

**‘An exploration into staff perspectives of parents as
young children’s first educators: case studies of a
family support team’**

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Abstract

This is a case study of a family support team working in nine Children Centres at a time of significant change and re-organisation. By examining practitioner attitudes to parent's as their young child's first educator, it aims to describe the current situation, identify next steps and ultimately improve outcomes for children. Many of the families, who are supported by the family support team, are located within groups that are considered "vulnerable" and the children are considered to be at risk of failing to meet their outcomes. This paper identifies a dichotomy within the Children Centre service. There is a strong Early Years agenda which requires all staff to work in partnership with parents, views which staff espouse and yet there is an unspoken narrative which positions parents as patients and staff as experts, which is evident both locally and nationally. This piece of research is a first step in creating an equality between practitioners and parents so that the service offered is empowering for parents and ultimately life enhancing for children.

Keywords: first educator, partnership with parents, staff perceptions.

1.Context

This piece of research is located within a cluster of nine Children Centres in the South West of England during a turbulent time where re-structuring has meant a significant reduction in staffing levels as many faced the uncertainty of redundancy. In the midst of these cuts there has been a re-focus of Children Centre work to become less universal “and provide targeted help to the most disadvantaged families” (Field: 2010:7).

The Ofsted South West Regional Report (2014) states that the South West is a region of ‘inconsistencies’ as there is no local authority where children across the age ranges do consistently well (2014:3). Nationally, children within the South West are situated within the top three regions for achieving the highest proportion of good level of development at the end of the Foundation Stage. In the local authority within which this study is located, the situation is more complex. Many of the Early Years settings are rated as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ and children tend to do well within the Early Years Foundation stage. However, the report highlights that children from poorer families achieve significantly lower than their peers from more affluent backgrounds. Therefore the attainment gap between the two is one of the largest in the country. The disparity in outcomes holds significance for this study as the onus is heavily on Children Centre staff to ‘make a difference’ to children’s outcomes and turn the curve of this current trend.

1.1 Situation of Self

As the sole Children Centre teacher, I am responsible for providing the pedagogical lead within the Children Centre service. I work alongside three area teams that include Children Centre co-ordinators, family support staff, senior Early Years Practitioners, nursery staff from each area, regular bank staff and a Children Centre social worker. My role is to support the staff to ensure that any child that accesses the service, in whatever capacity, will be enabled to improve his/her outcomes. This may be as a result of high quality groups, thoughtful and reflective practice or carefully considered individualised learning opportunities either in nursery, a centre or at home; ultimately to begin to narrow the attainment gap. For the purpose of this piece of research I will be acting as a participant researcher, as my field of study are

the people with whom I work and interact with on a daily basis. The choice to utilise the first person narrative is deliberate, to not only engage readers outside the academic framework, but also to ensure that this research is useful for practice in the real world and to recognise the importance of the reader as a contributor to the continuing praxis as outlined by Thody (2006:12).

1.2 Theoretical Basis

The importance that parents play in a child's capacity to learn has long been established through Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory which he continues to develop in later work..

"Evidence is accumulating that human beings of all ages are happiest and able to deploy their talents to best advantage when they are confident that, standing behind them, there are one or more trusted persons who will come to their aid should difficulties arise." (Bowlby 1979:103)

Elfer et al (2012) developed this further, in their work on the keyperson approach which took the understanding about the power of a secure relationship and applied it to Early Childhood Educational settings; subsequently being enshrined within the first Early Years Foundation stage guidance (2007). The Labour government (1997-2010) and authors of Every Parent Matters (2007) ensured that the vital role of parents as their child's first and most enduring educator remained a central component to their Early Years agenda. Much of the above theorists based their findings on The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPSE) Project. (Sylva et al:2004) which reports that, "What parents do with their children is more important than who they are" (Sylva et al: 2004:5) recommending that the children who achieve the most intellectual gain are those whose parents create positive home learning experiences.

1.3 Contextualising the Field

I have chosen the family support team as the field of study as much of their work with parents is relational, takes place within the home and therefore has a more intimate or 'real' element as opposed to parents of children attending a nursery setting; who may only have contact with staff for two brief periods in a day. As a teacher, I am primarily concerned with children's outcomes, as supported by their parents, so have chosen to describe the work of the family support team in

educational terms for the purpose of this inquiry, although I appreciate the perception of the family support role may differ across the service. My own pedagogy enables me to make the assumption that when discussing education, learning or parents as educator, formalised schooling or teaching is not what is meant. The support offered to parents through Children Centre services is educational in nature as it involves parents, children and staff in a learning process. The concept of all humans being engaged in a process of lifelong learning (Bertram et al 2008) represents education in its broadest sense and therefore informs this study. Friere (1994) suggests that the belief that educational practice is neutral is, “profoundly naïve” (1994:67). It is therefore important to acknowledge that the researcher, participants and the organisation itself bring its own set of beliefs and values which form our own cultural norms and practices (Bourdieu 1977, 1980) (Schein 1992). These may consciously or unconsciously influence attitudes towards parents. So in addition to examining the family support team’s attitudes, I intend to also consider the local authority’s perceptions of parents as their child’s first educator in the early years, through an examination of the policies, procedures and publications.

2. Rationale

As a participant researcher, it is important that this study is not only relevant to the Children Centre service but also that the rationale is firmly located within everyday practice. My intention is to use the findings to consider what I need to do next to support staff, so that the team can support parents to become more confident and competent as their child’s first educator. Reflecting on events and thinking about how to improve children’s outcomes provided the impetus for this paper. However, it is vital that this paper is grounded in praxis, or human action as described by Friere (1970) so that there is not only real purpose to the research, but also this thought and reflection is located within a clear praxeological research paradigm advocated by Pascal and Bertram (2012).

As I have begun to encourage staff to think more clearly about children’s outcomes and the importance of engaging parents in their learning, I have noted a quiet level of resistance from staff who support parents in the home. Equally, I have perceived some subtle attitudes to parents that potentially could impact the support offered to

parents as their child's first educator. This is typified in the following encounter described in my reflective journal.

"X expressed how worried she was that the team were not able to meet all the needs of the parents who were coming to the group. My observations suggested that this group was warm, welcoming, the children had plenty of excellent play opportunities and the parents for most of the time spent time playing with their children. The staff made sure that they welcomed the parents, supported the children in their play and there was a display about children's learning. X was (quite rightly) concerned that they were actually meeting the needs of the most vulnerable groups. We were talking and I just couldn't help but feel that her opinion of parents was extremely skewed. I did say to her that she had to remember that parents had agency. They were responsible for part of what happens to them in the group. I pointed out that vulnerable parents still have capacity to make choices, to choose to attend a group if they wanted to. I felt that I could detect a view of parents as victims, or maybe of the staff taking too much responsibility for parents (almost like a parent child type relationship)" (Gaywood, Reflective Journal: 27.11.14)

Whilst this is only one of a number of similar observations, it raises concern about limited expectations and aspirations for vulnerable families. The role of aspiration for parents and children within Children Centre services is vital. If staff are unconsciously engaged in limiting relationships with parents, can it be concluded that they are effectively creating a glass ceiling for vulnerable families with low aspirations and a deficit care model? Evangelou and Boag-Munroe's (2012) systematic review of literature regarding "hard to reach" families, concludes that it is vital that the services which work with complex vulnerable families need "to build relationships of trust with families and with each other" (2012:234). If these relationships are interpreted through Berne's transactional analysis theory (1964), my observation of staff's unconsciously occupying a parental position falls short of the ideal adult interaction Berne (1964) describes. My concern about any negative impact this may be having on staff aspirations for parents has also partly driven the rationale for this research study.

However, as a participant within the field, I believe these observed attitudes are unconsciously held by a strongly caring and highly skilled staff team, who, if questioned, would undoubtedly refute my claims. This continuing dilemma of espoused beliefs being misaligned to action (Argyris and Schon 1974) is a common problem, which I note in my reflective journal time and again.

“I am very aware that there are huge contradictions in my inner life – I believe one thing desperately and somehow, act in a different way. For example: I believe that I should be respectful to all my staff, they all have much to offer the team and it is my job to enable them. I believe that it is only by making mistakes that we can learn, but when mistakes are made, inwardly I become impatient. I become impatient when practice isn’t good enough – even though it is my job to empower staff to deliver good services. If you were to ask me what I felt about the staff and the values I hold – I would tell you all the good and right things. However, there is an inner part which is in rebellion to this. If we believe, that the hidden curriculum, the unspoken, the unseen has an impact – what is the impact of this on the staff? My next logical question then is: if I am aware of these struggles within myself – surely the staff must be holding similar dichotomies within their own hearts? Unacknowledged and therefore unconscious. Again, I need to ask the question- what impact is this having on their relationships with the parents with whom they work?” (Gaywood, Reflective Journal: 11.11.14)

3. Literature search

3.1 Method

This literature search has presented me with a number of challenges from the outset. My approach was to use keywords that were within my research proposal and input these into a variety of databases to elicit significant texts and literature. I hoped to limit my field by considering only articles from settings in England within the last five years. I searched for ‘parents as a first educator’ as it seemed the most relevant to my area of study. However, this proved to be fruitless so I changed my terminology to ‘parental engagement’.

Initially, the results from the first database, Educational Evidence Portal, were relatively encouraging, producing seventeen articles—referring to either primary or secondary schools. The articles generally discussed how schools engage parents

and the methods that are successful. The majority of the articles tended to be generic, did not explicitly discuss Early Years settings and, for this reason, I rejected their use within this literature study. However, worthy of note is the work of Desforges and Abouchar (2003) who have clearly documented the benefits of parental involvement for children's learning, which inform much of current thinking and Early Years practice.

In order to ensure that this literature search was fully relevant and securely fixed within the field I currently work, I decided to look specifically in Early Years journals. For each of the journal searches I looked through the volumes systematically, beginning at the most recent then searching backwards, chronologically, for five years; ending in 2009. Using the titles and abstracts, I searched for articles which related to practitioner perspectives of parents or were specifically relevant to the field of study.

The new information available to me was drawn from international contexts. I selected articles that consider issues surrounding home visits as well as research papers investigating working with vulnerable groups, which are relevant to the research context of this paper. The challenge is to ensure that the relevance and application of the knowledge gained is clear and explicit.

In addition to journal articles, I looked at databases, reports and considered a number of seminal texts. My intention has always been to set this research within the political context. Therefore a portion of this literature search is concerned with government papers and policy documents pertaining to Children Centres. I am interested to discover the government's attitudes to parent's as children's first educators, through their own publications.

3.2 Results of literature search

Through examining the literature, five clear themes have emerged: the location of parent and professional, influences on practitioner attitudes, culture, aspirations and home learning. The literature review will consider each of these themes in turn.

3.2.1 The Location of Parent /Professional

The position the parent and professional occupy in relation to each other is a key factor in understanding this field. The relationship is a complex one but there seems to be two general models in operation. Professionals, often unconsciously, locate the

parent in a position of inequality (Alasuutari: 2010, Cottle and Alexander: 2014, Dalrymple and Burke: 2006, Greenfield: 2011). This seems to be in conflict with the current narrative in Early Years where the notion of working in partnership with parents is firmly established (Every Parent Matters: 2007) and currently enshrined in law (Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage: 2014:5). Cottle and Alexander (2014) discuss this dichotomy further as they explore practitioners' perspectives regarding parent partnership. They describe two emerging models when describing parent partnership; a "*discourse of deficiency*" and a "*discourse of agency*" (2014: 639). It is helpful to use these positions to explain more fully the location of the parent and professional in relation to each other.

The '*discourse of agency*,' which is the understanding that people have agency and are therefore able to make decisions, self-determine or take responsibility, is clear in the work of Dalrymple and Burke (2006) as they trace the history of how working in partnership with parents is enshrined in law, from the Seebohm Report (1968) which calls for citizen participation, the Barclay Report (1982) that advocates close working partnerships, the National Health service and Community Care Act (1990) and Children Act (1989). All of which advocate working in partnership with parents and children as being crucial. The authors also point out that, from 1997, the policies of the New Labour government place this concept of partnership working "central to the development of public services" (2006:129).

However, even with this legislative backdrop of partnership working a '*discourse of deficiency*' is still recognisable as,

"Traditionally, in both statutory and voluntary agencies, service providers have seen themselves as official protectors of vulnerable people and so, despite legislation recognising the need for empowerment and participation and the genuine commitment of many service providers to involve people who use their service, partnership working is not easy" (Dalrymple, and Burke 2006:134)

By viewing the parent as 'deficient' in some way means the professional views themselves as an expert who offers advice and support; creating an imbalance of power which has potential to impact the practitioner parent relationship negatively. This is not a current phenomenon. Wilderspin (1824), who is reputed for setting up the first infant schools in England, described his ideas about educating 'poor

children' in mission-like terms. His ideas and motivation, however Victorian, interest me because I can detect a resonance that has potentially survived and could be found in some deeply felt, unspoken beliefs and attitudes held by some of my colleagues today. Greenfield (2011) traces the history of home visiting where there is an explicit vertical frame in operation, which later grew into the health visiting service we recognise today.

Prior to the work of Cottle and Alexander (2014), Alasuutari (2010), writing in Finland and using very different research methods, identified two frames of interaction between Early Educators and parents, which are described as vertical and horizontal. Within the vertical frame, practitioners are positioned as the expert and are more remote from parents, whereas in the horizontal frame of interaction, expertise is shared between the practitioner and parent; the style more collaborative as they work side by side as equals. Whilst the early health care service and education provision for poor children had a clear vertical frame, the current Early Years narrative seems to advocate a horizontal frame that is more appropriate. However, in everyday practice the picture may be more complex. Birbli and Tzioga (2014) suggest that although staff may be working with parents to make assessments of their child's learning and development, the vertical frame is still in operation and the discourse of deficiency remains at the root of many practitioners attitudes and perceptions. So although staff may espouse the beliefs of a horizontal frame or a discourse of agency, their practice may be vastly different.

Pound (2003) developed an epistemology of alonsideness whilst working as a health visitor. Her work offers an opportunity of re-alignment to practitioners, moving away from the distant professional operating within a vertical frame of interaction to a horizontal position (Alasuutari 2010) of being alongside parents, in relationship. Pound's (2003) work is particularly helpful as she is currently based within one of the Children Centres in this study and works with the same families as the family support team. Her knowledge, therefore, is local and relevant.

