

***“Trusting in the ideas of children. An exploration of creative collaborative enquiries with young children.”***

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***Preface******Signed statement***

This dissertation is an original piece of work. It is my own work and has not been submitted either in the same or different form to this or any other Higher Education Institution for a degree or other award. It is available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, with the permission of the Dean of the School of Education.

Signature:

Date: *September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010*

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**Abstract**

Early Years Education has become overburdened with policy and curriculum initiatives. How can educators trust in children's competencies and potential, using them as a guide rather than predefined curriculum goals? The aim is to examine pedagogies where educators support children's own enquiries through a creative collaborative approach, based on the co-construction of meanings.

The research focused on the following key research questions:

- What are the *values* of the educator? What has *influenced* their thinking and practice?
- What characterises the *learning environment* (both physical and emotional)?
- What is the *nature of the enquiry process*?
- What is the nature of the *relationships* and the *collaborations* between the educators and the children; children and children?
- How is *meaning-making* undertaken with the children, and amongst the adults themselves?
- How does the *educator* view their *role*?
- What focus or significance is given by the educator to *learning groups*?

The aim in focusing on these key aspects is to deconstruct the processes and their context: to examine what is happening, and what it is that the educators are doing that allow them to '*trust in the ideas of children*'.

Focus was on the processes that take place in an early years setting using a case study approach. The viewpoint of the educator as an active participant was considered key in interpreting and exploring the meaning of the events taking place in addition to that of the researcher. A partner educator was sought (from within the 5x5x5 = creativity research community) who shared an interest in the research aims and questions for their own professional development purposes. Contact, access and relations was established to work in collaboration with the key educator, their classroom colleagues and the children in the class.

Collection of data was through an open semi-structured interview, direct observation in the classroom, and examination of educators' documentation of children's enquiries. Further data was generated and analysis begun through reflection sessions with the educators (Cremin et al, 2006).

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## **Glossary of names, terms and abbreviations used throughout the report:**

*5x5x5=Creativity*: An arts-based research project in South West England inspired by the thinking in Reggio Emilia who are 'researching children researching the world'. Artists, educators, and cultural centre partners work in collaboration with children. Bancroft et al., (2008). [www.5x5x5creativity.org](http://www.5x5x5creativity.org)

*Educator*: this term is being applied to all the adults working with the children in a school or early years institution.

*Enquiry*: this term is applied to both children's natural, independent processes of researching the world around them and to the processes of enquiry as supported by adults in general and more specifically educators in this context. The sense in which the term is used is close to that of research involving investigation and exploration. It is considered holistically involving scientific and creative dispositions as well as ways of communicating or expressing the ideas being explored. It is a concept that will be considered through the course of the main literature review and the research project.

*Learning*: definition as used by Rinaldi (2006:141) 'Learning is the emergence of that which was not there before'.

*Pedagogy*: The definition used is: 'the science of the art of teaching' (Gage, 1985 cited in Siraj-Blatchford, 2009:149)

*Reggio Emilia*: Is a term used to refer to both the International *Reggio Children* network, and to the philosophy and pedagogy arising from the experiences and practice in the Preschools and Infant Toddler Centres of Reggio Emilia, in Northern Italy.

*ReFocus*: is co-ordinated by and facilitated by *Sightlines Initiative*. It is a 'U.K. network of early childhood educators, artists and others influenced in their practice by the preschools of Reggio Emilia' (Duckett, 2009: cover). *Sightlines Initiative* acts as a reference point for and link with *Reggio Emilia* in the U.K. and aims to develop reflective creative practice in the Early Years. [www.sightlines-initiative.com](http://www.sightlines-initiative.com)



## Chapter 1. Introduction

In the changeable world of early childhood education it could be argued there are two constants: the children and their educators. Early years practice in the U.K appears to have been dominated by in educational policy, regulation, curriculum, and accountability, alongside exploration of several influential models or approaches (BERA, 2003:21-24; Jackson and Fawcett, 2009:117-133); so is it possible in such a climate to assume a pedagogical stance that trusts in the ideas of children? Views of child development, childhood, children's rights, competencies and the role of education are being reviewed interdisciplinary, socio-politically and socio-culturally at global levels (OECD, 2004; Clark *et al.*, 2005:2-4) This study assumes the viewpoint that it is the relationships between educators and children and the educative processes they engage in together that lie at the heart of the early years context. The aim of this single case study is to hold a lens up to a pedagogy where children and educators, trusting in each other, research the world creatively and collaboratively.

Jackson and Fawcett (2009:117-129) track the changes in early childhood education in the U.K. stating: 'there is hardly time for one [initiative] to be absorbed before it is overtaken by another' (p117). By 2002 I had become aware of my own and my colleagues growing dissatisfaction as teachers (Bancroft *et al* 2008:70). It seemed as if the initiatives were at odds with our values. We wished to get back to our 'joy' of being with children, and a more intuitive form of teaching-learning that we felt was a more natural and creative approach to early years education. We then explored the

development of creative collaborative enquiries through our involvement in the 5x5x5=creativity research project (Bancroft et al., 2008:69-80). My roles in professional development, as a 5x5x5=creativity mentor, and as a ReFocus consultant have raised my awareness of the desire of an increasing number of educators nationally to

- gain a deeper understanding of the processes involved in creative collaborations
- find ways to tune into children's interests and competences
- develop approaches based on deeper enquiries with children

These are contemporary issues but as Drummond (2005:12) reminds:

The reshaping of the whole of our early childhood services into a reflective, creative, critical community of co-researchers is still a long way off.

In my current role, supporting creative reflective practice with educators, it appears there is still need to research and seek further clarity as to how creative co-enquiry approaches operate in contemporary practice. It is hoped that this study will be able to add to a growing body of action research projects and case studies to illuminate and analyse the processes, relationships, environments and pedagogy that support it.

The research aims to focus on the pedagogy of an educator where the intention is to support young children's enquiries and their co-construction of meanings. It aims to

- examine the *learning environments* that support this approach
- explore the *strategies and processes that teachers use* to support, sustain or extend children's enquiries
- gain a deeper understanding of the *enquiry and meaning-making processes* and the origins of the enquiries
- explore the *roles, relationships and collaborations* of the educators and children

- enquire into the *values and beliefs* of the educators

The project design aims to be mutually beneficial and co-participatory; supporting the role of the educator as teacher-researcher (Cremin *et al.*, 2006:112).

At the beginning of the research process there was a central interest in creative collaborative enquiry and the foci for observation and exploration became clear in identifying the research questions. An open mindset was nevertheless the intention of the researcher particularly with regard to the title *trusting in the ideas of children*. The literature reviewed highlighted issues of children's socio-cultural participation and therefore could be said to have raised the researchers awareness and perception of such factors in the case being viewed. Conversely reciprocity emerged as a key concept through the analysis and seemed to have more significance when the literature was revisited in the later phases of the study. Researcher and educator embraced co-enquiry as a research process as well as a subject of enquiry. The study presented in this report is a result of that engagement in co-analysis and co-constructed meaning-making.

The findings of the case will be illustrated through extracts from observations in the classroom and reflections with the educator-researcher to allow the reader to extrapolate their own conclusions and co-construct meaning with their own experiences (Nisbet and Watt, 1984:90). The report will also present an analysis of the emergent themes and key issues, together with hypothetical models derived from the findings. The first model attempts to show the relationship of creative collaborative enquiry to children's meaning-making, in the context of the child's socio-cultural

participation. The second model represents the pedagogy that supports creative collaborative enquiry.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

The literature review will explore constructs of childhood including the image of the child, views on childhood and children's competencies. It will examine approaches and models of early childhood education, and the underlying paradigms. A critical analysis of three emerging strands will then follow: learning environments, learning processes and creativity. The chapter will be concluded by considering some of the relevant issues of contemporary early childhood education that appear particularly significant in relation to creative collaborative enquiries with children.

### **Constructs of Childhood**

Early childhood educators are at the centre of a national and international debate concerning childhood and child development. Clark *et al.*'s (2005:2-4) analysis of the social, political, economic and academic developments highlight children's 'voice and participation'. Children are viewed 'as beings'; children and citizens in the 'here and now' (*ibid*:3). It can be argued that childhood is not solely a preparation for adulthood and that children are 'experts in their own lives' (*ibid*:3). Others argue that approaches to early childhood education need 'not only to be here and now orientated' and should take into consideration how children can be prepared for life in 'an unpredictable future', suggesting the need for life-long learning (OECD, 2004:4,28). This raises the question: are these agendas at odds with one another? In examining case studies such as this, can it be shown that creative collaborative enquiry with children effectively recognises their lived experiences in the here and now, helping them to make sense of

them, and through this process equip children with the skills that will help them as they go through life?

In addition to the debate, between childhood as preparation for adulthood versus children as citizens now, the literature highlighted the question: does the role of education serve the citizen or the state? *All Our Futures* (NACCCE, 1999:9) recognized that policy makers globally had urgent need to 'develop human resources....in particular ....creativity, adaptability and better powers of communication'. Gothson (2009:19) in considering current global issues affecting the individual asks:

Do we dance like puppets? In the hand of whom? How can we reject being puppets, but instead become responsible and participating citizens, giving shape to a new global democratic citizenship..

Further to the question of the role of education Gothson (*ibid*: 20) reminds of Dewey's stance that it is 'possible to combine the interest of each individual, the quality of knowledge with the usefulness for a democratic society.' The debate about cultural capital calls for a review of 'some of the basic assumptions of our education system' (NACCCE, 1999:9). The debates concerning childhood and child development highlight the need for education that empowers children as active participants, with regard for and in communication with others, therefore placing children as agents in their own learning in creative collaboration with others as central to developments in pedagogy.

Dahlberg, Pence and Moss (2007:3) comment on how as early childhood institutions in the developed world have grown, so has search for 'quality'. They describe this as a language of 'norms against which performance should be assessed' that disregards context (p.ix). They view as problematic the dominance of developmental psychology in

pedagogical practice whose theories tend to operate as ‘a kind of abstract map’ overlaid on ‘children’s development’ (p.36). The current Early Years Foundation Stage, EYFS, (DCSF, 2008:9) states ‘a unique child’, as one of the four themes, ‘that recognises that every child is a competent learner from birth’. This may appear to be in agreement with Dahlberg *et al.*’s (2007:7) belief in ‘a rich child, active, competent and eager to engage in the world’. The EYFS, however, also talks about ‘broad phases of development’, going on to present learning in stages towards ‘goals’ (DCSF, 2007: *Practice Guidance*). Analysis of the language reveals terms such as ‘effective practice’ are still in use (*ibid: Principles into practice cards.*). A review of the EYFS documents reveals an inconsistency and ambiguity. This is corroborated by Fawcett (2009:37) who views the ‘unique child’ theme to be at odds with the weight given to the ‘ladder –like progression’ and the emphasis on ‘academic achievement in schools and in the early years’.

For early years educators wishing to recognise children’s competencies, with more interest in the processes of learning than predetermined goals, Dahlberg *et al.*’s (2007:ix) ‘language of meaning-making’ offers another language through which to question and explore their pedagogy. It offers educators an alternative that is consistent with the image of the ‘rich child’ (*ibid:7*), recognising the child as co-creator of knowledge and taking into account the socio-cultural contexts of children’s lives. Dahlberg *et al* (2007: 56) argue the case for learning processes:

which are neither linear nor isolated, and which give children opportunities to use their curiosity and creativity, to experiment and take responsibility, to make choices concerning life and future. ...The challenge is to provide a space where new possibilities can be explored and realized through enlarging the reflexive and critical ways of knowing, through construction rather than reproduction of

knowledge, through enabling children to work creatively to realize the possibilities

The literature indicates focusing on contextual, creative, teaching-learning processes rather than emphasis on nationally determined curricular policies and goals.

### ***Approaches and models of early childhood education***

Siraj-Blatchford (2007) suggests ‘putting pedagogy’ (p21) before curriculum and looks at early childhood education models that involve a ‘theoretical and knowledge base’ (p19).

Several authors and reports have compared such models (OECD, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009; Soler and Miller, 2003). Solar and Miller (2003) explore the tension between ‘socioculturally inspired’ approaches at the ‘progressive’ end of a spectrum and ‘vocational and instrumental influences’ in curricular at the other. Siraj-Blatchford (2009:155) correlates findings from the EPPE and REPEY studies to:

- Effective Early Learning project , U.K.
- High Scope, U.S.A.
- Reggio Emilia approach

She asserts that there are correlations with REPEY study ‘effective practice’ in five key aspects

- teacher’s initiating activities
- teacher’s extending activities
- differentiation and formative assessment
- relationships and conflict between children
- sustained shared thinking



Siraj-Blatchford's (*ibid*:155) table of comparison indicates differences, as well as similarities. It indicates key areas of pedagogy that deserve closer scrutiny. In particular with regard to researching creative collaborative enquiry

- how and when is it appropriate for *teachers to initiate activities* or enquiries
- how do *teacher's extend enquiries* that have been initiated by the children or the teacher
- what forms of *observation, pedagogical listening, and planning* support children's learning
- what are the *nature of relationships* between children and how are these supported
- what is the nature and role of the *engagements, dialogues, interactions and sustained shared thinking* taking place between children and adults

*Sustained shared thinking*, is defined as 'episodes in which two or more individuals worked together in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities or extend narratives, etc.' (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009:154). It could perhaps be seen as another term for, what this research refers to as, *creative collaborative enquiry*.

Both terms relate to Vygotsky's notion of 'interaction in the *zone of proximal development*':

the idea that children learn through their interactions with more experienced adults and peers, who assist them in engaging in thinking that is beyond the "zone" in which they would be able to perform without assistance.  
Rogoff (2003:282)

Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002:43), in reference to *sustained shared thinking*, state:

the effective pedagogue orchestrates pedagogy by making interventions (scaffolding, discussing, monitoring, allocating tasks) which are sensitive to the curriculum concept or skill being taught.

