being in the 'right place at the right time' but also an 'invitation' from an established member of the group who, seemingly, recognised a display of certain common characteristics.

Louis continued to cry for some time. He joined the group of children on the carpet kneeling at the back of the group and patiently waited while the adults made arrangements to take the group outside.

It was a group of older children who were first to make their way outside as I recall seeing them with the popular red 'trikes'. What was immediately noticeable was the way in which two of the children, Eleanor and Chris, chose to use one of the 'trikes' like a scooter, rather than a bike. Each placed one foot on the ledge at the back and used the other to push against the surface to propel the trike around the area whilst holding on to either side of the handlebars. Another child, Jack, became associated with these two children either accompanying or following them around the area in a more traditional way on one of the other red 'trikes'.

Louis initial followed on foot and then ran behind the group pushing a less popular toy wheelbarrow. These older children generally took an anticlockwise pathway around the area using, it would seem, the bench at one end and the wall at the other as a base. Eleanor became the noisiest and seemingly leader of the group at one point calling out to Chris, who was near the door, while sitting on the bench at the far end of the area.

Once again, the children's initial actions appeared quite frantic. Calmness quickly followed with the older children seemingly involved in more complicated role play, as well as taking rests at the bench, and the younger children choosing to explore their surroundings. At one point the older children discarded their vehicles, joined hands and began running as a group within the area. I watched as Louis' initial attempts to join the group were ignored before he was allowed, for some reason or another, to become part of the moving group. It seemed as though Eleanor refused to hold his hand but Chris was willing to do so.
Field note, 12 May 2009

While the evidence suggests that individual experience may have varied, children were controlled by an expectation that they would contribute to the reproduction and, eventually, the production of 'life'. Through a pattern of interactions overtime, with objects as well as others, children's cultural participation was a reflection of their efforts to work in concert with a social world defined by a material landscape and adult imposed rules and routines that governed how they acted individually and with other children. Typically, children

were initially wary watching others or what others do, as if learning what was culturally expected of them, before attempting to become involved. Children were similarly cautious during their early experiences in a Danish day care centre. In the presence of their mothers, children 'eagerly' explored the unfamiliar environment. They individually and independently came across new things, new children and their play objects as well as supporting adults but returned to their mothers after and between these various encounters (Thyssen, 2000).

As is normally expected in western cultures (Chen, 2012), an individual relationship with objects in this particular context preceded the creation of social relationships with small numbers of other children. The introduction of a greater range of resources, to supplement those associated with the Montessori materials, promoted interactions but older children consistently chose to or created opportunities to interact with each other. With limited language skills, objects were the key to the initial creation of relationships with other children, as a result of parallel, shared or collaborative use in confined spaces. Alliances between pairs and small groups of children were established and maintained in pretend games which often involved favoured objects and an emerging pattern of language similar to that used by adults during group and individual socialising practices. Observations of children's initial use of a new outdoor area seemed to suggest that children, irrespective of their chronological age, returned to a solitary mode of operation during times of change or difficulty. In such a situation, they appeared to need to act independently in order to explore novel materials, become familiar with a modified environment or cope with a challenging emotional experience. Although constrained by the social structure and cultural context children, when equally positioned, were able to appropriate information from the adult world and use this to facilitate and develop mutually beneficial interactions with other children. At their most sophisticated level these interactions demonstrated, in terms of children's use of the 'basic kinds of face work' (Hatch, 1987: 102), a simplified understanding of how social interactions can be managed and controlled. While incorporation within the group was relatively straightforward for many, those who adopted a modest or hesitant approach struggled to become members of the peer group especially when unfamiliar with the practices of the dominant peer group.

8   SELF PORTRAYAL

'Narrative is an essential form through which children describe their own
experiences and communicate their views of the world. Through their
narrative activities, children are not only able to represent their
understanding of the world, but also to make sense of it both factually and
emotionally and to find their place in it.'
(Nicolopoulou, 1992: 157 quoted in Ahn and Filipenko, 2007: 279)

Research suggests that young children use personal storytelling as a resource
to express and understand who they are (Miller et al, 1990; Ahn and Filipenko,
2007). Stories may be created using oral and written communication forms but
young children also create stories and express themselves while playing.
Through play children not only represent experience, as they know it to be, but
also represent experience, as they would like it to be (Ahn and Filipenko, 2007).
A*s* Brissett and Edgley (2006) explain, the self cannot be separated from the act.
'Whatever our self is, it is attached to our doings. And because we do many
different things, we can be said to have many different selves'. 'Doing is being'
and what might be regarded as 'play' or 'playing at' (p114) is serious business.

In this chapter I use Goffman's dramaturgical view of self to explore the meaning
of stories told through the playful 'doings' or actions of eight individual children:
four boys and four girls. While the children were evidently 'constrained by
situational and material conditions, embedded in and ordered by fields of
discourse' (Peterson and Langellier, 2006: 175), they were able to fashion
relatively unique performances. But as Goffman explains in his book, *The
Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* the actions of the individual are guided by
the impressions that he wishes others to form of him. During 'performances'
individuals tend to present a sense of self that is acceptable to others and 'the
facts and motives that are incompatible with an idealized version of self are
concealed or underplayed' (Puroila, 2013: 329).

Gender, a 'thread' of identity, is constructed and is constantly being constructed
at three separate but practically connected levels (Burr, 1995). At a structural
level, gender is regarded as a system of social relationships that infuses, informs
and influences the organisation of society's institutions. But gender is also
viewed as both an attribute and a routine, methodical, and recurring
accomplishment or an 'achieved property of situated conduct'. It is not just an
aspect of who you are but also what people do in and through the interactions

that occur (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Following Goffman's ideas, as explored by others (Puriola, 2013; Manning, 1992; Miller et al, 1990; West and Zimmerman, 1987), this chapter considers gender not as 'a fixed or static identity but as a product that is constructed and performed in interaction' (Berkowitz et al, 2010: 133). In other words, rather than pre-existing norms passively fashioned though childhood socialization, I began by viewing the expressed actions of children, depicted within the following accounts, as 'socially scripted dramatizations of idealised feminine and masculine natures' (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 130) performed for an audience who were familiar with and understood the presentational form. These children were 'doing gender' (Berkowitz, 2010; Lorber, 1994; West and Zimmerman, 1987) without thinking about it but, as it turned out, they were doing gender in different and, possibly, unexpected ways. It seemed to me that they were adopting workable gender positions (Lowe, 1998) which were 'right' for the particular context. Rather than exhibiting typical male or female qualities, the children used their knowledge of the range of gender characteristics to shape their actions and achieve strategic advantage. This, therefore, is a story of how these individuals, in their different but playful ways, maintained or came to maintain a desired impression of self and, to some extent, took control of their own lives within a framework defined by adult conceptualisations of appropriate behaviour for boys and girls. As Lober (1994) explains using Simone de Beauvoir's quote regarding civilization's production of the feminine woman, 'children learn to walk, talk and gesture the way that their social group says girls and boys should' (p57).

In concert with the dramaturgical view of self, I use the notion of the construction of a self identity as a performed and 'complex journey' (Ahn and Filipenko, 2007: 287) and begin by considering, as a first step, the individual construction of self or I. Later sections explore how a constructed notion of self was contested and reconstructed in association with others before a final section explores how children acquired knowledge to develop their understanding of the world and tackled issues regarding their relationships with others. Examples provided illustrate how the children were constructing meanings about themselves as social and moral beings but the gendered nature of self is the primary focus.

Stories focussing on self or I

Lucy might have chosen to use one of the primary coloured, finely and precisely manufactured Montessori materials or a rigid plastic toy but, instead, typically chose to 'dress up'. Consistent with the sex category to which she had, by

name, been assigned by her parents, she would chose, if she could, to wear the long, brightly coloured rather ornate princess dress. It was, however, the preferred choice of a number of other girls, who also used the dress seemingly as part of their own gender display, so there were occasions when the outfit was unavailable. On another occasion, when the adults had arranged the home corner as an Accident and Emergency Unit, Lucy dressed, as if enacting, in a 'proper' socially hierarchical sequence, the most obvious, predictable 'medical' roles. Demonstrating flexibility and, possibly, the blurring of gender roles, firstly she dressed as a doctor, then a nurse and finally performed as if she were a patient. But, as confirmed a few weeks before Christmas, when she was dressed as Santa Claus, Lucy was not averse to wearing other costumes.

> *Lucy spent most of the time wandering through the area on her own dressed as a doctor or nurse and carrying a toy first aid box. Brief contact was made with other children but she appeared to be content to be on her own. She confidently asked an adult for help when removing or putting on costumes. When O had woken and been removed from the role play area (Accident and Emergency Department), Lucy chose it as a place to rest pretending, perhaps, to be a patient.*
> Field note, March 2009

Montessori believed that pretence may be regarded as a form of play therapy or a 'key to learning about children' and, contrary to popular opinion, that it has no developmental function (Lillard, 2003). Irrespective of what was being worn, Lucy's dramatization communicated an awareness of stereotypical feminine behaviour. She was content to remain 'nice and quiet' and, psychologically, somewhat removed within her own private space empowered, it would seem, to manage the situation in order to avoid contact with other potentially bothersome or troublesome children if not engagement with more physically, socially or intellectually arduous tasks. She knew, however, how to acquire help from 'scarce' adept adults who helped her to maintain a comfortable superficial, apparent personal pretence that fitted a particular socially constructed status of woman. But, by doing so, the adults perpetuated the notion of the weak, delicate and superficial woman and condoned an apparent reluctance to engage with more challenging tasks. As Zicklin (1968) explains, 'in every encounter, no matter what else is accomplished or what the intention of the persons, the individual effectively conveys a definition of the situation which includes an image of self, and this definition of the situation may be confirmed, modified or rejected. The audience will tend to identify the person by his presented self,

which includes elements of which he may be unaware, whether he wills it or not'
(Brissett & Edgley, 2006:4). A limited version of self may have been constructed,
re-constructed and perpetuated through passive reinforcement.

Constructing a notion of self

Whereas Lucy's actions exhibited a relatively stable sense of self and, possibly,
the idealized world in which she wished to participate, the actions of another girl
implied that this understanding was achieved over a period of time. At the
beginning of the study, Tiffany was one of the youngest children in the Nursery.
As a white child with Anglo-Saxon type features from a middle class seemingly
affluent family, she was similar to many of the other children. Like other girls,
Tiffany infrequently wore a dress or a skirt but her thick, curly mid length hair
and her name, unequivocally marked her as a girl rather than a boy. However, in
comparison to a number of girls of a comparable age, she initially presented as
a more robust, dominant and outgoing figure.

When I first knew her she was an inquisitive, some might consider an
adventurous child - interested during her 'waking hours' in using her 'new found'
mobility at every possible opportunity to explore her immediate surroundings.
She instinctively complied with certain expectations independently choosing, for
much of the time, what she wished to explore within the contained environment.
Keeping still, however, was a considerable challenge and unlike other children,
who seemed to quite naturally develop associations with other children as they
matured, Tiffany was confident but less gregarious. She was no one's particular
'friend' and did not seek the company of identified others. It was as if she had
not or had yet to learn how to 'walk, talk and gesture' in the way that young girls
were expected to do. Like, possibly, Agnes, the transsexual raised as a boy
studied by Garfinkel (West and Zimmerman, 1987) Tiffany was in the process of
making 'visible what culture has made invisible - the accomplishment of gender'
(p131) but this was a particular, possibly contemporary, version of being a girl
which communicated an essential nature of self which may have been unfamiliar
to others.

Sex-role socialization, associated with 'three major theoretical explanations'
(Parsons, 1983), is conventionally regarded as the way in which an individual's
behaviour, attitudes and perceptions come to resemble those prescribed by
society for persons of his or her gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987).
Irrespective of the theoretical explanation, each emphasises the importance of

parents and early childhood and, together, the complex and numerous processes involved in the development of this human characteristic. 'No one theory appears to tells the complete story' as to how gender role is acquired but 'the behaviours of the individuals around the child, the child's interpretations of the behaviours of these individuals and the reactions of these individuals to the child's behaviour are clearly influential' (Parsons, 1983: 36).

There were times when children were expected to conform to group rules but adults seemingly understood and accommodated Tiffany's particular needs and interests but, by doing so, accepted and acknowledged a display of what might commonly be regarded as wilful behaviour. On one particular occasion, the day that the setting was being formally inspected, the children had returned from a short visit to the farm. They were encouraged, through the use of props, instructions and questions to sit for a few minutes listening to a story before the adults began to prepare a musical activity that many of the children evidently enjoyed. Rather than being 'nice, quiet and polite', Tiffany was bold and focussed manipulating the situation to achieve her aims.

> *11.25*
> *Possibly stimulated by a break in proceedings, while the leading adult collected additional information and resources from the kitchen area, Tiffany (2) wandered off around the back of the 'cosy area'. Acting freely, as she had become accustomed to and adults expected of her, Tiffany came upon and began to explore a brightly coloured, textured object on an adjacent shelf. When the music began to play, she placed the cube on the table in front of her and, as if the sound had acted as a reminder, returned to the carpeted, 'cosy' area before emerging once again and pointing to the top of a storage area. She had spotted a puppet amongst a number of other items. An adult responded - 'You want a Beat Baby? - I know which one you want'. This finger puppet, not seen by other children, was quickly seized upon and effectively sealed Tiffany's involvement.*
> Field note, November 2007

As the following example is intended to illustrate, Tiffany continued to challenge dominant conceptions of femininity as she noisily, forcefully and inappropriately transferred paper clips using a large, toy magnet.

11.50

Natalie (U2) stood in front of the storage unit containing 'Practical Life' resources. With one hand and then two, she used large magnets to remove paper clips from a specific, plastic tray. She was joined by Tiffany (2), standing to her right, who used the magnets in a similar way noisily banging the magnets down onto the paper clips and then removing the paper clips with her fingers and mouth.

The setting evidently accommodated Tiffany's early interests but she became notorious for her non-compliant behaviour. Even though, on this occasion, approximately a year later, a number of children had been reluctant to sleep, she was the one identified by another child as wayward.

13.00

Even though the children appeared to understand what was expected of them at this time, to lie down and remain quiet, one or two needed encouragement to do so. Two of the female children (Tiffany and Rose) began to play with plastic cookware from the role play area which gave rise to the following question from an adult.

'Who can I still hear playing?'
'Tiffany.'
Field note, September 2008

However, the influence of the dominant, gendered discourse became obvious. On more than one occasion, about a year later, I noted how she behaved in a similar way to girls of approximately the same age. Although regarded as mischievous by her older brother and labelled a 'tomboy', as if a member of another gender category, by her mother, Tiffany began to don, whenever she could, the desirable princess dress as soon as she arrived. Although still able to enact the behaviour of the other – remaining playful and quite daring - she began to conform to gendered expectations. A small passing, unremarkable comment from a respected member of the girl community, simultaneously legitimised her behaviour as a culturally approved, feminine standard and strengthened an apparent claim to membership of the particular sex category.

09.15 – 09.35
Tiffany (3) was wearing a skirt. Rose exclaimed ('Oh!') and encouraged
Tiffany to do a 'twirl'.
Field note, July 2008

Seemingly empowered through the construction of a gendered identity, based upon an acceptable notion of feminine correctness developed in interaction with others, at ballet classes, as well as within the setting, Tiffany began to bond with a dominant female group. Once aware of both social scripts, she was able to draw upon feminine and masculine type behaviours to impress so as to become 'one of the boys' as well as 'one of the girls'. Hers was, nevertheless, a novel but possibly contemporary and potentially enabling version of developing femininity.

09.00 - 10.00
Tiffany (3) rushed into the carpeted area, looked at the boys and smiled
before arranging her body into an arch shape by balancing herself on her
two outstretched legs and arms. She dropped her head down, looked behind
through the gap in her outstretched legs before falling onto her bottom and
sitting, with legs apart, facing the group of boys.
Field note, January 2009

Contesting and re-establishing notions of self

As Lorber (1994) explains, gender is both an individual experience and a social institution. As a social institution it enables human beings to organise life in predictable ways based, for example, on the division of labour, the allocation of resources and the assignment of responsibilities. Choosing people for the different tasks may be based upon motivation or talent but every society uses gender and age to allocate people to work. As the older female child, Rose had clearly been ascribed responsibilities for the care of her younger sister and, although a young child herself, classified as 'substitute mother'. Having been assigned as mother, Rose consistently attempted to perform in harmony with this powerful gendered discourse but her actions were not always accepted by either her younger sister or other children.

Unlike a small number of other children, whose siblings also attended the Nursery, Rose characteristically attempted to look after the interests of her younger sister. At the time her younger sister was either unable or reluctant to communicate with others. There were occasions when Rose, positioned as more

194

powerful, answered for her young sister and attempted to direct her behaviour. However, Rose's seemingly well intentioned actions were not always accepted by her younger sister.