When considering the positionality of parents and practitioners, issues of power and its distribution are important. Friere (1970) suggests that when there is a disparity in wealth or empowerment in an educational context, there are then issues of power and control that need to be examined. Through this research piece I intend to

investigate the daily delivery of services within the children centre in light of central and local government's shifting priorities of targeting the most vulnerable families. In doing so, I consider the issues of power and control possibly perpetuated through current structures of family support within Children Centre services.

Friere's description of a repressive banking system of education, where power is located with the educators whilst those in receipt are merely passive "containers'to be 'filled'" (1970:53) still resonates clearly today and causes me great concern. Given the importance of the parent's role in supporting their child's learning and subsequently being able to reduce the attainment gap, my interest lies in finding a way to create a model of 'solidarity' (1970:58) so staff firmly locate themselves as partners with parents, working together for better outcomes. In addition, my intention is to make an assessment of the current situation *with* my colleagues so that the model of 'solidarity' is not merely an ideal, but a practical working relationship, validating an equality of status and power, thus authenticating the aims of this study and ultimately ensuring the service offered to parents and children is empowering and life enhancing.

Shier's (2010) investigation into children's participation models in Nicaragua and the United Kingdom is a helpful reference point when considering these issues of power and empowerment when developing a more participatory model, horizontal frame (Alasuutari 2010) or a discourse of agency (Cottle and Alexander 2014). In the same way Birbli and Tzioga (2014) identified tension between practitioners espoused beliefs and their practice, Shier (2010) highlights tension between "participation as control" and "participation as empowerment" (2010:26) To consider these intricacies of power balances within models of participation is helpful when looking to develop services to enable parents to participate more fully in their child's learning.

There seems to be much complexity in this matter. For this study I intend to examine staff perceptions of parents as a child's first educator and I will use Berne's (1964) transactional analysis theory to provide an initial framework to try to understand the complex interactions between practitioners and parents, by identifying whether practitioners adopt the parent, adult or child position during their interactions with parents.

One of the aims of this study is to analyse the local context of the field. It is also important to locate this study within the British context at the time of writing. The Child Poverty Strategy 2014-17 (2014) helps identify the government position in relation to parents of children growing up in poor families. This is relevant because the majority of the families engaged with the family support team live in poverty. The government is clear that education is vitally important in combating child poverty. However, examining the perceptions of parents is sobering. There seems to be not only model of deficiency in operation but also a narrative of deficiency and blame (Child Poverty Strategy 2014:14), not too far removed from Wilderspin's (1824) era. The implications of a negative national narrative are highlighted in section 3.2.4.

3.2.2 Influences on practitioner attitudes

Whilst investigating practitioners' attitudes to poor families, Simpson (2013) finds that staff views of families seems to mirror the British Coalition Government's meritocratic narrative (2013:90), which suggests that staff may be unwittingly influenced by the political climate. Cottle (2011) explores practitioners, "*ideals, aspirations, inspirations and constraints.*" (2011: 252) and finds that they are influenced by a variety of factors: the context of the centre, their individual history, educational background, professional heritage, training and any mentor or influential figure. It was found that family values, being a parent and the cultural setting also influenced practitioners' responses (2011:254). In addition, Cottle like Simpson (2013) concludes that practitioners were influenced by the current political agenda. This is considered more fully in section 3.2.4 when discussing aspiration.

Training is identified as having a positive influence on the perceptions of Early Years staff of parents. Pedro, Miller and Bray (2012) writing in the US, studied pre-service teachers knowledge and dispositions in regard to working with parents. Although the field of study was teachers in training, their conclusions are relevant and worthy of note. The research identifies a very negative attitude towards parents, which is held by the trainee teachers. They suggest that for a reciprocal relationship to emerge, teachers need to develop a more positive disposition towards working with parents as partners. Better training would equip teachers to work more effectively with parents through an improvement of attitude, knowledge, disposition and skill. Greenfield (2011) also identifies training to be an important element in changing

negative attitudes to parents, as well as practitioners being offered time to reflect about their practice.

Noddings (1984) writes extensively about the feminine ethics surrounding care. Her work is helpful as she describes the relationship between the 'one-caring' and the 'cared-for' which is pertinent to the complex relationships in operation between the family support team and parents. She discusses the role of freedom for the cared-for (1984:72). Brooker (2010) develops Noddings' (1984) ideas as she examines the role of power within practitioner and parent relationships. She concludes that the "cultural habitus" (2010:185) and "larger assumptions about values, identity, role and status" of practitioners has significant impact of the staff/parent relationship.

3.2.3 Culture

Bourdieu (1977, 1980, 1986) wrote extensively about habitus, cultural field and cultural capital. This study is primarily concerned with the habitus - the values, attitudes and dispositions of the family support team and its doxa –the discourses and narratives held to be true. At the same time, it considers the amount of cultural capital the parents actually have within the cultural field of the Children Centre. Gioia (2013) describes how the beliefs, attitudes and values of staff within an organisation form a micro culture. He identifies the existence of two types of culture within an organisation, the micro and the macro, and explains that the attitudes and beliefs of staff impact both types of culture. Schein's (1992) describes three levels of culture found in organisations: artefacts and observable behaviour, espoused beliefs and underlying assumptions. The challenge for this study is to be able to identify these three levels found in a culture as by their nature they are almost hidden and not obvious from a cursory glance. Bronson's (2005) uses Schein's work to underpin his study as he examines the culture of a home visit within a comparable field by using similar research methods and clearly sets the research within the current political context. Through his study, Bronson (2005) is able to identify patterns of behaviour that have influenced the cultural environment created by staff during the home visit, and are often based on assumptions. Through analysis of the data, my intention is to also begin to identify themes and patterns of behaviour; the espoused beliefs of the family support team. I also intend to examine the macro culture of the organisation through the examination of policies and the scoping of relevant local authority documents.

3.2.4. Aspirations

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a report about the correlation of attitudes and behaviours to children's attainment. The authors, Chowdry et al (2010) conclude that parental attitudes and beliefs about learning have a significant impact on educational attainment, particularly for poor children. The concept of generational transference of expectation and aspiration is important and has implications for this piece of research. In order to support parent's as first educators, it seems important to raise aspirations and expectations for themselves and their children. This may only be possible if staff hold positive attitudes, behaviours and aspirations for parents and children.

The Ofsted Children Centre Inspection Handbook mentions that practitioners' expectations and aspirations for children are evaluated (2013:29). It says that for a centre to be graded as outstanding,

"The centre's practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for all children and their families" (Ofsted 2013:37)

In the government response to the Education Committee's fifth paper (2014), there is no comment made about parents as their child's first educator or parental involvement- nor is anything said about the role of family support workers. The government is equally silent about practitioner aspirations and expectation. However, "*improving parent aspirations*" (2013:4) is mentioned and considered to be important.

In the latest statutory guidance for Sure Start Children Centres, (2014) it is worth noting that there seems to be a significant shift from previous documents. There is no mention of parents as partners, or being their child's first educator. Parents seem to be perceived as the recipients of services in need of targeted support. The role of the professional appears to include encouraging parent aspirations and improving parenting skills. The core purpose is to support child development and school readiness. It is difficult to draw any conclusions about how the government perceives parents, particularly parents who may need to access Children Centre services.

Slote (2007) suggests that aspiration for parents as their child's first educator is fundamentally an ethical responsibility and argues that both individuals and

organisations need to move beyond sympathy to actively promote the wellbeing and autonomy of those who are in a 'cared-for' relationship.

Aspiration then, is an important feature in children's attainment and practitioner attitudes to parents. The government seem to believe that parental aspiration is important, Ofsted rate as outstanding those Children's Centres where staff have consistently high aspirations for parents. Chowdry et al (2010) make the clear link between low generational aspiration to low outcomes and Slote (2007) describes aspiration, or the active promotion of autonomy, as an ethical responsibility. Therefore, it is vital to ascertain how aspirational the micro culture of the family support team and the macro culture of the Children Centre and the local authority is (Gioia: 2013), for parents as their child's first educators. If staff are operating within Bourdeiu's (1980) concept of a cultural habitus that has low aspiration then outcomes for children will be hampered.

The narrative of the current "troubled families" agenda which was introduced by the Coalition government (2011) seems less than positive, low in aspiration and with an underlying notion of blame.

"A troubled family is one that has serious problems and causes serious problems. In every troubled family there are a range of factors, including parents not working, mental health problems, kids not in school, the family causing crime and anti-social behaviour and costing local services a lot of time and money, routinely responding to these problems" (Pickles: 2011)

Families appear to be singled out and vilified as if the problems of crime are solely their responsibility. The extent this negative view of children and families has impacted Children Centre services and local authority policy makers is unclear and the impact on aspirational practice and thought can only be surmised. Levitas et al (2007) write extensively about the multi-dimensional aspect of social exclusion, which provides an opposing narrative which appears to offer more scope for an aspirational stance. Their model (2007) addresses similar issues as the troubled family agenda, yet manages to identify the barriers to inclusion, which incorporate: resources, participation and quality of life (2007:10), rather than blame families for being excluded or "troubled".

Many parents who are referred to Children Centres *are* in need of support but if whilst receiving support there is a level of blame or feelings of deficiency, this will inevitably undermine the relationships and work of the family support team.

3.2.5 Home Learning

Home learning is a broad subject but one which has been identified by this literature search as being significant. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project (Sylva et al 2004) is clear about the importance the home learning environment has on children's long term educational outcomes.

Rodriguez and Tamis-LeMonda (2011) investigate how the home learning environment affects the potential outcome for young children and suggest that without intervention, the trajectory for children as young as fifteen months changes little. The Department for Children, Schools and Families commissioned a report investigating 'Provider Influence on the Home Learning Environment' in which Hunt et al (2011) also acknowledged the importance of the Home Learning Environment, and outline the important role practitioners' play in supporting parents to be confident and knowledgeable in their role as their child's first educator. The authors report that the relationship between practitioners and parents is key. They recommend that communication with parents is vital, staff should be offered further training to help build good relationships and it is important to be aware of the everyday realities of family life (2011:8).

The House of Commons Education Committee (2013), which was responsible for reviewing Children Centre services, recognises the role of parents in supporting children's learning at home. However, they see the need for further research to investigate, "*the kind of parental engagement in the home environment which makes the most difference to narrowing the gap*" (2013:4).

There seems broad agreement that, for young children, learning with and from their parents at home is vital in their long term learning outcomes. I will be using this piece of research to identify if the family support team know this, acknowledge the importance and what their perceptions about parents reveal concerning their attitudes and beliefs about home learning.

4. Methodology

This piece of research is qualitative in both nature and design, and is located within a praxeological paradigm described by Pascal and Bertram (2012). It will be conducted in a real world context (Robson 2011) where I will be a participant researcher, collecting data from February 2015 to April 2015. I am using an alternative approach outlined by Thody (2006:10) that acknowledges the subjective nature of the participants' narratives. Primarily, this research is participatory and reflexive, so that those taking part will not just be subjects but their reflections and thoughts will be used in the development of partnership working with parents as their child's first educator. As a participant researcher, I have chosen to position myself alongside my colleagues in the field rather than occupy a more distant location. In order for this subjective approach to retain rigour, it is important to recognise the impact of the researcher to reduce the effect of bias by making visible my own values and pedagogical alliance from the outset. My intention is to operate as a reflexive researcher (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and use a reflective research diary to engage in a process of conscious self-inquiry whilst considering the relationships between myself, the family support team and parents. In order to reduce the potential effects of my own bias further, I will attend a small peer group of independent researchers for "peer debriefing" (Lincoln and Guba 1985: 308). In addition, I intend to employ "member checking" (Lincoln and Guba 1985: 314) by sending the synthesis of the results to the participants for comment or challenge (Appendix four and five) I also use triangulation as a strategy to promote rigour; an approach that is discussed in section 4.3

4.1 Ethics and the participants

As this study is fundamentally relational in design and purpose, there is a greater urgency to ensure it is ethically robust from conception. I intend to occupy an aspirational ethical position and so remain ethically 'responsive, relational and reflexive' throughout (Lahman et al 2010). I am fully aware that ethical problems may arise unexpectedly within the process of the research, due to the changing and complex nature of my relationships with staff, which are on-going and vital. Although my "prolonged engagement" in the field (Lincoln and Guba 1985:303) helps establish trustworthiness, it also raises ethical issues that need to be considered. As the Children Centre teacher, my role is to offer practical support and pedagogical lead in

the actual delivery of services, as a critical friend. I do not line manage staff so issues of power and trust are reduced. However, staff are aware of my professional opinions on the role of parents with their children and the importance of home learning; this prior knowledge of each other means extra vigilance is needed to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity are maintained. Staff need to be able to speak freely without fear of repercussions; whilst I need to ensure that our current working relationship is not damaged by the research process. I therefore decided *not* to discuss the findings of this paper in any detail with my colleagues or managers who hold line management responsibility for the participants, in order to fully respect and protect their anonymity. I made this clear to the family support team from the outset.

Staff relationships with parents form the central focus for this exploration so, ethically, it is important to recognise the significance of the work of the family support team who have the most intimate contact with parents, visiting families at home and also to honour the high levels of skills employed in negotiating positive relationships with parents. Building on this consensual model of working, this research is designed to be transparent from the outset with staff being made clear of the focus and proposed structure and being offered an opportunity to participate. Before choosing to participate, staff understand the collaborative nature of the research, the ethical parameters within which it will be conducted and their role as co-constructors. Participants will have an ethical contract before agreeing to take part, to ensure clarity at the start. (Appendix one)

4.2 The Research Design

This is a qualitative piece of layered research that will be an exploration of the current situation within which I work and lead. I will use a case study approach (Robson 2011) to collect and analyse data from the practitioners and the local authority. The design is flexible- firstly because this research is conducted within a 'real world' context during a period of significant change and secondly, there is a need to prepare for any issues which may arise, taking into account the challenges of collecting data in a participatory paradigm from staff under pressure. Geertz (1973) describes how in ethnography, "one peels off layer after layer" (Geertz 1973:37) As this study is broadly based within this research tradition, there are three

separate layers and by using an integrated approach, emerging issues and themes within each layer will be identified (Glaser and Straus 1967). Any new knowledge will be applied to the subsequent layers of data collection, where appropriate. For example, five themes were identified by the literature search as a first layer. These themes have highlighted issues that emerged from the current literature regarding parent participation and parents as a child's first educator. I have chosen to use this new knowledge when constructing the questionnaire as the first method of data collection. By creating a backdrop to the research, understanding gleaned from the literature search has also impacted some of the analysis of the findings.