Rogoff (2003:282) interprets Vygotsky as referring to interactions that take place in 'academic' contexts. The same can be inferred from Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*'s (2002:43) statement above, which is being linked with curricular goals. This is problematic as a pedagogical stance if the educator wishes to enter into the spirit of open-ended co-enquiry rather than intervening with a predetermined curriculum agenda of concepts or skills to be taught.

Soler and Miller (2003: 64) found 'an inherent tension .... by adapting a curriculum framework to learner-centred experiences', citing the *Te Whariki* curriculum model in New Zealand. Open-ended co-enquiry and a process of co-construction is one that is embedded in Reggio Emilia early education institutions. Bruner (2004:27) describes observing the collaborative enquiries of a group of four-year-old children and a teacher projecting shadows in a preschool in Reggio Emilia.

Everyone was thinking out loud: "What do you mean by upside down?" asked another child. Here we were not dealing with individual imaginations working separately. We were collectively involved in what is probably the most human thing about human beings, what psychologists and primate experts now like to call "inter-subjectivity"; which means arriving at a mutual understanding of what others have in mind.

Bruner's observations (*ibid*:27) perhaps include what some would identify as *sustained shared thinking or interactions in the zone of proximal development*, but these terms do not express the spirit of *creative collaborative enquiry* that Bruner conveys here in his observations of an extended project. As Rinaldi (*cited in* Bancroft *et al.*, 2008:5) asserts:

The potential for every child is stunted if the endpoint of learning is formulated in advance.

It is then to the approaches that embrace sustained collaborative projects or enquires that focus is turned.

Katz and Chard (2000:28) in the United States 'advocate incorporating the *project approach* into the curriculum as a way of increasing children's opportunities to actively construct and deepen their understandings of significant phenomena around them'.

They indicate how a project approach:

provides contexts for careful observation, indepth investigation, exchange of ideas, mutual support, resolution of conflicts, cooperation, collaboration, and other important experiences while in the process of learning about significant aspects of the local world of people, objects, and events. (*ibid*:20)

Katz (in Edwards *et al.*:27-45) explores some of the 'lessons to be learned' from educational projects undertaken in Reggio Emilia acknowledging:

- that children and educators 'examine topics of interest to young children in great depth and detail'
- that children's work is treated with great 'seriousness'
- the extensive and imaginative ways in which children and educators use many symbolic languages to explore and communicate their ideas

Rinaldi (2006:56) describes a sense of passion, reciprocal and authentic interest at the heart of the Reggio Emilia approach:

The highest value and the deepest significance lie in this search for sense and meaning that are shared by adults and children.

The creative collaborative enquiries undertaken are referred to as *progettazione*, where the educators project:

all the possible ways that the project could be anticipated to evolve, considering the likely ideas, hypotheses, and choices of children and the directions they may take. (Rinaldi in Edwards *et al.*, 1998:118)

*Progettazione* are free from curricular frameworks 'leaving ample space' for the possibilities of 'the unexpected' (*ibid*:118). The literature review indicates a need to explore the *trust* that the educator places on their own and the children's capacities and their roles and relationships in co-constructing enquiries.

Soler and Miller (2003:64-66) place the learner-centred approach developed in Reggio Emilia at the progressive end of the spectrum. Central to the debate concerning enquiry approaches is the issue of top-down control and the extent to which educators and children have advocacy (*ibid*:64). Whilst comparisons of early childhood education models are useful: it seems important to examine the values, beliefs and paradigms that lead educators to trust to a greater or lesser extent in the ideas of children.

Several authors have analysed the differing paradigms and perspectives underlying pedagogical values and beliefs (Dahlberg *et al.* 2007:19-42; Janzen, 2008; Woodhead, 2005). Woodhead (2005) examines perspectives on early childhood development and how these relate to children's Rights (United Nations) using two paradigms (p85):

- 3 N's (normal, naturalistic, needs)
- 3 C's (contextual, cultural, competences)

Dahlberg *et al.* (ix) 'warn against' the 'habit of 'dualistic thinking'. The concept of the '3 C's' is, however as Woodhead (2005: 86) asserts, 'a useful summary' that other literature, reviewed here, could be related to and became highly relevant as a construct throughout the research process itself. He suggests that consideration of childhood

development should ‘respect and support ...children’s expressions of competence’ and accept ‘responsibilities ....to structure children’s environments, guide their learning and enable their social participation in ways consistent with their understanding, interest and ways of communicating’ (*ibid*:94). He advocates ‘bottom-up action which engages with the realities of children’s lives in context’ (*ibid*: 89). Both Woodhead (*ibid*:89-91) and Rogoff (2003:63-77) assert that child development is socially and culturally as well as biologically determined. Rogoff’s (*ibid*: 368) work explores how:

Humans develop through their changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change.

This ‘overarching orientating concept’ (*ibid*: 368) together with Woodheads’s ‘3 C’s’ both emerged from the literature reviewed as significant concepts that orientated critical thinking throughout the research process.

The review of early childhood education contexts and models highlight key questions:

- What *learning environments* support and recognise the advocacy of educators and children, their lived contexts and children’s competencies?
- How can educators and children develop a bottom-up, open-ended, *learning approach* taking into account context, culture and competences?
- What is the role of *creativity* in early childhood education?

Each of these questions will now be considered in turn.

### **Learning environments**

Claxton and Carr (2004:91-93) define *learning environments* as ‘prohibiting’, ‘affording’, ‘inviting’ and ‘potentiating’. They describe ‘potentiating’ environments as those that

support and extend learning ‘dispositions’; where adults and children participate actively sharing power and responsibility (Claxton and Carr, 2004:91-92). This indicates the significance of relationships and encounters where there is an equality and true power distribution. In Reggio Emilia they refer to children, teachers and parents as ‘protagonists’ (Rinaldi, 2006:58). Pedagogy is built upon reciprocal relations, participation (*ibid*:141), exchange, dialogue (p172) and negotiation (pp186-187). In fact Rinaldi (in Edwards, 1998:115) explains ‘relationships, communications and interactions sustain our educational approach’. *Reciprocity* emerges as a key concept in relation to the learning environment. Smith’s (2009:35) research focuses on reciprocity, which she says:

involves negotiating, mutual sense and interest, communicating with others...giving opinions, taking into account the perspectives of others, sharing, responsibility and communicating ideas.

*Learner agency* also emerges as a key concept from the literature (Berthelsen and Brownlee, 2005; Claxton and Carr, 2004:91-92; Roberts, 2010:44-48). Roberts (2010:45) defines agency as: ‘feeling you can make a difference, to your own life and to other people’s’: identifying three categories: ‘being in the world, ‘exploring and understanding the world’ and ‘acting on the world’. Together these authors highlight that the learning environment is not just a physical one; what lies at the heart of it is the nature of the interrelationships between the adults and children.

Whilst reciprocal relations and learner agency, it has been argued, are significant components in *potentiating learning environments*, two further notions seem evocative of the learning environments that support collaborative enquiry: that of *adults as*

*companions in children's learning* and the idea of a *community of learners*. Trevarthen (2006:12) says:

Our most important and valuable ideas are products of shared enthusiasms and ambitions learned in the joy and hurt of companionship.

Rogoff (2003:284) proposes the idea 'that learning is a process of changing participation in community activities' which she likens to Wengers' (1991, cited in *ibid*:284) idea 'that learning is a matter of people's changing involvement as "legitimate peripheral participants" in *communities of practice*'. Rogoff (2003:282-326) draws attention to focusing on the learning environment as a *community of learning*, and presents the many ways that children learn through participation in communities. This broader perception of these exchanges and engagements seem to warrant further consideration.

Rogoff's (*ibid*:283) view of the 'collaborative nature of learning' draws upon her studies of how children learn 'outside of (as well as within)...instructional situations', proposing 'the concept of *guided participation* in cultural activities'. Methods of learning, included: interpreting non-verbal gesture or cues, 'opportunities to observe and participate', 'structuring through direct interaction', 'recounting, elaborating and listening to narratives', 'practicing and playing with routines and roles', 'encouragement of keen observations', 'responsive assistance', 'apprenticeships', and 'learning through listening in' (Rogoff, 2003:285-326). In other words the children were learning as much from observing, listening, and copying other adults and children as through more intentional interactions on the part of the adults. Learning was via non-verbal communication as well as verbal, and included narrative, play and routines (*ibid*: 285). Drummond (2010) traces the pattern of exchanges, verbal and non-verbal, in

documentation of creative collaborative projects undertaken in Tyne and Wear. She analyses the 'dialogical exchanges' in a 'context of multiple listening' where:

an extended sequence of answers, both spoken and unspoken, offers children the opportunity to do so many things: to respond with detail, incident, emotion; to extend and expand the field of reference; to make comparisons and contrasts; to give alternative examples; to cite relevant stories; to apply insights, empathise and exult; to remember, connect and re-connect; to build on previous learning; to look forward to the promise of tomorrow.  
Drummond (2009:71)

Drummond also 'traces the flight of an idea' and illustrates how children and educators embrace many 'expressive languages' in these examples of creative collaborative learning communities. Rogoff's (2003) and Drummond's (*ibid*) critical analysis suggests that there is need to re-examine the ways in which children learn, in partnership with others, broadening approaches to explore ways of 'multiple listening' and expressing and a move away from the traditionally accepted norms within educational institutions.

Rogoff's (2003) work provokes re-viewing and re-assessing collaborative learning communities. Berthelsen and Brownlee (2005) researched 'children's participation in learning' in Australian early childhood centres. They corroborate their findings with Rogoff's work and identified four categories:

- children's competence as observers in social settings
- learning through engagement with others in social settings
- children as autonomous learners
- children and teachers as learning partners

(*ibid*:54)

These raise considerations as to the role of the adult in collaborative learning communities.



Claxton and Carr (2004:95) suggest that the educator's role is to 'explain, orchestrate, commentate on and model learning responses'. They could be said to construct or co-construct the learning environment and community. What term, however, can be used to describe the educator's roles in co-constructing learning environments, reciprocal relations, support of learner agency and multiple ways of collaborative learning? The term 'scaffolding' as used by Bruner, is described by Matthews (1999 *cited in* Goouch, 2008:97):

It is not to be understood simply as a physical process; it involves a psychological empathy with the child and an understanding of what he or she might be moving toward. Nor is it a one way process from the teacher to the child. When it exists, it is a fluid, dynamic and often seemingly effortless dance between teacher and child.

Johansson (2004:23) found that where educators 'created a reciprocal encounter between different life-worlds', with the intention of getting closer to the life-worlds of children, the *atmosphere* was then 'often sensitive, permissive and mutually intersubjective'. Goouch (2008:95) suggests that those educators 'who are able to engage' with children in encounters, such as 'playful pedagogies', 'are now rare'; requiring educators 'to trust both children and their own intuitive responses'. Throughout the research process the term *scaffolding* has seemed appropriate as a term to ascribe to the roles of the educator (summarised above). It takes it wider perhaps than that intended by Bruner, being used here (and in the findings section of the report) to apply to the atmosphere that the educator creates in the spirit of 'psychological empathy with the child', and not just to the 'dance between teacher and child' in particular episodes of sustained shared thinking. It is used to apply to the

conditions, atmosphere, or strategies that are created that make such engagements possible.

In summary these literature sources indicate that collaborative, empowering, relationships and educators remodelling their role as ‘companions’ along-side children, are key factors in children’s learning that is ‘contextualised’ and recognises children’s competencies. The term *responsive learning environment* perhaps better reflects the significance of reciprocity, learner agency, intuition, responsiveness, empathy, trust, and fluidity in preference to the term ‘potentiating’. As Smith (2009:47) states:

A responsive early childhood environment can empower ..children to be able to take control and initiate, to connect with possible selves, and to engage jointly and collaboratively with others in meaningful tasks.

The literature reviewed in addition indicates that creative collaboration and meaning-making thrives in a creative community of learners.

### ***Learning processes***

Trevarthen (2006:11) indicates how in a community of learners infants have innate motivation and curiosity to learn. Laevers (2005:4-5) found ‘involvement’ to be a crucial factor in quality learning environments. He (*ibid*:5) states that the satisfaction that goes with involvement stems from:

the exploratory drive, the need to get a better grip on reality, the intrinsic interest in how things and people are, the urge to experience and figure out.

Laevers (*ibid*) saw Csikszentmihalyi’s idea of *flow* as being significant. Csikszentmihalyi (2002:6) defines *flow* as ‘the way people describe their state of mind when

consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake.' He refers to it as a motivating experience that brings enjoyment and happiness (*ibid*:6), where levels of concentration are intense and 'sense of time becomes distorted' (*ibid*:71). Laevers (2005:5) saw curiosity, exploratory drive and flow as essential factors in deep-level-learning. Together these literature sources highlight that children's innate competencies include the motivation and capacity to explore, enquire, and to research the world around them in the pursuit of meaning and well-being.

Yan (2005) accepts that children construct 'naïve theories' (p145) in the process of *figuring out* and suggest that educators should 'evoke' and 'challenge' these theories (p147-154,156). Rinaldi (2006:112) disputes the use of the term 'naïve' as it implies something 'inferior', 'imperfect', or a 'misunderstanding'. She explains:

From a very young age, children seek to produce interpretative theories, to give answers....the important thing is not only to give value to but, above all, to understand what lies behind these questions and theories, and that what lies behind them is something truly extraordinary. There is the intention to produce questions and search for answers, which is one of the most extraordinary aspects of creativity.  
(*ibid*:112-3)

Dahlberg *et al* (2007:48-50) proposed languages based on 'meaning-making' that 'welcomes ...., uncertainty, and provisionality' (*ibid*: ix). Yan's (2005) studies show how educators and a community of learners challenge thinking; provoking revision and reformulation of provisional and uncertain theories (p150-154). The process of children and educators exploring children's interpretative theories seems to be at the heart of co-enquiry and the co-construction of meaning with children.