09.30
Rose and Gina (2) arrived shortly after the start of the Dentist's visit. Rose immediately joined the group and suggested to Gina that she should do the same. Gina chose to sit at the table with an adult and used the glitter to decorate a paper Christmas tree. She eventually joined one of the adults and a small number of younger children who were sitting at the back of the larger group.
Field note, December 2008

Rose was consistently sensible acting in prescribed ways and providing assistance with menial tasks that other children typically failed to notice or actively chose to avoid. Her willingness to provide assistance clearly attracted attention, may well have promoted self-esteem and confidence, which she quite possibly craved, and re-enforced personal expectations. Adults condoned and promoted this maternal but dogmatic behaviour through the delegation of popular tasks, possibly to contain her actions, but may have encouraged engagement with less demanding rather than more challenging activities.

09.55
Once they were told that they would be 'making cakes', a number of the older children made sure they found a place around the main table. With the exception of Rose (4), who successfully managed to find a seat immediately to the left of the adult leading the activity, the children spent most of the time patiently waiting to have a turn at either spooning out the dry ingredients for the cake (sugar, flour), mixing or beating the eggs. Rose was given the task of 'buttering' the tins which occupied her for most of the time.
Filed note, April 2009

Some children clearly enjoyed and presumably benefited from the support and attention Rose voluntarily provided. Her intentions were not always clear but she seemed to be attuned or primed to the needs or difficulties of younger children. For example, on one occasion, she expressed concern when a child attempted to eat a large piece of vegetable (*'Oh, No! No, you can't have this bit. It's big,*

very big!'). But like her younger sister, individual children, when empowered by age superiority, did not necessarily accept her officious manner.

The following example begins with Rose explaining and then demonstrating, at my request, the way she understood the colour box *should* be used.

> *14.20 – 14.35*
> *'These are colours - we do matching.'*
>
> *With the colour box on the table immediately in front of her, Rose began by removing the wooden lid and placing this in front of her. One by one, particular colour tablets were removed from the box and placed in a line to the side of the box: shades of blue, brown, yellow, purple and black. She then explained that 'we find the same colour' and continued by taking further colour tablets from the box and attempting to match them to those she had already removed. Those that matched were placed, one on top of the other, in front and also to the left hand side of the box.*

In the presence of two other boys, standing at the table to her right, Rose began to devise another method of use and exert her perceived level authority by providing instructions on how the materials were to be used. One of the boys willingly complied. The other boy, seemingly positioned more favourably due to age, challenged her authority but Rose remained in overall control.

> *'I'm going to do a different one.'*
> *'We are going to do this - alright?'*
> *'Sit down (to Richard).'*
> *'Show us what we are going to do.'*
> *'Yes, you (can) put them over here as well.'*
> *'Not on top of each other.'*
> *'Don't do that (to Chris.).'*
>
> *Chris (3) seemed to be slightly irritated by the instructions Rose was providing.*
> *'Don't tell me. I'm the biggest (oldest?) one.'*
> *'You can't take all of them Chris.'*
> Field note, October 2008

However, Rose developed a certain status amongst the group of children. It was clear that there were times when she became the leader establishing, for example, the rules of a made up game.

> *11.00*
> *On this occasion the skittles seemed to be the activity of choice which a number of children wished to join in with. After a brief time playing with the skittles in the central part of the room, John joined Rose in what she described to another child as a 'two player **not** a three player game'. He was told to: 'Go and play with Jack'.*

But there were other times when power circulated more freely and she was prepared to share power with at least one other child who also displayed 'mothering' like traits. By the time of her transfer to primary school, Rose had become associated with and spent much of her time 'happily' collaborating, as if an equal, with a small dominant, social group of boys and girls.

> *13.00*
> *Chris, Jack, Rose and John chose to lie together with the later two children sharing a blanket which covered most of their bodies. There was some movement from the children before Rose and Jack went off to the toilet together.*
> Field note, January 2009

Constructing beliefs about themselves and their worlds

Holly, on the other hand, was a quiet, unassuming child who spent most of her time on her own or in the company of younger children. When other children were content and confident to independently explore materials, she desired adult support and seemed unable to initiate and maintain the social relationships that children of a similar age seemed so easily to acquire.

In the following instance, a routine part of the day when children were expected to independently chose materials for their own use, Holly was surprisingly reluctant to use a selected resource without adult support. She had chosen a general but self-correcting resource, rather than one of the specific didactic pieces, that had been popular with a number of other children. Unlike other children, who I had seen on a number of occasions experimenting with the equipment, she appeared to be unwilling to adopt a trial and error approach.

Although ostensibly unlike the other girls featured in the previous 'tales', there were a number of situations when Holly achieved what she seemingly desired. She had learnt to be helpless but by acting as though powerless or inadequate she successfully garnered adult interest to help her resolve difficulties using materials and initiate involvement in social situations.

09.00
Holly (3) was sitting at the largest area of tables. An adult was sitting on her left. Holly was attempting to place holed, wooden primary coloured shapes (squares, rectangles, circles and triangles) on to a corresponding formations of pegs on a wooden board. The adult was called away. After a short time, Holly began to moan. I'll be two minutes, said the adult.
Field note, January 2008

On another occasion, a few months later, Holly appeared interested in an adult prepared activity but seemed to lack either the will or enthusiasm to join in. I assumed that she had preferred an alternative activity but she may have found the presence of an assertive, livelier group of children disconcerting.

10.00
One of the adults had prepared a string painting activity. A small group of older children (two girls and a boy) were provided with aprons. Another asked me to help him with his. Paint from three plastic bottles was squeezed out into the tray. When the adult described what they would be doing (placing the string in the paint and then using it to print onto the white A4 paper provided) one of the children responded by enthusiastically saying:

String painting activity.
May 2008

'Like Mr Maker! Mr Maker's on my table.'

Tiffany (2) and Holly (3), two of the younger girls, appeared fascinated and stood watching from a short distance. Tiffany eventually joined in. Holly did not.
Field note, May 2008

Holly remained a quiet, unassuming individual who conformed to adult expectations willingly, when encouraged, to participate in shared group activities. When compared to other children, she seemed less able to concentrate on or develop a creative response to particular activities. Physically she was of a comparable size to children of a similar age who spent much of her time moving within spaces, effectively 'flitting' between activities, rather than giving focussed attention to specific self-chosen tasks.

> *14.00*
> *Holly's concentration on her chosen drawing activity, in comparison to some of the other children, was brief. She began to wander (wearing her dressing up shoes or Cinderella slippers) through the area before finally spending some time moving and manipulating objects in the toy kitchen.*

The well-intentioned actions of an adult, however, distracted her attention and she became physically separated from a group of children with similar interests.

> *An older group of children moved to the same area and began to use the kitchen materials as part of their role play - they were 'having a party'. Holly was encouraged to complete one of the specific puzzles.*
> Field note, February 2008

The conduct of her mother, when she was collected one cold winter's day, suggested an expected level of resilience that was not necessarily associated with other children.

> *15.00*
> *At the end of the day's session, Mary's (3) grand mother made sure that she was dressed for a cold day. She took responsibility for putting on her coat, hat and scarf. Holly left as she was.*
> Field note, February 2008

Like her daughter, Holly's mother characteristically adopted a quiet rather humble manner. Daily fleeting, rather than sustained, contact was made with adults in the setting.

09.00

I noticed Holly's (3) initial presence for a very different reason. She was looking very feminine dressed unlike the other girls in a skirt and dainty shoes. In comparison to some of the other children and their parents, both she and her mother entered very quietly. Her mother signed the register and immediately departed after a very brief word with one of the adults. Holly remained quiet, unnoticed and on her own throughout the morning.
Field note, April 2008

Holly clearly enjoyed outdoor experiences. On one particular occasion I noted how well co-ordinated and efficiently she moved but she failed to comply with what appeared to have become an established rule 'of the road' for movement in the outdoor space. Whereas other children moved in anticlockwise direction, Holly did not. Proximity to a significant member of a group of children, who were using a bench as their base in the outdoor area, implied an intention to instigate social contact but this was not forthcoming.

09.00 – 09.40

A group of four year old children more or less immediately formed a 'working group'. They spent some time running what seemed to be 'fun' competitive races from the bench, at one end of the outside area, to a corner of the Nursery wall at the other. Initially, these were running races but then became races using either the available vehicles which they rode on or pushed across the space. Every now and then they used the bench as a stopping off or resting point with Elsie (4) and Jack (4) 'hooking' their toy wheel barrows under the bench and using the bucket part of the toy as a seat.

At one point, when she sat next to Jack on the bench, it seemed as though Holly was attempting to find some way of being or getting involved. She remained on the bench for a few moments but Jack immediately moved off to do something else.

Her actions seemed to go unnoticed and she remained detached and excluded from the activities of a similarly aged group of boys and girls throughout the rest of the morning.

10.30

During group snack Holly (4) sat at the smaller table. Spaces at the main table had been taken by the dominant group.

Field note, April 2009

Later the same morning she chose to interact, in a 'motherly' manner, with an agreeable group of younger children over whom she was successfully able to exert a degree of control. Acting sensibly, selflessly and maturely, in this case, she exhibited a submissive form of femininity but this sense of self limited her choices and the possibility for interaction with other children of a similar age who had adopted a more dominant or assertive form of being.

Holly pushing one of the younger children.
April 2009

Understanding and finding a place in their world

During a period of time when a number of children, mainly boys, were bringing objects from home, two children arrived with toys that immediately attracted the attention of other children. In the first case, the child (Roger) was keen to demonstrate how his toy worked but his behaviour implied that he was aware of the local arrangement of identities and relationships that constituted a form of social order.

08.40 – 09.40

Roger (4) arrived with a toy from home and, while kneeling, began to remove items from a large, soft cardboard box. Three other boys watched as Roger laid out a plastic mat, drew lines on this and then demonstrated how the

Thomas engine 'magically' followed the lines. He acknowledged the arrival of another child, quickly grabbed the box and pulled it nearer to him.

'Hello Mark (4).'

While Richard avoided contact with the two older, physically mature boys (Allan and Mark), another child (Rob), also seemingly aware of the existing power relationships, competently orientated himself to court their favour and minimise the possibility of conflict. According to Berger's dramaturgical perspective, 'people do not attempt to change the social structure, nor do they detach themselves from it. Rather they choose to make deliberate use of the structure in accordance with its own purposes. Here the individual can capture a sense of freedom and can experience a sense of personal control' (Brissett and Edgley, 2006: 48).

Using mechanism associated with the selfish, if not silly, dominant male discourse, Rob used his appearance and possessions to attract the attention of adults and other children. Rob was evidently prepared to share his possessions with other boys but he had decided, based upon his knowledge of the hierarchy, who should and who should not have access to those items that he cherished and others desired. However, rather than possibly creating disappointment or causing offence one child, who appeared to be viewed as a subordinate or an outsider, was politely but firmly offered an alternative, inferior item.

Suddenly Rob (3) arrived wearing a yellow, plastic safety helmet. He had a rucksack on his back and a book in his hand. Dropping down onto his knees in front of me he began to show me his book. It was a book about different kinds of tractors. Other children became interested in his belongings.

Joseph (3): Can I read this (referring to the book of tractors he had in his hand)?
Rob: No, this is for 'Big Boys.'
Rob: Joseph, read this (referring to another book he had taken out of his full rucksack).

Seemingly motivated by an apparent desire to become accepted by the four year old 'Big Boys' one of the group (Mark), who had literally positioned himself close to Rob, was allowed to use a popular toy. Another younger boy (Chris) of a smaller stature, often seen in Joseph's company, was not.

Mark began to watch over Rob who had started to remove other items from his rucksack.

Chris (3): Shall I have one as well (one of the various items in the rucksack)?
Rob: No!
Rob: The 'Big Boys' can do it. Only he can play with it (referring to Mark and the metal detector).

Behaviour later the same morning suggested that Rob had, at least, successfully acquired temporary membership of the 'Big Boys' group which, in this instance, was spatially and symbolically defined by the arrangement of carpet squares and cushions beneath a table. Acceptance within this friendship group was, however, clearly dependent upon Rob's willingness to submit to the power differential and make available 'interesting' resources that he had brought from home but the older boys had clearly come to realise that access to these resources would or should be achieved through persuasion rather than force. Nevertheless, much of this was 'backstage behaviour' hidden from the view of supervising adults.

0940
Moving carpet squares and cushions, Allan (4) and Mark began to create a 'den' beneath a table. At first this area was described as the 'water tank' and later as a 'rocket'. The two boys began to persuade Rob to join them in their den. Emerging from his hiding place, Mark called out to Rob before moving off and not returning.

Mark: Allan wants you Rob.

Allan began to call Rob and Mark from his hiding place encouraging them, with the promise of a gift, to return to the den.

Allan: Rob, we've got a present for you. Mark, there's a present for you.
Allan: Mark, there's a present for you.
Rob: I'm coming Allan.

Rob appeared with the rucksack on his back, yellow helmet on his head and a roll of sugar paper in his hand. He squatted down in front of the 'hiding place', from which Allan could be seen, spreading out the roll of paper so that it was visible to both of them.

Rob: I'm here.

Allan: Where's the treasure going to be (looking at Rob's paper)?

Allan: What's that (referring to the broken handle of the rucksack)?

Rob removed a book from his bag.

Allan: I'm just going to look in it (referring to Rob's bag and 'finding' the metal detector).

Rob puts the metal detector back in his bag.

Allan: Please can I have it?

Rob: Allan is waiting for you (referring to Mark). Mark, there's a present for you and you need to come quick.

Rob hides with Allan.

Rob: Mark, there's a present for you.

Although not explicitly communicated, a young girl's reaction as she entered the Nursery suggested that she was aware of the boys' presence and anticipated a certain form of aggressive behaviour. She avoided any form of contact choosing, instead, to join a large group of children being overseen by an adult in the designated communal space.

Cautiously, Rose (3) entered the Nursery. She watched the boys at play, picked up a spanner for no apparent reason, said 'car, car' and then joined the children in the carpeted area.
Field note, July 2008

Allan was a significant member of this group of 'Big Boys'. His idiosyncratic behaviour mirrored his egocentric, forceful demeanour and he appeared most content when working individually on a challenging task.

09.00 - 11.25
Allan (4) arrived with his mother. He had removed his coat but was still wearing leather gloves. Separating himself from the group and after a little persuasion, he began to concentrate on using elastic bands to make shapes on a board. Although he found it initially difficult to make triangular shapes, he persevered and after some initial attempts, which did not represent true

triangles of three straight sides, eventually succeeded and seemed delighted
with his success.
Field note, November 2008

Some of his unkind actions towards other children appeared to go unnoticed as they happened in obscured places some distance from supervising adults.

09.30
While some tidying up was taking place, Nina (U2) had moved to the edge of
the carpeted area. She was standing very close to Allan (4). He was in a
confined, hidden space - on the floor beneath the smaller group of tables. He
appeared to be teasing her. Allan showed Nina the marble but didn't allow
her to have it.

Characteristically, he was often unwilling to become involved in adult directed activities choosing instead, as was his prerogative, to direct his own time and occupations. It seemed that he ignored instructions, manipulated situations to gain personal advantage and was loath to share his own possessions or the settings resources. Although unwilling to submit to the generational and institutional order, when in the company of other children he typically became a leader - the 'boss' - issuing commands and instructions which supported his 'work' and the collaborative 'work' of the group.

14.00
As 'quiet time' came to an end, some of the children collected specific
materials from the shelves to use at the large table. Allan (4) enthusiastically
moved a large box containing the coloured, plastic pieces for the marble run
game to the carpeted area. He positioned it in front of me and began to
construct a run. When he asked me to hold onto his 'walkie-talkies', I
suggested that he placed them in his drawer. This task was delegated to
another child.

Allan was joined by other, older children and they began (quite noisily and
roughly) to construct the 'run'. In response to their requests, they were each
allocated specific, coloured marbles. During this time, Allan took charge
directing operations.

'You get the marbles from up there.'
'We don't need that.'

'Take this bit off for a moment and leave this bit at the bottom.'
'Take this bit off and leave this bit on.'
'Where's that big, blue bit?'

There were initial disagreements about the way in which the 'run' should be constructed before an effective run, which included a tall tower, was produced by the small group. The children were particularly interested in the effect of the tall tower.
Field note, October 2008

Mark, a slightly younger child of a similar physical stature was a consistent, sub-ordinate play mate with whom Allan shared common interests. He sought contact with Allan, when others were unavailable and achieved a degree of parity by tolerating but not challenging his domineering behaviour.

09.00
Allan arrived with his mother and soon after seemed to be inseparable from Mark. On this particular day, they were the only two older boys (two out of a group five 4 year olds) present. Libby was the only four year old girl.