This small-scale piece of research has been designed to be robust. The process of 'random sampling' (Shenton 2004:65) was employed to add credibility. Staff, working across a wide and diverse geographical area (as illustrated by fig 2) were given the choice to participate or refuse, for each layer of data collection. This process of opting into the project meant that participants could not be selected which ensured data elicited was more trustworthy.

4.3 Triangulation

Triangulation is one method to ensure robustness and trustworthiness within the research process (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This study has been designed with three layers of data collection using three different methods (fig 1). In addition, data was collected from three different teams within three diverse hub areas (fig 2), which provides internal triangulation, in addition to the data collection triangulation already in operation.

Fig 1. Data Collection Triangulation

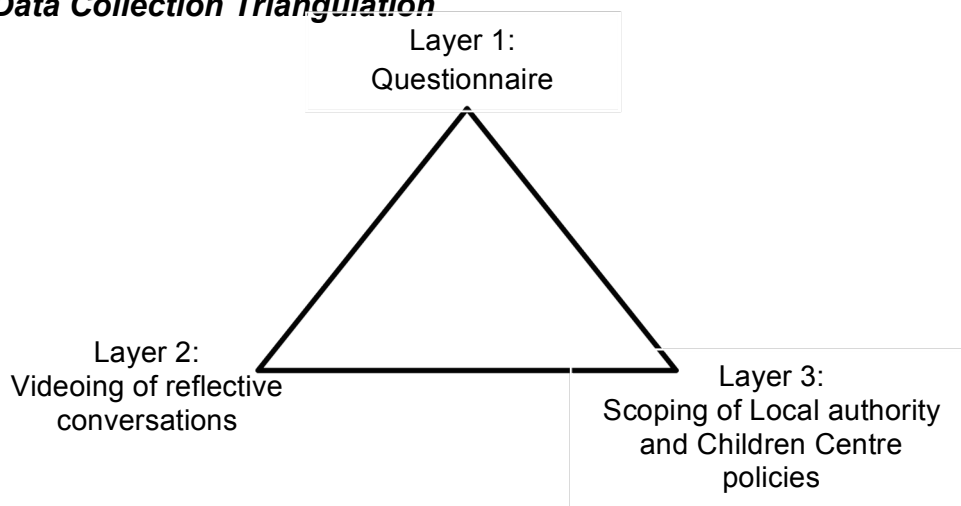
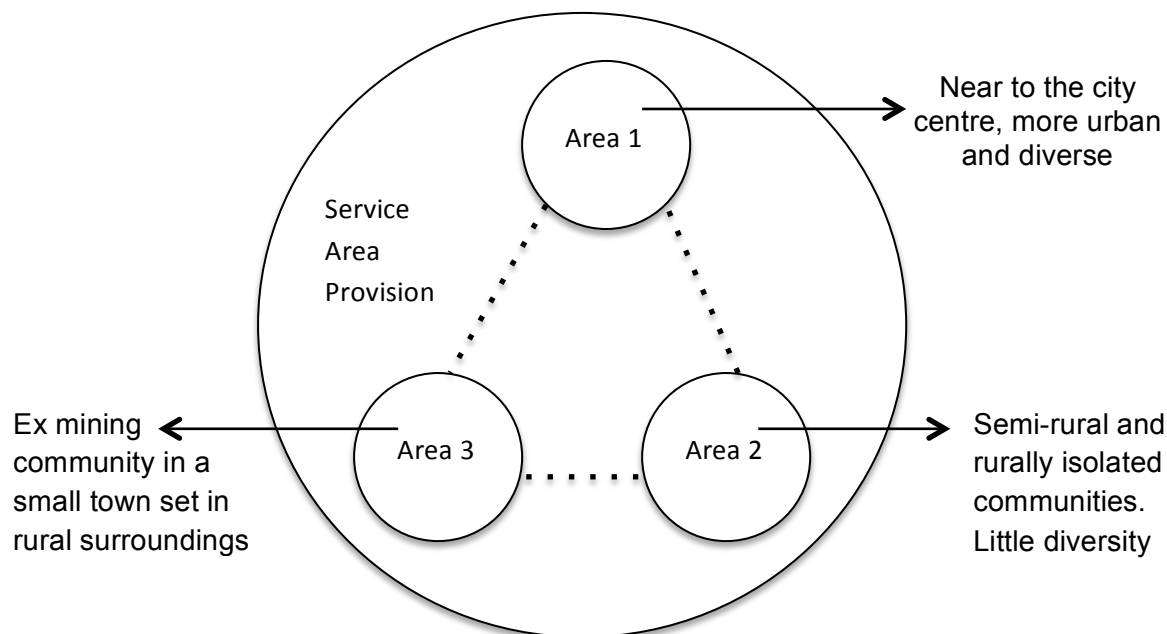


Fig 2. Family Support Team and Area Triangulation



With the geographical areas, peer team and data collection methods being triangulated, the aim is to ensure this study is data rich and has a high level of robustness.

4.4 Data collection methods

To ensure credibility, established research methods have been adopted. (Shenton 2004:64). Cottle (2011) and Brorson (2005) used similar research methods and elicited data that provided transferable findings. The chosen methods for this study were semi-structured questionnaires, staff reflection time and reviewing various strategy and local authority papers.

4.4.1 Semi-Structured Questionnaires

The questionnaire (appendix two), sharpened in design by the literature search, employs open-ended questions and a Likhert scale, enabling staff to give a graduated response to questions

4.4.2 Staff Reflection Time

Staff were given the opportunity to reflect together, examining issues which emerged from the first layer of research. I facilitated and videoed these sessions. Lengthy transcripts were not made of the conversations but notes were taken afterwards as the content was examined, data elicited and themes identified. The video will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research process.

4.4.3 Scope of Children Centre and Local Authority Papers.

I intend to make a review of the local authority and Children Centre strategy papers, protocols and relevant standards to locate their position regarding parents as their children's first educator.

4.4 Data Analysis

Following the initial scrutiny of each layer of data collection, the data will be re-examined using a thematic coding approach (Robson 2011) that is compatible to a participatory research design. This information will be synthesised, sent for member checking (Lincoln and Guba 1985), themes identified, similarities and patterns sought. (Robson 2011:467). Once these have been identified, the analysis will be framed by the literature search to consider issues of power, (Friere 1970) positionality of parents (Cottle and Alexander 2014, Alasuutari 2010) and the culture of the staff team (Schein 1992, Bourdieu 1977). When presenting the findings of the second layer, the reflective conversations, I intend to employ the "thick description" advocated by Geertz (1973) when investigating and interpreting cultures. Through this analysis of the current working situation amongst the staff team, I intend to identify next steps for the service, make recommendations to develop our practice with parents and ultimately improve children's outcomes; thus promoting praxis within the researched organisation, ensuring the findings are relevant.

However, to assess the transferability of the findings (Shenton 2004:69) is more complex, for although the results will be useful primarily for those involved, and potentially for other practitioners working in similar situations, it is important to recognise the limitations of the study. This is a small-scale piece of research, which is being conducted within a small time frame. The amount of participants is small and further limited by the optional aspect of engagement. The research is being undertaken within a specific context at a specific time in the development of a service. The hope is that by examining staff perceptions of parents, there may be

some emerging themes that can be applied to other situations in a more universal manner. Through the final analysis I hope to address some of the following questions:

- What is the current situation amongst the staff team?
- What are the staff's expectations and perceptions of parent's as their child's first educators?
- What are the current perceptions amongst the staff team of Home Learning Environment and its significance?
- What do staff understand by a good home learning environment?
- What attitudes and values do staff bring to their work with parents?
- What are the implicit and explicit values of the local authority regarding parents as a young child's first educator?
- How are these translated into strategic planning?

4.5 Positionality of the Participant Researcher

As previously discussed, Children Centre Services are under pressure and have sustained significant cuts. Many are concerned about the impact on the children and families who access Children Centres. In order to be transparent about my own position, it is important to make clear that I share staff's concern. I am keen to ensure that all children and their parents, irrespective of socio-economic circumstance or experiences, have access to high quality early education through Children Centre Services so that children under five have the best possible start in life.

I strongly identify with the belief that parents have agency and are not deficient-needling professionals to advise them. (Cottle and Alexander: 2014) Also, I tend to value more highly the 'horizontal frame' of interaction described by Alasuutari (2010). Both stances are consistent with the praxeological approach which is located within a participatory world view (Formosinho and Formosinho 2012:600). In addition, I adhere to the values explored in Every Parent Matters (2007) which suggests that the role of parents is vital for very young children and their capacity to become

lifelong learners; a view which has been re-iterated more recently by The House of Commons Education Committee (2013:4) I also agree with Hunt et al (2011) who conclude that the relationship staff have with parents is key to improving children's opportunities to learn at home.

My beliefs will inevitably drive the direction of this piece of research, however my aim in acknowledging them is to ensure there is transparency within the research process. As an explorative case study, my intention is not to judge or criticise but rather describe and interpret what I find. Once an assessment of the situation has been made, my distinct purpose is to identify my own next steps, so that I can be more effective in my role of supporting staff to support parents as their child's first educators.

5. The Findings

In order to present the findings of this piece of research clearly, firstly the challenges encountered during the data collection timetable will be outlined and the impact assessed. Following this, the findings of each layer will be presented and the emerging issues discussed, consecutively. Finally, next steps for the service will be identified, with recommendations being made.

5.1 Challenges Encountered

5.1.1 Impact of the political agenda.

As already discussed, this study captures a turbulent time in the history of Children Centres in the United Kingdom. The 2015 general election has been fought and won by the Conservative party who, as part of the 2010-2015 Coalition government, had already shifted Children Centre focus from universal delivery of services to a more targeted approach. Funding decisions were made about the reduction of the service prior to this data collection, which has impacted the research process significantly.

In February 2015 there were 24 staff who made up the Family Support teams in three separate areas across the local authority, delivering services in nine Children Centres. By July 2015, there remains only 16, a staff reduction of 33%. The three Children Centre areas, illustrated by fig 2, have been merged into one large service and so staff have had much to occupy their thoughts.

Engaging staff to participate has been a challenge. My aim to create an ethical, consensual research design where participants could take part freely and with full agency, very soon became an ideal. In order to mediate the reflective conversations, my senior colleagues allowed me to use the well-established team meetings to collect data, which meant that the participants were given little choice to take part. Within these constraints, the approach always remained ethical but the data collection was shaped by a real world context, as theorized by Robson (2011).

The emotional impact of the context has also had an impact on the data collected. Many of the staff who took part expressed strong protective feelings toward the families, anger at the labelling of families and all recognise their role in supporting children to achieve better outcomes; with some understanding the relevance and implication of the current political landscape in the United Kingdom not only for their jobs but also the parents and children who currently benefit from the Family Support team's work.

Additionally, as a participant researcher, there have been times when it has been difficult to maintain enough distance to ensure a rigorous critique. This seemed to have been most difficult during the third layer when I was scoping the Children Centre and local authority papers. Feelings of being disloyal and the emotional impact of watching colleagues bear the brunt of the public sector cuts affected me greatly. However, my stance as a reflexive researcher was helpful during this time, as my reflective journal allowed me to identify and recognise the troubling feelings I was experiencing. Talking with peers at the research group also enabled me to minimise the impact of this by becoming more self-aware. Equally, by adopting Robson's (2011) thematic coding approach, I was able to re-visit data time and again with a more systematic view for analysis. Measuring the impact of the emotional fall out is not possible, but it is worthy of note because, should the same questions be asked of a stable non-threatened team, the results may vary.

Fortunately, the research was designed with robust internal triangulation, however the impact of the timing of the research presented specific unforeseen challenges with the data collection for both layer 2 and 3 of the research. The original aim had been to hold reflective sessions with all three area teams. The team in Area 2 became compromised early on with poor morale. Only 9% of the respondents to the

questionnaire worked within Area 2 and as a result of the re-shaping of the service only two of the original team were in post on 1st June 2015. As staff began to leave, team meetings were often cancelled and it seemed insensitive to ask the remaining staff to participate in the project.

For the scoping exercise, the initial data was collected between 12.3.15 – 19.3.15 using the Policies and Standards folder which is available for all staff and parents to access in the reception of each Children Centre. The folder was removed from one Children Centre reception in order to examine the policies and standards, to ascertain the Children Centre Service attitude to parents as their child's first educator. The assumption that was made was that the policies were up to date and therefore a true representation. However, it became apparent that the policies used had not been updated in line with the policies which were in operation. This was a logistical error due to the general disruption of the redundancies amongst senior staff. This was rectified and so the secondary check was made on 18.5.15 to ensure accuracy and improve robustness. Area 1 and 2 share the same policies and standards. These differed slightly in Area 3, due to management differences. At the time of data collection these were beginning to be merged in preparation for one service. For the purpose of this piece of research, which was conducted prior to this merger timetable, the policies examined were situated in Area 1, mainly because this is where the participant researcher has worked for the longest time.

5.1.2 Flexible design

At its conception, this research was designed flexibly to ensure that findings from each layer could influence the subsequent layer. To investigate staff's perceptions of parents as a child's first educator was its primary purpose. However, the responses of the team and the scoping exercise have meant that the results and analysis needed to re-focus slightly. Very little was found about parents as a child's first educator specifically, but much was discovered regarding the staff, the organisation and local authority's attitudes to parents generally. Participating staff were given ample opportunity to input the findings with reflections and comments, as the first two layers of data were synthesised (Appendix four and five) and sent for checking and validation, but there was very little response.

6. The Results

The results are discussed each layer at a time, in consecutive order. The first layer details how staff position themselves in relation to parents and the type of role they tend to occupy, which is summarised using a Venn diagram. The second layer highlights four emerging themes from the reflective conversations when staff considered what motivates them in their work, which is presented using Geertz (1973) “thick descriptive” approach.

The analysis of the final layer of results concentrates on the espoused beliefs and underlying assumptions (Schein 1992) found in the “macro culture” (Gioia 2013) of Children Centre services, through the examination of relevant documents. Results have been synthesised (Appendix four, five and six) from the key areas that were examined. Implicit beliefs and attitudes regarding parents have been surmised. Two main aspects concerning service delivery have been identified and discussed.

