

# **UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

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**An exploration into early years practitioners' work experiences in private day  
nurseries and voluntary sector pre-schools in England.**

by

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## **ABSTRACT**

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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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Natasha Elizabeth Crellin

This thesis is a study of early years practitioners' experiences of their working lives. The data was collected from 25 semi-structured interviews with 25 participants in four early years settings. This is a qualitative study that explores what influences early years practitioners' working identities and considers the similarities and differences of experiences working in a private day nursery (PDN) and a voluntary sector pre-school (VSPS).

The findings demonstrate that the type of provision directly affects early years practitioners' working experiences, which has a marked impact on their working identities. Commonalities between the two groups exist in daily tasks, the rewarding aspect of emotional labour and in the experiences of policy and inspection. Likewise, the two groups share a similar disregard for the qualification system. However, there are differences in the two groups, especially the process of being managed, pay, working conditions, hours worked and professional development opportunities.

Participants in the PDN settings voiced much more unhappiness in their work and experienced greater frustrations. This resulted in higher staff turnover, and managers reported continued recruitment problems. Different management styles between the two types of settings had a marked impact on how valued and empowered staff felt. This directly affected staff retention. There was a clear difference in staff profiles within the two setting types, with the VSPS settings having older, more-experienced staff and the PDN settings having a high turnover of young and inexperienced staff.

This PhD offers a unique study into the workforce of early years practitioners. As an original piece of research it develops an understanding of the working experiences of childcare staff in two different types of settings. The findings have implications for developing a clear understanding of the rapid changes that have occurred in early years childcare provision over the past 30 years in England. The findings have implications for those in managerial positions in the early years sector and for policymakers who are interested in the long-term development of the sector.

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## **DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

I, Natasha Crellin, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

### **An exploration into early years practitioners' work experiences in private day nurseries and voluntary sector pre-schools in England.**

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly whilst in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signed: .....

Date: .....

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For my children, Max and Sophie. You are the loves of my life and the laughter in my days. Where would I be without you?

....I am just a body.

(Private day nursery participant)

## Abbreviations

DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service (police check)
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
EYFS	Early years foundation stage
EYP	Early years practitioner
EYPS	Early years professional status
EYE	Early years educator
EYT	Early years teacher
FIS	Family Information Service
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
QTS	Qualified teacher status
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
PDN	Private day nursery
VSPS	Voluntary sector pre-school

# Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis aims to explore the working experiences of early years practitioners. It compares the stories of those working in private day nurseries (PDNs) and voluntary sector pre-schools (VSPSs) in England. The research seeks to fill a gap in knowledge about the childcare workforce and to explore the similarities and differences of working experiences for staff working in two different early childhood settings.

The term 'private day nursery' refers to a setting that most frequently offers care for children 0–5 years of age and is open all year round for longer days, such as 7am to 6pm. These organisations are registered as companies and have a company hierarchy, including directors (Family Information Service, 2017). The term 'voluntary sector' means a voluntary group acting as a committee to run the organisation. The term 'pre-school' means they most frequently care for children 2–5 years of age, on a term-time basis, more often shorter hours, such as 8:30am to 4pm (Family Information Service, 2017).

## 1.1 Study context

The last 70 years have seen childcare in England develop rapidly from a cottage industry to a major financial sector. Political interest in early childhood education and care has increased over this time due to economic, social and lifestyle changes, which have centred on women returning to the workforce after having a family (Arber and Gilbert, 1992). This increased attention has led to unprecedented demands on staff and providers, who have had to keep up with rafts of changes and increased expectations on their work. The introduction and success of private settings in England have split the childcare sector into two distinct sectors. These two parts are the newer model of PDNs, which usually run for profit, and the more-traditional not-for-profit model pre-schools, also known as the voluntary sector. The impact of these changes on the workforce has had limited attention. There is inadequate understanding of the challenges facing the workforce, despite a recruitment crisis facing the industry (Moss, 2009).

The National Careers Service (2012) estimates that there are a quarter of a million people in the UK working within the early years and childcare sector, of which 165,200 were employed

in full-day care (PDN) and 58,000 in sessional day care (VSPS). The vast majority (99%) of those employed are women (Caroll, Smith and Oliver, 2008). This makes the childcare market a major employment sector, especially for women. There has been limited commentary on the changes to the early years sector since the development of the private sector in England (Neuman, 2005).