After a short period of time, during which there was some conflict over the use of a colouring book and a selection of pencils, the two boys began to work alongside each other. The boys continued to play co-operatively with a range of other materials during the time when they were expected to 'take something from the shelves'.

He had allegedly become Libby's friend, one of the older robust girls, but other children of slighter build were reluctant to accept Mark's presence or encourage his involvement in their play.

I recall being surprised to see the two boys together. I had begun to associate Mark with Libby. On a previous visit, Libby had referred to Mark as her friend. She had spent the previous night at Mark's house.
Field note, November 2008

Other children were more cautious in Allan's presence. Some, however, were prepared to challenge, by being assertive, Alex's dominant behaviour but confidence to do so may have been dependent upon adult presence.

09.15

Allan (wearing a black hat which he eventually chose to remove) arrived with his mother and joined a group of boys investigating a pile of junk. The boys began to use the junk as if they were items for purchase and, at other times, as substitute weapons.

Warren (3): No, I'm having that.
Jack (3): I need to buy …
Warren (to me): Look after this.
Warren: Give me that box (whilst holding onto Allan's jumper).
Field note, December 2008

In certain situations, adults used special measures to avoid potentially difficult situations which may have embarrassed the child, his family or the setting. But these personalised arrangements reinforced typical 'silly, selfish, immature and demanding' (Francis, 2010) conceptions of developing masculinity and affirmed power differentials that were evident in children's group play.

09.30 – 10.00
Allan (4), holding a toy drum in his lap, sat down on the seat next to me. I helped him to secure himself with the safety strap. At the time, I recalled a brief statement that the Manager had made, presumably in response to something Allan had said, to reassure him that he would not be expected to do anything he did not want to do. Unlike the other children, who were wearing nativity costumes, he was not.

During the short journey by bus to the local church for the annual carol service, he talked knowledgably about the Star Wars films (currently being shown on TV) identifying the names of some of the key characters and explaining that he was hoping Santa would bring him certain, associated items (such as a Jedhi sword/sabre).

He was reunited with his mother as soon as we arrived at the entrance to the church. The Manager, who saw us enter the church, took him by the hand and led him to sit with his mother in the congregation rather than join the other children in a room at the back of the church.
Field note, December 2008

In comparison, Chris was a quiet, possibly shy but active boy. Nonetheless, he was persuasive and evidently operated with a similar self interest in mind. In certain circumstances, he was not averse to using force to achieve his aims.

At the beginning of the study, when one of the younger children, he showed limited interest in other children. With increasing maturity and growing awareness of cultural expectations, he became increasingly involved with other children. As if intent on absorbing the actions of older or more skilful children, he 'began' by watching them before repeating behaviours.

> *Chris (2) was kneeling alongside another child in front of one of the 'practical life' resources - a biscuit tin containing plastic cotton reels, flat holed shapes and cord. Chris watched as the child chose shapes from the tin and threaded these onto the cord.*

Similarly but more explicitly, he secured adult support - support that helped him to persist with and successfully complete activities that he initially found difficult.

> *Chris attempted but was unable independently to thread flat shapes onto a piece of frayed cord. When an adult held the cord vertically, Chris successfully placed a shape on top of the cord. Giving other shapes to the adult who had continued to hold the cord, he asked if she would do it for him. The adult held the cord. Chris placed another shape on top. He was encouraged to try another shape but chose to return to the first shape.*

> *'Will you do this for me?'*
> *'Try this one.'*
> *'I don't want to try this.'*
> *'I can do it if I hold this bit.*
> *'Thank you.'*
> *'I can't do this.'*
> Field note, November 2007

He was 'knowingly' compliant, understanding and responded, as expected, to adult requirements phrased as direct and implied instructions.

> *09.20*
> *An adult had chosen to work with Chris on the same table where I and another child were sitting. Chris collected a set of graded, knobbed cylinders*

from the shelf. With a student sitting beside him, he withdrew each cylinder from the block in turn and randomly placed these to his right. He was reminded to do this 'quietly/carefully'.

The adult began to demonstrate how the cylinders should be used. A set of individual red cylinders contained within a box with a red lid were taken from the shelf. The adult carefully removed the cylinders from the box and placed them on the table.

'Shall we see if we can arrange them in order?'

Chris began to fit smaller shapes between larger shapes but not to order them as suggested even though he had been able to order similar shapes within the graded, self-correcting block. The adult then built a tower with the red cylindrical shapes. A set of blue cylinders were removed from the shelf.

'Perhaps you could build a blue tower next to it. Which is the tallest - blue or red tower?'

Both the blue and red cylinders were put in their boxes and returned to the shelves.
Field note, April, 2008

Proximity to others, as well as a declared interest in what they were doing, were strategies Chris effectively used to establish contact with other children.

08.30
What you doing? asked Chris (3.).
Write my name on it, replied Libby (4.).
Field note, January 2008

Chris displayed a sense of fun and timing. He knew when to watch and when to join in and his humour, as it was appreciated by other children, facilitated membership of a mixed-sex group led by an older, dominant girl. In one particular incident, he began by watching the actions of two older children before following them, leading them and eventually becoming an important character within their play.

09.05

Chris (3) watched and then removed his cardigan before walking towards an
adult with his cardigan in his outstretched hand. A picture of a spider on his
'T' shirt caught Libby's attention.
'The spider is going to get me!'
Field note, January 2008

With the exception of his younger brother, Chris worked willingly and
independently alongside others sharing resources when needing to do so.

08.30 – 09.00

Chris (3) was sitting with two other boys in the far right hand corner of the
'cosy area' beneath the book shelf. The other two children had books in their
hands, Chris did not. All three children were watching the other children
perform the yoga exercises but they had chosen not to join in.

But, in a similar manner to a small number of boys, he chose to build and create.
It was this particular interest in trains that effectively stimulated and perpetuated
membership of a single-sex group.

When I arrived a few of the children had already been dropped off and were
contained within the carpeted area. The area was dominated by a small
wooden track and a transparent plastic box of resources containing the
trains and carriages. Chris (3) was playing with these. One of the adults
confirmed what I had understood to be Chris' fascination with trains, but
particularly, Thomas (Thomas the Tank Engine). I was reminded of
behaviour I had seen on a previous visit when he was using building blocks
to construct something for Thomas (bridge?). When questioned by an adult,
he explained that he was 'making Thomas' but in fact appeared to be using
wooden bricks to create a place or context for a story involving the engine. It
was an interest that Chris shared with a number of other children but his
body language suggested that it was interest he was unprepared to share
with his younger brother.
Field note, May 2008

Chris creating his place and the place where 'Thomas is/lives'.
May 2008

For a time, Chris and a small group of similarly minded boys operated alongside each other at the beginning of the day co-operatively constructing, before using, either a train track or marble run. He accepted the presence of other children but clearly found ways of ensuring that his younger brother was barred from their play.

> *09.00*
> *Soon after Chris (3) arrived, he collected the Brio train set and began to work in a co-operative manner with Jack laying out the track in a small space to the right of another plastic set. Owen, Chris' younger brother, remained on the edge of this activity and was initially content to play on his own with a set of large mixing bowls.*
>
> *After a brief moment of watching Owen he got up on to his feet, collected a large orange, plastic train carriage and then attempted to move his large carriage under a low bridge formed with small pieces of Brio train track. This behaviour resulted in the following comment from Jack.*
>
> *'That doesn't fit. It fits on that track. Doesn't fit on there.'*

Owen persisted with his attempt until his brother, Chris, deliberately removed the carriage and began to add more track to the layout in response, presumably, to Jack's request.

'More track! More track!'

Through avoiding or excluding his younger brother, Chris was thought to be seeking justice for unkind behaviour. As Owen had been observed pushing and biting other children, it was assumed that his older brother had been the victim of similar behaviour. However, Owen's exclusion was effectively instigated by another child (Jack) who may have been unwilling to share Chris' attention, the relatively scarce resources or tolerate a younger child's uncoordinated actions. Acting in accordance with an instruction and deploying an effective strategy, Chris forcefully banished his younger brother. By doing so, he submitted to the authority of another similarly aged child (Jack), in order to secure his friendship and distance himself from his younger brother.

10.00
Two small, soft children's armchairs had been moved a short distance away from a table to create a roughly triangular space which was large enough for one child to stand in. Owen, the younger brother of Chris, had moved into the area and was sitting on a nearby chair. He was wearing a hat – the black pointed hat with a wide brim that I have heard the children refer to as the 'Witch's Hat'. He may have been attempting to join in or intent on provoking some kind of reaction but his presence seemed to be unacceptable to Jack who instructed Chris to encourage Owen to move.

Jack (4): Try to get Owen off first.

Responding immediately, Chris reached over and removed the hat from Owen's head before stepping back and distancing himself from his brother. Owen got up and out of the chair in an attempt to try and recover the hat. Chris returned the hat to his brother once he had vacated the chair.
Field note, January 2009

Jack evidently enjoyed the company of children who had similar interests. He was often the dominant leader but adopted other identities in order to share resources with small numbers of selected children. Besides Chris, Joseph was a frequent, co-operative play mate with whom he worked as an equal respectfully

facilitating action as well as sharing, rather than enforcing, control in order to achieve what he desired.

> *08.30 – 09.30*
>
> *Jack (3) and Joseph (3) were knelt on the carpet, either side of the small marble run Jack had been constructing. Using both hands, Jack firmly secured the top section of the run, adjusting it so that it sloped towards Joseph. They both seemed to acknowledge that another piece was needed (Jack: Quick we need another bit; Joseph: Yea!') but Jack discarded the piece he was holding. Picking up a white marble in one hand (the other hand contained his toy car) from the dish at the bottom, Jack began to use the run.*
>
> *Using the same hand, Jack placed the marble in the top section of the run. He allowed the marble to run a short distance towards him before using an index finger to push the marble from one level to the next. Jack picked up a blue marble from the bottom of the construction and attempted to drop the marble into the top of the run at a position which was furthest from him. He hesitated before then trying to place the marble in an equivalent position but nearer to him. In the meantime, Joseph had picked up his white marble and was attempting to place his marble in the same position. He announced that, 'it's your go'.*
>
> *Jack and then Joseph dropped their marbles into the top of the run and watched as they rolled down the slope. Once again, when the marbles reached the point at which there was a transfer from one level to the next, Joseph used his index finger to push them on. They watched the movement of their respective marbles before picking them up from the bottom.*

The two older, physically dominant boys (Allan and Mark) who used a more aggressive approach were actively avoided even though they shared a common interest in super-hero type play creating pretend weapons from particular construction materials and cardboard tubes.

Like his mother, who wished to ensure that he was able to 'get along with other people' and 'achieve what he wanted/needed', Joseph was a friendly, socially competent child. He was popular with other children, including those who were older and, usually, the adults who cared for him even though certain practices potentially marked him out as different.

213

12.00

At lunch time I was sat between two children – Joseph (3) and Lisa (4) who had already been seated in front of hot savoury dishes and their respective personal lunch boxes. Joseph had been provided with a dish of mince and rice; Lisa's mother had sent a pot of pasta. The other children were eating a more usual sandwich type lunch. Joseph and Lisa began to talk about their food.

Please may I look in my lunch box one more time? said Lisa referring to Joseph's rather than her own lunch box.
'I've got jelly. I'm going to show Lucy.'
It's just like yogurt, stated Lisa.
'Have I've got a banana? Sticker on there (banana).'
You have (referring to the sticker). Look on your shirt, suggested Lisa.

From a relatively young age, Joseph's speech was clear to both children and adults. He recognised communication conventions and used this knowledge to jointly develop simple patterns of dialogue with adults, as well as children, which centred on familiar, concrete objects. Although some times appearing rather abrupt at first, he understood that common pleasantries, such as please and thank you, needed to be used in certain circumstances to gain what he wanted.

I've got a banana (showing the child in the buggy) banana, banana, said Joseph.
'I've got a … there's a ball up there.'
I've got raisins, stated Lisa.
What you got? Is that cake, Karen? asked Joseph.
(An adult had just returned from the kitchen with two cakes inside a transparent paper bag. She gave one piece to another and kept one for herself.)
Open my banana for me - please, asked Joseph.
I've got a bread stick at home. Haley, Haley (referring to an adult) I've got a bread stick at home, explained Joseph.
I have but they are cheesy flavoured. Do you have cheesy flavours? asked the adult.

His relatively sophisticated knowledge of language allowed him the means to articulate his thoughts and feelings in ways which others, generally, found acceptable. There were times when he was concerned with convention

214

encouraging, possibly 'mothering', others so that they would behave in expected ways but he was prepared to try new experiences which were not always perceived to be appropriate.

> *Josepha and Chris began to play together, pushing a toy tractor backwards and forwards as they talked to each other.*
>
> *Chris: I'm coming to share with it (share it with you?).*
>
> *Chris began to run around the carpet in a circular motion. Joseph was grinning.*
>
> *Joseph began to assert himself and command attention perhaps subconsciously responding to an awareness of the Nursery routine or because he had heard an instruction from one of the adults. This was the time in the morning when the yoga activities usually began.*
>
> *Chris: I'm going around.*
> *Joseph: Don't put it in the cage.*
> *Chris: It doesn't fit in there (referring to the turntable).*
> *Joseph: It's not play time.*
> *Chris: Yes, it is.*
> *Joseph: No, it's not. It's tidy away. No, it's not play time.*
>
> *Joseph continued to dominate the situation. He persuaded Owen ('No!') to refrain from taking the lid of the blue box containing the wooden pieces of track and puzzle. Chris was led away from the carpeted area to another area of the Nursery.*
>
> *Returning to the carpeted area, Joseph and Chris began to climb onto and then jump off a blue, plastic box (Joseph: That was good, shall we do it again?) until the Manager spotted them and they were told not to.*
> Field note, July 2008

Joseph made friends with both boys and girls who usually accepted his non-aggressive but bossy manner. Using resources either found in the setting or brought from home, he initiated and led activities which other children wished to be part of. Such was his popularity or influence that on one occasion I observed how his peers effectively chose to create paper 'gifts' especially for him.

14.00

Joseph (4) chose to collect three small cars that he had brought from home. His mother had explained that he must only use his cars if he was willing to share them with other children. He gave one car to each of the two other boys and kept one for himself. Using language to direct operations, he encouraged each of the boys to take their turn to roll the cars down the top of a toy (a large lorry) which was acting as a road surface.
Field note, January 2009

As the child, he responded to adult help and support - actions which brought success, recognition for achievements and status within the group.

One of the adults watched as Joseph (4) threaded shapes onto a cord. He was then encouraged to match a set of words to a corresponding set of pictures which had been taken from a small, pink box. Joseph successfully matched the words to the pictures by sounding out the letters of each word. Each set of successful words was laid out together in a line in front of him on the table. I was asked to take a picture of Joseph and one of his successful matches as a record of what he could do - that he could read simple three letter (consonant, vowel, consonant) words such as 'pig'.
Field note, 22 January 2009

As one of the older children, with acquired standing, accustomed to the established routines and customary practices, he began to influence the actions of other children. In this case, he attempted to control the distribution of food, again as though 'mother' or 'father', seemingly for the group's benefit, which ultimately produced personal benefits. While he presented as a competent preschool child, he subsequently positioned others as incompetent.

10.30

Starting at the main table, the children were provided with a small selection of 'cut' fruit in a plastic bowl and an individual drink. The children began to pass the bowl around the main table, selecting a piece of fruit to eat before this was passed to the smaller number of children on the other two tables.

I sat on one side to the right of Joseph who began, with some brief involvement and comments from other children, to ask indirect questions and issue instructions. It was if he was mimicking conversations he had previously heard.

216

Joseph: Shall we have some fruit then (referring to the fruit in the bowl which had not been passed around)? You don't have all of it, just pass it on. Pass it on to Owen. Then pass it on to …Good boy! To me, Chris. Thank you. Here you are. Pass it on. Owen, the fruits here (Rose laughs and states, 'I think he didn't hear'). Owen, don't stand on chairs (repeated by other children). Then me.

Field note, January 2009

In the past, as Lowe (1998) explains, children were regarded as discrete individuals who learnt, through absorption, 'appropriate stances to be used in social situations' (p306). More recent ideas view the learning of social behaviours as an on-going dynamic during which children, through participation in the social structures of the adult world, come to know about the social world and actively constitute and structure an identity during the living of their everyday life. As people, children can adopt and select from the range of available positions but may be positioned by acceptable ways of being which, together, provide the cultural meaning of such concepts as femininity and masculinity.