Reggio Emilia has world-wide recognition and acclaim for its educational approach based upon creative collaborative enquiries with young children (Fawcett, 2009:131; Gardner, 2000:25). They have paramount belief in the 'child's strengths, alongside curiosity and sense of wonder' and the 'desire to relate to' and 'to communicate' with others (Drummond, in *Duckett and Drummond*, 2009:63). Their approach is described as 'contextual', and children are believed to

- develop theories in interpreting, constructing and giving meaning to the world around them
- 'acquire an awareness of their capacity to think' and 'interpret reality' and appreciate that others 'can share their own different beliefs and theories'

and in addition

- have mastery of many symbolic languages

(Rinaldi, 2006:205)

Participation and collaboration of community, parents, educators and children is central to the co-construction of enquiries that can arise from 'a proposal' by children, teachers, or events (*ibid*:205-206).

The teachers' role is to help children discover their own problems and questions. .... to focus on a problem or difficulty and formulate hypotheses.  
(Edwards *et al*, 1998:185).

The Reggio Emilia *Progettazione* approach exemplifies the potential for deep and sustained collaborative enquiry with children.

The review has revealed learning processes that involve curiosity, the exploratory drive, questioning, hypothesising, and a search for meaning, which could be viewed as

empirical, scientific, investigative processes, habits or dispositions. This study, however, concerns *creative enquiry*. The 5x5x5=creativity research community has collected evidence of 'learning dispositions' and 'habits of mind' that have been observed when children are 'engaged in rich and deep ways' (Bancroft *et al.*, 2008:117). These included for example 'playfulness', 'imagination', 'initiating their own ideas', 'making connections', 'negotiating', 'resilience' and 'persistence' (*ibid*:120). As Drummond (2009:71) described (p.28) creative and collaborative learning includes enquiry, exploration and expression of ideas in an *Hundred Languages* (Edwards *et al.*, 1998). The literature review indicates the adoption of a more holistic and multi-modal conceptualisation of enquiry processes.

To summarise, the literature reviewed concerning *learning processes* indicates that educators can:

- build upon children's innate curiosity and drive to explore, investigate and make sense of the world
- engage in a process of the co-construction of meaning-making, to support children's formulation, and reformulation of hypotheses in collaborative learning communities
- support their desire to explore, exchange and communicate their ideas in many expressive languages

It highlights the need to explore the role of creativity and expressive languages in relation to these.

## **Creativity**

Roberts (2006:31) in response to the NACCE (1999) report stresses the need for 'supporting creativity in the early years'. Duffy (2006:25) defines creativity as being 'about connecting the previously unconnected in ways that are new and meaningful to the individual', linking it to imagination defined as 'internalizing perceptions and ascribing objects and events with new meanings'. Craft (2003:148) distinguishes between *big C creativity* (in 'arts' or 'great figures') and *little c creativity* ('in everyday life'). Craft (*ibid*:148) like Duffy sees creativity as involving imagination, adding that it also involves the use of intelligence and self-expression. It is Duffy's definition that will be used for the purposes of the study; which as a construct seems to correlate with children making sense or meaning from an exploration of their world and a wish to communicate their interpretations of it (p.29, Rinaldi, 2006:112-3).

Jeffrey and Craft (2003, *cited in* Craft, 2005:42) found that 'teaching for creativity' included learner agency; valuing innovation; 'encouraging children to pose questions, identify problems, and issues'; and 'the opportunity to debate and discuss their thinking'. Burnard *et al* (2006) take Craft's concept of 'possibility' or 'what if?' thinking (p.245) and propose a model (p.257) characterised by: posing questions, play, immersion, innovation, risk-taking, being imaginative and self-determination', within 'the overlapping domains of teaching and learning', and set in an enabling context. These correlate strongly with the processes of learning explored in the section above. Cremin *et al's* (2006:115-116) research went on to identify three pedagogical strategies that fostered possibility thinking in young children: standing back, profiling learner agency and creating time and space. If, as it appears, 'teaching for creativity' and 'what if?' thinking are central to children's and educators' creative collaborative enquiries then

Burnard *et al.*'s (2006:257) and Cremin *et al.*'s (2006:115-116) findings play a significant part in focusing this research closer-in to the key tenants to be explored. These findings which corroborate with the research of creative collaborative practice in the U.K. will now be discussed.

In the 5x5x5=creativity research similar concepts, to those found by Cremin *et al.* (*ibid*), are referred to as *time, space and attention* (originally used by the Sightlines Initiative Creative Foundations project, cited in Bancroft *et al.*, 2008:19). The terms draw upon the 'pedagogy of listening' (Rinaldi in Guidici *et al.*, 2001:80-81). *Attention* refers to actively listening to the interests and questions of the children; in other words to learner agency. It encompasses the role of the teacher as being 'alongside' (used in preference to 'standing back' because the teacher is still attentive to the child).

The children see themselves as researchers, as protagonists in their own learning. Time, space and attention are given to supporting and developing children's hypotheses and theories about the world." (Bancroft *et al.*, 2008:9).

Likewise, Cremin *et al.* (2006:113) link 'standing back' to 'learner agency' as the teacher's focus remains on the children. In summary the review of literature regarding creativity in early childhood education indicates a strong correlation between the learning environments, learning processes and pedagogical strategies in developing creativity and those that (as explored above) support collaborative enquiries and meaning-making with children. In Reggio Emilia the atelier and role of an atelierista 'has developed to ensure that learning engages the many languages of children. Veà Vecchi (2004:19) states:

This kind of approach can help us to discover and investigate the hidden structures of reality, to weave maps capable of holding together processes of

logic and emotion, of technique and expression. It is an excellent curriculum for learning

### ***Creative collaborative pedagogies***

This literature review began with an exploration of the *construct of childhood* and showed how ‘postmodernism’ seems to require the deconstruction of early childhood education involving reappraising beliefs and values of childhood and learning. It required, it was argued

- a new language of meaning-making (Dahlberg *et al.*2007)

and an exploration of

- learning environments
- learning processes
- role of creativity

that were consistent with a belief in children’s competencies and a desire for learning to be contextualised and take account of their cultural participation (Woodhead, 2005:94). The embracing of creative collaborative enquiry with children seemed to be central. The question then is how to reconstruct pedagogical approaches for the twenty-first century? Willan (2009:152) suggests it is time to revisit the work of Susan Issacs who ‘understood the deep issues concerning learning and ..... ways in which teachers could enable children to explore their worlds through imagination and creative play’. Doddington and Hilton (2007:56) suggest that the ‘child-centred tradition’ can be viewed as ‘creative’ and go on to explore how ‘to construct’ a ‘twenty-first century conceptualisation of child-centredness’. They advocate a *holistic experiential approach* to learning encompassing children’s feelings, perceptions, beliefs, meanings; their lived and



significant experiences, expressions, engagements and interests; and authentic relationships (*ibid*:55-95).

Yelland *et al.* (2006:81) argues that pedagogies for the twenty-first century ‘need to be transformed to take account of the sophisticated skills students bring to school’, giving evidence of the ‘children’s cultural literacy around music, movies, games and the Internet’. This was also born out in my own practice as an educator where children of three and four-year-old used digital and creative technologies to explore and express their ideas when engaged in creative collaborative enquiries (Bancroft *et al.*, 2008:140-141). Rogoff (2003) suggests that:

- ‘cultural practices’ include ‘ways of teaching and learning’, and ‘skills with specific tools and technologies’ (*ibid*:78)
- individuals are ‘participants in cultural processes that form the common practices of particular communities’ (*ibid*:80)
- ‘people often participate in more than one community’ that ‘may overlap or conflict with each other’ (*ibid*:81)

Therefore, it appears significant for educators, in a diverse and rapidly changing world, to take into consideration the differing and overlapping communities that children participate in.

This critical analysis highlights the complexities facing educators if they are to tune into children’s lived experiences in their overlapping realms of participation:

- Each child's realms of participation, their significant and lived experiences, their cultural literacy and ways of communicating, may have both similarities and differences.
- The cultural practices of the classroom or learning community may 'overlap or conflict' (Rogoff, 2003:78) with those of the other communities the children participate in.

Ang (2010:49) indicates the 'challenges' and 'necessity' of embracing these issues. How then can educators be responsive and identify possible lines of enquiry that may be of significance to the learner?

How can we help children find the meaning of what they do, what they encounter, what they experience?  
(Rinaldi, 2006:63)

Paige-Smith and Craft (2008:22) state the:

capacity to co-construct understanding and ideas may be considered to be an essential part of the early years practitioner's role, constructing meaning alongside the children, and trying to understand children's experiences in order to support and encourage learning.

They show how this can be achieved through the development of reflective practice (ibid:2008). In Reggio Emilia this takes the form of a 'pedagogy of relationships and listening' (2006:64). This central tenant has been strongly influential in the development of reflective practice elsewhere (Paige-Smith and Craft. 2008:18-19). Sightlines Initiative were involved in the initial professional development for the 5x5x5=creativity research project and their model of a *creative and reflective cycle* was drawn upon by educators involved. Fawcett (2009:131-143) synthesises three tenants identified from Reggio

Emilia and 5x5x5=creativity research: observation, reflection and documentation. These require closer inspection.

Aguirre Jones and Elders (2009:12-13) represent a revised model of the *creative reflective cycle*, as developed in our 5x5x5=creativity research. Through it we attempt to describe the processes:

The creative reflective cycle could be thought of, like breath, as a vital exchange of energy that goes on between the children and the adults. As in breathing it is a continuous cycle made up of a progression of stages. The in-breath is observation; our reading of the environment and what is happening. The pause between in and out breath is the revisiting, analysing and generating of possibilities. The out-breath is our response to the children and the environment of enquiry, our breathing life back in to it. This is a continuous cycle that involves a reciprocal exchange between the children and the adults. (*ibid*:13)

The adults involved with the children (educators, artists, and sometimes parents) bring together their different perspectives and interpretations to the reflection sessions where they can re-visit, re-view and search for meaning about the children's engagements, curiosities, explorations, interpretations, and expressions. As Rinaldi (2001: 79-80) says:

For adults and children alike, understanding means being able to develop an interpretive "theory", a narration that gives meaning to events and objects of the world. Our theories are provisional, offering a satisfactory explanation that can be continuously reworked.

The creative reflective process enables the educator to reflect-on-action (Schon, 1987:4) after the event. It allows the educator to tune in to, interpret and thus to be *responsive*, in the construction or co-construction of the learning environment and in the opportunities offered to deepen the collaborative enquiry. In Reggio Emilia, documentation that includes 'interpretations' and 'theories' is the 'visible trace' of their

collaborative enquiries and is seen as integral and inseparable from the spiralling process of observation, interpretation and documentation. (Rinaldi, 2001:84).

Reflection-in-action (Schon, 1987:3-4) can also be said to take place where the educator is in a reciprocal, sensitive and empathetic relationship with the children and is able to respond intuitively in the moment:

reflection-in-action is jazz, because if you think about people playing jazz within a framework of beat and rhythm and melody that is understood, one person plays and another person responds, and responds on the spot to the way he hears the tune, making it different to correspond to the difference he hears, improvisation in that sense is a form of reflection-in-action.  
(*ibid*:4)

Together ‘reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’ can be considered to be a part of the ‘artistry’ of pedagogy (*ibid*:3-4) that allow educators to be responsive and to collaborate in a search for meaning both with children and in order to support children. They are both key elements of a creative reflective pedagogy.

## Summary

In summary the literature review has identified contemporary issues, linked to this studies aims and questions that warrant further research:

- the pedagogy of educators who value and respect children’s competences and capacity for depth of learning
- responsive learning environments
- children’s enquiry processes; their innate curiosity and drive to explore, investigate and make sense of the world; their exchange and communicating of their ideas in many expressive languages
- collaborative, reciprocal, authentic relationships

- children's formulation, and reformulation of hypotheses in processes of the co-construction of meaning-making
- holistic, creative, reflective pedagogies
- children's participation in communities of learning

Ang (2010: 48) points to the challenge that educators face, and states that the EYFS needs to 'move beyond a monocultural or bicultural positioning, and look towards one which engages multiple positionings, identities and belongings'. Maynard and Chicken (2010:37-38) explored a child-led project approach with early years educators in Wales. They involved them in an encounter with the Reggio Emilia approach to enable them to look at their practice 'through another lens'. They found that it gave teachers a greater insight into their 'implicit and explicit theories of learning' and 'exposed the...embeddedness of an approach dominated by prescribed and subject-related outcomes'. This highlights the need for more research and case study documentation such as that exemplified by 5x5x5=creativity (Bancroft *et al.*, 2008) and those in conjunction with Sightlines Initiative (Duckett and Drummond, 2009). There is a place for small case studies, such as this, to add to the growing body of research that holds a lens up to the pedagogy of educators in the U.K. who engage on a daily basis in collaborative enquiries with young children and to extrapolate models that it is hoped will be of benefit to other educators.

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<sup>i i</sup> 'the atelier – a studio – and the atelierista – a person with an artistic background' (Vecchi, 2004:19)

### **Chapter 3. Research Approach and Methodology**

#### **Research questions**

The research questions identified at the design stage were:

- what are the *values* of the educator? What has *influenced* their thinking and pedagogy?
- what characterises the *learning environment* (both physical and emotional)?
- what is the *nature of the enquiry process*?
- what is the nature of the *relationships* and the *collaborations* between the educators and the children; children to children?
- how is *meaning-making* undertaken with the children?
- how do the *educators* view their *role*?
- what focus or significance is given by the educator to *learning groups*?

The aim in focusing on these key aspects was to deconstruct the processes and context: to examine what is happening, and what educators ‘do’ that allow them to ‘trust in the ideas of children’. The aim of the research presentation is to reconstruct these processes and contextual factors to provide the reader with a ‘three-dimensional’ (Nisbet and Watt, 1984:72-73) or multi-dimensional picture of the way educator supports the creative collaborative enquires of the children.

The research questions were referred to and their significance scrutinised, by researcher and teacher-researcher, during each phase of the project. Two questions were considered:

- how relevant were the questions in relation to *this case*?
- which were the questions that resonated between us?

Reflecting together on the research questions it was concluded that all the questions were relevant and inter-related, though the later question seemed to require less focus [Appendix D2:43].