## 1.2 What is currently understood

Literature and research have portrayed early years practitioners as fitting a specific profile. They are most commonly described as being white, working-class, young women with low educational success, minimal qualifications and limited aspirations (Rolfe, 2005). Caroll, Smith and Oliver (2008) support this employee profile and describe a diminishing labour pool. They illustrate that young people leave school with higher qualifications and greater career and employment aspirations than being an early years practitioner can provide. Existing research does little to address the differences between the private and voluntary aspects of the sector and has not considered if these profiles vary within the setting types. An exception is the work of Cleveland et al. (2007), who conducted a study in Canada exploring the difference in quality between for-profit (PDN) and not-for-profit (VSPS) childcare settings. The findings of this study suggest that the for-profit sector (PDN) offers a much lower quality of care and education for children. However, the focus of Cleveland et al.'s study was on outcomes for children, rather than the experiences of staff, and was contextualised in the Canadian system.

This PhD study is unique in its exploration of the childcare workforce. Researchers such as Osgood (2012) and Nutbrown (2012) believe that the key aspect of high-quality provision in early years settings is the quality of the staff. This would suggest that research into understanding the workforce is essential towards achieving high-quality early years provision.

Colley (2006) studied students on childcare courses as they progressed through college. Her work describes the process of becoming the right person for the job and illustrates the influence of work factors on developing vocational habitus. Colley's study goes someway to illustrate the highs and lows of the working life of an early years practitioner. However, the emphasis is firmly on college students training to work with children, rather than staff working in the job. This PhD offers more depth of study into the daily experiences of early years practitioners' working lives.

Existing literature about early years practitioners can be summarised into the following statements:

- The vast majority of early years practitioners are women (Caroll, Smith and Oliver, 2008).
- The childcare sector is a major employment sector for women (National Careers Service, 2012).
- The common profile of early years practitioners is white, working-class women with limited educational success (Rolfe, 2005).
- There is a reported recruitment crisis in childcare and a diminishing labour pool (Caroll, Smith and Oliver, 2008).
- High-quality provision is linked to high-quality staff (Nutbrown, 2012; Osgood, 2012).
- Emotional labour is not recognised as being central to the work of caring for children. Staff do not have opportunities to discuss the emotional labour component of their work, and there is no training to support staff in developing appropriate professional emotional bonds with children (Taggart, 2011; Page and Elfer, 2013; Elfer, 2012; Page, 2011).
- Childcare work offers very low earnings, often below or at minimum wage. This is exacerbating the recruitment crisis in childcare (Simon et al., 2015).
- The complex nature of the emotional labour connected with parents and children makes early years staff susceptible to employment exploitation and manipulation (Powell and Goouch, 2012; Boyer, Reimer and Irvine, 2013).

These points will be discussed in detail in the literature review. Whilst there is much research on the work of early years practitioners, very little of it accesses the voice of the workforce. Little is known about the rewards and frustrations that early years practitioners experience in their daily working lives. There is nothing known about the difference in working experiences between those staff working in PDNs or VSPSs, or even if there are any differences. Likewise, very little research touches on the working identities of childcare staff or reflects on the aspects of their working lives that have a positive or negative impact on their working identities. With continued pressure to professionalise the workforce and improve educational outcomes for children, this is a shortcoming. This research aspires to go some way in filling this void of understanding about the everyday working experiences of early years practitioners.

### 1.3 Research questions

This thesis is structured on two research questions that explore elements of the working lives of early years practitioners.

1. What influences early years practitioners' working identities?
2. How are early years practitioners' working experiences similar or different in PDN and VSPS settings?

The responses to the first question will describe the factors that influence an individual's decision to work in childcare and the elements of working life that impact on how they feel about their work. The concepts of working identity take into account Bourdieu's work on habitus (Bourdieu, 1998), which reflects the internalised cultural habit developed through a person's upbringing, including their social class, family make-up, education, gender, nationality and personal experience. Bourdieu's notion of habitus leads the research to the more recently coined term 'vocational habitus' (Colley, 2006), which can be described as becoming the right person for the job. Vocational habitus considers how an employee's characteristics, culture and history allow them to fit in at work and reflects on the process involved in becoming this person. The notions of habitus and vocational habitus have an impact on working identity formation and on the cultural development of a workplace. Identity also encompasses the ideas of occupational context, team, feeling valued, management and career prospects.