The construction of a gender identity begins in the family with parents choosing gender appropriate names, purchasing gender appropriate clothing and assigning specific attributes. It continues through interactions with members of the family in the home environment, with peers and educators in educational settings, as a result of exposure to a variety of media and through community interactions (Grieshaber, 2008). The 'family and home context may be one of the most powerful sites of discourse that informs children about masculinity and femininity'. But, for many children, the 'educational context either reinforces the position they have constructed for themselves or creates dissonance between the prevailing dominant gender culture and the child's individual position' (Lowe, 1998: 208). Such a perspective also calls into question the inevitability of belonging 'to one or the other category of a binary pair' and the inevitability of being powerful or powerless (Davies, 1998:132).

Each of these children, from a sociological point of view, used day to day situations to construct and project a certain version of self. While it was a seemingly intuitive process that helped children to get to know their situation and, to a degree, make the place their own, Hacking (2011) explains that character or those consistent and self-revealing patterns of behaviour – one's essence – is not something you are born with. Rather than being 'deeply

embedded, foundational and defining', identity is viewed as something more 'superficial, plastic' and prone to manipulation. Those, such as Michel Foucault, who have completely rejected the essentialist notion of identity, view this essence as entirely a 'product of discourse and inherently fragmented, multiple and transient' (Bendle, 2003:5) in nature. From a Foucauldian perspective, the self both positions and is positioned by discourse but as discourses are able to produce objects and subjects in certain ways, the individual can be positioned as powerful or powerless.

While to some degree, three of the four girls appeared to be powerless they, in effect, utilised an understanding or form of femininity to achieve or attempt to gain control. Each of these children demonstrated, through sustained engagement and the exhibition of necessary skills and capacities, that they had embraced a role and were embraced by it. But, as this identity was a consistent, unchallenged, constructed feature of their being, such a position appeared to be restrictive, as well as enabling, as it reduced the possibility in some cases for engagement with more challenging tasks. To some extent, the fourth girl was able to fashion a more flexible identity by adopting and utilising a range of different gender characteristics to suit the situation and her intentions.

Three of the four boys successfully used, as a significant part of their repertoire, what might be regarded as feminine like traits to achieve what they seemingly desired or required. In comparison to the most physically dominant boy, the fourth girl and these boys were able to do gender in an appropriate, if not a 'right', way which suited their purposes without becoming socially marginalised. While there was apparent variation within this smaller group, it seemed that a parental intention to bring up boys and girls to think of themselves as similar (Martin, 2005) was being enacted by the girl and boy children and passively reinforced by non-intervention. Presumably indicative of the children's experiences, the adopted roles were collectively akin to the familiar standardised family unit: mother, father as well as children.

9 CONSTITUTING CHILDHOOD

> 'only because daycare centres and schools serve some interest of adult
> society are they delivered, traded and maintained; and institutionalization of
> children is variable and changing, but always in response to a prevailing
> society's dominant interests. Currently these interests may be couched in
> terms of neoliberal economy and politics; at other times they may have
> assumed other forms and contents'
> (Qvortrup, 2012: 244)

In his concluding essay of *The Modern Child and the Flexible Labour Market*
Qvortrup (2012) considers the following questions. Who are the users of
institutions for children? Are institutions built to serve the 'interest of people
other than children' or are they built with 'children's best interests in mind
without any hidden agenda' (p243)? Using an amusing but real life account
about a small group of four year old children who seemingly attempt to dig their
way out of a day care centre, he proposes that as yet we know little about the
institutional experience from the child's point of view. However, he contends
that some children may react to the restrictions imposed on their freedom while
others may enjoy the experience.

I chose to study one early years' setting, a convenient privately owned Nursery
established in 1999 to provide a relatively structured, essentially educational
experience for three to five year old children based on the Montessori approach.
Using an ethnographic type of method I set out to examine the 'nature' of the
chosen early years' setting in order to deepen my personal understanding of the
practical realities of working and living in this type of social situation. I began by
considering the situation as a place or spatial location in which behaviour was
'shaped as well as constrained' (Wilson and Chaddha, 2009: 549) by the
contrived environment. The study initially considered adult actions. I gradually
became more interested in children's actions and reactions to the imposed
constraints.

Narrative accounts of commonly occurring patterns of behaviour form the core
content of each of the previous chapters. These accounts represent an initial
form of reported analysis but the final intention of this thesis was to present
'possible', subjective interpretations of the meanings of these events. I was
initially and, to some extent, remain challenged by this deconstructive process,
associated with poststructuralist thoughts about how 'texts' (Mac Naughton,

2005) and even space and materials (O'Toole and Were, 2008) may convey meaning, 'blinded' (Mac Naughton, 2005) by a position which places taken-for-granted understandings of children's expected development at the forefront of any consideration of significance. Nevertheless, I wish to emphasise how these interpretations are connected to a dominating point of view in which play is understood as a central device in the education of young children. According to Ailwood (2003), early childhood education is regulated by three so called 'truths' about play. Play is a natural past time of innocent, pure children; it is behaviour that bears a number of common characteristics and play can facilitate children's intellectual, social, emotional and physical development.

Who benefits?

As I have pointed out elsewhere, time spent in an out-of-home context before the start of formal schooling, often now between the age of four and five, has become a common experience for young children in the UK. Referred to as day care, it is part of a relatively new process of institutionalisation, of not necessarily the 'deviant, unruly or intractable' (Qvortrup, 2012) which presupposes the existence of organized regimes of protection and control. In the case of children, institutional mechanisms are normally 'directed toward knowledge acquisition, socialization and proper upbringing – whatever that may mean' (p 245). The development of day care provision is commonly viewed as a device to enable mothers to enter the workforce and provide a necessary contribution to the family income at a time when a higher standard of living is expected. Qvortrup (2012) maintains that children, corporate society, the market and the state as well as parents can be regarded as 'users' and beneficiaries. A number of studies have identified a link between children's participation in early years' settings, the collective term for a number of different contexts and the development of both cognitive and social skills (Kutnick et al, 2007). Some believe that the primary aim of recent UK initiatives is to increase revenue for the state and reduce levels of poverty (Penn, 2007). Others, more generally, regard early childhood education as a policy intended to support the development of life long learners and entrepreneurial citizens (Ailwood, 2008).

The UK government has provided funding to enable all three to five year old children to have access to a 'free' pre-school experience for a set number of hours each week. Additional accessible provision for this group of young children has mainly been supplied by the private rather than the voluntary or

maintained (state) sector (Osgood, 2012). In addition to places for children in nurseries attached to primary schools, private and voluntary providers may offer both full and part time day care for a wider age range. A curriculum, for the birth to five year old age group, acts as a universal reference point for all providers, irrespective of type, who are inspected by the same government body. Common criteria, used to make published judgements regarding the quality of both children's care and education in all private, voluntary and maintained pre-school settings, provides accountability for the use of public funds. Participation is not compulsory but given the school like curriculum focus of preschool provision it seems unlikely that many parents would be prepared to forgo the voluntary offer without fearing that their children would miss out on something important or lose a competitive edge.

What is it/what was it like?

Rather like a gigantic play pen but with a principally solid, rather than an open, framework the physical structure of the Nursery contained and constrained children while, at the same time, providing an environment where some possible forms of human activity could take place. Physically and symbolically, an electronically controlled entrance acted as an initial barrier, segregating supposedly innocent and potentially vulnerable young children to an 'artificial world' away from their families (Fleer, 2003) and excluded access by the general public who are perceived as a possible threat (Walkerdine, 1999). Permitted members of the community (children, their parents and adult workers) passed through on their designated days of attendance.

Once inside the building, established socio-spatial practices (Rutanen, 2012) determined where parents, as well as their children, might go - where they could linger and for how long. It was the parents, the clients, who were usually greeted by the Manager on arrival. Acting as the 'face' of the organisation, the Manager made contact with individual parents, mainly mothers, in order to obtain necessary information, primarily about children's care, which was subsequently relayed to her staff. While immobile children were often transferred from the arms of a parent to the arms of another adult at the beginning of each day, few children were openly or individually greeted by either adults or other children. What might be regarded as an over-familiar, as opposed to a professional, relationship was established with particular parents presumably to engender trust and encourage the sharing of information so that

221

the setting could endeavour to create consistency in patterns of care. Particular events were organised specifically for parents to socialise with the owner and members of staff but regular sustained contact with parents, with a few exceptions, seemed to be uncommon. Documenting children's achievements in the form of a 'learning journey', a device through which an individual child's development was monitored, evaluated and reported, alongside a standardised set of expectations, began to form the basis for a more sustained interaction between the setting and parents.

It was at the beginning of the day when an apparent contrast between an idealised home and setting experience seemed most striking. Children, entering as components of small family units, were immediately required to become one of a collective group of developmentally diverse young children. The situation could possibly, given the mix of different ages in interconnecting spaces, be compared to a large, traditional family but as children merged into the group they initially appeared to loose their personal identity. Pattern of attendance, primarily determined by parents and agreed by the setting, affected children's experience with some finding it especially difficult to separate from a parent and 'settle' at the beginning of each day. For some children, attendance at the nursery is part of a complex system of care involving other providers and family members. In some cases, this appeared to affect the child, in terms of their ability to settle or adjust; in other situations it did not. A consistent pattern of attendance for at least three days each week, corresponding for the older child with government funded free early education, appeared to support most children's ability to separate from a carer and make the necessary adjustments to cope with the situation. Less frequent attendance scattered across the week was not so helpful. It also became clear that attendance on consecutive days of the week was a comfortable experience for most children.

Adults, performing at this time as the notional mother-substitute, are expected to be both receiver and transformer of children's overwhelming internal anxieties (Elfer, 2007) but they were only able or prepared to offer brief emotional support. Standardised procedures used by adults to promote self-confidence and independent action, as well as avoidance, may have been strategies deployed by adults to deliberately distance themselves, emotionally, from children but these actions implied a perceived inadequacy predicated on assumptions regarding the quality of the child's attachment security to his/her primary carer. Children gradually became known to all the adults in this small nursery but an attachment to a particular individual (the key worker), a model

222

officially recommended but often avoided in practice (Elfer, 2007), was encouraged. Specific attachments may have been fleeting relationships as turnover of junior members of staff, which has been associated with the lack of organisational space (time and culture) to discuss the distressing aspects of the role (Elfer, 2007), has been relatively high. However, retention of two particular members of staff in this Nursery has created a notable degree of desirable continuity for parents as well as their children. For the time that they attended the Nursery, children were evidently attached to certain adults but with the exception of one particular case, parents did not appear to be concerned or jealous of the close relationships adults formed with their children and children adapted when members of staff left.

The majority of older, mobile children, arriving more or less at the same time when adult numbers were relatively low, were left to fend for themselves. Some, acting with agency, used objects, others or proximity to supporting adults as 'psychic defences' (Elfer, 2007) as if they were attempting to minimise the emotional discomfort of separating from a parent at the beginning of the day. Individual children became very obvious: those that were distressed at the beginning of the day; those that demonstrated unique, repetitive behaviours; the most vocal; the most dominant and the most sociable but a number of other children, usually quieter in nature, were inconspicuous.

While classic attempts (Degotardi and Pearson, 2009) had been made to create a homely atmosphere with soft furnishings and wall displays, the environment was a hard, open rather than a closed, cosy space. Durable, washable materials had understandably been chosen for large areas of flooring and for tables and chairs to cope with the 'heavy' daily traffic of children and supporting adults and ensure that frequent spills of food and drink in multi-functional spaces could be dealt with in an efficient and hygienic way. Carpeting, cushions and upholstered furniture quickly became soiled, worn and needed to be cleaned regularly or replaced. The open space enabled a comparatively small number of legally determined adults to oversee the overall actions of a large group of children without, necessarily, being constantly in direct or close proximity to each and every child. Adults, as well as children, were constantly under surveillance but individual children found ways of distancing themselves from other children as well as avoid the gaze of supervising adults.

Maintaining young children's safety throughout the day has always been of paramount importance but the adoption of an adult-controlled and formalised registration procedure emphasised current concerns and requirements to 'safeguard' children from potential harm. For this reason, from arrival to departure, a recorded number of named children were generally confined and remained held within the pre-arranged environment with a legislated number of qualified staff for the whole of each day. Occasional regimented forays into the immediate or surrounding areas declined once a substantial, supposedly 'all weather', outdoor space had been built and in response to growing parental concerns regarding children's welfare in comparatively insecure locations where they were likely to encounter members of the public. Consequently, children's direct experience of the world beyond the confines of the physical structure, especially as they were transported by car to and from the setting, was limited. The ledge beneath a relatively large indoor area of double glazing was a popular place for children as this was where they could view the interesting immediate location and watch for the arrival or departure of parents. Similar sights could be seen from behind and beneath slatted fences that marked the boundary of two outside spaces. Windows and their associated ledges, in each of two principal indoor rooms, provided useful additional light and storage areas for valuable and delicate objects but they had been positioned at some height away from the reach or view of young children. Contact between children and people, other than the adult workers or their parents, was a rare occurrence.

Staff members were deployed throughout the day in relation to increasing and decreasing numbers of children so that legally required low 'student-teacher ratios' associated with universalised standards of quality (Tobin, 2005) were always maintained. A simple uniform, provided but not worn by the owner, of black trousers and a plain, dark coloured 'T' shirt emblazoned with the Nursery's symbol, clearly identified to parents, visitors and members of the public who were the adult members of staff and, by default, at busy times, such as at the beginning and end of each day, who were not. Supplied with an altruistic purpose in mind as well as, I assume, an intention to promote conformity and advertise the Nursery, the uniform was a practical form of dress for the physical and, some times, messy duties the workers were expected to undertake. Unlike the owner of the setting who, for the most part, supervised the operation, the adult members of staff were required to complete what could be regarded as motherly, domestic as well as technical duties. In addition to being responsible for children's personal care, overseeing their safety and supporting them with various educational type tasks, adults also performed

certain 'housekeeping' duties. They were responsible for keeping areas clean and could be required to transport children both to and from local schools. Significant changes in staff during the study period, symptomatic of national concerns regarding the recruitment and retention of staff to the gendered professions of teaching, nursing and social care, as well as childcare (Moss, 2002), implied a certain level of dissatisfaction with either the nature of the work, or social position. The Nursery has, however, managed to retain two particular members of staff who have been rewarded, through promotion to more senior positions, for their dedication.

Each of the main and subsidiary spaces, of indoor and outdoor rooms, had an assigned, not necessarily, static function which facilitated the promotion of children's social as well as academic competence in a safe, secure and healthy environment. At the beginning of the study, an ordered space arranged for various but predefined objectives (learning, meal and sleep times) served as a classroom, with tables and chairs in the centre of the room and resources stored around the perimeter, for much of the day. Another room, seemingly of less importance, was arranged for more active, diverse forms of play associated with undefined objectives to which children were generally allowed once the 'work' of the day had been completed. While the dominance and arrangement of one room, with its multi-functional capabilities, communicated the importance of promoting individual learning in a formalised way it also represented an expectation to take care of, as well as educate, groups of young children. Comparatively it emphasised the importance, at this time, of a work as opposed to a play culture.

From the outset, children were expected to tolerate and become accustomed to various levels of social intimacy determined by a cyclical pattern of predetermined daily activities which ensured that a number of children could be provided with a balanced diet of rest, food and activity. Proximity to a number of others (adults and children) was particularly marked at key transition times (the beginning and the end of each day or session; snack, meal and rest times) and, to a lesser extent, during adult planned activities focussed upon the transfer of knowledge or the development of fine motor skills. Spontaneous as well as planned interactions, initiated by children, occurred throughout the day when children were 'free' to either use the self instructional, developmentally graded materials or a range of play type resources but young children had limited interest in other children. A number of older children clearly enjoyed the company of a fairly small number of other children. But for extremely infrequent

225

and fleeting occurrences, being alone was an unlikely physical possibility for the mobile child. Spaces could quickly become crowded and untidy as numbers of children moved within the areas using and discarding various objects at will.

Older verbal children, who had become accustomed to the linguistic form and associated behaviour pattern of a scripted dialogue used during adult-led individual and, to a more limited extent, group activities, appropriated and deployed this model when attempting to collaborate with other children. Seemingly aware of the social and moral order that existed within the Nursery, older children also used a similar pattern of behaviour to socialise other, usually, younger children. Acting as, promoted as and, therefore, constructed as leaders in certain cases, they directed, controlled and some times rebuked children particularly at snack and during meal times when moral patterns of behaviour were clearly required. Resources were often shared and used in playful as well as standardised ways but opportunities for collaborative engagement were initially restricted by a relatively narrow range of materials and a highly structured, daily routine, interspersed by a number of points of transition, which emphasised individual rather than group learning. Choice enabled children to select activities within their developmental capabilities but some evidently used this pedagogical characteristic to avoid either involvement in particular activities or proximity to other children.