### ***Research paradigms and procedures***

The research project was in conjunction with my professional roles (p.38). A qualitative and illuminative approach was chosen and based upon democratic and participatory processes consistent with the 5x5x5=creativity approach (Bancroft *et al.*, 2008:54).

The methodology drew upon Cremin *et al.*'s (2006) whose framework models the following advantages:

- a co-participatory way for an external researcher to work with 'teachers-as-researchers' (Cremin *et al.*:111-112)
- a case study approach to explore the 'object' of study (Stake, 1994:236); in this case the pedagogy of the educator who is facilitating children's enquiry-based learning
- the involvement of educators-as-researchers triangulates the research (Denzin, 1970 *cited in* Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:324)

The initial research proposal aimed to investigate the pedagogy of more than one teacher so as to bind several cases together as a 'collective' 'in order to enquire into the phenomena' (*ibid*:237). At the research design stage, however, it became apparent that this was beyond the scope of the present study, and would have stretched time

and attention too thinly across more than one setting, with the risk of losing any real sense of the processes of children's creative enquiry being investigated. The decision was, therefore, taken to explore one case comprehensively in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena.

The research adopted an *interpretivist* paradigm. The aim was to focus on 'contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:322). The study sought to reveal the views, attitudes and values of the educator that influence their pedagogical approach. Their viewpoint as an active participant was key, as well as the external researcher's, in interpreting and exploring the meaning of events taking place. Whilst the aim was not to eliminate researcher effect (Hammersely and Atkinson, 1995:19) it was not the intention to effect new cycles of action, as in action research models (McNiff with Whitehead, 2002:39-58). It was, however, hoped that through *reflection-on-action* (Schon, 1987:4) the educator would also gain a deeper understanding of their own practice resulting in it being 'usable' (*ibid*:9).

The research approach taken was consistent with the researcher's ontological and epistemological views of the co-construction of reality and knowledge. It is through the participation of the key educator, in the research process and in reflection, that differing views of what was happening could be brought together in order to make sense of the events and co-construct meanings and knowledge.

The approach was also consistent with the 'object' of the case in question:



- a setting and key educator were sought who held similar ontological and epistemological views and beliefs to the researcher
- the approach aimed to co-create a learning environment for the researcher and teacher-researcher. It aimed to be open, flexible, 'potentiating' (Claxton and Carr, 2004:91-92), contextual, and believed in the competencies of the educators and children
- it was a creative enquiry process guided by curiosity, questions, exploration of phenomena, making connections, hypothesising and theorising, re-presenting and expressing ideas
- it aimed to build relationships of trust, reciprocity, collaboration, and dialogue
- the research process engaged the researcher and teacher-researcher in the co-construction of knowledge; it was a meaning-making process

### ***Ethical considerations***

#### *Openness, honesty, anonymity and confidentiality*

Confidentiality would have been difficult to achieve given that I would have to describe some characteristics of the settings (Sapsford and Abbott, 1996 cited in Bell, 2005:48). It was considered preferable to reach informed consent with participants to openly name settings and educators: an approach used by Cremin et al (2006: 111). This would allow openness with colleagues for researcher and participants during the year of the research and in dissemination [Appendix A:3-8]. The research proposal suggested anonymising the children. In discussing this with the key educator, however, it was decided to seek parents consent to refer to the children by first name in accordance

with school documentation [Appendix A:1-2]. This approach shows respect for the children and gives them a voice. A pseudonym was used where consent for this was not appropriate.

A partner research setting and educator was sought who wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the processes that support children's enquiries. It could therefore be considered essential to openly acknowledge aims and research questions and to share understandings. This would also help to build good relations, would be democratic and co-participatory.

The dilemma, regarding openness, concerned the title 'Trusting in the ideas of children'. It was considered that *Trust* could be a key value that would emerge from data collection and analysis. It could be argued that to have openly used this term from the outset might have influenced what educators said in reflecting on their pedagogy. It was, therefore, decided to use a subtitle that described the process itself generally: *collaborative enquires with young children*.

#### *Access and consent*

The research focus was on processes taking place in the classroom plus reflection sessions with the key educator. The intention was to draw up guidelines [Appendix A:3-6] that clearly stated access parameters of *where, when, why, how* and *with whom?* There needs to be a valid reason to be in a particular place, at a particular time, with certain people, for a specific purpose that is relevant to the research.

Janzen (2008) raises the issue that where research considers children to be 'co-constructors of knowledge, identity and culture' (p.290) the position of the child must be reflected in the research design, data collection and analysis process (p293-294). It raises the issue of the children giving permission for the researcher to participate in the processes being investigated: to be an 'observer-participant' alongside them (Junker, 1960 *cited in* Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:104). The aim was to build relations with the children, to negotiate a role within their space and to respect their views on participation and privacy. The children were generally accepting of the presence of another adult in their classroom, documenting alongside them. This is a process and role for adults that they are familiar with on a daily basis. The approach adopted was to answer any direct questions by openly acknowledging an interest in what they were doing and a desire to write it down or take photographs, thus valuing what they were doing. Children sometimes directly described or commented on their activity, making eye contact, and seemingly welcoming the interest. On the few occasions when it was sensed that the observer-participant role was interrupting the flow of what the children were doing or making them feel self-conscious their right to privacy was respected and observations were focused elsewhere.

*Democracy, consistency and inclusion.*

The approach undertook to be democratic, inclusive and consistent in line with the research aims. Where a differentiation could be foreseen was possibly in the use of language. The aim was to find language that described the research to be undertaken that was as inclusive as possible. This is in line with BERA (1992:3) ethics. Draft information leaflets describing the proposed research were drawn up (Alderson and

Morrow, 2004:143-149): one for parents/guardians and the other for the Headteacher and educators [Appendix A]. These were then checked with the key educator with particular regard to the content and the language used. The key educator thought the style, in the form of questions that they might wish to ask with the researchers response (*ibid*:143-149), presented the information clearly. The language was thought to be appropriate for the recipients being neither too jargonistic nor potentially patronising by being over simplified.

The key educator involved was familiar with the use of certain language and depth of reflection that the research benefited from. Where terminology or concepts were less familiar or where different terms of reference became apparent these were openly explored in reflection sessions. In order to make the research more useable to the participants for dissemination purposes different forms of the report or presentation material can be co-constructed by researcher and teacher-researcher for use at a later date.

### *Co-participation*

Some feminist influenced research approaches (May, 1993:39-40) actively encourage co-participation. Cremin *et al* (2006: 111-112) involved teachers as teacher-researchers in both data collection and data analysis. This approach was also adopted in this study [see Chapters 4 and 5]. This is consistent with the research aims to co-construct knowledge and meanings and to be mutually beneficial.

## **Chapter 4. Data Collection**

The research took place in one early years setting who had been involved in 5x5x5=creativity where 'research' is 'considered a habit of mind' (Moss, 2003 *cited in* Bancroft et al., 2008:3). My aim was to establish contact, access and relations with one key educator in the setting and to work in collaboration with them, their classroom colleagues and the children in that class.

In order to meet the aims of the research a range of qualitative data needed to be collected to illicit:

- the values, attitudes and perspective of the key educator and the influences on their pedagogy
- the role of the educator
- the nature and characteristics of the learning environment (physical and emotional)
- the relationships and collaborations of the educators and children
- where the children's enquiries originated; the enquiry processes (of the children and adults), and the structures and strategies that supported and sustained them
- if and how knowledge and meanings were co-constructed with the children
- if and how knowledge and meanings were co-constructed by the educators

Data was collected through:

- an open semi-structured interview with the key educator

- direct observation in the setting
- examining the educators' documentation of the enquiries undertaken with or by the children
- reflection sessions with the key educator that focused on the material generated and the emerging strands of the research

The data was triangulated by

- gathering it from different *sources*; i.e. interview, direct observation, reflection sessions and documentation
- generating it through the researcher and the educator separately and together to provide different *voices and perspectives* (Stake, 1994:241; Bancroft *et al.*, 2008:8-9). It was hoped that the voice of the children would also be heard (Janzen, 2008: 287) through recorded observations both from researcher and teacher-researcher.
- conducting the research over a *time* period of twelve weeks (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:324)

The interview questions were constructed to relate closely to the research questions. The interview sought to reveal the views, attitude and values of the key educator and how they influenced their pedagogy. Through the initial interview and reflection sessions with the educator-researcher, the aim was to gain some understanding of their:

- underlying epistemological and ontological views, and educational paradigm
- perspective on the learning environment created and views on creativity

[Appendix D2:18-25]

An understanding of how meaning-making was undertaken with the children was first sought through the researcher's observations, and then explored through discussion with the educator-researcher in reflection sessions [Appendix D2: 29-30; 32-34, 37-40]

The interview, although focused through the questions [Appendix B:1], provided time and space for the educator-researcher to voice their views and perspectives. It was open enough to allow for the questions to act as an initial provocation and to allow the interviewee's thoughts to flow or to introduce ideas or perspectives that hadn't been anticipated (Bell, 2005:161). The semi-structured nature of the interview also allowed the asking of additional questions in order to reach further clarification or to go into greater depth in response to what the interviewee was saying. In effect, it enabled reflect-in-action (Schon, 1987:4) in conducting the interview [Appendix D2:18-25]. The interview and reflection sessions were sound recorded (permission sought) and then transcribed to allow for greater accuracy and comprehensiveness (Bell, 2005:164). This allowed for more eye contact and for both the interviewee and interviewer to engage in dialogue and reflection (*ibid*).

Direct observations were undertaken in the classroom on six occasions, across a period of 10 weeks. In preliminary discussions the aims and research questions were shared with the educator-researcher and the most relevant key times, episodes, and processes to observe were considered. It was decided that five of the visits should be in the afternoons to observe *Explore Time*<sup>ii</sup> and one should be in a morning to observe

how adult-led activity and co-constructed enquiries were facilitated in the same session. For the first few visits observations were focused on the key educator, following their interactions with the children, to gain an understanding of the pedagogical strategies being used. In later sessions some time was also spent following groups in order to observe if they collaborated with each other and used creative enquiry processes without an adult present. Whole-class discussions, at the beginning and the end of each session, were also of key interest.

The data was gathered through making a written record of what took place; noting non-verbal actions, what was said (by the educators and children), taking some photographs and short video clips. Copies of all the material was given to the educator allowing the data to:

- be member checked (Hithcock and Hughes, 1995:324)
- be used for the educators own documentation purposes
- offer the educator an outsider view-point of what the educators and children were doing in the episodes observed
- be used as feedback on the data being gathered

During this phase, the data being collected was continued to be cross - checked against the research questions, to ensure that the material being gathered was relevant and comprehensive. This allowed for any reframing of the focus of observations during subsequent visits.



During the observation sessions the key educator sometimes shared their thoughts on the children's learning behaviour and enquiry processes<sup>iii</sup> with the researcher. Informal 'reflection-ON-action' (Schon, 1987:4) also took place between researcher and educators at the end of each session<sup>iv</sup>. This process helped to build on-going analysis into the data collection phase, continued to build relationships and a process of collaborative enquiry.

An additional visit was made to the setting in order to examine the documentation collected and collated by the educators. The *Explore Time* documentation [Appendix D3] was photographed so that copies could be analysed. This would enable the building of a more comprehensive picture of both current enquiries and ones that had taken place earlier. This was advantageous in that it:

- extended the time period over which the data could be triangulated (Denzin, 1970 cited in Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:324)
- allowed the tracing of links between enquiries
- enabled the tracing of the beginnings of some enquiries that were current
- provided on-going observations in addition to the snapshots gained through direct observations in six sessions
- provided observations from different perspectives (from the three educators involved in the class) and the voice of the children (or *visible listening* through photographs of their engagement in enquiry, their spoken words, description of their actions and photographs of their drawings, constructions etc.) (Clark in Clark *et al.*:42)

After the observations had been completed two reflection sessions were arranged with the educator-researcher. Digital sound recordings of both of these sessions were transcribed providing a further layer of data for analysis.

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<sup>ii</sup> Explore Time is the name that staff of the school use to refer to periods of time given to profile more child-initiated activity. In Jayne's class the projects that emerge and that are sustained (over varying periods of time) are referred to as Enquiries.

<sup>iii</sup> A normal part of practice for the teacher, teaching-assistant and learning support teacher.

## **Chapter 5. Data Analysis**

A 'systematic' approach (Nisbet and Watt, 1984:73) to data analysis was used that involved different phases:

- After each observation session, and the initial interview, notes were transcribed and a copy sent to the educator to be verified. Phrases and episodes that seemed significant were marked up on the researcher's copies. This process kept the focus of the research questions and literature reviewed in mind but stayed open to allow the striking key characteristics of this particular pedagogy (of *the case*) to shine through (Stake, 1994:236-7). During this phase some emerging characteristics were reflected back to the educator-researcher. This is consistent with Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:297) cited description of grounded theory. The educator-researcher also began to notice things about her own practice through reading the observations, which she shared with me [Appendix D2:26].
- A reflection session was held with the key educator at the end of the data collection period [*ibid*]. The purpose of this was to clarify any data recorded, to add in the educator-researcher's perspective on what they had observed, to gain feedback on the written observations, and to reflect collaboratively on the educator's pedagogy. The key question at this stage was to explore *what the educators were doing that supported the enquiry process?* The

educator-researcher was able to focus in on key factors in the case of their practice and the researcher was able to offer what were seen as the emerging strands. These were then explored together through dialogue. This in itself provided another layer of data.