6.1 Results from Layer One – The Questionnaire

6.1.1 The positionality of the staff in regard to parents

Section 3.2.1 of the literature search highlighted the significance of how staff position themselves in regard to parents. Alasuutari (2010) describes both vertical and horizontal frames where staff appear to either be relating to parents from a hierarchical place or from as an equal partner and Noddings (1984) highlights the role of care within professional relationships. The staff responses to the questionnaires indicate that the situation within the family support team is more complex. The responses of each staff member was analysed to ascertain any themes or similarities regarding how staff perceived their positionality. Once all the responses had been collated, and similar responses were grouped together, three main positions clearly emerged. It appeared that staff considered themselves to be either: ‘the Helper’, ‘the Boundaried Professional’ and ‘the Partner’.

The Helper is characterised by staff expressing care and understanding for parents with the offer of support. The Helper feels empathy is important and describes the importance of giving parents a vision of what things could be like.

The Boundaried Professional recognises the working nature of the relationship with parents, understands their role and is clear about lines of responsibility. The

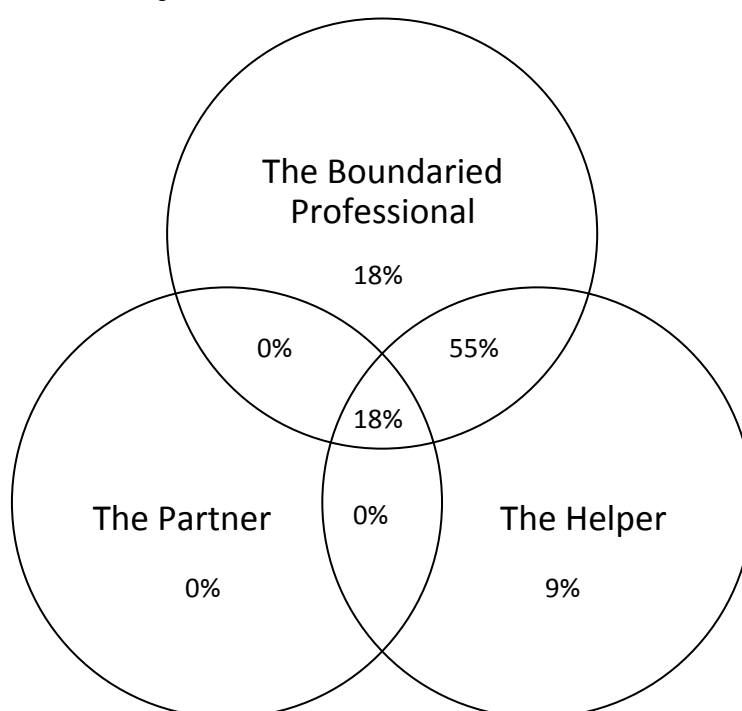
Boundaried Professional is keen to have a transparent relationship with parents and feels that being trustworthy is important.

The Partner expresses an overt sense of mutuality within the relationship and is clear that the relationship is a partnership of equals.

6.1.2 Map of positionality

Whilst the three areas of positionality were clear, the staff often located themselves in more than one area, at any one time. So I created a Venn diagram to represent these different positions, adding in the percentage of staff who located themselves in each area.

Fig 3. Map of Positionality



82% of the staff located themselves within the helper domain, and although there were other permeations within this, the dominant view seems to be that the staff see themselves primarily as helpers, with very few viewing the parent as a partner. In order for staff to occupy this role, it would be logical to conclude that if staff consider this important then there may be an underlying, unspoken belief about parents; namely that they are in need of help, which resonates with the 'discourse of deficiency' outlined by (Cottle and Alexander 2014) and also echoes observations that staff consider themselves "*official protectors of vulnerable people*" (Dalrymple

and Burke 2006:134). Interestingly, very few of the staff identified themselves as working in partnership with parents, which suggests the 'alongsideness' advocated by Pound's (2003) is not in general operation currently.

6.2 Results from layer two – reflective conversations

This "discourse of deficiency" (Cottle and Alexander 2014: 639) appears to inform the results gathered from the first layer of this research. The results from the reflective conversations seem to outline the 'doxa' (Bourdieu 1977) of the family support team which are described as,

"a set of core values and discourses which a field articulates as its fundamental principles and which tend to be viewed as inherently true and necessary" (Webb et al 2002:xi)

Although these were reflective conversations, the staff offered little critique of their own or others attitudes and beliefs. These results are illuminating as they allow insight into the 'habitus' of the team and offer a more complex view of staff's attitudes to parents.

It was planned that staff were asked three questions (Appendix five) However, as the conversation developed, one initial question was asked and subsequent follow on questions used to clarify responses and introduce ideas which emerged from layer one data. During the analysis of the videos, notes were first made of the conversations and discussion. Generally these were recorded verbatim but were not arranged formally, so were not a transcript. From these notes, broad issues within the discussion were identified. This data was synthesised and sent to the participants for member checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Staff offered no specific feedback. The discussion themes were sorted into larger main groups. Five overarching themes emerged which I labelled: Change, The Expression of Nurture, Age, Reciprocity and Creating and Maintaining Boundaries

6.2.1 Change

All the staff who took part in the times of reflections were firm in the belief that every parent has the ability to change and were open about how motivating being able to see the changes were. It was agreed that parents needed to want to change and the staff all identified themselves as agents of change, and saw this as a fundamental element of their work.

During the conversation where staff were discussing change, participant J talked about her own experiences. She shared with the group about her childhood which she described as living in a dirty household which meant that she smelt. Not only was she teased but when she went to university she did not know how to do washing in a washing machine, how to wash up or change a bin. J spoke about how people often take things for granted and that it is genuinely possible to not know certain things. She said that at first, when she tried to wash up, it would make the dishes ten times dirtier. Describing how she learnt from the other people she lived with, J was very clear that not only is change a process but that parents may genuinely not know any different, inferring that parents should not be judged or blamed.

All the participants identified themselves as agents of change. The most striking description of this was from D who spoke of belonging to the Brahmin caste in India and coming to the understanding that the Untouchables were people too. She told the group how she chose to rebel against the dominant view at the time, and began to work to support the parents of children in a government school who were unable to sign their name. D felt that it was vital to believe that there was always potential for change. The team began to talk about working with Child protection cases. When D was asked by a colleague how she remained motivated during cases like this she spoke about change saying,

“I think there is potential, if people are abusing their children, they can stop abusing their children.... When that belief goes, then the judgemental attitude comes in... When you don't believe in people then you start judging them; well they are not going to change are they, they are going to stay like this” (D, reflective conversation: 13.4.15)

F also talked about being motivated to change. She described growing up on a tough council estate, but both her parents were social workers which meant she learnt from a young age that,

“Everyone is human, we all make mistakes, we all learn from mistakes; we are all ultimately the same, it's just we haven't all been given the same opportunities. I grew up in a bad place but had parents who gave me opportunities” (F, reflective conversation: 22.4.15)

Any notion of change will inevitably rest on an assumption that change is needed. In the case of the family support team, there seems an unspoken assumption that parents need to change in order to do better or be better for their children. For staff to view themselves as agents of change, again there is possibly an unconscious belief that parents are powerless to change without help, which potentially has its roots in a therapeutic model of change where clients bring their willingness to change and are supported in the change process (Prochaska and Di Clemente 1982). Whilst much of this may feel valid for those working on a daily basis with families embroiled in domestically violent relationships or where children are subject to a child protection plan-when considering parents from a partnership model, it is hard to reconcile these unspoken assumptions about parents to the pedagogical understanding of parents as a child's first educator. These assumptions seem to create a power imbalance in favour of the practitioner. It would seem then that the conclusions of both Simpson (2013) and Cottle (2011) that staff can be influenced by the current political climate, may be relevant here. Although the staff all spoke with genuine compassion about parents, it could be argued that this drive for change could have been influenced by the Government's narrative in relation to "troubled families." (2011) where those parents and children who may have experienced abuse, mental health problems, live within dysfunctional families or have been looked after by the local authority (Casey 2012) are described as, "both troubled and causing trouble" who need to change, "for their own good, and the good of their communities" (Pickles 2011).

6.2.2 The Expression of Nurture

In spite of this, what was extremely evident in the reflective conversations was the positive regard with which all parents were held. It was clear that the staff perceived their work with parents in light of Roger's (1967) definition of a helping relationship,

"in which at one of the parties has the intent of promoting the growth, development, maturity, improved functioning, improved coping with life of the other" (Roger 1967:39)

In addition to this positive regard, staff also expressed very deep affirmative nurturing attitudes to parents, verbalising obvious concern and care for both the parents and children's life chances. Whilst examining the map of positionality, (fig 3) I became concerned that so many of the staff positioned themselves in a helping

role, in regards to parents, alluding to an underlying belief parents were in *need of* help. Noddings' (1984) discussion about care and the ethics of care has been helpful in framing the staff responses. She describes how care is concerned about 'action' (1984:10), 'engrossment' (1984:12), the 'displacement of interest' and is relational in nature (1984:14).

Participant B shared about a time when she first started in the role when she was so moved by a family's poverty, that she gave them some money to buy food. Participant C also told of a time when a family had no milk so he went out and bought some for the family. Both staff knew that this was not technically "allowed" but they spoke of responding to the families with humanity.

Participants from Area 1 talked about having maternal and paternal feelings for the parents but Participant G described feeling protective towards both the children and parents. He said that some of his relationships with parents were more akin to the teacher –child relationship. One member of staff commented that in her view parents were often stuck at a developmental age of 8 or 9. What was illuminating here was not necessarily the view expressed but that no-one challenged this assumption. Although some of the staff were more comfortable to talk about their relationship with parents in terms of 'professional friend' with less implied intimacy, what was clear was the warm attitude expressed, for example E described how she purposely made parents a hot drink during one group so that they could experience what it felt like to be nurtured and cared for. Both Noddings (1984) and Rogers (1967:50) are clear that the attitude of the helping person was vital in the relationship being positive and one that promoted growth.

"This attitude of warm acceptance and trust is important in all caring relationships. We are primarily interested in parent –child and teacher – student relationships, but it is clear that caring is completed in all relationships through the apprehension of caring by the cared for. When this attitude is missed, the one who is the object of caretaking feels like an object. He is being treated, handled by formula. When it is present and recognised, the natural effectance motivation is enhanced." (Noddings (1984:65)

From staff responses, it is clear that nurture and the practical outworking of care are important to the team, both as motivators and relationally. If care is relational in

nature (Noddings 1984:14) these findings suggest the staff understand the invested nature of a caring relationship with parents, so although there appear to be assumptions held about parents' need to change, this can be offset by the energy and warmth of staff relationships. Brooker (2010) discusses the balance of power within practitioner and parent relationships within a context of care, which is complex. The importance of maintaining an equity of power within the service between parents and staff in order to fully promote authentic parent partnership and thus support parents as their child's first educator, cannot be over stated. Slote (2007) further develops Noddings' (1984) ideas around the ethics of care and empathy. His work highlights the need for an ethical approach, not only within the personal relationships but also organisationally to ensure respect for those being cared for, a commitment to their emerging autonomy is uppermost and that the organisation recognises the need to maintain a healthy power balance, protecting the cared-for who inevitably are in a more vulnerable position.

6.2.3 Age

When considering staff perceptions of parents, the age of the staff member appears to be a significant factor. The predominant feeling amongst staff in Area One was that they felt either maternal or paternal towards the parents. Participant A talked about being like 'Rent-a-Granny in the cupboard.' She very much defined her role as a caring older woman, who had a long life view which enabled her to bring a wealth of experience to her work with the families. During the second reflective conversation I asked the staff about their ages in relation to their perspective of the parents and about parental feelings associated with this. J talked about the difficulty of being younger than some of the parents. She reflected about how hard the role was before she had her own child. L described how she worked with families and tried to act as a role model for parents who maybe always spoke negatively about their children because they knew no different. When J was asked how she positioned herself in regards to the parents she admitted that she often changed how she was according to the parent's age in relation to her own age.

Some, but not all, the staff admitted to relating to parents in a parental or protective way. The implication is that parents are placed in the child role. (Berne 1964) This was highlighted by one staff member's remark that most parent's development was arrested at about eight or nine years old. Using Berne's model of transactional

analysis (1964) when considering parental partnership is helpful. Ideally, even for those parents who are in a vulnerable position, the optimum relational transaction should occur between adults, as equals. For staff that are either older or younger than the parents, this seems to present a problem. When parents are forced to occupy the role of 'child,' respect, autonomy and agency are denied them – equally when staff feel intimidated by their own youth, parents do not gain the benefit of professional advice and support. The impact these attitudes might have on the service is potentially fairly damaging. For parents to be viewed in a childlike role may breed a level of dependency, which could limit their empowerment and be less than aspirational.

6.2.4 Reciprocity and Creating and Maintaining Boundaries

As previously discussed, relational caring is important to the family support team in their relationships with parents. During the first reflective conversation, staff were more comfortable in describing the relationships they have with parents as reciprocal. They described how fulfilling their work was and the joy experienced when things went well. The second group described the similar feelings but were less overt in their language and descriptions. F talked about how she enjoyed the challenge of supporting families who did not want to engage and described this in terms of professional purpose and interest.

However, she was very clear about the need for maintaining professional distance whilst being human and caring.

"I make it quite personal, quite warm and friendly whilst making it clear..... but we are not really friends. I'm here to help you. I will do everything I can to help you; if you will work with me, I will be there for you... but we are not friends." (F, reflective conversation: 22.4.15)

The map of positionality (fig 3) shows that 91% of staff position themselves within the bounded professional area. This was expressed through the first two layers of data collection, by staff demonstrating an understanding of the need to maintain professional distance from parents. Abbott (1988:36) describes professionalism as the assigning of human problems to experts. The result of staff defining their relationships with parents thus, distance is inevitably created and with distance, however necessary to manage the emotional impact of challenging work, issues of

power and equity are brought to the fore. Brooker (2010) points out that the traditional understanding of the practitioner as 'expert' (2010: 184) is potentially flawed and that the relationship with parents is far more complex. She suggests that these relationships need to be re-defined and considered in terms of "attentiveness, responsiveness and thoughtful consideration between caregiver and cared-for" (2010:194)

6.3 The results from layer three –scoping exercise

During the layer three scoping exercise, data was collected from five sources: the Children Centre Child Care and Development standards, the Partnership with Parents and Carers policy, the Service Delivery standards of the Children Centre, the local authority Early Childhood strategy 2011-14 and the local authority Children and Young People's plan from clinical commissioning group 2014-2017. The results will be presented in two parts, firstly the Children Centre policies and standards and secondly the local authority papers. Two broad themes have been identified which include 'the question of power' and the 'we know best' attitude which will then be discussed.