Changes in the arrangement of materials and a gradual reduction in the number of tables and chairs, to facilitate movement and a growing group of younger children needing floor rather table top space, signified an apparent change in philosophical emphasis. Ideas embedded in quality measures to which the Nursery was obliged to conform for funding purposes promoted learning as a social, rather than an individual, construct and the need to accommodate more dependent younger children. As the setting accepted increasing numbers of children under a year old, additional specific spaces were gradually created, within and adjacent to the seemingly lesser second room to maintain patterns of care originally established by parents (changing and sleep). Possibly and coincidentally reinforcing, through positioning of resources required for the care of younger children, the inferior nature of the second room and a corresponding social order to which older children became accustomed.

Accommodating the needs of a younger, more dependent group of children requiring significant periods of 'nurturing' attention evidently presented the

setting with certain challenges given the constraints of operating within a converted farm building, an original intention to provide a formalised, nursery experience for relatively independent three to five year old children and, presumably, a limited budget. In addition to providing additional sleeping and changing areas, 'softer' areas were created specifically for immobile children and populated with particular, sensory type resources. However, given the lack of a clear demarcation for different ages of children, in a space intended for a mixed age group, spaces devised specifically for the youngest children could be invaded, occupied or acquisitioned by older, more dominant children.

Despite a general lack of comparative evidence regarding the benefits of contemporary indoor as opposed to outdoor experiences, the early years community has come to accept that outdoor play is an important aspect of day care life for young children (Waller et al, 2010). Fuelled, it would seem, by studies of urban childhood which emphasise children's restricted access to outside spaces and their confinement within child specific institutions (Kernan, 2010), as well as claims regarding its importance for social and affective learning (Aasen et al, 2009), creating outdoor areas has become a common developmental aim for many early years settings irrespective of their location or knowledge of children's specific experiences. While the children associated with this setting were from a predominately rural area, a number of children were probably living in the nearby market town. It certainly seemed, with only one or two exceptions, that children's contact with nature may have been restricted. As I mentioned earlier, children were usually ferried by car to and from the setting and parents often carried young children into the building.

In a similar manner to the indoor environment and in common with a number of other Nurseries, the creation of a dedicated, accessible outdoor area provided children with exposure to a number of safe but standardised adult defined activities (sand and shingle pits, areas of grass and garden) within a similarly compartmentalised, confined and controlled space. Paradoxically, a previous outside space, although not immediately accessible and restricted to summer use, as well as more frequent incursions into the immediate area, provided children with a freer potentially more imaginative and diverse experience and a possible understanding of a wider, commercial world. It became clear that the majority of children, who appeared to be associated with relatively affluent and aspirational families, were very familiar with the activities that had been provided.

Additional smaller places, while seemingly of less significance, were essential functional spaces for caring and intimate practices. One of these defined, supplementary spaces - a toilet and a wash basin primarily for adult use - was frequently used for changing children at adult defined times, on a mat on a hard floor, before a softly padded, customised changing unit was purchased and placed in one of the openly monitored rooms. While necessary items, for children's personal care, were close at hand, the original space was an uncomfortable one for both adults and children - cramped and, possibly, cold. Potentially, the space granted the child and the adult a brief moment of privacy within a surveyed world but adults, kneeling in the restricted area, often left the door ajar. While this created additional 'working' space it also exposed how adults behaved in such intimate circumstances. An additional, adjacent toilet area and wash hand basins used by older, mobile children did, however, provide a small area away from the adult gaze but children were often in the company of other children.

As well as acting as a storage area and a place for the preparation of simple foods, the kitchen area functioned as a small staff room. It was here that adults could, momentarily, while preparing food for children's break or lunch, distance themselves from children and other adults or become involved in conversations that they did not wish to be overhead. The space acted as a brief refuge as adults, when on duty, were unable to take breaks away from the children and a place where a small number of personal possessions (coat and bag) could be temporarily stored in a small, shared (behind a door or in a cluttered cupboard) rather than a personalised space. A dedicated desk and later an office space, epitomized the status the owner, who was the Manager at the time, was afforded by parents and their children rather than, necessarily, the volume of administrative work associated with her role or the need for a place where private meetings could be held. The shared and dedicated spaces (coat peg/drawer of a wooden unit) allocated to children were where necessary and treasured possession could be temporarily stored. They may have been indicative of the relative status of children or the importance of creating a sense of belonging but the procedures clearly supported the adult role particularly when possessions associated with an individual child needed to be easily or quickly retrieved.

A developing object world

Arranged within the spaces that make up the overall place of this Nursery were numerous items associated with a child-centred rather than a child-embedded approach (Fleer, 2003). For much of the time, children were expected to learn by doing rather than watching - to be active rather than motionless. Expectations figuratively represented by the abundance and variety of materials, chosen in accordance with age related normative assumptions of children's behaviour and skills, the availability of flat surfaces and spaces between various items of furniture.

Besides the vast array of objects through which children were expected to be motivated to seek and acquire knowledge through engagement, a variety of other additional items were made available for children's care. As others have commented, 'early years education and care is inextricably linked with objects' (Jones et al, 2012: 49). Historically, objects are for learning. They are linked to the ideas of the educational pioneers: Froebel, Montessori and Dewey and categorised, respectively, as those for construction and design, conceptual manipulation and reality role-play (Zuckerman, 2006 in Jones et al, 2012). More recently, objects have been viewed as cultural artefacts, imbued with significance, which assist children in making connections between contexts, to normalise behaviour and promote participation (Jones et al, 2012).

There have always been similarities in the way in which the early years' environment is organised in the western world, as the overall aim is to ensure safety and facilitate active use of materials but this setting was originally identified by the presence of particular, educational materials. Taking her lead from the ideas of Montessori, formulated when a biologically deterministic view of childhood prevailed (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1997), the owner of this Nursery supplied and promoted the use of a specific pedagogical approach characterised by the presence of objects made from natural materials and pre-determined practices for teaching, learning and assessment. More common, commercial type toys associated, generally, with early years practice and the ideas of Dewey (Jones et al, 2012) were limited and most were deliberately located, as though they were trivial, in an infrequently used space.

In response to increasing numbers of younger children, as well as external and internal evaluation for quality judgements, the setting was encouraged to develop additional space and to re-arrange and introduce a range of additional,

toy like materials. Characteristically, these supplementary materials were miniature versions of an adult domestic world heavy on the child caring element or representative of a limited range of previous, not necessarily current, occupations or activities. While the apparent intention was to create a gentler more enjoyable experience or to bring the Nursery into line with other settings, they sat uneasily against the carefully crafted, tactile and subtly coloured but expensive range of Montessori resources. Irrespective of the type and abundance of resources, children actions were controlled rather than playful.

Previous arrangements involving the use of the Montessori didactic materials in conjunction with a structured routine supported a principled approach to learning. Viewed, it would seem, as though they were 'lone scientists' (Bruner, 1996 in Alexander, 2004), children were encouraged to individually work through a sensory curriculum, in the form of graded materials with defined objectives, to promote the gradual development of life skills and conceptual understanding. Socialisation did not appear to be an important expectation at the beginning of the study but ritualised practices designed for accessing, use and return of resources as well as the overt actions of supporting adults, emphasised an intention to provoke respect for the environment, the materials and each other as well as concentrated, co-ordinated activity. The new inclusive aim, dictated by legislated requirements, was also one of apparent 'individualization' (Alexander, 2004) but social, rather than intellectual, development through children's contact with playful materials, adults and other children became the primary focus. In the past, adults could be seen to be primarily responsible for the substance of children's learning *shaping* the experience of an older group of children through a localised but systematic curriculum of provision and practice built upon the on-going assessment of what children could do. Adults continued to provide and arrange materials within safe spaces but, with the shift in emphasis, a comparatively younger age group of children were 'free', for much of the time, to *mould or* take responsibility for their own experience and learning and were monitored according to national expectations. This social, interactive form of learning appeared to be an aim well within the capabilities of the groups of children associated with this particular setting who at entry, generally, had already acquired the necessary skills to work individually and independently in close proximity to other children and supporting adults. While collective forms of learning were relatively rare a daily yoga activity introduced at the start of each day during the move to a more social, interactive form of learning was used to promote concentrated, co-ordinated engagement.

Children have clearly adapted to changes which have been made by adults to ensure that both provision and practice complied with national and local requirements. Over time, the experience for children became less structured but a certain level of essential order remained. Adults facilitated children's experiences by providing the prepared environment and a relatively consistent daily routine necessary to support both children's care as well as their education. Children's actions generally conformed to expected patterns of social development with individual, independent predictable activity alongside others being the norm for most children. Co-operative behaviour was infrequently seen and when it did occur was associated with small numbers of older children generally over three years old. Some children were evidently disturbed by either the unfamiliar situation or the expectation to operate independently within the constructed environment.

The didactic Montessori materials continued to provide a 'background' for children's experience but when provided with choice, children demonstrated a preference for the brightly coloured, usually plastic, toys. Considered to be open-ended or holistic in terms of their educational benefit, the popularity of these materials may have been associated with their familiarity and the comparative ease with which they could be used. Adults, encouraging participation, as if the practice was a safety measure, continued to act as technicians demonstrating, in a prescribed manner, the way the more challenging Montessori materials should be used. Although associated with a particular learning purpose and developmental level, children were allowed to explore these, as they did other materials and responded in expected and unexpected, structured and inventive ways. Some children, seemingly who were not 'ready' - they had not reached the developmental level appropriate for the specific set of materials - discarded rather than persisted with equipment when the task was not immediately achievable.

An ability to complete a specific Montessori activity was used to determine and monitor children's achievements in line with curriculum expectations and create, in theory, through the identification of 'next steps', an individualised learning plan. However, identifying the next step in a child's learning by, firstly, establishing a relationship to the requirements was not straightforward. An ability to do so was dependent upon an understanding of the aim of each Montessori activity as well as knowledge of the developmental outcomes provided within the guidance to the statutory curriculum for the under fives. There are similarities between the two but the 'outcomes' in the guidance are

expressed in different language. For example, 'rolling a mat' is a Montessori activity that supports the development of particular, manipulative (physical) skills (Gettman, 1987). This relationship is not evident within the physical development section of the guidance to the statutory curriculum, as the intended focus for this section is gross (whole body) rather than fine (hand and fingers) motor skills. A possible, relevant relationship might be associated with another area of development (communication, language and literacy development) but specifically the sub-section relating to the development of handwriting skills. Rolling a mat could be interpreted as demonstrating ability to 'show control in their use of tools and equipment' or 'manipulate objects with increasing control' but the assumption is that the expected 'tool' would be a pencil rather than a mat. Given that 'rolling a mat' requires the co-ordinated movement of two hands (thumbs and all fingers) rather than a pincer grip (thumb and index finger of one hand), this seems to be an inaccurate relationship which demonstrates a different but more sophisticated skill.

The physical environment potentially provided children with a myriad of possible experiences to support and promote their learning and development. Observations of children's actions in this particular Nursery suggested that mobile children, when given the freedom to choose, returned to and engaged with similar experiences in comparable ways. This child-centred approach and associated behaviour could, evidently, reflect a child's current interests or needs and may stimulate desirable and sustained engagement with particular resources. However, choice appears to limit some children's involvement in the necessary extended range of experiences which are supplied, as a whole, to support each child's overall development. Choice and minimal intervention also appeared to limit use of some materials to fairly standardised, predictable rather than imaginative ways which may have developed through contact with adults and children outside of the setting. Interestingly, the didactic materials, rather than necessarily the 'free play' materials, were used in a number of unpredictable as well as predictable ways. Overtime, children appeared to lose interest in the multitude of materials provided by the Nursery for both structured and playful use. They introduced objects brought from home, which had personal significance and used these to create unique, creative and, possibly, more meaningful experience.

Adult selection and directed use of the didactic Montessori materials may have created individualised, gender neutral programmes of learning and development purportedly in line with each child's needs. Regular assessment of capabilities

using the same materials promoted children's use but progression through the programme and hence its possible value, given the adopted child-centred approach, would seem to be dependent on whether children continue to choose from the vast range of possible specific and general materials, those that have been 'recommended' by the adult. Similarly, children's access to and concentrated engagement in adult-led activities, planned to support the development of physical skills not necessarily promoted through the physical environment, was variable. Adults persuaded, gently, but children were not normally forced to participate. In some cases, challenge was minimal and engagement limited. These activities, which are of a similar nature and support related aspects of children's physical and creative development, were routinely available for toddlers and older children to access.

Throughout the day, children were provided with access to a vast range of harmless, fairly robust materials in safe, reasonably accessible places. In addition to a range of Montessori materials constructed from natural materials, the setting made considered choices about the materials available for children's use buying these from reputable retailers. Regular, standardised checks were used to review provision and remove, for example, broken or incomplete items as damage is inevitable given continued use in a public space. Small, sharp and other potentially dangerous objects were stored out of children's reach. Adults were deployed in regulated numbers to supervise children's use of materials in particular spaces and remind children how they should, for example, walk rather than run inside, in order to encourage personal responsibility for their own safety. Given the comparative numbers of children compared to supporting adults, children's safety was ultimately dependent on the adult creation of a relatively risk free environment. Small numbers of children were more closely supervised by supporting adults when risk, such as that associated with the use of sharp implements (scissors) and potentially toxic substances (glue and paint), was perceived to be greater.

It became clear that the modified arrangements promoted use of a greater range of materials over an extended period of time but some of the same constraints remained. Access to materials, whatever those materials are, will always be dependent on availability of sufficient numbers of supervising adults. Rather than promoting involvement to support children's holistic development, it became apparent that children exercised choice in relation to their interests and an associated identity already constructed before they enter the setting. Resources purchased through 'ring fenced' government grants to extend

233

children's opportunities and possibly challenge stereotypical views, regarding such things as disability and ethnicity, were not necessarily attractive or of interest to children even when adults demonstrated or encouraged use. Increasing numbers of young children, requiring more caring attention and the requirements to formalise children's educational progress, placed additional demands upon adults who had limited opportunities to spontaneously interact with children.

What do children become/what are they able to be?

Children's daily experience or 'childhood' within this setting was both shaped and constrained by the physical landscape and a hidden (Jackson, 1968) or implied curriculum of spatially and temporally defined routines, rituals and customary practices. From a socio-cultural perspective, learning, including the 'construction and negotiation of identity', is achieved through the social interactions that occur during daily routines (Aasen et al, 2009). These 'external and internal forms of control' (Smith, 2011), premised upon established but conflicting images of the child - the evil and the innocent and, possibly, the responsible and the reflexive - were characteristic socialisation features of this institution. Together they acted as a force that defined, through participation, what being a preschool child meant in this particular Nursery. The overall, apparent, aim was to normalise the young into becoming responsible, self-governing individuals whether operating on their own, alongside or with others in preparation for time at school. While the 'ideal' child learnt to take care of him/herself and comply with the established rules embedded within the daily routines, this reduced the need to constrain the child but also the likelihood of the child receiving individual attention. The majority of children quickly complied with these requirements but one or two, notably reluctant individuals, who did not, were marked as though they were pathologically deficient beings.

For most of the time, children were expected to choose to do 'something' rather than 'nothing'. As there were certain times when, for the benefit of the group, they were required to wait patiently with others in a confined but safe area for others to arrive, for materials to be provided or the re-organisation of specific spaces, they quickly became accustomed to curbing their impulsive actions. At other times, rather than adults exercising control over the young, children were 'trapped' within a process that required them to become self-managing enthusiastic participants operating independently of adults within spaces that were populated with a range of resources considered to be appropriate as well

234

as safe for children under five. Stringent measures, as noted above, to maintain children's health, safety and security recognised, paradoxically, the innocence and vulnerability of the young.

Consequently, children became accustomed to being a member of a group when the setting was relatively less secure (as the majority of children arrived or departed), when spaces needed to be re-arranged for different functions or in order to save time or effort. While some of these occasions were inscribed with ritualistic practices used to encourage the development of social skills and school like behaviour, in a prescribed way, many others were solely times of containment and control. Children conformed to the compulsory social intimacy that the situations demanded but also developed playful ways of countering the rules without, necessarily, challenging adult authority.

Whereas adults instructed and directed children particularly during defined group times and at points of transition, much of the learnt behaviour associated with periods of choice appeared to be 'appropriated' (Corsaro, 1997) from older, more experienced children. At these times, younger children were socialised by older children learning, through watching, what was expected before mimicking older children's behaviour. This process appeared to be straightforward for most children, who have presumably become accustomed to such freedom outside of the setting, but other children appeared, at first, to be distressed by the expectation. Children quickly came to demonstrate consistent, very English 'understandings' of acceptable behaviour. On the whole - they did as they were told, they lined up, waited patiently - without the need for formal rules. There were relatively few occasions when children were reprimanded for inappropriate behaviour and the times when they did occur were evidently disturbing for the individual perpetrator.