- Further analysis of all the data collected revealed four prominently emerging strands related to *creative collaborative enquiry* [Appendix C:4]. These were explored in depth in a further reflection and analysis session with the educator-researcher; examining what each might mean and how they might be connected. The significance of the emerging strands relating to pedagogy [ibid] was then also discussed; to examine what supported the collaborative enquiry process. The relationships of these seemingly significant strands were then explored further through trying out our developing co-constructed ideas to form a tentative model [Appendix D2:37-42].
- A further stage, as researcher, was to re-check the data, including the transcripts of recorded reflection sessions searching for key strands that appeared in more than one source. These were then refined and put into categories (Cremin et al, 2006:112) and sub-categories [Appendix C:1-3]. During this process key values, concepts and processes involved in *creative collaborative enquiry* and related to the *language of meaning-making* (Dahlberg et al.:ix) appeared relevant to several of the categories or between them, and were highlighted [Appendix C:1-3]. These correlated strongly with the themes placed in the tentative model that had been co-constructed and appeared to stabilize the categories (Cremin et al., 2006:113). The model then went through several revisions to refine it [Fig.1p.70]

- From the categories and sub-categories a second tentative model [Fig. 2 p. 83] emerged which aimed to show the *key characteristics of pedagogy* that appeared to support *creative collaborative enquiry*. Of the four main themes [Appendix C:4], though all are significant and are in relation to each other, two could be described as foreground and two as background (Rogoff, 2003: 58) for the purpose of this study.
- Once these themes had been identified, four in relation to *creative collaborative enquiry* and four in relation to the *pedagogy supporting it*, these themes were then colour coded, searched for and marked across the different sources of data (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:299). As the data was generated through the:
  - researchers own observations
  - interview with the educator where she sharing her perspective on her practice
  - joint researcher and teacher-researcher reflection sessions
  - educator's documentation of the children's enquiries

it could be said to triangulate the findings through 'multiple perceptions' (Stake, 1994:241).

- The key themes and models were then checked with the educator-researcher in order to further validate the analysis (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:324).
- Key episodes were then identified to illuminate the themes in the findings section. This material reflects the co-construction of meanings and the different voices of the educator-researcher, children and researcher (Stake,

1994:241). The selected material was then shared with and verified with the educator-researcher (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:324).

In summary the process was 'inductive' involving the:

moving backwards and forwards between data and analysis, and between data and any theories and concepts developed, and between the data and other sources of literature.  
(Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:297).



## **Chapter 6. Findings: the case illuminated.**

The findings are presented in this chapter as a 'portrayal' of the case with the evidence being 'woven' into the text in order to 'alternate generalization and illustration' (Nisbet and Watt, 1984:89-90). Hypothesis and conclusions are kept separate from the evidence, given comprehensively in Appendix D, making it possible for the reader to assess the evidence and to reach conclusions independently (*ibid*:90). The case is presented so that it moves from 'a description of what is the case to an explanation of why what is the case, is the case' (as in *Grounded Theory* Glaser and Strauss, 1967, cited in Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995:297).

### **Context of the school and the Key Educator's practice**

Twerton Infants School is situated in the city of Bath. Children, aged from three to seven years, live mainly in the neighbourhood of the school, which is predominantly local authority housing (Ofsted, 2009: 2). The school has strong links to the community, works closely with families, and values all children as capable (Twerton Infant School and Nursery, *Prospectus*). They give high profile to ensuring children have good basic skills but are also developing their key learning skills for life through a range of experiences (Explore Time) inside and outside school (*ibid*). The development of children's 'key skills such as collaboration and problem-solving', is supported within 'meaningful contexts', and involves children as active partners in their own learning (Rochford-Smith, 2007).



The school has been a 5x5x5=creativity research setting since 2003, and reception class teacher Jayne Rochford-Smith has been involved in this creative, collaborative action-research throughout. Paul Mattausch Burrows,

Headteacher, comments on the influence on the school:

What's brilliant about 5x5x5=creativity is that it respects the way children learn and values them as learners in their own right...[W]e have witnessed the direct results of this recognition: the children have learned more powerfully across all areas of the curriculum and made huge strides in their self-esteem.  
(Bancroft *et al.*, 2008: 88)

Jayne cites the 5x5x5=creativity project as the 'biggest influence' on her practice and indicates how it caused her to 'rethink' her role as a teacher. She identified the key aspects that changed:

the realisation of how capable the children were.... [And] allowing children to develop their own ideas...realising that I didn't need to be ...dictating to them what they needed to learn ....allowing them to think and to .. show me what they were capable of. And I was there .... to support them in developing their knowledge.  
[Appendix D 2:18-19]

Valuing children, seeing them as capable and profiling this through learner agency are evident in both the values of the school and Jayne's practice.

#### *An overview of the practice in Jayne's Reception Class*

Jayne describes their practice as:

really very open. A lot of our ideas come from the children. We try to make sure our children have a balance of the basic skills ...but embedded is ...our interest in developing the children as confident independent learners and ... building on their experiences and interests throughout  
[Appendix D2: Interview, 7.7.10]

There is 'flexibility' and balance in the timetable [Appendix D2:18]. Jayne has provided longer afternoons for Explore Time. She explains:

also in the mornings [the children] would have opportunities to continue to develop their own work and that would be mixed in with some .. supported adult-led activity.  
[Appendix D2:18]

### ***A description of the key themes emerging from the research***

An initial examination revealed six significant categories occurring across all forms of data:

- *the nature of the learning environment*
- *the use of a creative, reflective planning cycle by the educators*
- *profiling learner agency*
- *the way educators were scaffolding learning*
- *connections with family, community and the world outside school*

A full list of the categories and sub-categories identified is given in Appendix C.

Four recurring themes related to *creative collaborative enquiry* emerged across and between the categories and sub-categories. These were identified as:

- *the creative enquiry* processes of children and educators
- *reciprocity*; including relationships, collaboration, listening, dialogue and exchange of and responsiveness to each other's ideas
- *a contextual, cultural, competence paradigm* (Woodhead, 2005: 85) embodying the educators' values
- *meaning-making*; making connections in learning, engaging in meaningful experiences, recognition of children's interests and their cultural and social referencing and participation

In *Part I* extracts, drawn from the case study material, are presented to illustrate each of these themes. Each example may be evidence of more than one theme and although they are chosen to highlight the most predominant

they also serve to illustrate their connectedness. Phenomena in real life rarely act in isolation from other factors. In *Part 2* of the findings, evidence for the pedagogy supporting the creative collaborative enquiry will be portrayed.

## **Part 1**

### *Creative Enquiry Processes*

The educators identify the children's lines of enquiry and support these during Explore Time. There may be four or five main enquiries current at any time.

These can span a few days, several weeks or Jayne explains:

You find strands that go on continually throughout the year that sometimes never peter out; like this year the interest in drawing, has been really strong ..... I think we've got a group of about four or five children who spend a lot of their time really visualising their ideas. They do quite detailed drawings but they now seem to be doing very collaborative drawings .....

[Appendix D2:23]

The enquiries often originate from the interests of the children. The following extracts illustrate how such enquiries can arise and become sustained through the curiosity and exploratory drive of both children and adults. Whilst Jayne was gardening with one group, two or three children were engaged in digging elsewhere.

Two children come up to Jayne and show her something they have found ...  
 Jayne: have you found a piece of nest?.....  
 [Shortly afterwards]:  
Reece brings: 'a brick', they have found near the top of the soil.  
Jayne examines it with her hands and shows Reece the clay in it. Jayne asks him if he can mould it like the clay in the classroom?.....  
Reece finds: 'a hard rock', in the digging bed and brings it to show to Jayne.  
Jayne: 'Maybe concrete from the building work.'.....  
Reece brings more finds from the digging plot.  
Jayne: 'I think that's more clay?'

Reece returns to dig then brings another hard lump.  
Jayne asks if it came from the top? Asks him what it is like further down?  
Reece responds with observation: 'Soft'  
Jayne speculates if it is clay on top that has dried out and gone hard.....  
Reece shows me another bit: 'soil'  
I ask him what happens when he squeezes it?  
Reece: Tries squeezing it and it crumbles: 'It goes all softy' .....(he observes)  
Jayne has given them a pot to put the 'lumps' in.  
Jayne: 'We can have a look at those.'  
Jayne asks them how they are doing as she goes past.  
Reece digs down: 'See if we can find anything else? ...Yes!' (He puts the lump in the pot.).....  
 Clearing up at the end of the session Jayne suggests the children keep the pot of what they have found ....

Jayne reflects with me during the session exploring further possibilities:  
 'I'd like them to see what we could do with it. They could make something with it.' We talk about trying to separate the soil and the clay. Jayne says she will research it on the Internet. She would also like them to explore porcelain to see the difference between the types of clay.

When the whole class come together at the end of the session Jayne asks Reece, Javen and Brianna to tell the rest of the class what they found.

Reece: 'We found that lot.' (pointing to the bucket containing the lumps).

Jayne: 'What could we do with them next?' ....

The children suggest: 'cook them', 'put some mud in'.

Jayne: 'Shall we share what we thought Liz?' .....

Liz: 'Jayne had a good question. She asked how do we get the soil out of the clay?'

[The bucket is being passed around for the children to examine the lumps.]

Jayne: 'We could look it up on the Internet'.

One child suggests: 'We could put it under a microscope.'

[Appendix D1:4-6; D3:12-13]

The episode when analysed<sup>vi</sup> exemplifies some of the processes the adults and children are engaged in: they are exploring, discovering, observing, using 'possibility thinking' (Burnard *et al*, 2006:257) through their actions and questions, speculating, and sharing what they find and their ideas with each other. The curiosity of a few children is recognised and supported by Jayne, their explorations and ideas being valued, and through giving these time, space

and attention the interest spreads across the rest of the class becoming a new, shared line of enquiry. This is then taken forward over the next few weeks with experiments to separate the clay and other elements from the soil. Porcelain clay was also introduced to the children to build upon investigations with red clay earlier in the year. [Appendix D1:12-13; D3:2-3]

During the course of observations it was noticeable how much the educators modelled enquiry processes to the children through their hands-on exploration alongside them and through verbalising their thoughts; in particular the use of 'possibility thinking' through 'posing questions' (Burnard *et al*, 2006:257). In the following episode the non-verbal enquiry processes of the children are evident.

The children are exploring watercolour paint blocks:

Jayne: 'Try turning that over, see what it's like underneath.' (Paint blocks in the palette).

Javen and Chloe try turning them over. Some are stuck.....

Javen picks up a block and drops it on a piece of paper. Chloe and Javen experiment with using them as printing blocks, dabbing them on the paper.

Jayne: Is it wet? What is it like? (looking at bottom of block).

Chloe shows Javen another technique...

Javen: discovers wet paint under the blocks in the palette and uses it to paint with.

[Appendix D2:1, D3:16-17]

Javen and Chloe initially follow Jayne's suggestion *to see what it's like underneath*.

They then demonstrate their own 'possibility thinking' through their

exploratory *play, immersion, and innovation* with the paint blocks (*ibid*: 257).

In a reflection session we explored the effect on the children of the adults modelling creative enquiry processes.

Jayne: 'I think what you were saying about the *possibility thinking* ...I think the children have got a lot more experience of doing that now. When

we had parents evening..... [Anshee's] dad said: *'she's a real thinker, all the time she's asking me what does this do, how do you do this, what would happen if I did this, and asking all different questions ... it's fantastic'....*[He] was valuing that, and valuing the way that she was very creative and very imaginative in her questions and how she is investigating. ....I thought it was good that he's noticing something in her disposition outside school.'

Amy<sup>vii</sup> 'That language must have an impact....the language you use to voice those explorations ..., for them to go out and ask those questions further about more things.'

[Appendix D2:28]

The examples together reveal how the creative enquiry processes are embraced and embedded in the behaviour of children and educators; and indicates the children being creative researchers.

### *Reciprocity*

In addition to the educators noticing and responding to the children's interests, [pp.58-60] Jayne and Wendy<sup>viii</sup> reciprocate by sharing their interest in gardening and food with the children, triggering an enquiry that threads throughout the year.

We see that as a really important value ..... in terms of their understanding.. about where food comes from, ... the value of sustainability and the fact that you can grow your own vegetables and look after and nurture something over time.

[Appendix D2:23-24]

Jayne has been engaged with a small group of children who had expressed an interest in working on the class garden.

Jayne shows them the tiny gooseberries growing on the bushes<sup>1</sup>.

The children notice the 'spikes' on the gooseberries<sup>2</sup>.

Hannah counts 30 gooseberries: 'They look like grapes.'<sup>3</sup>

Jayne: 'They taste a bit sour like lemons, unless you cook them.'<sup>4</sup>

Hannah suggests her mum might have a recipe.<sup>5</sup>

[Appendix D1:6]

In this episode, Jayne draws the children's attention to a new encounter<sup>1</sup>, the children reciprocate by noticing details<sup>2</sup>, Hannah adds in counting and the connections she is making to her current knowledge<sup>3</sup>, Jayne adds in relevant information<sup>4</sup> and Hannah then offers the contribution of a recipe from home<sup>5</sup>. This evidences a reciprocal exchange of ideas through enquiry, dialogue and a process of co-construction of ideas and knowledge.

The research aimed to explore *collaborative* creative enquiry. Observations of how the children related and responded to each other revealed their developing ability to use collaborative skills independently of adult support. Collaboration is a process that involves reciprocal actions and responses:

Michael: 'This is my bed.' He puts cushions in a row and lies down. He gives a cushion to a girl. 'Brothers and sisters. Christmas Eve. Santa's coming down the chimney.'  
 Kaylesha: 'Pretend this is my cake.'  
 Taylor joins in. Michael says he is Santa....  
 Michael: 'Present. Present. Present.'  
 Kaylesha: 'Shall we play Princesses and Prince?'  
 Michael: 'I'm the Prince.' 'I sleep in my own room.'  
 Kaylesha: 'You have to be quiet: I've got babies.'.....  
 Michael moves his bed to another corner. He takes a bowl of food.  
 Michael: 'Breakfast!'  
 [Appendix D1:15]

Michael offers his idea and resources to the other children. When his own idea of Christmas is not taken up he accepts an alternative of 'Princesses and Prince' in collaboration with the rest of the group. During a reflection session Jayne comments:

'That's brilliant for him actually, because [Michael] is ... more likely to impose his own ideas. I think he has developed those skills over the year.'  
 [Appendix D2:36]

In these exchanges the children used 'listening' as an 'active' and 'reciprocal verb' where 'listening means being open to others' (Rinaldi, C. 2006:126) and takes 'into account the perspectives of others' (Smith, 2009:35).