6.3.1 The Children Centre documents

Each document was examined and every reference to parents was noted and categorised. The results were synthesised (Appendix six). From the synthesised results, broad themes emerged which suggested the organisational attitude to parents and broadly identified the priorities of the service as: support for parent and/or child, improving children's outcomes, providing better access to services and offering advice for parents so they can understand their child's needs and development more fully.

In order to consider an organisational stance, it is necessary to consider implicit meaning, which by its very nature, can only be surmised (Schein 1992). However if the following implicit beliefs hold any truth, much can be understood about the Children Centre's attitudes about parents as their child's first educator, as in table 1, below.

Table 1. Common Beliefs and Implicit Themes

	Common theme identified	Potential implicit belief held
1	Support for parent and/or child	<i>Parents lack information and would benefit from more.</i>
2	Improving children's outcomes	<i>Children's may be at risk of not meeting their outcomes.</i>
3	Better access to services	<i>Parents may find it hard to access services.</i>
4	Offering advice for parents so they can understand their child's needs and development more fully.	<i>Parents may need support in understanding their child's needs and development. Staff can offer advice.</i>

6.3.2 The Local Authority Papers

During the examination of the local authority documents, overarching themes were harder to identify, but the implicit values enshrined in the document were similar to those identified in the Children Centre delivery standards and policies.

The transmission of knowledge and supporting parental access to services were highlighted, which again suggests an assumption that parents lack knowledge about children's development and that vulnerable parents struggle to access services. Parents are described as partners but the strategy clearly states that simple language must be used with parents, which implies that either professional language will act as a barrier for parents or there is a belief that parents do not have the capacity to understand. Parenting is promoted but described only in terms of attachment, although Home Learning Environments are mentioned with a specific focus on speech and language development. Parent Forums are included in the strategic structure so that it appears parent consultation is important but the model remains a pyramid, with the parents very clearly near the bottom.

The Early Childhood Strategy document (2011-14) has raised the most questions about the local authority's view of parents as their child's first educator. There appear to be huge assumptions made about parent's capacity, a "we know best" approach and although parents are described as partners, little actual opportunity

exists for parents to participate and shape the service-which is supposedly for them and their children.

The Children and Young People's plan from clinical commissioning group 2014-2017 offered no mention of the role of parents as a child's first educator or of parents in any capacity. Understandably, it is concerned with the commissioning of local authority services first and foremost but was included as the most recent publically available document concerned with children's outcomes.

The scrutiny of the Children Centre delivery standards and policies, and the local authority papers, has raised two issues which can be described as: the question of power and the 'we know best' attitude.

6.3.3 The Question of Power

Throughout the data collection in the third tier, parents are often described as partners. Within the Childcare and Development Standards there seems to be a genuine commitment to work with parents as partners, as they support their child's learning. 46% of the references made to parents are concerned with parents being partners and 17% of the references allude to parent's being a vital resource. However, these standards are linked directly to the Children Centre nursery rather than the family support team or the service they provide, so the results are less applicable.

Although elsewhere parents are referred to as partners, there is little information about what this actually means in practice. Equally, parent forums are included in the structure of the Early Childhood strategy, which would suggest a partnership approach, but the model remains a pyramid with the forums at the bottom. It therefore would be reasonable to assume that the power was generally located at the top of the pyramid; giving little or no actual power to change or influence decisions to parents. Writing about the work of Bourdieu, Webb et al (2002) comment, "The amount of power a person has within a field depends on that's person's position within the field" (2002:23). The position occupied by parents, in light of this strategy paper, is one of little power. It could be concluded that the only power parents actually hold is the power to disengage when the service isn't statutory, therefore becoming the "hard to reach".

This misnomer points to the phenomena observed by Argyris and Schon (1974) of espoused belief and action being held in tension. The policy makers espoused belief is that professionals and parents should work together in partnership, but the practical outworking of this is diluted by structural, cultural and historic practices which are potentially so embedded in the working culture they are unseen and unacknowledged; part of the organisations micro and macro culture (Gioia 2013). This dissonance has caused me difficulties throughout the data collection process, as outlined by Box 3.

“This is really difficult for me because I believe that ‘knowledge is power’ and as a teacher I often operate within a model which believes about transferring knowledge in one form or another. If I believe that ‘knowledge is power’ and that parents are their child’s first educator but also recognise the experienced truth that many parents do not understand how children learn or how to develop their child’s learning capacity – how does this all fit? More importantly, how can we as service providers remain respectful or parents and humble in our civic role?”
(Gaywood Reflective Journal: 12.4.15)

In my analysis, I perceive echoes of Friere’s (1970) banking concept of education where the teacher is the source of all knowledge and the students merely receptacles; but in this case the staff and the local authority hold the balance of power, whilst the parents merely receive. How conscious people are of the situation is questionable, but whether conscious or unconscious, Friere is strong in his criticism and clear that the banking system,

“attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power” (1970:58)

Whilst I remain confident that my colleagues within the Children Centres and policy makers in the local authority definitely are motivated by compassion and want to “help” parent’s as their child’s first educator, Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of participation suggests that this alone does not promote true participation, nor attribute any real power. During the scoping exercise, there was much evidence to suggest that sharing information and consulting with parents were important. However, using Arnstein’s theory (1969) this is only representative of tokenistic participation. For a

citizen, in this case a parent, to hold any relevant amount of power, they need to engage fully as partners.

6.3.4 'We know best' attitude

Both staff and the policies within the Children Centre refer to parents as partners, and although the cultural picture of the family support team is complex, it cannot be ignored that there seems to be an underlying attitude amongst the staff, which is clearly reflected by the results of the layer three scoping exercise, that we as the professionals know best. (Booker 2010) If we believe that as partners we relate as equals with parents, then there is an uncomfortableness with staff positioned as experts and parents as mere recipients of knowledge, somehow reducing parents and their value as their child's first educator (Friere, 1970). Reflecting about a recent rainy farm trip, reminded me of the pervasive power this attitude can hold.

“Three of the parents decided to return to the coach as they felt it was too cold and wet to continue. Those children remained on the coach for the duration of the trip. I found it hard to not feel angry with the parents for not allowing their children to experience a rainy day on a real working farm. On reflection, my irritation with them was based on my value that children should experience adverse weather conditions and that it is ‘good’ for them to spend time in rural settings. Culturally I recognise the gulf between us. What is concerning is not that I believe I am right but that my attitudes and deeply held beliefs about the outdoors could easily lead me to feel that ‘I know best’ and with that feeling I could and did form a judgement about the parents. It is a sharp descent into viewing the parents as deficient because they did not comply with my beliefs. This is rather concerning and it leads me to wonder whether it is incidents like this, which have a tendency to shape our attitudes. The moral high ground feels quite comfortable but unfortunately fails to give honour or respect for those parents experiences that are different from mine. (Gaywood Reflective Journal: 23.5.15)

What was surprising for me was how easily I moved my stance. Theoretically I am committed to working with parents as partners, however one incident in practice very easily threw my position and unwittingly I soon occupied the role of ‘knowing best.’ Not dissimilar to Wilderspin (1824), this happened quickly and had I not been occupied with this piece of research, it is doubtful I would have even questioned my

feelings and motives. It is easy to discern that the culture of perceiving parents as deficient and that as a professional 'I know best' is deeply engrained in our service.

7. Summary of findings

This study has provided three layers of rich data. The aim was to investigate the family support team's attitudes and perceptions of parents as a young child's first educator. Early on in the research process, the focus seemed to shift from parents as first educators to staff's general perception of parents as a whole. Drawing together the strands of all the layers, two areas have been identified which need to be considered when determining future praxis: The culture of seeing parents as deficient and parents as participants not patients.

7.1 The culture of seeing the parents as deficient

All three layers of this research indicate that parents are perceived as deficient in some way. I have used my own reflections to show how endemic and deep-rooted this attitude is in the culture of Children Centres, and how easy it is to buy in to the notion that we as professionals are the experts who know best. However, the issue is far more composite. During the reflective conversations, staff offered a strong defence of the parents and families with whom they work. A number described their irritation when people labelled and stereotyped families with little or no knowledge of their circumstances. Although A felt that some parents' developments had been arrested at about eight or nine years of age, her other comments made clear that she did not whole-heartedly believe in a parental deficiency model.

"It's quite tragic really, isn't it, when you think, just from where you are born and things that happen to families, that some people can be completely disenfranchised from all that life has to offer or all that you could have access to if you decide to pick things up and run with them." (A, 13.4.15)

The vast majority of the staff identified themselves as helpers and saw their role very much as agents of change, supporting parents who needed to change. Additionally, a number of staff identified strongly with parents and expressed non-judgemental compassion that suggests this vilification of families is not shared by the family support team. Many parents who are referred to Children Centres *are* in need of support but if whilst receiving support there is a level of blame or feelings of deficiency, this will inevitably undermine the relationships and work of the family

support team. It is likely that staff are experiencing the contradictory nature of espoused beliefs (Argyris and Schon 1974), and would benefit from on-going professional development and more time to reflect together as peers as advocated by Pedro, Miller and Bray (2012) and Greenfield (2011).

7.2 Parents as participants not patients

At the outset of this study, it was made clear that its purpose was ultimately to identify next steps for the service's work with parents, with a view to improve our ability to support parents as their child's first educator and promote a more empowered participatory model. Shier's (2010) highlights the difficulties that now face the family support team as they take up this challenge,

"Practitioners who have analysed how these tensions affect their current practice recognise that it is rarely viable to make a simple choice between one side or the other... For most, however, the challenge is to navigate the tensions, steering a path around the constraints imposed by different social, organisational and political contexts, with their sights firmly set on a more effective empowering practice that resonates with their personal beliefs and values" (Shier, 2010:35)

In order to use these findings to develop praxis, both ethically and practically, it will be important to understand the tensions and constraints currently imposed on the service. For although currently it seems that staff do not adhere to the troubled families agenda (2011, 2013), parents are nevertheless primarily viewed as wanting or inadequate, with staff proffering help and support. It therefore seems important to re-write the current narrative where families are seen implicitly as helpless and in need of the expertise of staff. This could be done utilising the work of Levitas et al (2007) who use the Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix to identify different aspects of exclusion, and then consider ways to remove the barriers that exclude. The excluded people are not blamed or described in a negative way. By cognitively and consciously addressing issues of exclusion not only would staff be identified as enablers rather than experts, but parents would also be seen as excluded rather than deficient.

The map of positionality suggests that few staff locate themselves alongside parents as partners, offering support as an equal. Although, even within the timeframe of the research piece, new practice is emerging where parents are welcomed as peer

partners as a service delivery strategy. This shift in emphasis needs to expand. Pound's (2003) epistemology of alongsideness and the vertical frame of interaction advocated by Alasuutari (2010) offer a new model to staff, where professional and parent are positioned alongside one another, in relationship.

The staff's expressions of care and concern should not be minimised as they are a vital motivation in people's work. To channel these feelings so that parents are not seen as patients but rather supported to become included into society is the challenge of this paper. Slote (2007) is clear that organisations can and should be ethically sound when considering care and empathy, so that the wellbeing and autonomy of those who are cared-for remains central. It would be valuable for the staff team to spend time reflecting and thinking about our ethical responsibility to the families we work with; therefore my proposal is to create a Children Centre ethical code, which considers issues about caring ethically, power and empowerment, autonomy for parents and transparency.

Although this piece of research is very specific in both time and field, the findings have relevance for other colleagues working with vulnerable children and families. This study have unearthed a dichotomy within the Children Centre service: on one hand staff face the daily challenge of working with families whose lives are disrupted by different elements of social exclusion and on the other, there is a strong national narrative which apportion blame and describes families as deficient. Equally, within the service, there are many 'professionals' who see themselves as experts, offering advice and support to parents who lack knowledge, both of which create a huge power imbalance weighted against parents. However, the reality is that practitioners often *do* have knowledge that would be helpful for parents. At the same time, the expected ideal is that parents and practitioners work as equals in partnership, a relationship that needs to be balanced in terms of power and participation. Therefore there is a disconnect between the ideal and the practical reality of the service, suggesting much work still needs to be undertaken to recalibrate the power imbalance currently in existence.

8. Final reflections

Whilst with my research peers, (26.6.15) I described an interaction at work which prompted a series of reflections. The group members felt very strongly that this ought to be included in this study. From my point of view, I had 'finished' gathering data. Through our subsequent discussion I realised that although I had found out much about the culture and attitude of both the family support team, and I had begun to identify ways to promote change, for example to develop an ethical code around empathetic caring (Noddings, 1984, Slote 2007) and also to provide more time for staff to reflect (Greenfield 2011), there was still room for further identification to answer my original question of: What is my role in supporting staff to support parents to be confident, empowered first educators of their children? Therefore I recorded the interaction with a staff member in my reflective journal,

"H came to see me because she was very worried as she did not think that a parent she was working with had the capacity to understand the concepts she needed to make an initial assessment of her child's lifelong learning skills. As we talked about it, she mentioned that the parent was a drug user and seemed to understand very little. H also told me that the parent was dyslexic. The concepts H wanted the parent to understand was that of: Rarely, Sometimes, Often and Consistently (Bertram and Pascal 20??) I explained that the best way for a person to learn a concept is for them to understand it from their own perspective, and as a dyslexic she may need visual images to support this. I coached H and explained how to introduce this to the parent by supporting her to think of things she would do Rarely, Sometimes, Often or Consistently, then choosing images which were meaningful for her. H was unsure that this would work, but agreed to try it the following visit. It was a success! H reported that the parent fully understood and was able to begin to engage in understanding her child's learning. I was extremely excited about such a success -the empowering of a parent to become so engaged in their child's learning. (Gaywood Reflective Journal 24.6.15)

This incident and reflection seems to embody the importance of this research and has assisted me in clarifying my role as the educational lead in the organisation. I set out to investigate staff perceptions of parents as a child's first educator, with a view to use the findings to inform my own practice and provide guidance in the development of the service. The findings have indicated that the situation is multi-

faceted and there is a culture within which the family support team operates, both locally and nationally, that requires parents to be supported, but needs staff to relate as a partner. This inequality of power seems to create a dissonance with staff who often demonstrate a lack of congruence where they do or say one thing but believe another: A state many seem unaware of.