Much of this was positive, necessary consistent behaviour, possibly associated with children's life at home, as well as in the setting, which supported the overall function of the Nursery but it may also have been limiting, was stereotypical and promoted individual dominance. Some children, whether intentional or not, found acceptable ways of modifying or personalising actions to cope with certain kinds of situations which, in the long term, become common patterns of individual or group behaviours. In the main, power was used 'politely' and, in some instances, the probable consequence of unintentional 'promotional' adult interactions but some children became more powerful possibly due to their larger physical presence or their ability to persuade. Children acknowledged

and even encouraged the development of certain, more powerful individuals but they also found acceptable ways of avoiding or curbing the power of others. It was unclear whether adults, who have a range of physically demanding responsibilities relating to the care, as well as the education of an increasingly younger group of children, were either aware of or had the time to influence these dynamics even if they wished to do so.

On occasion children became loud and boisterous but this was primarily associated with enthusiastic, acceptable behaviour in the outdoor area. Whether in the indoor or outdoor area, with very few exceptions, the majority of children displayed an understanding of what was deemed to be contextually appropriate or inappropriate behaviour without the need for formal rules. Adults, who really needed to remind children how they should behave in certain circumstances, seemed to rely on children to 'police' other children's behaviour. Conflict was avoided through supply and access to a range of sufficient resources as well as what I have referred to elsewhere as the 'temporary ownership principle'. In rare instances, short disputes between children were centred on the use of particular, limited but desirable resources. Issues regarding the use of certain resources were quickly resolved when children were reminded and accepted that the resource was being used by another and would not be available to them until it had been relinquished by the first child. Older children, acting with self interest in mind, had learnt to hide specific resources and enlist help from friends to 'save' resources for continued use.

While modified arrangements to practice promoted, through increased choice, use of a greater range of materials over an extended period of time, some of the same constraints remained. Access to materials, whatever those materials are, will always be dependent on the availability of sufficient numbers of supervising adults. Rather than promoting involvement to support children's holistic development, it became apparent that individual children exercised choice in relation to their interests, not necessarily need and developed a gendered identity associated with use of certain objects even though others have claimed (Brooker, 2006) that the early years setting often provides a context where stereotyped and constrained dispositions acquired by some families can be confronted and possibly undermined. Older children often sought the company of others forming, seemingly dependent upon the context or even chance encounters, both small single and mixed sex friendship groups.

Broadly, this has been a study of young children's 'place' within UK society before the start of formal schooling. Though a local situation, benefiting from significant financial support provided by the state, has been the focus of attention, institutions for the young are a common aspect of children's experience in the UK and across the western world. However, much of what is currently known about this experience comes from ethnographic studies of institutions in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. While benefits for the young, such as socialisation, are commonly regarded as initial drivers for the development of provision before school, the needs of working parents, corporate society, the market and the state have sustained and stimulated further demand for this early institutional experience in recent times. Placed as they are, often at some distance from the rest of the population, children would seem to be positioned as no more than passive recipients of an institutional order imbued within socially constructed physical spaces and customary practices.

By necessity, time spent in this Nursery was a mixture of times for activity and relative inactivity defined by the physical environment and a pattern of care and prevalent educational ideologies which have been ascribed within guidance and regulations. Directions from the state intended to provide good quality early education especially for disadvantaged children (Sylva et al, 2006) seem to have been inappropriate for this situation but have, nevertheless, influenced the type of experience being provided even though a local group of parents were seemingly supportive of the less progressive form of practice. Using general and specific philosophical principles associated with a particular educational thinker and others which currently find favour with the wider early years' community, the owner of this setting has gradually constructed a 'hybrid' environment of spaces, resources and pedagogical practices as a strategic response to increasing numbers of children under three years old, a statutory requirement to provide opportunities for play and notions of quality as espoused within specific instruments originally designed for use in American preschools. A consistent but more flexible routine of daily actions, seemingly to counter an original modernist intention to 'order, govern and master', was developed to promote 'potential possibilities' (Moss, 2002) while ensuring that the welfare needs of a diverse group of dependent and relatively independent children were met. The development of a supposedly 'freer' environment, where predominantly playful rather than structured activities could take place and necessary to achieve a high score on a widely used measure of quality, aimed to provide an inclusive experience for a younger age range of children based on

their individual needs and interests but this also defined and controlled child and adult actions.

Use of the specific didactic materials became less evident. However, certain associated principles continued to underpin practice in this particular setting. Adult intentions, as demonstrated through the arranged physical location and customary practices created an individualised childhood experience which was modified, but not superseded, by socio-cultural ideas regarding the emergence of cognitive competence through participation in communities of practices (Hatano and Wertsch, 2001). Though not exclusive, overall provision began to support a child-centred, play based approach thought to promote innovative, rather than fixed, ways of thinking and understanding (Goouch, 2008). Commonly occurring patterns of play behaviour seemingly reflected children's unique abilities and interests but these experiences may have proved to be limiting, as well as liberating, as direct adult involvement in these types of child initiated experiences was extremely rare. Adults continued to act as mothers and as facilitators, technicians and teachers attending to children's basic needs as well as determining the beginnings and ends of activities; demonstrating, monitoring and assessing the use of resources and supplementing experience with a range of pre-planned tasks. They placed their trust in these and the more informal play type activities to support children's holistic development in accordance with a sequence of supposedly identifiable behaviour represented as a curriculum of requirements for children before the start of school. Children, however, demonstrating the sophistication as well as the richness and subtlety of their early communication abilities (Goouch, 2008) became accustomed, particularly during periods of apparent free choice, to collaborating and co-constructing experience with other children of a similar or older age. While the longer periods of uninterrupted free choice may have potentially extended possibilities, children jointly constructed learning when unstructured materials were relatively scarce.

The Montessori resources, when compared to commercial toys, appeared old-fashioned and restrictive but they continued to be attractive to younger children even when materials became more abundant. They seemingly provided a useful, initial learning experience for young children particularly as the culturally familiar activities were designed to support attributes (independence, perception and physical development) which are generally believed to be useful precursors for early reading and writing development. Behaviour was established by adults and modelled by older, more experienced and more powerful children before

238

being expressed in the reoccurring actions of other children. Increased access to a wider range of provision has potentially extended choice but concentrated engagement in particular activities became less apparent.

On the whole, children appeared content, seemingly accepting of the situation in which they had been placed and adapted to the on-going changes being made. They were controlled and protected as 'products of nature' while, at the same time, being governed by an expectation that they would be willing and able, at certain times, to act as self-responsible agents or social citizens (Smith, 2011; Gullov, 2003). As such, two contrasting models of child rearing were evident. On the one hand, children were provided with few opportunities to express their individuality but, on the other, child-centred approaches provided children with the freedom necessary to develop their own interests and talents (Jenks, 2005 in Smith, 2011). Children generally complied with adult requirements but, as others have noted (Fog Olwig and Gullov, 2003), usually in relation to older children, small groups in controlling situations used playful ways to resist, avoid or modify the generational order as if they were attempting to take charge of their lives. Relationships with small numbers of other children, initiated during chance encounters when individuals used objects in confined spaces, were cemented by shared interests in certain resources and involvement in appropriated practices.

Whether intentional or not, a number of children, irrespective of the changing pedagogical approach, created private spaces within the collective space of the Nursery. They used favoured objects, bodily positions, interactions and role as well as occupation or the adjustment of adult defined areas to create these personal places and possibly avoid the continual evaluative gaze of adults and other children. These contrived spaces, often marked by gendered or dominating behaviours, were actively defended and hence difficult for an 'outsider' to penetrate. While children socially positioned as an inferior 'other' where able to take some control over their experience, this did not appear to be an option for the adult workers whose day to day life was similarly framed by a set of imposed requirements representing a dominant view of child development and the goals that children should achieve. A belief in constructivism 'as the best possible pedagogical approach for young children and in the idea that knowledge is most meaningfully acquired when it is constructed rather than received' (Tobin, 2005: 433) appeared to have had limited influence on the development of practice in this relatively untypical early years setting.

REFERENCES

Aasen, W;Grindheim, T L and Waters, J (2009) The outdoor environment as a site for children's participation, meaning-making and democratic learning: examples from Norwegian kindergartens, *Education 3-13:International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, 37(1), 5-13.

Adamo, S M G (2001) "The house is a boat.."The experience of separation in a nursery school, *Infant Observation*, 4(2), 134-139.

Ahn, J and Filipenko, M (2007) Narrative, Imaginary Play, Art, and Self: Intersecting Worlds, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 34 (4), 279-289

Ailwood, J (2003) Governing Early Childhood Education through Play, *ContemporaryIssues in Early Childhood*, 4(3), 286-299.

Ailwood, J (2008) Learning or earning in the 'smart state': Changing tactics for governing early childhood, *Childhood,* 15(4), 535-551.

Alasuutari, M and Markstrom, A-M (2011) The Making of the Ordinary Child in Preschool, *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research,* 55(5), 517-535.

Alcock, S (2007) Playing with rules and routines: children making mealtimes meaningful and enjoyable, *Early Years: International Journal of Research and Development*, 27(3), 281-293.

Alexander, G (1995) Instigating change in the early years: financial management implications, *International Journal of Educational Management*, 9(3), 10-13.

Alexander, R (2004) Still no pedagogy? Principle, pragmatism and compliance in primary education, *Cambridge Journal of Education*,34(1), 7-33.

Allan, J (1996) Foucault and Special Educational Needs: a 'box of tools' for analysing children's experience of mainstreaming, *Disability & Society* 11(2), 219-233.

Back, L (2007) *The art of listening,* Oxford: Berg.

Bailey, S and Thomson, P (2009) Routine (dis)order in an infant school, *Ethnography and Education*, 4(2), 211-227.

Beatty, B (1995) *Preschool Education in America*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Becker, H S (1958) Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation, *American Sociological Review*, 23(6), 652-660.

Becker, H S; Geer, B; Hughes, E C and Strauss, A L (1977) *Boys in White: Student Culture in Medical School,* New York and London: Transaction Publishers.

Bendle, M F (2003) The crisis of 'identity' in high modernity, *The British Journal of Sociology,* 53(1), 1-18.

Berger, J and Mohr, J (1997) *A Fortunate Man*, Vintage Books: New York.

Berkowitz, D; Manohar, N N andTinkler, J E (2010) Walk Like a Man, Talk Like a Woman: Teaching the Social Construction of Gender, *Teaching Sociology*, 38(2), 132-143.

Blatchford, P; Battle, S and Mays, J (1982) *The First Transition: Home to Pre-school*, Windsor: NFER.

Boyer, K; Reimer, S and Irvine, L (2013) The nursery workspace, emotional labour and contested understandings of commoditised childcare in the contemporary UK, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 14(5), 517-540.

Brennan, M (2007) A culture of tenderness: teachers' socialisation practices in group care settings, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 15(1), 137-146.

Brissett, D and Edgley, C (2006) *Life asTheater: A Dramaturgical Sourcebook* (2E), New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Brooker, L (2006) From Home to the Home Corner: Observing Children's Identity-Maintenance in Early Childhood Settings, *Children & Society*, 20, 116-127.

Brooker, L (2008) *Supporting transitions in the Early Years*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Brooker, L (2010) Constructing The Triangle Of Care: Power And Professionalism in Practitioner/Parent Relationships, *British Journal of Educational Studies,* 58(2), 181-196.

Burr, V (1995) *An introduction to social constructionism*, London: Routledge.

Cheal, D (2005) *Dimensions of SociologicalTheory*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Chen, X (2012) Culture, Peer Interaction, and Socioemotional Development, *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(1), 27-34.

Chudzikowski, K and Mayrhofer, W (2010) In search of the blue flower? Grand social theories and career research: The case of Bourdieu's theory of practice, *Human Relations*, 64(1), 19-36.

Clark, A (2005) Listening to and involving young children: a review of research and practice, *Early Child Development and Care*, 175(6),489-505.

Clark, A and Moss, P (2001) *Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic Approach*, London: National Children's Bureau.

Cobb-Moore, C; Danby, S and Farrell, A (2009) Young children as rule makers, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41, 1477-1492.

Corsaro, W A (1985) *Friendship and Peer Culture in the Early Years*, Norwood, New York: Ablex Publications Corporation.

Corsaro, W A (1997) *The Sociology of Childhood*, London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Corsaro, W A (2000) Early childhood education, children's peer cultures, and the future of childhood, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal,* 8(2), 89-102.

Corsaro, W A (2012) Interpretive Reproduction in Children's Play, *American Journal of Play*, 4(4), 488-504.

Corsaro, W A and Eder, D (1990) Children's Peer Cultures, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 16(1), 197-220.

Cossentino, J (2005) Ritualizing Expertise: A Non-Montessorian View of the Montessori Method, *American Journal of Education*, 111, 211-244.

Curtis, D and Carter, M (2003)*Designs for Living and Learning: Transforming Early Childhood Environments*, St Paul MN: Redleaf Press

Dahlberg, G; Moss, P and Pence A (2006) Beyond quality in early childhood and care: Languages of evaluation (2E), Routledge: London.

Dalli, C (2000) Starting child care: what young children learn about relating to adults in the first weeks of starting child care, *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, 2(2), 1-31.

Daniel, B; Wassell, S. and Gilligan, R (2010) *Child Development for Child Care and Protection Workers* (2E), London: Jessica Kingsley Publications.

Daniel, P and Gustafsson, U (2010) School lunches: children's services or children's spaces? *Children's* Geographies, 8(3), 265-274.

Davies, B (1982) *Life in the classroom and playground: The accounts of primary school children*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Davies, B (1998) The Politics of Category Membership in Early Childhood Settings in Yelland, N (1998) *Gender in Early Childhood*, London and New York: Routledge.

Davies, B and Bansel, P (2007) Neoliberalism and education, *InternationalJournal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(3), 247-259.

Dean, M (1999) *Governmentality: power and rule in modern society*, London: Sage.

Deegan, M J (2001) The Chicago School of Ethnography in Atkinson, P; Coffey, A; Delamont, S, Lofland, J and Lofland, L (Eds) (2001) *Handbook of Ethnography*, London: Sage.

Degotardi, S and Pearson, E (2009) Relationship Theory in the Nursery: attachment and beyond, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 10(2), 144-155.

Dennis, E (2001) Seeing beneath the surface: An observer's encounter with a child's struggle to find herself at nursery, *Infant Observation*, 4(2), 107-120.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DfCSF) (2008) *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage May 2008: Setting the Standards for Learning, Development and Care for children from birth to five*, Nottingham: DCSF Publications.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DfCSF) (2009) *Implementing an Early Years Single Funding Formula: Practice guidance (July 2009),* http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/IG00611/ (accessed 16.01.10).

Department for Education (DfE) (2010) *Provision for children under 5 years of age in England,* http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000935/sfr16-2010.pdf (accessed 20.04.11).

Department for Education and Skills (2007) *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage*, Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Docket, S and Perry, B (2013) Siblings and buddies providing expert advice about starting school, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 21(4), 348-361.

Doucet, F (2011) Parent Involvement as Ritualized Practice, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 42(4), 404-421.

Dowling, M (2010) *Young Children's Personal, Social and Emotional Development* (3E), London: Sage.

Duncan, J (2005) "She's always been, what i would think, a perfect day-care child!: Constructing the subjectivities of a New Zealand child, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal,* 13(2), 51-61.

Duneier, M (2001) *Sidewalk*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Ebrahim, H (2011) Children as agents in early childhood education, *Education as Change*, 15(1), 121-131.

Einarsdottir, J (2007) Research with children: methodological and ethical challenges, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 15(2), 197-211.

Elfer, P (2001) Psychoanalytic methods of observation as a research tool for exploring young children's nursery experience, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 15(3), 225-238.

Elfer, P (2007) Babies and Young Children in Nurseries: Using Psychoanalytic Ideas to Explore Tasks and Interactions, *Children & Society*, 21(2), 111-122.

Ellegaard, T (2004) Self-Governance and Incompetence: Teachers' Construction of "the Competent Child" in Brembeck, H; Johansson, B and Kampmann, J (Eds) (2004) *Beyond the competent child: Exploring contemporary childhoods in Nordic welfare societies*, Roskilde University Press: Roskilde.

Fabes, R A , Martin, C L and Hanish, L D (2003) Young Children's Play Qualities in Same-, Other-, and Mixed-Sex Peer Groups, *Child Development*, May/June 2003, 74(3), 923-932.

Fleer, M (2003) Early Childhood Education as an Evolving 'Community of Practice' or as Lived 'Social Reproduction': researching the 'taken-for-granted', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 4(1), 64-79.

Flewitt, R (2005) Conducting research with young children: some ethical considerations, *Early Child Development and Care*, 175(6), 553-565.

Fog Olwig, K and Gullov, E (2003) *Children's Place: Cross cultural perspectives,* London and New York: Routledge.

Forbes, R (2004) *Beginning to play: young children from birth to three*, Buckingham: Open University.

Francis, B (1997) Power Plays: Children's constructions of gender and power in role plays, *Gender and Education*, 9(2), 179-192.