The second research question looks specifically at the similarities and differences of working experiences and will consider if working in a private setting affects staff differently to working in the voluntary sector.

This study was carried out by collecting data in four childcare settings in South East England. The settings were a variety of sizes, with the smallest employing seven members of staff and the largest employing 44. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. This form of interview allowed the participants' stories to be told in their own voices. Semi-structured interviews allowed new topics to be raised and explored, and the participants could put more emphasis on the parts of their stories that they felt more strongly about. Participants were both qualified and unqualified. This included managers and deputy managers who had previously worked and qualified as early years practitioners. Staff qualifications ranged from

none to degree level. Between six and seven participants were interviewed in each of the four settings, totalling 25 interviews. Data was analysed using thematic analysis.

As a researcher, I have assumed a subjective epistemology throughout the research. I fully acknowledge the impact that my gender, experience and teaching background had on the responses from the participants. I have provided information about myself as a researcher to support the process of being reflexive (Etherington, 2004).

## 1.4 Thesis outline

The thesis has been organised into a series of chapters. Each chapter addresses a distinct area of the research. A summary outline of each has been provided in order to describe the progression of the research.

**Chapter 2** describes the history of childcare in England, focusing on the changing pattern of provision due to the expansion of private day care since the 1990s. The chapter describes the change in focus in early years care and education from 'mothers' groups' to professionalised and highly monitored education provision. It reviews the major literature and political movements that have influenced these changes.

**Chapter 3** explores discourse surrounding early years practitioners as currently represented in the research and literature. It defines what early years practitioners' work involves and explores the concepts of care and emotional labour. The chapter reviews the literature on the recruitment crisis facing the childcare industry and considers how the literature portrays the type of person attracted to working in early years.

**Chapter 4** describes the methods and methodology used for the data collection. It rationalises the use of semi-structured interviews to support a qualitative survey. It details the process of thematic analysis used to analyse the data and proposes why this was the most suitable choice. The second half of the chapter provides a description of the four settings used in the research and outlines information about the individual participants.

**Chapter 5** is the first of two empirical chapters. It focuses on the first research question by considering the influences that have bearing on the working identity of an early years

practitioner. It explores the influences on their work trajectories and reflects on the elements that influence vocational habitus.

**Chapter 6** is the second empirical chapter. This chapter considers the similarities and differences of working in PDN and VSPS settings. The impacts of these similarities and differences are explored with emphasis on how the differing experiences led to how the staff felt about their long-term commitment to their work. Exploring these differences is vital in order to begin to understand elements of recruitment and retention of staff.

**Chapter 7** This chapter is the discussion of the empirical findings. It pulls together the themes raised in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 and compares the findings to the information found in the literature review. The findings address current gaps in the knowledge about the early years workforce and concludes by discussing the limitations of this study.

## Chapter 2: Childcare in England

This chapter describes the history of childcare in England. The aim of this review is to consider the development of the PDN sector in the UK and to reflect on the changes faced by the childcare industry over the last 40 years. This process will highlight the political trends that have occurred in recent history and the impact of these trends on the sector. Connell (2013) states that it is important to consider the history of education in order to develop an understanding of education as a social process. It is important to see the childcare sector as a changing and adapting landscape and not as a static provision that runs in isolation to political and social pressures.

Education of all types has endured constant reform for centuries. Early years education has not been exempt from this (Payler and Locke, 2013). However, the formation of PDN settings is a relatively new phenomenon in England. Until approximately 25 years ago, early years education was largely out of political focus. Provision was run, managed and monitored by those who chose to work with young children (Thane, 2011). The vast majority of this provision was part of the voluntary sector in the form of crèches, pre-schools and playgroups. Due to these semi-recent changes in provision, we are only now in a position to begin to understand and reflect on the impact of privatisation and to document the impact of this on children, the workforce and wider society. This chapter will describe the political interest in early years care and education leading up to and during the research. This will set the scene of the research and frame it in a temporal sense.

### 2.1 History of childcare in England

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, childcare in the UK gained little attention. There was limited discourse, politically or in research, surrounding the care and education of children under five years of age (Pre-school Learning Alliance, 2012). In the 1900s, arrangements for the care of children were predominately informal ones, with neighbours, servants, nannies and family members such as grandparents being relied on for family support (Thane, 2011). Childminders and group settings began to appear in the mid-1900s, offering childcare that was paid for by parents.