Reflecting on the relationships between the educators and the children, Jayne describes them as 'open' and 'respectful'. She comments on the children being able to say 'how they feel', 'what they want to do' and says: 'I think there is a real bond between us'. [Appendix D2:22]. In a further discussion Jayne indicates how they encourage reciprocal relations: stressing the importance of listening, conflict resolution, empathy, and true collaboration described as 'an equal partnership where no one person dominates'. [Appendix D2:35].

Together the examples illustrate reciprocity in the exchange of interests and ideas (between educators and children, and between children) through listening, dialogue, enquiry, and a process of co-construction. They exemplify collaboration as a process of reciprocal respect, actions and responses: a true partnership. It illustrates the co-creation of a collaborative learning community between the adults and the children.

*A contextual, cultural, competence paradigm* (Woodhead, 2005:85)

Observations revealed a learning community in which children's competencies could be expressed (*ibid*: 85), and their lived and significant experiences, expressions, engagements and interests were recognised (Doddington and Hilton, 2007:55-95). On one occasion the children asked if they could share the



dances they had been developing during the lunch-break. A space was cleared and different groups of children came forward to show their dances to the rest of the class, to the music of J.L.S. [Appendix D1:3]. During a later visit children were observed setting up their own dance show:

Tash and Hardeep had the music on. Three other children were on a row of chairs, with whiteboards on their knees. One said: 'You've won.' Tash and Hardeep were dancing in front of the 'judges'<sup>ix</sup>. The judges write...

The music is *You're flying from High School Musical*

.....

Tash and Hardeep perform their dance for the class at the end of the afternoon. The class sing along to the music.

Tash and Hardeep ask the group for comments or questions.

Jack: 'I like when you did the ball.' (They had curled up in a ball at the end of the dance.)

Child: 'I liked it when you was going like this' (imitates them flapping arms)

[Appendix D1:13-14]

The educators gave equal time, space and attention to this line of enquiry in which the children were exploring and expressing their ideas through movement, dance and with music of their own choosing. It profiled the children's social and cultural referencing and participation. Jayne commented on the children's competencies observing how the children's movements were becoming 'more imaginative' [*ibid*:14]. It exemplifies the educators trusting the children's capabilities and their capacity to develop their ideas. It illustrates the value that the educators are placing on what children bring of themselves, and of their experiences outside school. The extract indicates a process of creative, collaborative, enquiry that here is being co-constructed by the children and given value by the educators within the learning environment.

### **Meaning-making**

In one reflection session the *language of meaning-making* (Dahlberg et al, 2007:ix)

was discussed:

Liz: 'It's that co-construction of knowledge that goes on between you and them, and between the children. So it's to do with what sense, what meaning are they making from their experiences and how important it is, to see it as not just what goes on in the classroom or the school but (also) what goes on outside. Hence the references to things like the dance and the culture that they are bringing in from outside..... it's at the heart of the enquiry process: what sense are they making out of things? ..... *How are they meaning-making from this process?....*'

Jayne: 'I don't know if they would really be able to explain ..... They make the connections...'

Liz: 'I guess it's then what we can pick up on a non-verbal level, the connections that they are making in their learning, because if we can see the connections that they're making between different experiences or over the year.....whether it's *how a piece of paint responds* or *what happens when you plunge that block in the water and the water spills over* or whether it's *snow melting* ...'

Amy: 'So you're interested in tracking the smaller parts that make a bigger.... meaning?'

Liz: '...And what is it that you do that supports that happening? ....

Amy: 'You reflect with the children too don't you [to Jayne]. That's a way that you help them to continue those connections or fill in another piece?'

Jayne: 'Yes. It makes you wonder .....what they make of it all?'

Liz: '.....it's planting the seeds and bits that will then connect up later on and make sense to them.'

Jayne: 'That's the key thing isn't it.'

[Appendix D2:30]

During a reflection and analysis session we discussed relations educators have with the children's families looking for the context and linking of the children's different spheres of social and cultural life.

Jayne: 'I think our relationship with parents is very strong. .... [The] children see us a link between them and the families....I think that's a really important part.' [Appendix D2:20]

The following extract illustrates Jayne connecting children's lives outside school with their world of learning in the classroom. Jayne was working with children

drawing and talking about their families. Her conversation with them flowed naturally and authentically:

Jayne asks one child about his brother: 'Is his leg better? He broke his leg playing football [to me].'.....

Jayne recalls the name of another girl's mum to her and asks what her four uncles are called?.....

One girl tells Jayne about her baby: 'My baby has a big thing in her eye..'.....

Two children recall seeing each other in the park:

Brianna: 'I saw Tian at Vicky Park. ...In the sand.'

Tian: 'You can climb up the ladder..'

Brianna: 'Tian wouldn't come down the slide.'

[Appendix D2:8-10]

It was noticeable how often children made reference to places they had visited with family. These experiences were often shared between each other informally or brought up at group discussion time. Jayne recalled how on one occasion Tash had shared his holiday experiences. Jayne was reading a story and, when it referred to swimming in the ocean, Tash explained about the swimming pools at Butlins. He shared his knowledge explaining which pools he was allowed in due to height restrictions and where those who wore arm bands could go and what they could do [Appendix D2:31-32].

Analysis of observations and documentation revealed that often children referenced or likened things to something else when they were engaged in their enquiries. In the following example the children are exploring porcelain clay for the first time:

Child: 'Looks like milk.'

Javen: 'Feels like milk.'.....

Jayne feeling the residue left on her hands: 'It's chalky, like when you've used chalk!' .....

Javan: 'Looks like a policeman'. 'Look done a skull.' He looks down on it and says to me: 'See? Eyes there and there and a bit of skull there.'.....

Javan put someone's leftover head on top of his own (clay).

Javan: 'Snowman'  
 Jayne: 'It's the colour of a snowman.'.....  
 Javan adds eyes and nose.  
 Javan: 'Bob the Builder.'  
 Jayne: 'It looks like the one with the nose in Bob the Builder.'  
 Javan: 'The Scarecrow. Yeh.'  
 [Appendix D1:12-13]

During the session Jayne commented on how the children's symbolism often develops into narrative expressions. Wendy referred to a large-scale collaborative collage children had been creating in the morning. The children had made water going all round the perimeter of the picture.

John had said: 'Water was following round like a dinosaur'.  
 Wendy: 'If you think about what he said you can really picture it.'  
 [Appendix D1:14]

During the reflection and analysis phase the meaning of *meaning-making* was explored and understandings co-constructed. Reference is made to a large scale collaborative drawing [Appendix D3:19]:

Liz: 'they're talking about....a monster in a house ... and the house has got flags all over it. .... I wondered.....is the monster in the house metaphorical in terms of the bad things out there in the real world?'  
 Jayne: 'There's lots of police and monsters.'.....  
 Liz: '.... monsters are usually, if you look underneath that, to do with the good and the bad in life. Or not having control over something.... And they dip in and out of fantasy and reality so much.'  
 Jayne: 'They do. It's something that is very apparent with our children... But the police comes up quite a lot...'  
 Liz: 'And it was during the World cup and loads of houses and flats had flags all over them. But one of the houses, there was a monster in it.'  
 Jayne: 'But they quite like the bad – it will often be monsters chasing..'  
 ....  
 Liz: 'I think monsters are often a metaphor for something that they are trying to make sense of. I think it's part of the meaning-making ..'  
 [Appendix D2:38]

The extracts together illustrate the connections the children were making in their learning between different social and cultural realms; family, school experiences, neighbourhood, visits or holidays with family and media references.

They exemplify the children connecting the previously unconnected in ways that are new and meaningful to them (Duffy, 2006:25) through their enquiry processes using 'many symbolic languages' (Rinaldi, 2006:205).

*Towards a model of children's meaning-making through a creative collaborative enquiry*

During the reflection and analysis process researcher and educator-researcher sketched a hypothetical model of the process of meaning-making that was being co-constructed from the analysis of the data [Fig. 1]\*:

Jayne: 'You could look at it as if you were a child... So you would have ....what effects them out of school, like family, media.. their friendship groups, which could be part of school'  
 Liz: 'And then they talk a lot about what they've done, like going to Wookey Hole .....

Jayne: 'So that could be their cultural out of school experiences' .....being taken to places, it could be their local [environment].. because we talk a lot .. about ....what's very close to them.' .....So within what we are as a school, we encompass some of that ...because we're there making some of those connections with family, and possibly with friendship groups.... .....The media we definitely have an influence on.... Especially with the music side of things it's a big influence on them.

Liz: 'So in school encompasses...' (their experiences outside school)

Jayne: 'Yeh – it goes right across the whole thing.' .....

Liz: 'And the children are bringing in some of this.' (referring to areas of the diagram shown in green on Fig. 1)

Jayne: 'And ..in terms of what experiences we give them ... Things like when we took them to the farm, and they go home and talk about [it] .....then their parents might take them there. There's that whole cross-over.' .....

Liz: 'So I suppose this is the end result isn't it.' [indicating meaning-making]

Jayne: 'It's them making sense of it all.....So that's almost the centre of it... You need that for it all to join together ... Because you need the collaboration ...between the family and the school.... [T]he media thing is an interesting one .. like with the *High School Musical* ..

Liz: '...it motivates them to dance.'

Jayne: '...When you actually saw what they got out of it, it was fantastic, in terms of collaboration, ..Breakdance, and stereotypes (that boys ..were in to it more than the girls were). ....

Jayne: 'So the collaboration and enquiry – it all needs to be there – it all needs to be connected.'

Liz: 'The enquiry really is the process through which it all happens.'

Jayne: 'How you do it.'.....

Liz: 'Those are the learning skills, a way of learning, of making sense.'

[Appendix D2:37-40]

The model is therefore presented [Fig. I] to illustrate the overlapping experiences and relationships from inside and outside school that a child may be experiencing from their view-point. It represents reciprocity throughout. The child is shown at the centre of the model surrounded by their overlapping realms of social and cultural participation. The analysis and co-construction engaged in by researcher and teacher-researcher led to the co-creation of the model. It illustrates the meaning-making supported by the values of school and the educators in Jayne's classroom, the collaborative relationships they build together with the children, family and friendship groups, and the recognition of children's lived lives and experiences. It shows creative, collaborative enquiry as a key process through which the children are supported in making sense of their experiences and in the co-construction of knowledge.

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<sup>v</sup> Earlier in the year the children had used a microscope to look at things they had found in the playground. [Appendix D3, Documentation 1.2.10.]

<sup>vi</sup> Key words in the transcript were underlined in order to analyse the processes.

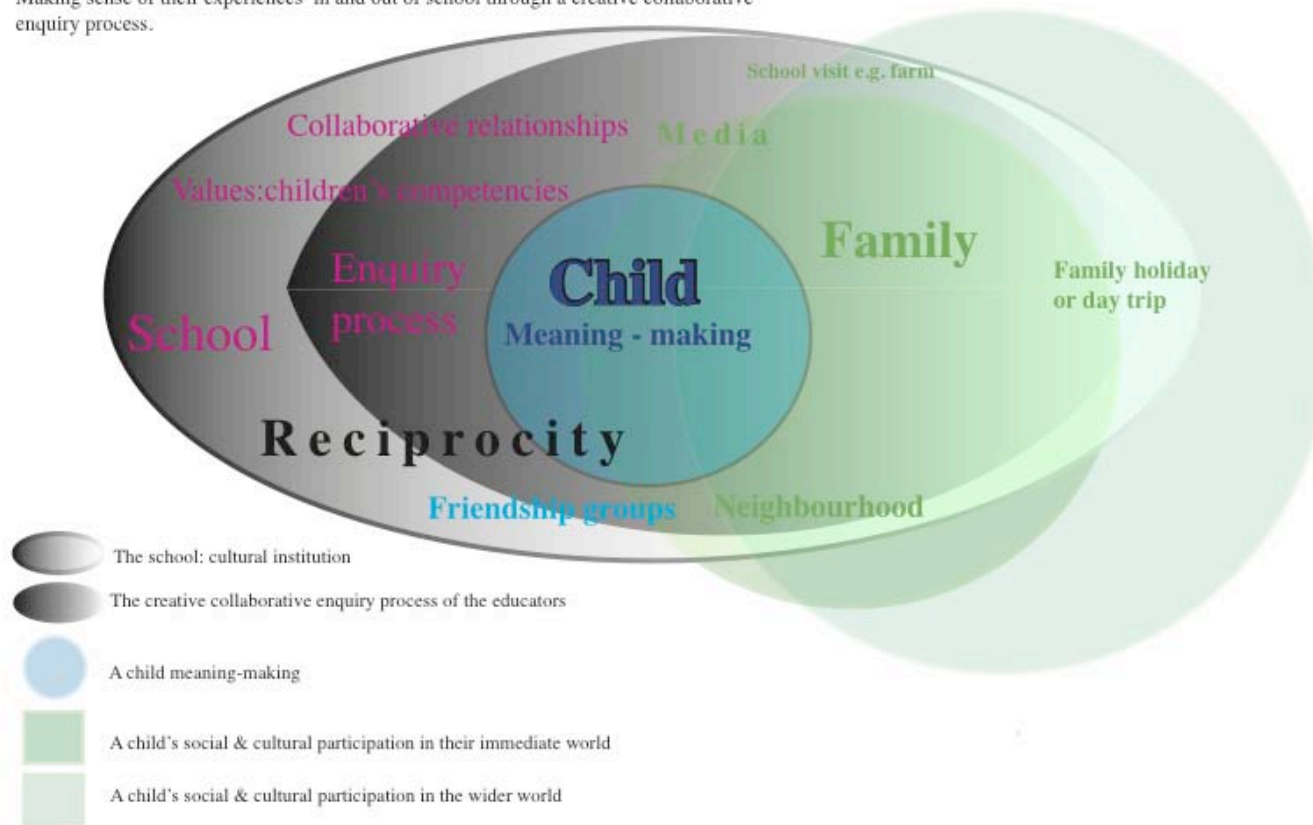
<sup>vii</sup> Amy Houghton has been collaborating with the staff of Twerton Infants School, as part of the 5x5x5=creativity research project, for a number of years. Amy had joined us for the reflection session. She is familiar with Jayne's practice and shared our interest in this enquiry.