Gallacher, L-A (2005) 'The terrible two's: Gaining control in the nursery?' *Children's Geographies*, 3(2), 243-264.

Gallacher, L-A and Gallagher, M (2008) Methodological Immaturity in Childhood Research? Thinking through 'participatory methods', *Childhood*, 18(4), 499-516.

Getman, D (1987) *Basic Montessori: Learning Activities for Under-Fives*, London: Christopher Helm.

Gold, R L (1958) Roles in Sociological Field Observations, *Social Forces*, 36(3), 217-223.

Goldschmied, E and Jackson, S (1994) *People under three: young children in day care* (2/E), London: Routledge.

Goouch, K (2010) Understanding playful pedagogies, play narratives and play spaces, *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, 28(1), 93-102.

Gordon, C (1980) (Ed) *Michel Foucault: Power/Knowledge*, Hemel Hempstead: The Harvester Press.

Grieshaber, S (2008) Interrupting Stereotypes: Teaching and the Education of Young Children, *Early Education & Development*, 19(3), 505-518.

Gullov, E (2003) Creating a natural place for children: an ethnographic study of Danish kindergartens in Olwig, K F and Gullov, E (2003) *Children's Places: Cross-cultural perspectives,* London: Routledge and New York.

Gutman, M and De Coninck-Smith, N (Eds) (2008) *Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Hacking, I (1999) *The social construction of what?* Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press.

Hacking, I (2004) Between Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman: between discourse in the abstract and face-to-face interaction, *Economy and Society*, 33(3), 277-302.

Hammersley, M (2005) What can the literature on communities of practice tell us about educational research? Reflections on some recent proposals. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 28(1), 5-21.

Hannikainen, M (2007) Rules and agreements – And becoming a preschool community of learners, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 13(1), 97-110.

Harcourt, D (2011) An encounter with children: seeking meaning and understanding about childhood, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 19(3), 331-343.

Harcourt, D and Conroy, H (2005) Informed Assent: ethics and processes when researching young children, *Early Child Development and Care*, 175(6),567-577.

Harcourt, D and Einarsdottir, J (2011) Introducing children's perspectives and participation in research, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 19(3), 301-307.

Hare, J and Anderson, J (2010) Transitions to early childhood education and care for indigenous children and families in Canada, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 35(2), 19-29.

Hatano, G and Wertsch, J V (2001) Sociocultural Approaches to Cognitive Development: The Constitutions of Culture in Mind, *Human Development*, 44(2/3), 77-83*.*

Hatch, J A (1987) Impression Management in Kindergarten Classrooms: An Analysis of Children's Face-Work in Peer Interactions, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 18(2), 100-115.

Hatch J A (1989) Alone in a crowd: Analysis of secondary adjustments in a kindergarten classroom, *Early Child Development and Care*, 44,39-48.

Hendry, J (1994) Book Review. Learning to Go to School in Japan: The Transition from Home to Preschool Life by Lois Peak, *American Ethnologist*, 21(4), 992-993.

Holligan, C (1999) Discipline and Normalization in the Nursery: The Foucauldian Gaze, *Scottish Educational Review*, 31(2), 37-149.

Holloway, S L and Valentine, G (2000a) Spatiality and the New Social Studies of Childhood, *Sociology*, 34(4),763-783.

Holloway, S L and Valentine, G (2000b) *Children's geographies: playing, living, learning*, London: Routledge.

Holmes, R M and Procaccino, J K (2009) Preschool children's outdoor play area preferences, *Early Child Development and Care*, 179(8),1103-1112.

Horton, J and Krafti, P (2006) What else?Some ways of thinking and doing 'Children's Geographies', *Children's Geographies,* 4(1), 69-95.

Hultqvist, K A (1998) History of the Present on Children's Welfare in Sweden: From Froebel to Present-Day Decentralization Projects in Popkewitz, T. & Brennan, M. (Eds) (1998) *Foucault's Challenge: Discourse, knowledge, and power in education,* New York: Teachers College Press.

Huxley, M (2006) Spatial rationalities: order, environment, evolution and government, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7(5), 771-787.

Jackson, P W (1968) *Life in Classrooms*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc.

James, A (2001) Ethnography in the Study of Children and Childhood, in Atkinson, P; Coffey, A; Delamont, S, Lofland, J and Lofland, L (Eds) (2001) *Handbook of Ethnography*, London: Sage.

James, A and James, A L (2004) *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

James, A; Jenks, C and Prout, A (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*, Oxford:Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Jenks, C (1998) Active/Passive in Jenks, C (Ed) (1998) *Core SociologicalDichotomies*, London: Sage.

Jones, L; MacLure, M; Holmes, R and MacRae, C (2012) Children and objects: affection and infection, *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development,* 32(1), 49-60.

Kampmann, J (2004)Societalization of Childhood: New Opportunities? New Demands?inBrembeck, H; Johansson, B and Kampmann (Eds) (2004) *Beyond the competent child: Exploring contemporary childhood in the Nordic welfare societies*, Roskilde: Roskilde University Press.

Karasik, L B; Tamis-LeMonda, C S and Adolph, K E (2011) Transition From Crawling to Walking and Infants' Actions With Objects and People, *Child Development,* 82(4), 1199-1209.

Kelly-Byrne, D. (1989) *A child's play life*, New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Kernan, M (2010) Space and place as a source of belonging and participation in urban environments: considering the role of early childhood education and care, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 18(2), 199-213.

Kluckhohn, F R (1940)The Participant-Observer Technique in Small Communities,*The American Journal of Sociology*, 46(3),331-343.

Komulainen, S (2007) The Ambiguity of the Child's 'Voice' in Social Research,*Childhood*, 14(1), 11-26.

Kramer, R (1978) *Maria Montessori: a biography*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Kroes, P (1994) Science, Technology and Experiments; The Natural versus the Artificial, *Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*, 2 (Symposia and Invited Papers), 431-440.

Kutnick, P; Brighi, A; Avgitidou, S; Genta, M L; Hännikäinen, M; Karlsson-Lohmander, M; Ruiz, R O; Rautamies, E; Colwell, J; Tsalagiorgou, E; Mazzanti, C; Nicoletti, S; Sansavini, A; Guarini, A; Romera, E; Monks, C and Lofqvist, M (2007), The role and practice of interpersonal relationships in European early education settings: sites for enhancing social inclusion, personal growth and learning?, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal,* 15(3), 379-406.

Kyratzis, A (2004) Talk and Interaction Among Children and the Co-Construction of Peer Groups and Peer Culture, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33, 625-649.

Lam, M S and Pollard, A (2006) A conceptual framework for understanding children as agents in the transition from home to kindergarten, *Early Years:An International Journal of Research and Development,* 26(2), 123-141.

Lash, M (2008) Classroom Community and Peer Culture in Kindergarten, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 36, 33-38.

Laurie, H (undated) Training Notes: Pouring water freely from one identical jug into another (introduction of the use of sponge) unpublished, handwritten notes.

Lillard, P P (1997) *Montessori in the Classroom: A Teacher's Account of How Children Really Learn*, New York: Schocken Books Inc.

Lloyd, R (2005) *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Post industrial City*, Routledge: New York.

Lloyd, E and Penn, H (2010) Why do childcare markets fail? Comparing England and the Netherlands, *Public Policy Research*, March – May, 2010.

Loftsdóttir, K (2002) Never forgetting? Gender and racial-ethnic identity during fieldwork, *Social Anthropology*, 10(3), 303-317.

Lohman, J D (1937) The Participant Observer in Community Studies,*American Sociological Review*, 2(6), 890-897.

Lorber, J (1994) 'Night to His Day': The Social Construction of Gender, in Lorber, J (1994) *Paradoxes of Gender*, New Haven CT: Yale University Press.

Lowe, K (1998) Gendermaps in Yelland, N (1998) *Gender in Early Childhood*, London and New York: Routledge.

MacNaughton, G (2005) *Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies: Applying poststructural ideas*, London and New York: Routledge.

Manning, P (1992) *Erving Goffman and modern sociology,* Oxford: Polity.

Mannion, G (2007) Going Spatial, Going Relational: Why 'listening to children' and children's participation needs reframing, *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, 28(3), 405-420.

Markstrom, A-M and Hallden, G (2009) Children's Strategies for Agency in Preschool, *Children & Society*, 23, 112-122.

Marquez, X (2012) Spaces of Appearance and Spaces of Surveillance, *Polity*, 44(1), 6-31.

Martin, C and Evaldsson, A C (2012) Affordances for participation: Children's appropriation of rules in a Reggio Emilia school, *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 19(1), 51-74.

Martin, K A (2005) William Wants a Doll. Can He Have One: Feminists, Child Care Advisors, and Gender-Neutral Child Rearing, *Gender and Society*, 19(4), 456-479.

Maynard, T (2007) Outdoor play and learning, *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, 35(4), 305-307.

McKechnie, L (E F) (2000) Ethnographic Observation of Preschool Children, *Library & Information Science Research*, 22(1), 61-76.

McLaren, P (1986) *Schooling as a Ritual Performance: Towards a Political Economy of Educational Symbols and Gestures*, London: Routledge.

Meltzer, D (1984) A One-year-old goes to Nursery: A Parable of Confusing Times, *Journal of Child Psychotheraphy*, 10, 89-104.

Miller, P J; Potts, R; Fung, H;Hoogstra, L &Mintz, J (1990).Narrative practices and the social construction of self inchildhood, *American Ethnologist*, 17, 292-311.

Montessori AMI (UK) Montessori - an education for life, http://www.montessori-uk.org/whatis.htm (accessed 30.11.10).

Montessori Education UK Ltd Montessori and the EYFS: Introduction, http//www.montessorieducationuk.org/?=eyfs/introduction (accessed 7.10.10).

Montessori Schools Association (2008) Guide to the Early Years Foundation Stage in Montessori Settings, London: Montessori St Nicholas Charity, http://www.montessori.org.uk/data/assets/pdffile/0020/50582/guide-to-early-years.pdf (accessed 17.11.10/18.04.12).

Monti, F and Crudeli, F (2007) The use of infant observation in nursery (0-3 years), *Infant Observation*, 10(1), 51-58.

Moss, P (2002) Time to Say Farewell to 'Early Childhood'?*Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 3(3), 435-438.

Oates, J. (2010) Early Years Foundation Stage under review, *Journal of the British Association for Early Childhood Education,* 62 (Autumn 2010), London: Early Education.

O'Donnell, M (2007) *Maria Montessori*, London: Continuum International Publishing.

Osgood, J (2012) *Narratives from the Nursery: Negotiating professional identities in early childhood,* London and New York: Routledge.

O'Toole, P and Were, P (2008) Observing places: using space and material culture in qualitative research, *Qualitative Research*, 8(5), 616-634.

Page, J (2013) Will the 'good' [working] mother please stand up? Professional and maternal concerns about education, care and love, *Gender & Education*, 25(5), 548-563.

Page, J and Elfer, P (2013) The emotional complexity of attachment interactions in nursery, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21(4), 553-567.

Parson, J E (1983) Sexual Socialization and Gender Roles in Childhood in Algier, E R and Mc Cormick, N (Eds) (1983) *Changing Boundaries, Gender-roles and Sexual behaviour,* Mayfield: Palo Acto, CA: Mayfield.

Pascal, C and Bertram, T (2009) Listening to young citizens: the struggle to make real a participatory paradigm in research with young children, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journa*l, 17(2), 249-262.

Paterson, B L; Bottorf, J L and Hewat, R (2003) Blending Observational Methods: Possibilities, Strategies and Challenges, *International Institute for Qualitative Methodolog*y, 12(1), 29-38.

Penn, H (1995) Nursery education: what is it for? *International Journal of Educational Management*, 9(3), 4-9.

Penn, H (2007) Childcare Market Management: how the United Kingdom Government has reshaped its role in developing early childhood education and care, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 8(3) 192-207.

Peterson, E E and Langellier, K M (2006) The performance turn in narrative studies, *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 173-180.

Philo, C (2000) 'The Corner-Stones of My World': Editorial Introduction to Special Issue on Spaces of Childhood, *Childhood,* 7(3), 243-256.

Pike, J (2008) Foucault, space and primary school dining rooms, *Children's Geographies*, 6(4), 413-422.

Pin, E J and Turndorf, J (1985) Staging One's Ideal Self in Brissett, D and Edgley, C (Eds) (2006) *Life as Theater: A Dramaturgical Sourcebook* (2/E), New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publisher.

Pole, C (2007) Researching Children and Fashion: An embodied ethnography, *Childhood*, 14(1), 67-84.

Powell, S and Goouch, K (2012) Whose hand rocks the cradle? Parallel discourses in the baby room, *Early Years; An International Research Journal*, 32(2), 113-127.

Punch, S; McIntosh, I and Emond, R (2010) Children's food practices in families and institutions, *Children's Geographies*, 8(3), 227-232.

Puriola, A-M (2007) The multiple faces of everyday life: Frame analysis of early childhood practices, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 10(2), 31-47.

Puroila, A-M (2013) Young children on the stages: Small stories performed in day care centers, *Narrative Inquiry* 23(2), 323-343.

Qvortrup, J (2004) Editorial: The Waiting Child, *Childhood,*11(3), 267-273.

Qvortrup, J (2012) Users and Interested Parties: A Concluding Essay on Children's Institutionalization in Kjorholt, A T and Qvortrup, J (Eds) (2012) *The Modern Child and the Flexible Labour Market*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Richards, C (2011) In the thick of it: interpreting children's play, Ethnography and Education, 6(3), 309-324.

Rodd, J (1998)*Leadership in early childhood: the pathway to professionalism (2/E)*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Rosaldo, R (1993) *Culture and truth: The remaking of social analysis*, London: Routledge.

Rossman, G.B and Rallis, S F (2010) Everyday ethics: reflections on practice, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 23(4), 379-391.

Rustin, M (1997) What do we see in the nursery? Infant observation as 'laboratorywork', *Infant Observation*, 1(1), 93-110.

Rutanen, N (2007) Two-year-old children as co-constructors of culture, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 15(1), 59-69.

Rutanen, N (2012) Socio-spatial practices in a Finnish daycare group for one-to three years olds, *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, 32(2), 201-214.

Ryan, S (2005) Freedom to choose: Examining children's experiences in choice time in Yelland, N (2005) (Ed) *Critical Issues in Early Childhood Education*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Salminen, J; Hännikäinen, M; Poikonen, P-l andRasku-puttonen, H (2014)Teachers' contribution to the social life in Finnish preschool classrooms during structured learning sessions, *Early Child Development and Care*, 184(3), 416-433.

Schaffer, H R and Emerson, P E (1964) The Development of Social Attachments in Infancy, *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, Serial No94, 29(3).

Shire County (2009) Needs Analysis for Children's Trust Partnership Board in support of the Children and Young People's Plan 2009-2011, internet source (accessed 7.12.09).

Singh, P (2002) Pedagogising Knowledge: Bernstein's Theory of the Pedagogic Device, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23(4), 571-582.

Smith, F and Baker, J (2000) Contested Spaces: Children's experiences of out of school care in England and Wales, *Childhood*, 7(3), 315-333.

Smith, K (2011) Producing governable subjects: Images of childhood old and new, *Childhood*, 19(1), 24-37.

Spencer, J (2001) Ethnography After Postmodernism in Atkinson, P; Coffey, A; Delamont, S; Lofland, J and Lofland, L (Eds) (2001) *Handbook of Ethnography*, London: Sage.

Standing, E M (1984), *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work*, New York: Plume.

Steinberg, S R and Kincheloe, J L (1997) *Kinder-culture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*, Oxford: Westview Press.

Stephen, C (2010) Pedagogy: the silent partner in early years learning, *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, 30(1), 15-28.

Sylva, K and Pugh, G (2005) Transforming the early years in England, *Oxford Review of Education*, 31(1), 11-27.

Sylva, K; Siraj-Blatchford, I; Taggart, B; Sammons, P; Melhuish, E; Eliot, K and Totsika, V (2006) Capturing quality in early childhood through environmental rating scales, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 21(1), 76-92.

Thompson, J (1990) *Ideology and modern culture: Critical social theory in the era of mass communication*, Cambridge: Polity.

Thornberg, R (2007) Inconsistencies in everyday patterns of school rules, E*thnography and Education*, 2(3), 401-416.

Thorne, B (2008) What's in an age name? *Childhood*, 15(4), 435-439.

Thyssen, S (2000) The Child's Start in Day Care, *Early Child Development and Care*, 161(1), 33-46.

Thyssen, S (2003) Child culture, play and child development, *Early Child Development and Care*, 173(6), 589-612.

Tobin, J (2005) Quality in Early Childhood Education: An Anthropologist's Perspective, *Early Education and Development*, 16(4), 422-434.