To ensure that this piece is fully relevant and grounded in action (praxis) I have used these findings to identify specific ways to address this problematic culture of seeing parents as deficient, to promote an ethos where parents are treated as participants not patients and develop ways for staff to be better equipped to support parents to become confident and effective first educators of their children and thus improve their long term outcomes.

8.1 Recommendations for practice.

- a) Use team meetings to revise the current narrative where families are seen implicitly as helpless, in need of the expertise of staff
- b) Support staff to identify different aspects of exclusion and then consider ways to remove the barriers that exclude -using the social matrix Levitas et al (2007)
- c) Introduce Pound's (2003) epistemology of alonsidness to staff so that they have an opportunity to re-align their relationship to parents.
- d) Work with the whole team to collectively create a Children Centre ethical code, which considers issues about caring ethically, power and empowerment, autonomy for parents and transparency.
- e) Spend time with staff individually and in teams, supporting staff to increase their knowledge of andragogy so that their aspirations for parents are built on a model of co-constructed learning.
- f) Further develop the model of parents as peer partners that is currently emerging in practice.

Having made these recommendations for the family support team, it is worthy to note the outcome of a recent team meeting when the team were asked, "Where do we go from here?", in terms of developing our work with parents as their child's first educator. The meeting demonstrates the change in the team's understanding of their role and add to the continuing development of praxis. They all agreed that the

parental engagement needed to be improved and some were very vocal about this being in genuine partnership, which led to issues of power being discussed. H talked about using images to support a parent's conceptual understanding (see section 8) so I was able to share about different models of learning, the co-constructed view as opposed to the empty vessel. D shared how the way she is now talking to parents about their children's learning feels more authentic and less like a "tick box" (D. Team meeting. 15.7.15). She told her peers that as a result she has found that parents are open about their children's learning. Another staff member talked about the need to promote parental aspiration for their children and to be aspirational for parents.

9. Conclusion

It is hard to conclude this paper because the very nature of the study is praxeological and is concerned with the ongoing development of practice. The intention was to carry out a highly ethical, participatory piece of research within a real world context. Whilst I am confident the process remained rigorously ethical, how invested the staff were in this study is questionable. My assumption is that this is due to the changes within the service, but without undertaking another piece of research, it is difficult to assess. Nevertheless, the impact of the research is palpable. I feel more focused and sure of my role, and staff understanding about the importance of parents as a child's first educator appears to have increased.

In section 4.4, a number of questions were outlined which I hoped to find the answer to. Unfortunately this piece of research has not been able to answer all those original questions. What this paper has failed to do is consider staff understanding of the Home Learning Environment and its significance, primarily because during the data collection it was not highlighted by staff and therefore reduced in importance as the research developed. This may well be a further piece of research to be undertaken in the future. In spite of this, my intention was also to find out the current situation amongst the staff team in regards to their expectations and perceptions of parent's as their child's first educators. I intended to examine the attitudes and values staff bring to their work with parents and examine the implicit and explicit values of the local authority regarding parents as a young child's first educator. All of which can be demonstrated through the results and analysis in this paper. I have discovered that

staff are caring and passionate but are influenced by not only the current political narrative but also historical views of parents that have subversively infiltrated the culture of Children Centre services. Staff work ably and well with this contradiction but would benefit from more time to reflect and consider issues of power, empowerment and their role as part of this.

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APPENDICES

Appendix One

Dear all,

As some of you may or may not be aware, I am currently undertaking a piece of research in order to complete my masters.

I am keen for this research to help develop our service and be useful to us all. I also would like this research to be something that the whole team can shape and input into so that it is 'our' piece of work. I intend to avoid being an outsider looking in but rather I will be a co-participant. I will write up the findings but hope to share those with those who have taken part so we can reflect together what they may mean and how it might impact what we do next.

I am interested in staff relationships with parents and I want to explore this. My intention is to gather data to find out our current position rather than bring a pre-judged view.

My research title is:

An exploration into staff perspectives of parents as young children's first educators: case studies of a family support team

I have designed three layers to this research.

1. A questionnaire
2. A reflective group session (as part of the current meeting schedules)
3. A scope of BANES policies, documents and publically available material.

I will anonymise everything so that each participant will be unidentifiable and anything said during the course of this research will remain as part of the research. I will suspend my management responsibilities and the confines of my role whilst conducting the research, so staff can speak freely without fear of recriminations. I will not discuss any individuals responses with other colleagues either during or after the research.

I am hoping to video the reflective group session, however I will not be creating a transcript of the reflection time and once I have made notes to elicit the relevant data I will delete any record. In addition, following the analysis of the questionnaires, these too will be destroyed.

PLEASE NOTE: (If you agree to be part of this research project it is not obligatory to join a reflective session and be video-ed).

I have included Senior Early Years practitioners amongst the potential participants because they also work closely with parent.

Please can you let me know by email if you are happy to be part of this piece of research and I will send you a questionnaire to complete,

Many thanks,

Donna Gaywood

Appendix Two

Research questionnaire January 2015

Name (optional).....

Current role within Children Centre services.....

Professional background (eg Early Years, Social work, Childminder, Health etc)

Qualifications:

How would you describe your role?

How would you describe your relationship with the parents you work with?

What skills do you think you need to make a successful relationship with parents.

How confident do you feel to talk parents about children's learning at home?

Not confident *Somewhat confident* *Confident* *Very confident*

In terms of priorities in your work how do you consider children's learning and development?

Low priority *Medium priority* *High priority* *Top priority*

What do you think either supports or disrupts your relationship with a parent?

Any further comments?

Would you be happy to be part of a follow up discussion group? YES/ NO

Appendix Three

A reflective session (Tier two data collection)

Learning outcome:

For staff to be given the opportunity to think about their motivations and values in respect to their work with parent's as a child's first educator and as a group to engage in a self-reflective and critical way, in order to improve and inform everyday practice.

Introduction:

1. Share learning outcome
2. Explain about research project (share letter again) – negotiate if necessary. But also, it is an important piece of self-reflective practice for staff
3. Discuss videoing (note: if not able to video then record responses using a flipchart)
4. Be clear the importance of capturing everyone's voice.
5. Ground rules

Honesty

No judgement

THREE QUESTIONS

A. What motivated you to start to work with children and parents?

Discuss in twos/threes then each take a turn to talk. (Video the final talk of each)

B. Write down three things that are most important to you in your work with parents

Discuss in twos/threes.

Are there any shared values? What are the similarities/ differences

Report back to the wider group. (Video the reporting)

C. What would help you improve your relationships with parents?

Discuss in twos/threes. Make a list.

One person report back to the wider group (Video the reporting)

Appendix Four**Appendix four****Initial synthesis of data for layer one of research- questionnaire****(prepared for participant checking)****Data collection time table**

The data was collected between 21.1.15 – 26.2.15

Initially 23 staff were emailed a letter explaining the ethical issues, the outline of the research project and an invitation to take part. For those who responded, a questionnaire was emailed for them to fill in.

Response was slow, so on the advice of an outreach worker a reminder email was sent on 10.2.15

23.2.15 staff in one team were reminded about the questionnaires in a team meeting.

One staff member left during this time, so there was a total of 22 respondents.

50% sent their questionnaires back.

Demographic breakdown of respondents

Highest Early Years Qualification Held		
NVQ 3 or equivalent	Foundation Degree	Degree
27%	18%	55%

Current contract status	
Permanent	Temporary
64%	36%

Gender	
Male	Female
9%	91%

Areas of work		
Area one	Area two	Area three
64%	9%	27%

Key:

Area one – nearer to the city centre, more urban and diverse communities.

Area two – semi rural and rurally isolated communities. Little diversity.

Area three – ex mining community in a small town set in rural surroundings with poor links to the city.

Feelings of confidence and priorities

How confident do you feel to talk parents about children's learning at home?			
Not confident	Somewhat confident	Confident	Very confident
		55%	45%

In terms of priorities in your work how do you consider children's learning and development?			
Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	Top priority
		27%	73%

Description of relationship with parents.

There were three broad themes which characterised the way staff described their relationships with parents:

- Friendly/ professional working relationship
- Transparent (open and honest)
- Trusting

Supportive and disrupted elements in this relationship

45% staff did not comment about what was *supportive* for the relationship and there were no clear or obvious themes in the responses of the 55% who did.

However, the disruptive elements of the staff/parent relationship were located clearly in three areas

- The behaviour or attitudes of the parents themselves (82%)

- Requirements of the job (which included lack of time, high levels of recording, large case loads) (55%)
- Difficulty working with other professionals (36%)

Skills cited as necessary to make a successful relationship

Eight main skills were considered helpful in making successful relationships with parents:

Empathy	55% of the staff considered this to be important
Understanding	55%
Listening	45%
Honesty	45%
Being non-judgemental	27%
Having time	18%
Being respectful	18%
Establishing trust	9%

The positionality of the staff in regards to parents.

The responses of each staff member was analysed to ascertain any themes or similarities regarding how staff perceived their positionality. Three main positions were clear defined which included:

- The helper
- The boundaried professional
- The partner

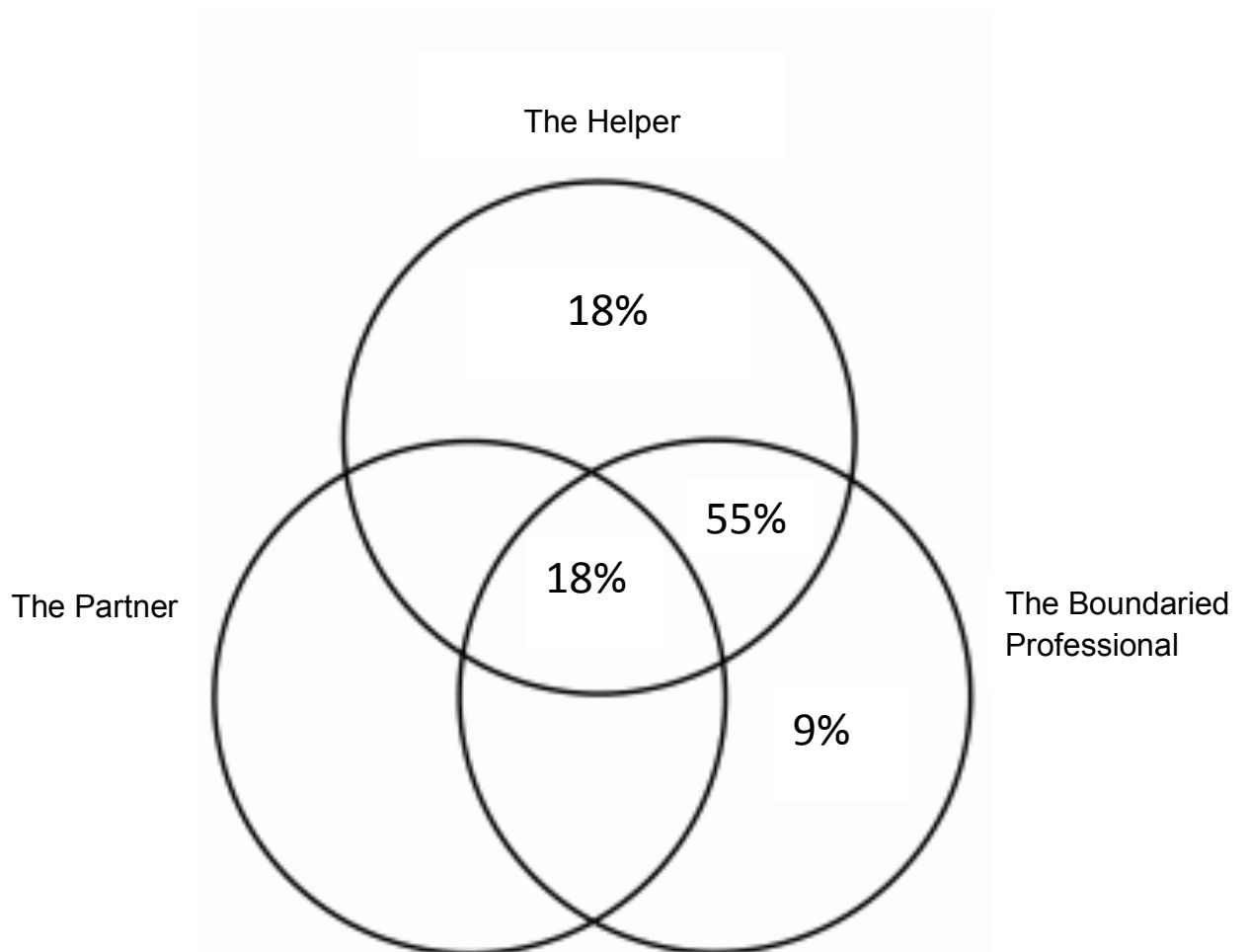
The helper is characterised by staff expressing care and understanding for parents with the offer of support. The helper feels empathy is important and describes the importance of giving parents a vision of what things could be like.

The boundaried professional recognises the working nature of the relationship with parents, understands their role and is clear about lines of responsibility. The boundaried professional is keen to have a transparent relationship with parents and feels that being trustworthy is important.

The partner expresses an overt sense of mutuality within the relationship and is clear that the relationship is a partnership of equals.

Map of positionality

Whilst the three areas of positionality were clear, the staff often located themselves in more than one area, at any one time.



Appendix Five

Initial synthesis of data for layer two – video of reflective session (x2) (prepared for participant checking)

Data collection time table

Reflective session 1 – Area one – 13.4.15

Reflective session 2 – Area three – 22.4.15

NOTE: a reflective session did not seem viable in Area two

- a) Only 9% of the respondents from layer one represented Area two
- b) A high number of staff have left or are leaving in Area two as a result of the public sector cuts leaving only two of the team in post on 1st June.
Understandably, the morale is very low and it seemed insensitive to ask the remaining staff to participate in the project.

The set-up

The reflective sessions were set up as part of the regular outreach team meeting. Senior managers were positive and allowed the researcher access to the field.