Pre- and post-World War II, the maintained (government-subsidised, such as nurseries in schools) sector in England provided places for children from deprived backgrounds. The main objective of this was to keep children who were considered at risk safe during the day and off the streets (Thane, 2011). Shortages of men after the war meant that women entered the paid workforce in larger numbers, creating a need for new types of childcare provision for children from all family backgrounds.

In the 1960s, mothers began to come together to form pre-schools and crèches. These were established with the dual purposes of providing care for children and preparing them for school (Pre-school Learning Alliance, 2012). In the 1970s, this type of provision became recognised by the government, and funding for pre-school became available (David et al., 1993). The provision for children under three years of age was considered appropriate employment for unqualified mothers. However, when children reached four years of age, it was deemed necessary for children to be taught by qualified teachers in a school. At this time, settings were either government-funded pre-schools (maintained) or run by volunteers who formed management committees (voluntary). Please see Appendix A for a more detailed history of early childhood care and education in the UK, which has been compiled from a variety of sources, including government publications such as the Rumbold report (1990) and publications by non-governmental organisations such as the Pre-school Learning Alliance (2012).

Publication of the Rumbold report in 1990 signalled a change in political interest in early childhood education and care (ECEC). The report, written by a Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher, defined the quality of educational experiences for three- and four-year-old children in the UK. It identified many areas for improvement within the sector. It also identified that there were not enough pre-school places to meet the increasing demand. This led to the introduction of a market model approach to early years, in order to quickly develop more pre-school places.

*Provision for the under fives has also received increased attention from the wider public. Demographic change has alerted employers to the need to attract mothers of young children back to work. In consequence, there is an increasing market for childcare of various kinds. This and the legislative developments outlined above have increased interest in what is provided, and pressure for a more coherent and comprehensive set of services for children under 5 and their parents. (Rumbold, 1990, p.6)*

Policy development, such as the Children Act 1989, allowed private settings to access funding for the first time, which had previously only been available to the voluntary and maintained (government-managed) sector (Children Act 1989, sections 19, 71, 73). The publication of the Rumbold report in 1990 was the beginning of the wave of registered private settings. In 1986, there were 1,044 registered private settings. By 1989, this had risen to 1,696. This was an increase of 62% over three years. By 1989, this meant that just over 1% of the early years population were in private childcare provision.

Neuman (2005) believes that there were two factors that motivated the shift in political interest in the early years sector in the UK in the 1990s. Firstly, educational research was beginning to empirically demonstrate that the early years of a child's life are critical for the child's learning and development. Secondly, increasing numbers of women were returning to work after having children. Osgood (2012) highlights how women entering the workforce in large numbers has changed the nature of the early years sector and has increased the need for childcare provision.

*The enormous growth in childcare is in part a consequence (and in part a cause) of increased labour market participation of working parents/mothers. (Osgood, 2012, p.7)*

The creation of Sure Start in England in 1998 provided a more focused approach to funding for the early years. Sure Start targeted socially disadvantaged areas and aimed to reduce child poverty. Its creation was supported by the white paper *Excellence in Schools* (Department for Education and Employment, 1997), which recognised the importance of early years education. This led to each local authority being required to write an early development plan demonstrating how they would proactively meet the care and education needs of the children in their area. The Sure Start initiatives and childcare centres had a pivotal role in these plans (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 1991). This increased political interest was instrumental in the expansion of the early years sector in the early 1990s. Many new settings became registered, resulting in an increase in childcare places and an increase in the number of children under five years of age being enrolled in early years provision (OECD, 2006).

The first national curriculum documents for early years were published, which provided a framework and guidance about how young children should be taught and cared for. In 2004, *Birth to Three Matters* (Department for Education and Skills, 2004a) was published for children in pre-schools. This document aimed to clearly describe the requirements for the care and

education of children under three years of age. The *Curriculum Guidance for Foundation Stage* (Department for Education and Skills, 2000) was written in 2000 for the education of children in school from four years of age. These documents were later merged to create the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) (Department for Education, 2014). This document details the care and education requirements for all children under the age of five years. The EYFS framework has had many revisions and updates since 2008, but it still exists under the same title (Department for Education, 2014). The release of the EYFS framework was accompanied by mandatory inspections being removed from local authorities to be centralised through Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills). Vincent, Braun and Ball (2008) describe the impact of this combined political interest as shifting early years from a backwater to becoming central to contemporary social policy agenda in the UK.