Vanderbeck, R M (2008) Reaching critical mass?Theory, politics, and the culture of debate in children's geographies, *Area,* 40(3), 393-400.

Vidich, A J (1955) Participant Observation and the Collection and Interpretation of Data, *American Journal of Sociology*, 60(4), 354-360.

Walkerdine, V (1999) Violent Boys and Precocious Girls: regulating childhood at the end of the millennium, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 1(1), 3-21.

Waller, T (2007) 'The Trampoline Tree and the Swamp Monster with 18 heads': outdoor play in the Foundation Stage and Foundation Phase, *Education 3-13*:*International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education,*35(4), 393-407.

Waller, T; Sandseter, E B H; Wyver, S; Arlemalm-Hagser, E and Maynard, T (2010) The dynamics of early childhood spaces: opportunities for outdoor play? *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 18(4), 437-443.

Warming, H (2011) Getting under their skins?Accessing young children's perspectives through ethnographic fieldwork, *Childhood*, 18(1), 39-53.

Watson, C M (1982)The Presentation of Self and the New Institutional Inmate: An Analysis of Prisoners' Responses to Assessment for Release inBrissett, D and Edgley, C (Eds) (2006) *Life as Theater: A Dramaturgical Sourcebook* (2/E), New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publisher.

West, A; Roberts, J and Noden, P (2010) Funding early years education and care: can a mixed economy of providers deliver universal high quality provision?*British Journal of Educational Studies*, 58(2), 155-179.

West, C and Zimmerman, D H (1987) Doing Gender, *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 125-151.

Whyte, W (1981) *Street Corner Society*, London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, W J and Chaddha, A (2009) The role of theory in ethnographic research, *Ethnography,* 10(4), 549-564.

Wittenberg, I (2001) The Transition from Home to Nursery School, *Infant Observation*, 4(2), 23-35.

Wong, S (2007) Looking Back and Moving Forward: historicising the social construction of early childhood education and care as national work, Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 5(2), 144-156.

Wright, R and Froehlich, H (2012) Basil Bernstein's Theory of the Pedagogic Device and Formal Music Schooling: Putting the Theory Into Practice, *Theory Into Practice*, 51(2), 212-220.

Yeboah, D A (2002) Enhancing Transition from Early Childhood Phase to Primary Education: evidence from the research literature, *Early Years:An International Journal of Research and Development,* 22(1), 51-68.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ailwood, J (2004) Genealogies of governmentality: Producing and managing young children and their education, *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 31(3), 19-33.

Alanen, L (2004) Theorizing children's welfare, Paper presented at WELLCI Network Workshop 1: *New perspectives on childhood*, The Centre for Research on Family, Kinship & Childhood, University of Leeds (UK) 12 – 13 November 2004, http://www.ciimu.org/webs/wellchi/reports/workshop_1/w1_alanen.pdf (accessed 28.11.11).

Alasuutari, M and Karila, K (2010) Framing the Picture of the Child, *Children & Society*, 24, 100-111.

Amit, V (2003) Epilogue: children's places in Fog Olwig, K and Gullov, E (2003) *Children's Places: Cross Cultural perspectives*, London and New York: Routledge.

Baldock, P; Fitzgerald, D and Kay, J (2005) *Understanding Early Years Policy*, London: Paul Chapman.

Berger, P L and Luckmann, T (1991) *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge,*London: Penguin.

Blaise, M (2005) A feminist poststructuralist study of children "doing" gender in an urban kindergarten classroom, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 20(1), 85-108.

Brison, K J (2011) Producing "Confident" Children: Negotiated Childhood in Fijian Kindergartens, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 42(3), 230-244.

Broadhead, P (2004) *Early years play and learning: developing social skills and cooperation*, London: Routledge Falmer.

Broadhead, P (2006) Developing an Understanding of Young Children's Learning Through Play: The Place of Observation, Interactions and Reflection, *British Educational Research Journal*, 32,191-207.

Broadhead, P (2007) A Vision for Universal Pre-School Education - by Edward Zigler, Walter S. Gilliam and Stephanie M. Jones, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 55(2), 227.

Buchbinder, M; Longhofer, J; Barrett, T; Lawson, P and Floersch, J (2006) Ethnographic approaches to child care research: A review of the literature, *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 4(1), 45-63.

Buck, L T and Rustin, M (2001) Thoughts on transitions between cultures: Jonathan moves from home to school and from class to class, *Infant Observation*, 4(2), 121-133.

Carr, M (2001) *Assessment in Early Childhood Settings: Learning Stories*, London: Paul Chapman.

Cohen, L E (2008) Foucault and the Early Childhood Classroom, Educational Studies: *A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, 44(1), 7-21.

Cooley, A (2009) Reviving Reification: Education, Indoctrination, and Anxiety in "The Graduate", *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, 45(4), 358-376.

Corsaro, W A and Rizzo, T (1988) Discussione and Friendship: Socialization in the Peer Culture of Italian Nursery School Children, *American Sociological Review*, 53(6), 879-894.

Cox, R (2013) Gendered spaces of commoditised care, *Social and Cultural Geography*, 14(5), 491-499.

Cuff, E C; Sharrock, W W and Francis, D W (Eds) (2006) *Perspectives in sociology*, New York: Routledge.

Danby, S and Baker, C D (2000) Unravelling the Fabric of Social Order in Block Area in Hester, F and Francis, D (2000) *Local Educational Order*, Amerstdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Darbyshire, P; Schiller, W and MacDougall, C (2005) Extending new paradigm childhood research: meeting the challenges of including younger children', *Early Child Development and Care*, 175(6), 467-472.

De Gioia, K (2009) Parent and staff expectations for continuity of home practices in the child care setting for families with diverse cultural backgrounds, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 34(2), 9-17.

Dowling, M (1999) Early years: Then, now and next, *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education,* 27(3), 5-10.

Dunn, L (1993) Proximal and distal features of day care quality and children's development, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 1993, 8(2), 167-192.

Faulkner, D and Coates, E A (2013) Early childhood policy and practice in England: twenty years of change, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 21(2/3), 244-263.

Fleer, M (2006) The cultural construction of child development: creating institutional and cultural intersubjectivity, *International Journal of Early Years Education,* 14(2), 127-140.

Forsey, G M (2010) Ethnography as participant listening, *Ethnography*, 11(4), 558-572.

Geertz, C (1988) *Works and lives: the anthropologist as author*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gergen, K J (2011) The Self as Social Construction, *Psychol Stud*, 56(1), 108-116.

Gieryn, T F (2000) A Space for Place in Sociology, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 463-496.

Goodfellow, J (2005) Market Childcare: preliminary considerations of a 'property view' of the child, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 6(1), 54-65.

Goodwin, M J and Kyratzis, A (2007) Children Socializing Children: Practices for Negotiating the Social Order Among Peers, *Research on Language & Social Interaction*, 40(4), 279-289.

Gottlieb, A (2000) Where Have All The Babies Gone? Toward an Anthropology of Infants (and their Caretakers), *Anthropological Quarterly*, 73(3), 121-132.

Grace, R and Bowes, J (2011) Using an ecocultural approach to explore young children's experiences of prior-to-school care settings, *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(1), 13-25.

Grieshaber, S (1997) Mealtime rituals: power and resistance in the construction of mealtime rules, *British Journal of Sociology*, 48(4), 649-666.

Grieshaber, S and McArdle, F (2010) *The Trouble with Play*, Maidenhead:OUP.

Hallden, G (2012) Children's Sense of Place: Aspects of Individualization, Flexibility and Free Choice within the Preschool Context in Kjorholt, A T and Qvortrup, J (Eds) (2012) *The Modern Child and the Flexible Labour Market*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Hamilton, V L (1992) Review. Learning to Go to School in Japan: The Transition form Home to Preschool Life by Lois Peak, *Contemporary Sociology*, 21(4), 497-498.

Hannikainen, M (2001) Playful Actions as a Sign of Togetherness in Day Care Centres, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 9(2), 125-134.

Harre, R and Luk van Langenhove (Eds) (1999) *Positioning Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Hartmanan, W and Brougere, G (2004) Toy Culture in Preschool Education and Children's Toy Preferences in Goldstein, J, Buckingham, D and Brougere(Eds) (2004) *Toys, Games and Media*, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.

Hill, M (2006) Children's voices on ways of having a voice: Children's and young people's perspectives on methods used in research and consultation, *Childhood,* 13(1), 69-89.

Holloway, S D (1999) Divergent Cultural Models of Child Rearing and Pedagogy in Japanese Preschools, *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 83, 61-75.

Holmes, R M (2011) "Do you like Doritos?":preschoolers' table talk during lunchtime, *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(3), 413-424.

Hope, A (2005) Panopticism, Play and the Resistance of Surveillance: Case Studies of the Observation of Student Internet Use in UK Schools, *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 26(3), 359-373.

Horsch, P; Chen, J Q and Nelson, D (1999) Rules and Rituals: Tools for Creating a Respectful, Caring Learning Community, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81(3), 223-227.

Hyun, E and Choi, D H (2004) Examination of youngchildren'sgender-doingandgender-bending in their play dynamics: A cross-cultural exploration, *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 36(1), 49-64.

Johansson, E and Emilson, A (2010) Toddlers' Life in Swedish Preschool, *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 42, 165-179.

Jones, L (2002) Derrida Goes to Nursery Schools: deconstructing young children's stories, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 1(1),139-146.

Jones, L and Brown, T (2001) Reading the nursery classroom: A Foucauldian perspective, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(6), 713-725.

Kentili, F D, (2009) Comparison of Hidden Curriculum Theories, *European Journal of Educational Studies*, 1(2), 83-88.

Kernan, M and Devine, D (2010) Being confined within? Constructions of the Good Childhood and Outdoor Play in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings in Ireland, *Children & Society*, 24 (5), 371-385.

Kjorholt, A T and Seland, M (2012) Kindergarten as a Bazaar: Freedom of Choice and New Forms of Regulation in Kjorholt, A T and Qvortrup, J (Eds) (2012)*The Modern Child and the Flexible Labour Market*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Knupfer, A (1996) Ethnographic studies of children: the difficulties of entry, rapport, and presentations of their worlds, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 9(2), 135-149.

Kohli, W (1999) Performativity and pedagogy: The making of educational subjects, *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 8(5), 319-326.

Lam, C-M (2012) The disablement and enablement of childhood, *International Studies in Sociology of Education,* 22(2), 147-167.

Lam, M S (2009) Crossing the cultural boundary from home to kindergarten in Hong Kong: a case study of a child's strategic actions, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 17(1), 125-145.

Lee, S Y; Recchia, S L and Shin, M S (2005) 'Not the same kind of leaders': Four young children's unique ways of influencing others, *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 20(2), 132-148.

Lee, Y-J and Recchia, S L (2008) "Who's the Boss?" Young Children's Power and Influence in an Early Childhood Classroom, *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, 10(1), 1-14.

LeVine, R A (2007) Ethnographic Studies of Childhood: A Historical Overview, *American Anthropologist*, 109(2), 247-260.

Löfdahl, A and Hägglund, S (2007)Spaces of participation in pre-school: Arenas for establishing power orders?*Children and Society*, 21(5), 328-338.

Mansell, W (2010) We all fall down, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 30.03.2010.

Mawson, B (2010) Gender and leadership styles in children's play, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 35(3), 115-123.

Mawson, B (2011) Children's Leadership Strategies in Early Childhood, *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 25(4), 327-338.

Mayall, B (2002) *Towards a Sociology for Childhood*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

McNamara, D R (1980) The Outsider's Arrogance: the failure of participant observers to understand classroom events, *British Educational Research Journal*, 6(2), 113-125.

Messerschmidt, J W (2009) 'Doing Gender': The Impact and Future of a Salient Sociological Concept, *Gender & Society*, 23(1), 85-88.

Miller, D (1998) (Ed) *Material cultures: Why some things matter*, London: Routledge.

Moore, J D (Ed) (2004) *Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists* (2/E), Lanham: Altamira Press.

Morrow, V and Richards, M (1996) The Ethics of Social Research with Children: An Overview, *Children and Society*, 10, 90-105.

Moss, P (2007) Bringing politics into the nursery: early childhood education as a democratic practice, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 15(1), 5-20.

Moss, P and Petrie, P (2002) *From children's services to children's spaces*, London: Routledge Falmer.

Nærland, T (2011) Language competence and social focus among preschool children, *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(5), 599-612.

Nærland, T and Martinsen, H (2011) Child-child interactions and positive social focus among preschool children, *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(3), 361-370.

Nasir and Cooks (2009) Becoming a Hurdler: How Learning Settings Afford Identities, *Anthropological and Education Quarterly*, 40(1), 41-61.

Newton, E and Jenvey, V (2011) Play and theory of mind: associations with social competence in young children, *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(6), 761-773.

O'Loughlin, M (2001) The Development of Subjectivity in Young Children: theoretical and pedagogical considerations, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood,* 2(1), 49-65.

Owen, M T, Ware, A M and Barfoot, B (2000) Caregiver-Mother Partnership Behavior and the Quality of Caregiver-Child and Mother-Child Interactions, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15(3), 413-428.

Pahl, K (2004) Narratives, artifacts and cultural identities: An ethnographic study of communicative practices in homes, *Linguistics and Education*, 15(4), 339-358.

Penn, H (2005) *Understanding Early Childhood: Issues and Controversies*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Polk-Lillard, P (1997) *Montessori in the classroom: a teacher's account of how children really lean*, New York: Schocken Books Inc.

Poveda, D and Marcos, T (2005) The Social Organization of a 'Stone Fight': Gitano children's interpretive reproduction of ethnic conflict, *Childhood*, 12(3), 327-349.

Powell, S (2010) Hide And Seek: Values In Early Childhood Education And Care, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 58(2), 213-229.

Raittila, R (2012) With children in their lived place: children's action as research data, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 20(3), 270-279.

Rasmussen, K (2004) Places for Children - Children's Places, *Childhood*, 11(3), 155-173.

Riseman, B J (2004) Gender as a Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism, *Gender & Society*, 18(4). 429-450.

Robson, S (2011) Producing and Using Video Data in the Early Years: Ethical Questions and Practical Consequences in Research with Young Children: Video Data and Research with Young Children, *Children & Society*, 25(3), 179-189.

Roe, E (2012) A Review of 'Artifactual Literacies: Every Object Tells a Story, *The Journal of Educational Research*, 105(4), 299-299.

Rokach, A and Parvini, M (2011) Experience of adults and children in hospitals*, Early Child Development and Care*, 181(5), 707-715.

Ruckenstein, M (2010) Toying with the world: Children, virtual pets and the value of mobility, *Childhood*, 17(4), 500-513.

Shpancer, N (2002) The home-daycare link: mapping children's new world order, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 17(3), 374-392.

Singer, E and Haannikaainen, M (2002) The Teacher's Role in Territorial Conflicts of 2 to 3 Year Old Children, *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 17(1), 5-18.

Siraj-Blatchford, I and Siraj-Blatchford, J (2001) An ethnographic approach to researching young children's learning in MacNaughton, G, Rolfe, S A and Siraj-Blatchford, I (Eds) (2001) *Doing Early Childhood Research*, Buckingham: OUP.

Slater, D (1997) *Consumer Culture & Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Stamatoglou, M (2004)Listening to Young Children's Voices: An Ethnographic Study of Nursery Play. Paper presented at the 30th British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, UMIST, Manchester, September 2004.

Stephen, C and Brown, S (2004) The culture of practice in pre-school provision: outsider and insider perspectives, *Research Papers in Education*, 19(3), 323-344.

Taggart, B (2004) Early years education and care: three agendas, *British Education Research Journal*, 30(5), 619-622.

Timmerman, G and Schrender, P (2008) Gendered Constructions of Professionals in Daycare, *Sex Roles*, 59, 199-213.

Vandenbroeck, M and Bouverne-De Bie, M (2006) Children's Agency and Educational Norms: A tensed negotiation, *Childhood*, 13(1), 127-140.

Vandenbroeck, M; Coussée, F and Bradt, L (2010) The Social and Political Construction of Early Childhood Education, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 58(2), 139-153.

vanGennep, A (1960) *The Rites of Passage*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

vanOers, B and Hannikainen, M (2001) Some Thoughts About Togetherness: an introduction, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 9(2), 102-108.

Walkerdine, V (2006) Playing the game,*Feminist Media Studies*, 2006, 6(4), 519-537.

Wang, X (2012) The construction of researcher-researched relationships in school ethnography: doing research, participating in the field and reflecting on ethical dilemmas, *International Journal of Qualitiative Studies in Education*, 26(7), 763-779.

Wiltz, N W and Klein, E L (2001) "What do you do in child care?" Children's perceptions of high and low quality classrooms, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly,* 16, 209-236.

Wood, E and Attfield, J (2005) *Play, Learning and the Early Childhood Curriculum* (2E), London: Paul Chapman.