The ethics of the project (which all staff had received initially by email) were explained again and staff were re-assured that their confidentiality would be respected. Senior managers were asked to leave, so were not present during the reflective time. The researcher was clear about her role as a participant researcher and asked the initial question, then continued to facilitate the session; at times asking further questions for clarity or giving examples to illustrate a point. Each session very quickly became a conversation between the participants who also asked each other questions throughout.

Various themes arose from the first reflective conversation and the researcher chose to raise some of these with the second group (in Area three) to clarify and check the validity.

The participants

At the time of data collection, there was 20 staff still in post.

Of the 20 staff 50% took part in the reflective conversations.

60% of the participants in the second layer of research had also taken part in the first layer (questionnaire)

80% of participants were female

90% were White British

Only 30% had over 4 years' experience in the role.

However, this is fairly representative of the current staff demographic

Area one

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Length of experience in role
A	F	55-59+	White British	6 years
B	F	55-59+	White British	22 months
D	F	40+	Indian	7 years
C	M	40+	White British	6 months

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Length of experience in role
E	F	40+	White British	4 years
F	F	30+	White British	2 years
H	F	40+	White British	9 months
G	M	30+	White British	X
L	F	20+	White British	6 months
J	F	20+	White British	X

Area three

Extra questions asked by the participant researcher:

The initial question from the plan was asked in both sessions:

What motivated you to start work with children and parents?

As each conversation developed, the participant researcher asked further questions to clarify and delve more deeply into what was being said. These differed as the conversations developed differently. The reflective session in area three, was used by the participant researcher to check emerging themes from Area on.

.Area one

Follow up Q 1:

Staff were talking about seeing results

What do you mean by 'get results'?

Follow up Q 2:

What motivates you today?

Follow up Q 3:

How distant do the families feel to you. Can you identify with needing interventions?

DG explained about transactional analysis and that her interest was in the three states parent, child and adult.

Follow up Q 4:

How does this apply to your work with parents?

Staff discussed strong maternal feelings towards parents

Follow up Q 5:

To the male worker: *Do you have any paternal instincts that kick in?*

Do you feel paternalistic to the mothers or the children?

Follow up Q 6:

When relationships don't go well – what would help improve relationships?

Area three

Follow up Q 1:

What motivates you on a daily basis?

Follow up Q 2:

The last group seemed to say that the relationships with the parents were quite reciprocal, that the staff got something out of it. Is that your experience?

Follow up Q 3:

The last group described a strong maternal instinct, and the male worker had paternal feelings towards the children and sometimes to the parents. Is this what you are talking about?

Follow up Q 4:

A member of staff was talking about the need for professional distance.

Is that something you have learnt?

Follow up Q 5:

Discussing working with people who are older

How do you position yourself?

Follow up Q 6:

Does your background motivate you?

Follow up Q 7:

I'm interested in what drives us to do what we do?

Emerging themes in both meetings

1. Change

Staff as agents of change

The need for parents to want to change

Staff being motivated by changes they see

The belief that all have the ability to change

Passion for change

2. The expression of nurture

Care

Maternal/ paternal feelings

Positive regard for families

Protectiveness

Role modelling

3. Age

Ages of staff – the positives and negatives

Generational issues (specific to Area three)

4. Reciprocity

Personal fulfilment

Professional purpose and interest

5. Creating and Maintaining Boundaries

Professional distance

Responding with humanity

Appendix Six

Initial synthesis of data for layer three of research- scoping

PART 1 Children Centre policies and standards

Data collection time table

The data was collected between 12.3.15 – 19.3.15

In the reception of each children centre, there is a policies and standards folder which is available for all staff and parents to access. The folder was removed from one children centre reception in order to examine the policies and standards, to ascertain the children centre service attitude to parents as their child's first education.

The standards and policies are the same within Area one and Area two, but differ slightly in Area three.

This scoping is located in Area one and two.

Secondary check 18.5.15

It was deemed necessary to complete a secondary check because during the first scoping exercise it became apparent that the policies used had not been updated in line with the policies which were in operation. This was a logistical error due to the general disruption of the redundancies amongst senior staff. This was rectified and so a secondary check was made. The secondary check ensured the accuracy of the data gathering and also enabled further analysis of the data, to improve robustness. The policy folder used was also taken from Area one but from a smaller centre.

Demographic breakdown of standards and policies

Six main sections

- **Childcare and development standards**
- **Health and safety**
- **Partnership with parents and carers**
- **Safeguarding and code of conduct policy**
- **Service delivery standards**
- **Staff and centre users policy**

As with the first scope, three sections were considered as they seemed most relevant to the research.

- Childcare and development standards
- Children Centre policies
- Service delivery standards

	Name of the standard	No. of explicit references to parents	Positionality of parents
	Standard statement	0	parents described as visitors consultation with families
1	Childcare and quality standard	0	users of the service
2	Intimate care standard	4	Partnership with parents important with the parents leading on the routines for the child.
3	The EYFS* and ECM* Framework including Building Positive relationships and Self Esteem standard	5	Parent partnership Equality of power with parent's voice and input highlighted as important.
4	Behaviour standard	3	Staff act as role models to parents and children. Implicit value- we know best
5	Children with SEN standard	3	Partnership and support offered
6	Children in transition standard	4	Partnership characterised by strong communication
7	Key person and lead professional standard	6	Clear parent partnership of equality. A recognition that this relationship is on-going and needs to be built.
8	Play and learning standard	4	Parents to feel welcomed – as guests.
9	Outdoor play standard	2	Parents to feel welcomed – as guests.

*EYFS – Early Years Foundation Stage

*ECM –Every Child Matters

Children Centre policies			
	Name of the policy	No. of explicit references to parents	Positionality of parents
	Standard statement	3	Partnership Consultation Information
1	Partnership with parents and carers policy	10	'first and enduring educators' Support Information Home learning * Partnership
2	Arrears policy	0	whole policy addressed to parents
3	Consultation policy	1	Consultation Described as service users
4	Equality and diversity policy	4	Partnership
5	Roles and responsibilities policy	1	Information for parents
6	Applicability policy	1	Equality with staff, students, children and young people
7	Policy awareness	0	
8	Monitoring and enforcement	0	

Themes identified in the Child Care and Development standards and Partnership with parents and carers policy.

1. Partnership

Characterised by mutuality, respect and equal communication

2. Parents as a vital resource

Parents seen to take the lead in the relationship

3. Support offered

Implicit inference that parents may need support possibly 'we know best'/ staff as expert model.

4. Receivers of information

This is very different from the communication which characterises that parent partnership, the implicit inference is that staff hold knowledge which needs to be received by parents. Again, possibly the 'we know best'/ staff as expert value

5. Consultation

Implicit value is that parents views are important in decision making

NOTE:

- one reference to staff acting as a role model for parents. Implicit value 'We know best'/ staff as the expert model

-only one reference to home learning

Themes identified	Percentage of references
Partnership	46%
Parents as a vital resource	17%
Support offered	9%
Receivers of information	17%
Consultation	6%
*Home learning	2%
*Staff as role models	2%

The secondary check of the Service Delivery standards revealed a far more extensive set of standards and audit forms used in the Children Centre services. For the purposes of this research only the delivery standards were examined.

10 service delivery standards

- 1. Baby group Standard**
- 2. Briefing and debriefing Standard for Facilitators of all groups**
- 3. Children's group Standard**
- 4. Family Focus, Dad's group and other Targeted parent group**
- 5. Outreach visit (New Birth) standards**
- 6. Parent led group standard**
- 6. Playbuds standard**
- 7. First Assessment Visit for Outreach Staff Standard**
- 8. Rhyme time Standard**
- 9. Children's Centres Stakeholder Event Standard**
- 10. Stay and Play and Universal Groups Standard**

Nine common themes were identified within the Delivery standards. References were made throughout all the standards to each of these. A note was taken when a reference was made in each standard.

	Common theme identified	% of standards making explicit references to theme	Potential implicit belief held
1	Information about services or about child	45%	<i>Parents lack information and would benefit from more</i>
2	Support for parent and/or child	82%	<i>Parents may need support</i>
3	Identification of needs (parent or child)	36%	<i>Parents and children may have unidentified needs</i>
4	Strengthening of attachment	27%	<i>Attachment relationships are important, parents may have disrupted relationships</i>
5	Improving children's outcomes	73%	<i>Children's may be at risk of not meeting their outcomes</i>
6	Access to services	73%	<i>Parents may find it hard to access services</i>
7	Understanding child's needs and development/ Advice about child	73%	<i>Parents may need support in understanding their child's needs and development. Staff can offer advice</i>
8	Consultation about services	55%	<i>Parents should have a voice in the development of the services</i>
9	Parent partnership model	45%	<i>Parents are partners</i>

Based on the amount of standards which make reference to the themes identified, it can be concluded that the main focus of the Service Delivery standards are to provide:

- Support for parent and/or child
- Improve children's outcomes
- Better access to services
- Advice for parents so they can understand their child's needs and development more fully.

This study is concerned about the staff attitudes to parents as their child's first educator, and this third tier has been designed to offset staff attitudes by making an assessment of the organisational attitudes to parents. Implicit meaning, by its very

nature, can only be surmised however if the following implicit beliefs hold any truth, much can be ascertained about the Children Centre's attitudes about parents as their child's first educator.

Potential implicit beliefs held

- *Parents lack information and would benefit from more*
- *Children's may be at risk of not meeting their outcomes*
- *Parents may find it hard to access services*
- *Parents may need support in understanding their child's needs and development. Staff can offer advice*

Through the scope of the Children Centre service delivery standards and policies I have identified three broad themes. These are not wholly linked to parents as a child's first educator but represent a more generic stance in terms of the organisational attitude to parents:

SUPPORT FOR PARENTS- to increase their understanding of their child and therefore improve child's outcomes.

PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS- which includes information sharing and consultation

ENABLING PARENTS TO ACCESS SERVICES – this is underpinned by a belief that access to high quality provision will improve children's outcomes

Further thoughts and questions:

Is this a service delivery model where parents are seen as the client?

Is that inevitable particularly as the agenda is moving to a more targeted approach and the government's troubled families agenda?

Where does power lie in this model?

How does this model relate to the first two layers??

PART 2: Early childhood strategy 2011-14

Values:

- Transmission of knowledge (the assumption that parents lack knowledge about children's development)
- Access to services (the assumption that vulnerable parents struggle to access services)

- Parents described as partners (what does this actually mean)
- Parent Forums included in the strategic structure but the model remains a pyramid (where does the power lie?)
- Simple language needing to be used (assumption that language is a barrier for parents or that they won't be able to understand professional language?)
- Parenting seen as important but described only in terms of attachment.
- Home Learning Environments are mentioned (to promote speech and language)

Key theme:

POWER

- **Where does the power lie?**
- **Who holds the power?**
- **Have we as a service considered the balance of power?**

PART 3: Children and Young People's plan BANES clinical commissioning group 2014-2017

No real themes identified –

Service delivery model - with parents at one point described as a customer and "improving customer experience" (2014:8)

Early Help strategy – suggesting parents needing help

Three priorities:

Children and Young people are Safe

Children and Young people are Healthy

Children and Young people have Equal Life Chances

No explicit mention of parent's as a child's first educator.

"What we know now from evidence and research is that the earlier in a child's life that we identify and support both them and their families to reach their potential, the better their life chances and an ability to be socially mobile are" (2014:17)

Appendix Seven

Outline of research structure

Title of research

An exploration into staff perspectives of parents as young children's first educators: case studies of a family support team'

Research paradigm

This piece of research is qualitative in both nature and design, and is located within a praxeological paradigm (Pascal and Bertram 2012) It will be conducted in a real world context (Robson 2011) where I will be a participant researcher, collecting data from February 2015 to April 2015.

Brief description of research design

It is fundamentally relational in both design and purpose; therefore there is a greater urgency to ensure it is ethically robust from conception. I intend to occupy an aspirational ethical position and so remain ethically 'responsive, relational and reflexive' throughout. (Lahman et al 2010) This is a piece of layered research which will be an exploration of the current situation within which I work and lead. I will use a case study approach (Robson 2011) to collect and analyse data from the practitioners and the local authority. The design is flexible

Writing in the first person

The choice to utilise the first person narrative has been deliberate to not only engage readers outside the academic framework, but also to ensure that this research is useful for practice in the real world, recognising the importance of the reader as a contributor to the continuing praxis (Thody 2006:12) In addition, I am opting to use an alternative approach (Thody 2006:10) which acknowledges the subjective nature of the participants narratives. Primarily, this research is participatory and reflexive, so that those taking part will not just be subjects but their reflections and thoughts will be used to identify the team's next steps, to further develop partnerships with parents