<sup>viii</sup> Wendy is the class teaching assistant

<sup>ix</sup> This is an assumption or interpretation of what the children were acting out. It seemed to resemble the format of shows such as X-factor, but the term was not used by the children.

<sup>x</sup> The sketch was reworked visually to represent a child's viewing point, but the ideas being discussed in the transcript of this dialogue are consistent with the model in Fig. I.

Figure 1.  
CHILD'S EYE VIEW OF THE WORLD - a possible model of their meaning-making.  
Making sense of their experiences in and out of school through a creative collaborative enquiry process.



## **Part 2**

In the second part of the case the key factors in Jayne's pedagogy that support creative collaborative enquiry and the process of meaning-making are presented. The extracted data illustrates the foreground themes (Rogoff, 2003:58) of learner-agency and scaffolding by the educators, within the context of the background themes (*ibid*) of the nature of the learning environment and the educators creative reflective cycle.

### *Responsive learning environment*

The learning environment significantly was responsive to the children in terms of the educators' use of *time, space* and *attention* (Bancroft et al., 2008:19). *Flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002:6) also emerged as a concept of the environment as well as describing children's engagements. It appears key to the way the educators support the children's on-going enquiries. Relationships built on reciprocity and trust also underpinned the collaborative learning community. These are exemplified in the extracts below.

The learning environment responds to the rhythms and time frames of the children ensuring continuity and supporting the children's focus and concentration. The enquiries can be sustained and children take as much time as they like or need. The approach supports the children's total immersion and *deep level learning* (Laevers, 2005:5). The children were frequently observed in



sustained engagement [Appendix D2:29]. There was a sense of momentum and flow during an activity but also across sessions:

Jayne: 'So they have chances to spend quite a *good chunk of time working through their ideas*. ...[T]he *day flows* quite well and they can start something in the morning but then ...they *can follow their ideas right through* ..We also allow them to *develop their ideas over time* so they know that if it's something that they are interested in they can *carry it on* the following day ..... all week if they want to. .... [W]e try to build it so that if there are certain projects that are *on-going* they've got the access to the resources and what they need *continually over time*.' [Appendix D2:18]

Jayne in reflecting on the learning environment says that 'the flexibility of it is probably the biggest key' [Appendix D2:21]. She describes resources as 'open-ended' and 'easily accessible for the children' [*ibid*]. What is striking, in addition to this, is how attentive the adults are to the interests, the learning dispositions, learning styles, and preferred ways of working of the children; in response changing the environment as they go through the year. It remains flexible to adapt to the enquiries of the children. It is linked to a listening pedagogy (Rinaldi, 2006:65).

The following extracts exemplify this:

Jayne: '[I]t ...changes very much with the children.... .... [W]hat we normally do is set up the classroom ... and then through our observations we will work out the best use of the space for the children. [W]e found this year they ...wouldn't go to the end [of the classroom] near the door... it was because they found it too open .... So we blocked it off and made it into two sections and they will go in there now and use it. [I]t's ..that observing and finding out what they are interested in and seeing whether the space suits them and that only comes from knowing them.' .....

'You can adapt that space according to what you are doing. I think the scale, as well, at which they work. [T]his year they are very interested in big drawing so we've done a lot of papering up the tables for them to draw whereas last year they liked to work on the floor so it was much more that we needed a big space on the carpet area for them to work. ' .....

Liz: 'That's very responsive to their movements, their physicality not just *I'm interested in drawing*, it's how are they interested in drawing.'

Jayne: 'What is it about it that they like?...I wouldn't have thought about that when I first started in Reception. I would have made a very nice environment for them... but I wouldn't have thought about the *impact of the space for them*. It's only when you see how changing that, you can change the dynamics within the class for the better. Sometimes they can't tell you why they don't like it ....you've got to observe and see how behaviours change and try things out.'

[Appendix D2:21-22]

The learning environment is emotionally supportive. The educators model and support the development of positive and collaborative relationships. It is also a 'can do' environment; supporting the children's efforts, perseverance and giving them positive role models of learning. It was noticeable how Jayne, Wendy and Rachel<sup>xi</sup> created an environment, between each other and with the children, where there is an equality of relationships and valuing everybody's contributions. Speaking in terms of the relationships between the adults:

Jayne: 'we have quite trusting relationships in terms of what value we give to each other'

Liz: 'There is that sense of equality in terms of relationships in your classroom. It doesn't feel hierarchical and there is a huge amount of respect.'

[Appendix D2:36]

In terms of the educators relationships with the children:

Jayne: 'And because our values are very explicit to the children, and we're consistent in our approach, ...letting them ...know where they stand with you, but they know that they...have their opinions valued....I think that's really important and especially with how they respond to each other.'

[Appendix D2:22]

Jayne offers the children positive examples of *being a learner*. Jayne told the children about a *Reading Millionaires* project in Norway [Appendix D1:1].

Liz: '.. you seem to be modelling...persevering, trying and what you get out of learning?'

Jayne: 'Totally, because a lot of times they'll say *I can't do it*. .... We're always trying to raise their expectations of what they are capable of, so they go through life thinking *yeh – I can do that*, .. *I can have a go and I can do well*.' [Appendix D2:29]

Taken together with the evidence of reciprocity (61-63, 66) the learning environment supports a collaborative community of learners built upon relationships of trust and reciprocity.

### *A Creative Reflective Cycle*

Jayne talked about how a retrospective cycle of planning, based on observation and a responsiveness to the children, developed:

*Jayne: 'We found we did .. on-going observing.. So we would work with the children, then we would write key things that perhaps had come out of that and then we would think about the next step for learning. So you might end up with three or four focuses happening within the class but ....it was picking up on the main strands and then how you were going to support that. So observations are key and that time just to discuss. [O]ften with Wendy and Rachel we'll just discuss it on-going – and we'll say *this has happened, what do you think, what shall we give them next or shall we try this?* .....And then we review with the children and talk with them about things that they've been interested in. And often they have things that they want to show as well, ...that we can pick up and think about how we can develop...'*  
[Appendix D2:23]

Jayne refers to the garden episode [Appendix D1:6-7] showing how the reflective process *in-action* and *on-action*, (Schon 1987:3-4) and a listening pedagogy (Rinaldi, 2006:65) supports the enquiries of the children.

*Jayne: 'I think ..it's mainly down to listening to what they are saying and then responding to their enquiries and questions. None of it you could always plan for...like ...with the planting. It was quite a structured activity but when you read through it [the observation], it's not really. If you were looking at it in terms of ...this is what you're going to achieve out of your session, then you'd think that you hadn't achieved what you started out to do. But when you read through so much has been covered – it's gone off in a different tangent.'*  
[Appendix D1:4-6; D2:26]

Following on from the discovery of the clay in the garden (pp.58-60), the educators had set up a tray of compost in the classroom, which they were

considering moving to the garden. Jayne involved Rachel and the researcher in reflection. The children's responses were considered and possibilities generated (Aguirre Jones and Elders, 2009:12-13) for how they could support the children's enquiries further:

Jayne: 'We could have some coloured sand there or a massive tray with clay on it! I'm reluctant to let go of the idea of the clay. They seem to like the feeling and making it into mounds.'

Liz: 'I guess it depends what you want them to get out of the clay? If you have clay (in the tray inside) it allows them to explore the properties of clay and you've still got the soil in the tray outside ... They can explore the properties of the soil, clay and sand separately. There is a possibility, further down the line, of then combining the clay, soil and sand and reconstituting what they found (in the garden).'

Jayne: 'Yeh. Great idea.'

[Appendix D1:10-11]

During a later visit Jayne revisited what happened next:

Jayne: 'The separating [of the clay from the soil] didn't really work – maybe we should have used more water. What they liked was moving it from bucket to bucket, adding water and watching it change, then seeing it change back again when it dried out ... They weren't really interested in moulding it or shaping it. It seemed to be the 'transformation' they were interested in.'

Jayne remarked that they liked the .. feel, the mixing of materials: that they were making connections [to previous experimentation and experiences with different materials].

[Appendix D1:14; D3:2-7,13-14]

Through these examples the processes of the educators become transparent.

The traces of their creative, reflective cycle (observation; revisiting what happened; analysis and hypothesis of children's learning behaviours and dispositions; exploring possibilities and planning for possibilities) are made visible. The relationship between this process and its central role in a pedagogy that supports creative, collaborative enquiry can be seen. It is a creative and collaborative enquiry process for the adults, that is, in tune with what they value and choose to support with the children.

### *Learner Agency*

Several indicators of the educators' profiling of learner agency were evident. Each of these is identified below. Together they illustrate an approach that is at the heart of Jayne's pedagogy.

Children's initiation of ideas and interests are taken seriously and supported by the educators as sustained enquiries.

- The profiling (Cremin *et al.*, 2006:115-116) of the *children's initiation of ideas* are evident in the example of the children's discovery of clay (pp. 58-60) and their initiating of a dance project (pp. 63-64).
- During enquiries initiated by the provocations of the educators, the children can be seen to *contribute ideas*: with children then *taking ownership* of the project and having an awareness that they are free to follow their own fascinations, questions and lines of enquiry. This is exemplified in Jayne's documentation where Kyra requested colouring and objects to put in the shallow trays of water that they were going to leave outside in freezing conditions to see what happened [Appendix D3:4-6]
- Enquiry processes (such as exploring, discovering, experimenting) referred to by Roberts (2010:470) as examples of positive dispositions of learner agency, are evident in the extracts of the children exploring paint (p.60) and discovering clay (pp.58-60).

Children's independence, problem solving and initiative is encouraged and celebrated by the adults. The environment in terms of time, space, attention, flow and relationships supports these.

- It was evident on visits that children were encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning environment. During the session exploring paint, the children cleared-up and reset the painting table and resources [Appendix D1:2]. Children were observed setting up the role play area choosing what would take place there, how to use the space collaboratively, and selecting and accessing the resources they needed to support their play [Appendix D1:15]. Children, finding their own solutions when working independently was celebrated [Appendix D1:16]. During an adult-led activity to support literacy, the children were observed problem solving and using creative ways of expressing their ideas [Appendix D1:10].

Children have their views taken into account, are involved in negotiations, and are supported in making decisions. In the following example the children are working with porcelain clay:

Jayne: to Joshua. ' We can put it in the kiln like we've done before. .... If you want to have it in the oven then we might have to take some of the middle out otherwise it explodes.....

The children tell Jayne they don't want to fire their clay. Jayne suggests the alternative is to leave it to dry and then paint it.

[Appendix D1:13]

Agency in the learning community is evidenced in the learning groups that formed fluidly around specific activities or enquires. A question for discussion was how the educators chose children to take part in particular activities during any one session. When asked, children would express their interest, then, Jayne explains:

[We] pick the children who haven't had the experience yet. .... I think they are quite good at knowing that if they don't get chance straight away that they will get that opportunity [over the next few days]. And you find that they almost naturally select themselves but also the ones who show a real interest will sustain it.  
[Appendix D2:25]

Children then flowed in and out of the group as the session progressed.

Children also choose, negotiated access to, and set up their own play and enquiries [Appendix D3:8]. The question of how children self-selected learning groups involved in particular enquiries was also discussed:

Jayne: 'It tends to be what you would call a core group but I think you've got other children who dip into it. ....like Harry probably wasn't one for doing the big drawing but he's really got into that lately. ... It's often instigated by certain children, but then others will follow. ..  
[Appendix D2:25]

Agency in the learning community is also evidenced by the dialogical exchanges that take place with the whole class each session. The children are encouraged to take ownership of group conversations, to share their learning and achievements. Researcher and educator discussed the process:

Liz: 'you remind them all to listen to the person talking, and then you say *Javan will ask if you have any questions that you want to ask him...and he will choose.* So the children know the format ....'  
Jayne: '.. They like ... the whole power thing ...they are in control of the conversation ..[T]hey are saying *this is about what I've done, now you can talk to me and you can ask something.....*Some of them will (ask a question), but some of them will offer a positive comment.'  
[Appendix D1:28]

Together these examples illustrate the learner agency at the centre of Jayne's pedagogy. They are consistent with Roberts (2010:47) components, elements and definitions of agency and the findings of Cremin *et al* (2006:114).

### *Scaffolding*

In examining Jayne's pedagogy it was evident how modelling of positive attitudes to key-learning skills, collaboration, and the process of enquiry were central.

The children's learning was also scaffolded by the educators' provision of experiences and support for learning relevant skills. Companionship and improvisation were additionally striking characteristics of how educators viewed and performed their roles in supporting children's creative collaborative enquiry and meaning-making. The following extracts from reflection sessions with Jayne illustrate the significant aspects of the educators' scaffolding.

Extending experiences and skills in co-enquiry:

Earlier findings have indicated (pp. 55-56, 72) how the educators aim to balance the teaching of skills and building on the children's experiences and interests.

The importance of extending experiences was explored:

Jayne: '...I think the listening, and responding to what they do ..[supports co-enquiry] but also understanding the need to ... increase their perception of the world. You've almost got to give them experiences outside of their own knowledge as well and thinking about the next steps ... It's like with the clay...what we did there, where that started, and you think I could offer them this it's a new experience, offer them something else that will increase their knowledge and widen their perceptions and allow them to make all those connections between their different experiences. But I think that's where you have to be thinking all the time outside of the situation. ....you need to be always thinking what else can I offer that'll extend that experience. '  
[Appendix D2:36]

Modelling the process of enquiry and life-long learning skills:

Liz: 'you seem to model the enquiry process quite a lot: thinking aloud and posing questions yourself?'

Jayne: '....I think it's become the way we work. ...Allowing them to see that adults can try things out or experiment as well...'

Liz: 'But that then gives them skills for life. They know how to tackle new things or find out about things.'



## [Appendix D2:

Scaffolding group discussion and the co-construction of knowledge:

The process the educators used to facilitate group discussion was reflected back to Jayne:

Liz: 'There was an example.. ... a group discussion, and I guess that's in a sense when some of those ideas come together ... supporting different view points or different ideas about something and that gives children.. the co-construction?'

Jayne: 'It is.'

Liz: '.. when you're asking for their ideas, it's almost as if they are feeding in different ideas into that melting pot. That in a way it .. is scaffolding the ideas of all the children. ...'

Jayne: 'I feel it's important. ..I think we were probably more conscious of doing that earlier on, perhaps now it's just a way of working really, the way we talk with the children.'

[Appendix D2:34-35]

Improvising and conducting:

On visits it was very notable how educators supported several concurrent enquiries during a session. A particularly striking example of this was when

Jayne was gardening with the children and Reece made a new discovery. It

relates closely to Schon's (1987:4) notion of reflection-in-action as *improvisation*:

Liz: 'I felt that session ... like you were *conducting an orchestra*.'

Jayne: 'That's a good way of putting it.'

Liz: '.. You fine tune this, and work with that group and then pull a little bit in over there....'

Jayne: 'That's the hard thing...containing all that and trying to keep all that going. ... It's keeping all those thoughts in your mind that's quite hard. To keep all the conversations going but being able to also let others in as well ... It's engaging everyone so everyone feels valued.'

[Appendix D1:4-6; D2: D2:26]

Being a companion alongside children in the learning

When observing the educators it was evident how they positioned themselves alongside the children as co-enquirers and co-learners. There were authentic relations, genuine interest, and shared curiosities (reciprocity pp. 60-63, 66).

The scaffolding is significantly from a position alongside the children and is a pedagogical stance that indicates respect for and valuing of children for who they are now.

Jayne: [Your] trying to nurture them .. in terms of those life skills. But you are valuing them, they are kids and they are with us for only a short space of time.' [Appendix D2:41]

Role of the educators in supporting meaning-making:

How the role of the educators and their approach of scaffolding supported the children's creative, collaborative enquires and meaning-making was explored through a process of co-construction between teacher-researcher and researcher:

Liz: 'I guess I'm trying to work out how ...the enquiries that you support ... fit with the overall sense-making [by the children] of the world and how everything in the world works? '

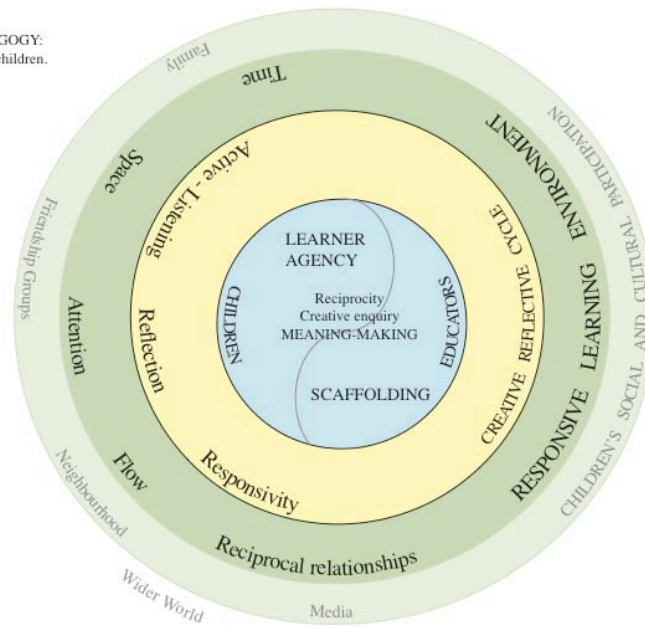
Jayne: '...I suppose we're almost adding to it aren't we: adding to the experiences we give them and then we'll offer them questions or we'll support their discussion and them working together to find things out. We'd never really know if they make connections outside apart from when parents say things to us or they come back with [e.g.] *Oh, I saw this*. That's when you know they are making those connections with other things and you'd hope that as they go through life, the experiences that you're giving them would then help them to make connections outside of that initial experience. Whether it's if they go to the park and see something growing that they'll understand about where that's come from or they go to the supermarket and see a pot of raspberries and think *yeh, we've grown those* .... I suppose what we're doing is just giving them that opportunity .. to do things that are slightly more of interest to them but also widening their experiences and perceptions by allowing them time to ask questions or to say what they are interested in. [Appendix D2:33-34]

*Towards a model of pedagogy that supports the creative collaborative enquiries of young children*

The analysis and findings illustrated here were conceptualised as a hypothetical model to represent the pedagogical approach in the case [Fig.2]. *Learner agency* and the *educators' scaffolding* were both found to be at the heart of Jayne's

pedagogy and were therefore placed centrally. They also were shown to work in synchronicity and harmony with each other; there is *reciprocity* between the two indicated by the interlocking shapes that together make up the central circle. Learner agency and the adults scaffolding have the effect of supporting the children's creative collaborative enquiry and process of meaning-making (at the centre). The circle is nested in two concentric circles representing a *creative reflective cycle* and the *responsive learning environment*. The learning environment relies upon the creative reflective process of the educators in order to be responsive. Equally the findings show the relationship between the *creative reflective cycle* and a *responsive learning environment* in supporting the *process of the children's creative, collaborative enquiry and meaning-making*. Part one of the findings and *Figure 1* have shown the relationship between the children's experiences out of school and the creative collaborative enquiries supported by the educators. This influences and contextualises the pedagogical approach, the creative reflective cycle being key to this. The context of the children's experiences out of school therefore is shown in the diagram encircling the co-constructed environment, the creative reflective cycle and the combined pedagogical stance of learner agency and scaffolding.

Figure 2.  
A MODEL OF PEDAGOGY:  
that values and trusts children.



In summary the case has been portrayed through the voices of the researcher, researcher-educator, educators and the children. Together they paint a multi-dimensional image to enable the reader to visualise the case: the creative collaborative enquiries of children and how the educators support these. The analytic processes, reflecting and critical thinking of researcher and educator-researcher have been made visible and sharable through the documentation of the case. The process of the creative and collaborative search for a sense of meaning has been made transparent. The construction and co-construction of interpretative models (Rinaldi, 2006:112-3) has been presented.

<sup>xi</sup> Rachel is a learning support teacher

## **Chapter 7. Conclusion**

### ***Reflection on emerging lines of the enquiry***

The process began with noticing curiosity and fascination regarding *creative collaborative enquiries* and educators *trusting in the ideas of children*. A focus and possible line of research emerged on how educators identified and supported children's fascinations and interests. As the literature was reviewed the significance of views of childhood, children's competencies (Woodhead, 2005; Dahlberg et al. 2007:19-42) and recognising their social and cultural participation in overlapping communities (Rogoff, 2003:81) became more apparent. The centrality of the *language of meaning-making* became clear (Dahlberg et al. 2007:ix). Creative and collaborative learning processes were examined through the literature reviewed and a critical analysis of researchful pedagogies made. Researcher and educator-researcher engaged in making connections, exploring relationships between emerging themes and co-constructing an interpretative model.

A critical analysis of the literature and a systematic analysis of the data, together with reflection and analysis sessions with the educator-researcher allowed the case of the educators pedagogy to be examined. A model of the pedagogy that supported the creative collaborative enquiries with the children could then be constructed.

The story of the children's learning experience and that are of the researcher and the educator-researcher are parallel. They both involve collaborative

enquiry, open-ended research, and deep-level learning. They both involve the *life of an idea* (Mason and Duckett, 2005:16-17).

***The ‘life of an idea’: search for meaning of ‘trusting in the ideas of children’***

The researcher and educator researcher reflected upon the models that had emerged from the research and their significance:

Jayne: ‘.....You’re providing the opportunities for them to make their enquiry and then all those skills that they are developing will come through. It makes you think ...where does curriculum sit in all that?’  
... ‘In terms of what value should you put on that? .....

Liz: ‘So the difference is that you’re not starting with, and teaching towards those goals and skills and ticking them off. This is what you value [referring to Fig.1] but actually you know that everything that QCA or people in society ...think children of this age should be able to do ....., you know that you are covering that anyway. But that’s not how you are framing it.’

Jayne: ‘Yes, exactly. .. what we would do is the reverse ...[We] say we have achieved that after we’ve done it rather than saying this is what we are going to teach.’

Jayne: ‘..... The meaning-making is how everything fits together isn’t it.’.....

Liz: ‘.....that they make sense of their lives.

[We discuss preparing citizens of the future versus childhood in the here and now.]

Jayne: ‘And you need to be a child.’

Liz: ‘... and this is about your life now. .. [W]e want you... to be able to cope with being an adult in the real world, but actually we value you and what your ideas are now and trust in that.’

Jayne: ‘But there are connections between the two isn’t there?’

..... In terms of impact you’re going to have on them, in terms of how they see education and learning. So you are preparing them..... trying to nurture them ..in terms of those life skills. But you are valuing them....

Liz: ‘..... [If] you’re feeling valued in yourself and your ideas, and your learning, then that’s building the process of who you are in the future anyway. The two are not at odds.’.....

Liz: ‘I think the idea of trusting..... is to do with... valuing [referring to Fig 1], who they are now .....and what [they] are about, .... then .. you are trusting that your receptiveness to who they are, and the way they go about learning is going to be fruitful. You’re adding things in, but you are working with what’s there as well, so you are scaffolding it all the way up.’

Jayne: ‘I think it’s that understanding where they are and valuing where they’ve come from and what you want to do next..’

Liz: 'So I think it goes back to that thing of curiosity....[I]f we believe the way children are from the moment of birth, is that they are curious and explore the world and try to make sense of it, then we don't actually teach them that it's already there.... But you do have to support it in many ways.'

[Appendix D2:40-42]

Through examining the educators pedagogical approach educator-researcher and researcher came to the conclusion that through collaborative enquiry, that took account of children's competencies, context and lived experiences, it was possible to support children in the 'here and now' and to develop their life-long learning skills that would help to equip them for the future (OECD, 2004:4,28).

### ***Summary of conclusions***

The interpretative model [Fig.1] indicates how creative collaborative enquiry with young children enables them to research the world, make connections, express ideas (in many languages), and co-construct interpretative theories in the process of meaning-making. Creative collaborative enquiry emerged as being significant to children making meaning from their experiences; and providing ways of learning that were contextualised, and took account of their competencies and socio-cultural participation. The model of pedagogy proposed indicates how reciprocal, and trusting, relationships between educators and children supports creative collaborative enquiry and the process of the children's *meaning-making*. Learner agency and the way educators scaffold learning seem key and to be interlinked. Scaffolding included the modelling of learning strategies and collaboration, the educator's authentic companionship in learning and their engagement and involvement in enquiry with the children. These central relationships and processes seem to be made possible and

sustained through a responsive learning environment characterised by time, space, attention, flow and reciprocal relationships. Reciprocity and responsiveness were linked, in the model, to a *listening pedagogy* (Rinaldi, 2006:65) and a *creative reflective cycle* (Aguirre Jones and Elders, 2009:12-13). A listening, reflective pedagogy appeared key to being responsive to children's competencies, socio-cultural participation and referencing and support of children's contextualised lines of enquiry.

### ***Relevance of the research***

The case has been portrayed with the aim of it being accessible and usable by other educators. It is hoped that in reading the report educators will be able to:

- relate it to their own experiences, knowledge and contexts
  - extrapolate their own conclusions from the findings (Stake, 1994:8)
  - generalise from the research findings through its contextualisation in the literature reviewed (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:327)
  - find the interpretations and conclusions of relevance in conjunction with a growing body of research (referenced in the literature review above)
- (*ibid*)

The research has built upon

- my interest in the *Progettazione* approach in Reggio Emilia through study visits and literature



- previous experience of developing creative collaborative enquiries with children in my own nursery through involvement in the 5x5x5=creativity project (Bancroft *et al.*, 2008:69-80)
- my knowledge and experience of supporting other educators who are interested in following the fascinations of young children in my current professional roles

The study has deepened my own knowledge and understanding of creative collaborative enquiry and the pedagogy that supports it, from both a theoretical and practical point of view. It will inform my role in the mentoring and professional development field in supporting other creative reflective practitioners or those who wish to develop their practice in this way.

The research aimed to be of use in the reflective practice of the key educator and to be of some use to the school. Upon reflection at the end of the research the key educator remarked on the possible contributions of the case study:

Jayne: 'It's really interesting. I've learnt a lot from doing this. ....In terms of the actual connections this is really interesting [Fig 1 & 2]. Because it's something you think about but it's when you talk through it and revisit it, it's really helpful.....'

[I]n terms of us as a staff, we need to widen people's understanding of how children make those connections through being allowed to explore, and the fact that they'll be doing maths, they'll be doing their literacy, they'll be doing everything – it's more real for them isn't it.' ....I think they would find it really interesting the whole relationship thing [referring to Fig.1] and how we use our skills as teachers [Fig 2]. And the way we *teach* is what they need to understand. I think some people already understand but it's new to some' [Appendix D2:42-43]

### **Final thoughts**

Once children are helped to perceive themselves as authors or inventors, once they are helped to discover the pleasure of inquiry, their motivation and interest explode.

(Malaguzzi, in *Edwards et al.*, 1998:67)

The case study portrays the trust in children that can be brought about through embracing creative reflective practice and the co-creation of learning communities. It illustrates that creative collaborative enquiry can be a contemporary alternative approach for the early years educator when it becomes embedded in the participatory practice of children and educators. Threading though the study has been the question of who or what guides the education of young children; curriculum policies or educators trusting in themselves and children in a relationship of reciprocity? In the words of Malaguzzi (Barsotti, 2004:15)

Inquiry represents a way into that part of our humanity which is more open to the profounder sense and meaning of things, of events, of connections and especially of relationships between human beings.

It is an approach that has at the heart of it the value of 'trust', a trust in the

the role of children as guides, as stimuli, the children as central figures or as partners centre stage in the teaching experience.  
(*ibid*:11)

This study explored how one educator in the U.K. has been able to develop work with the 'children as guides', centre stage in the teaching-learning context.

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