Triangulation

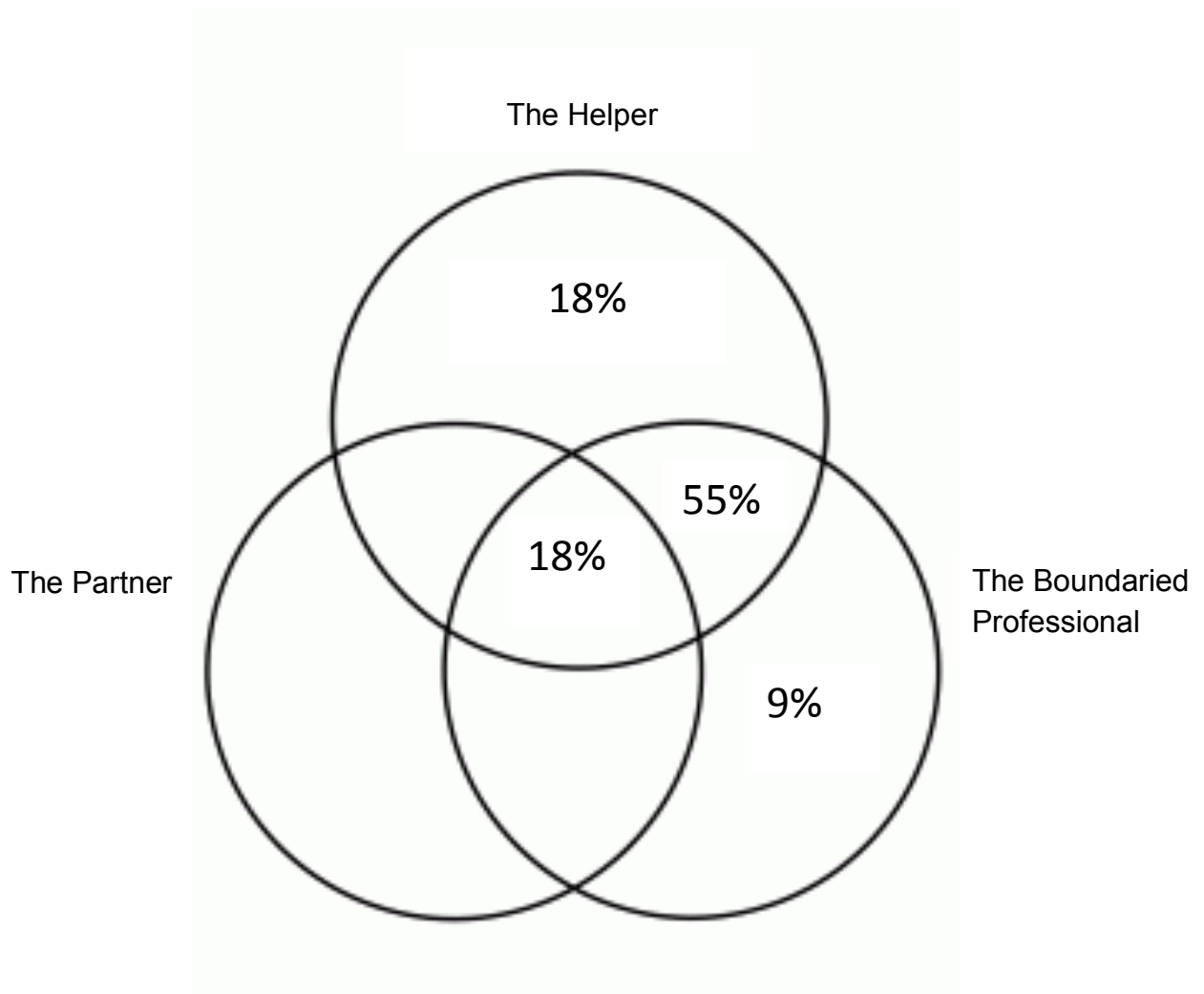
I propose to use three layers of research to form the initial triangulation. I intend to build further strength into the triangulation element of this research design, by using three separate methods to gather data. In addition a third element of triangulation has been added to this design. The participants in the research work within three Children Centre areas and therefore, assuming that there will be at least one person from each area, this will provide the peer triangulation. Staff experiences may differ because of team culture, the nature of the geographical area and the management

ethos within which they work, so having representatives from three teams, will provide extra strength.

Results of layer one

Map of positionality

Whilst the three areas of positionality were clear, the staff often located themselves in more than one area, at any one time.



91% of the staff located themselves within the helper domain, and although there were other permeations within this, the dominant view seems to be that the staff see themselves primarily as helpers. It could be concluded that if staff consider this an important part of their role then there is an underlying, unspoken belief about parents, namely that they are in need of help

Results from layer two

Emerging themes in both meetings

Change

- Staff as agents of change
- The need for parents to want to change
- Staff being motivated by changes they see
- The belief that all have the ability to change
- Passion for change

The expression of nurture

- Care
- Maternal/ paternal feelings
- Positive regard for families
- Protectiveness
- Role modelling

Age

- Ages of staff – the positives and negatives
- Generational issues (specific to Area three)

Reciprocity

- Personal fulfilment
- Professional purpose and interest

Creating and Maintaining Boundaries

- Professional distance
- Responding with humanity

Results from third layer

The primary purpose was to ascertain from the scoping exercise the attitude the organisation held of parents as first educators and to consider any similarities or differences with views held by staff. Throughout the exercise there seemed to be a similar approach to parents which broadly identified the priorities of the service as:

- support for parent and/or child,
- improving children's outcomes,
- providing better access to services
- offering advice for parents so they can understand their child's needs and development more fully.

Implicit meaning, by its very nature, can only be surmised however if the following implicit beliefs hold any truth, much can be ascertained about the Children Centre's attitudes about parents as their child's first educator.

Potential implicit beliefs held may include the assumption that:

- parents lack information and would benefit from more
- children may be at risk of not meeting their outcomes
- parents may find it hard to access services
- parents may need support in understanding their child's needs and development. Staff can offer advice.

Whilst many of these assumptions may well be grounded in experience and considered evidence, it does suggest that there is a common held belief that parents are in need of help.

The transmission of knowledge and supporting parental access to services were highlighted which suggests an assumption that parents lack knowledge about children's development and that vulnerable parents struggle to access services. Parents are described as partners but the strategy clearly states that simple language must be used with parents, which suggests that either professional language will act as a barrier for parents or that they do not have the capacity to understand. Parenting is promoted but described only in terms of attachment, although Home Learning Environments are mentioned with a specific focus on speech and language development. Parent Forums are included in the strategic structure so that it appears parent consultation is important but the model remains a pyramid, with the parents very clearly near the bottom.

This document more than the previous ones, has raised more questions about the local authority's view of parent's as their child's first educator. There appear to be

huge assumptions made about parent's capacity, a "we know best" approach and although parents are described as partners, little actual opportunity for parents to participate and shape the service which is supposedly for them and their children.

The most recent local authority paper which is authored by the clinical commissioning group offered no mention of the role of parents as a child's first educator or of parents in any capacity. Understandably, it is concerned with the commissioning of local authority services first and foremost but was included as the most recent publically available document concerned with children's outcomes.

The question of power

Parents are described as partners, but there is little to clarify or describe what this means in practice. Equally, parent forums are included in the structure of the strategy but the model remains a pyramid with the forums at the bottom, it therefore would be reasonable to assume that the power was generally located at the top of the pyramid; giving little or no actual power to change or influence decisions to parents.

The 'we know best' attitude

This 'we know best' attitude causes me concern but it seems so widely held in our culture at the Children Centre and within the local authority. Staff have exhibited high levels of care, commitment and compassion for parents, yet there is an undercurrent which cannot be ignored. However a reflection from a recent trip to the farm highlights my own struggles with this issue and demonstrates how pervasive it is.

"I have been thinking about the farm trip last week. It was raining heavily. All the parents had been pre-warned to ensure that their children needed waterproofs and wellies. They had been told that it was a working farm. Most of the children arrived to nursery inadequately prepared. We did our best and distributed the wellies and waterproofs we had. The first part of the farm trip was a walk. The grass in the field was long and was probably at waist to chest height for the children. We then went into a wood which was sheltered and was full of wild garlic. Three of the parents who were with us decided to leave the trip and return to the coach as they felt their children were too cold and too wet to continue. Those children remained on the coach for the duration of the trip. One boy came out to see some of the animals but the other three children did not. They did not join us in the barn for lunch or for the parachute games, nor did they come along to collect eggs in the chicken coop when it stopped raining. I must admit that I found it hard to not feel angry with the parents for not allowing their children to experience a rainy day and a real working farm. I have thought a lot about this subsequently. I recognise that some of the parents possibly may never have been to a farm before and therefore may have not fully understood the impact of being on a farm on a rainy day. My irritation with them was based on my value that children should experience adverse weather conditions and that it is 'good' for them to spend time in rural settings. Culturally I recognise the gulf

between us. What is concerning is not that I believe I am right but that my attitudes and deeply held beliefs about the outdoors could easily lead me to feel that 'I know best' and with that feeling I could and did form a judgement about the parents. It seems like this could be a sharp descent into viewing the parents as deficient because they did not comply with my beliefs. This is rather concerning and it leads me to wonder whether it is incidents like this, which have a tendency to shape our service and government policy. The moral high ground feels quite comfortable but unfortunately fails to give honour or respect for those parents experiences that are different from mine. (Reflective journal: 23.5.15)

The troubled families agenda/ culture of seeing the parents as deficient

To what extent the Children Centre service is being shaped by the government's troubled families agenda is unclear, however as Children Centres are being tasked to create Early Help strategies rather than deliver universal services it seems that it may be becoming increasingly difficult for local authority policy makers *not* to perceive parents as deficient. Families are identified as "vulnerable" by Ofsted and although these are only risk indicators to under achievement, it seems to be considered inevitable that the children who have a more complex start will definitely under achieve.

Praxis – where do we go from here? (recommendations)

1. An ethical code
2. A revised narrative to end social exclusion
3. New models of participation
4. A commitment to alonsideness

Appendix Eight**Request for Ethical Approval**Section 1 – to be completed by the researcher

Full name	Donna Louise Gaywood
Module number and title (student researchers only)	EDU7133 Dissertation module
Research Proposal title	An exploration into staff perspectives of parents as young children's first educators: case studies of a family support team.
Funding body applying to if applicable	
Brief outline of proposal (including research questions where appropriate) You are also asked to submit with your application copies of any questionnaires, letters, recruitment material you intend to use if these are available at the time of requesting approval	<p>I intend to use this piece of research to inform my current role within nine children centres where I am responsible for supporting the family support team to raise the educational attainment of the children with whom they work within the home and also the children who access children centre services through the targeted groups. My understanding is that the relationship staff have with the parents is key to this as is the quality of the home learning environment each child experiences. I have spent the first six months in this role, building relationships with the staff and introducing them to the Accounting Early for Lifelong learning programme (Pascal & Bertram, 2008) which has within it joint parent/practitioner constructs of children's learning I now believe that in order to have greater impact on children's outcomes I need to make a full exploration of this area, so I can plan my next steps of support for the staff.</p> <p>Research questions</p>

	<p>What is the current situation amongst the staff team?</p> <p>What are the staff's expectations and perceptions of parent's as their child's first educators?</p> <p>What are the current perceptions amongst the staff team of HLE and its significance?</p> <p>What do staff understand by a good home learning environment?</p> <p>What attitudes and values do they bring to their work with parents?</p> <p>Questions for the scoping exercise:</p> <p>What are the implicit and explicit values of the local authority about parents as a young child's first educator?</p> <p>How are these translated into strategic planning?</p> <p>What evidence is there of these values in daily operational plans through delivery standard?</p> <p>What is the current political agenda regarding parents as children's first educators?</p> <p>How does this compare with the local authority stance?</p> <p>Are there any patterns/ resonance identified through the analysis of the research?</p>
<p>Level of research, e.g. staff, undergraduate, postgraduate, master's (award related), MPhil, PhD</p>	<p>Masters</p>
<p>Please outline the methodology that would be implemented in the course of this research.</p>	<p>This is going to be a qualitative piece of research within which I will be a participant observer. It is located within a praxeological paradigm, as I intend it not only to be participatory but also I intend to use the finding to inform my own next steps as I lead the staff in developing further our partnership with parents and the Children Centre strategy for improving the home learning environment for the most vulnerable under-fives within the local authority. In accordance with the values of this paradigm, this I intend to ensure that this study will be</p>

	<p>ethically sound. I intend to use a reflective journal to minimise bias and to ensure that an ethical approach is maintained throughout.</p> <p>This research will be a case study of three separate teams of family support workers, who are located in nine children centres across a diverse local authority. I intend for this to be a layered study, which will be an exploration of the current situation within which I work and lead. Due to the forthcoming cuts within children centres services my intention is to locate this piece firmly within the current political climate and policy making</p>
<p>Please indicate the ethical issues that have been considered and how these will be addressed.</p>	<p>Due to the current climate of cuts within the service, note will be taken of the higher levels of stress experienced by the staff; therefore staff will be voluntary participants of this research with clear timetabled expectations of them outlined from the start.</p> <p>As a participant observer, I could encounter issues of bias as my prior knowledge of the staff and an awareness of their former responses to parents may influence my interpretation of the data.</p> <p>My position as part of the management team may threaten my ability to maintain confidentiality and provide complete anonymity to protect staff. Equally my role which is to support staff in their understanding and practice regarding parents as their child's first educator, may cause staff to respond to research questions in a manner they know I would approve rather than giving an authentic response, so eliciting a true response may be compromised.</p> <p>I intend to use my research journal extensively which will provide an opportunity to reflect and consider my own position of power. It will allow me an arena to reflect on the interactions, interviews and data gathered.</p> <p>It should also help me to challenge my own assumptions</p>

	<p>and pre-judgements about staff. The journal will be confidential but may be cited in the study. Any citations will ensure the anonymity of staff and will primarily demonstrate shifts in my own understanding and reflections.</p> <p>The Focus group will be video-ed. The contents of the video will be analysed as data. A transcript will not be made of these interactions and the film will be destroyed following the analysis.</p> <p>Staff will understand that their responses will not be transcribed or kept and that the film will be destroyed following the analysis of the data, so they can be honest about their values and how they perceive parents, without fear of recrimination.</p> <p>I intend to be explicit about my own beliefs and views in order to identify and reduce bias throughout the research process. I will use my reflective journal to demonstrate an ability to reflect upon these beliefs, being open and aware of how my own views, assumptions and opinions could affect the research.</p> <p>I will use permission letters for each layer of the research so that all staff are clear of the parameters, understand how their identities are protected and confidentiality maintained.</p> <p>I will ensure through these that staff understand the character of this piece of research that is an exploration of a situation and that, as participants, their responses will help shape the next steps of the service development.</p>
<p>Please indicate any issues that may arise</p>	<p>Staff may have discriminatory views about parents. The paradigm the research sits within is a participatory</p>

<p>relating to diversity and equality whilst undertaking this research and how you will manage these.</p>	<p>praxeological model, therefore should staff express discriminatory views then this will become part of the findings. The intention is to share these findings with the participants and with them to explore the next steps for the team to become more effective support for families.</p> <p>Continuing use of reflective journal</p> <p>Discussion and support from supervisor</p>
<p>Please indicate how participants will be de-briefed about their involvement in the research process and or provided with opportunities for reflection and evaluation</p>	<p>Participants will have the opportunity to de-brief in a one-one session with the participant researcher or their line manager.</p> <p>The findings will be shared with the participating members of the team and be used as part of their peer support sessions, to inform practice.</p>

Please answer the following questions by circling or highlighting the appropriate response:

1. Will your research project involve young people under the age of 18?

YES _____ **NO**

If yes, do you have an Enhanced Disclosure Certificate from the Criminal Records Bureau?

YES

NO

2. Will your research project involve vulnerable adults?

YES

NO

1. 3. For which category of proposal are you applying for ethical approval?

Category

A

B