In 2004, the Labour government published a ten-year strategy for childcare titled *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury, 2004). This strategy aimed to promote integrated provision, which would help to address issues of social inequality and disadvantage for young children (Osgood, 2009). The strategy was committed to building on the free nursery education entitlement for four-year-old children, which had been introduced in 1988. The strategy included an increase of free childcare to 15 hours a week for 38 weeks a year for three-year olds. This allowance is not means tested, and all children receive it regardless of their family circumstances. This change in the entitlements also allowed children in private settings to receive the same entitlement as those in the maintained sector. This was aimed at encouraging more flexibility for parents in choosing childcare (HM Treasury, 2004) and greatly encouraged the development of private settings, as the funding for places was made available to them. In 2014, this initiative was extended to include free places for two-year-old children from families with a lower income. This funding could be accepted by any settings that were registered with Ofsted. In 2016, the government conducted a consultation and trialled an increase in free childcare to 30 hours a week for working parents. This is due to be rolled out throughout England in September 2017.

An independent report was commissioned by the government to review early education and childcare qualifications in the UK in 2012. The report was titled *Foundations for Quality* (2012), written by Professor Nutbrown. Her report was widely accepted as a positive and accurate review of the system (Moylett, 2012). Nutbrown summarised the findings of her report by saying:

*I am concerned that the current early years qualifications system is not systematically equipping practitioners with the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to give babies and young children high quality experiences. (Nutbrown, 2012, p.5)*

In response to the Nutbrown report, the Department for Education released its own report, titled *More Great Childcare* (Truss, 2013). The report reviewed the government's perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the childcare system. It proposed changes such as professionalising the workforce through encouraging graduates into the workforce and reducing detailed staffing rules in order to help private businesses. Controversially, the report suggested changes to the adult-to-child ratio, suggesting that managers should have more freedom to interpret the ratio needs. This, however, caused great public outcry, and following overwhelming numbers of petitions by the early years sector, the government announced a reversal of this decision (Gaunt, 2013). The Nutbrown report (2012) suggested that the drive for profits was encouraging employers to reduce staff costs, specifically by employing lower-qualified and hence cheaper staff. This was the first report within the UK to highlight differences in staffing in the PDN and VSPS provision types.

Early years childcare and education continue to be central to government policy. With no reduction in interest, the early years sector is under continued scrutiny. Staffing, childcare costs and the overall quality of care and education are repeated themes (Truss, 2013). As such, any research into the work of early years practitioners is well timed, to reflect and inform the wider interest in the sector as a whole.

## 2.2 Political context of the study

The study reported here was conducted in a time of complex political and financial upheaval for the United Kingdom. The research began in 2008, a year that was marked by the longest recession in England since records commenced (Seager, 2009). The recession was officially recognised in January 2009 following the collapse of the banks after the breakdown of the housing market. This was preceded by two terms of negative economic growth, meaning that, in real terms, problems had begun in mid-2008. Continued economic problems in the eurozone affected the UK economy with the collapse of the Greek economy and much of Europe and the USA suffering from the effects of a global downturn.

In May 2010, the British government changed from a Labour government to a coalition government made of a power-sharing alliance between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative Party. This was the first time that two parties had formed a coalition. Before this, a coalition government had only been seen in the UK following times of crisis, such as during wartime. In 2015, the Conservatives were elected and the coalition ended.

Both the Coalition government and the Conservative government continued to support the neoliberal movement in early years education and care, with the aim of creating a free-market economy. The neoliberal movement aims to increase the privatisation of resources, encouraging a shift in the responsibility of providing provisions from the government to the private sector. This initiative began with Thatcher's Conservative government (Davidson, 2013). A well-known observer and commentator of this shift in education and neoliberal politics, Stephen Ball, commented on the widespread effects of a free-market economy:

*There are no service areas which are exempt from private sector participation... the state is increasingly repositioned as the guarantor and not necessarily the provider nor the financer of opportunity goods like education. (Ball, 2007)*

Connell (2013) describes the aim of neoliberalism as to make existing markets larger and to create new markets. This process involves changing public agencies into private ones. Bourdieu (1998) offers a critique of free-market politics and believes that the withdrawal of public agencies is ignoring the voice of disempowered individuals and empowering the already powerful. A full examination of this topic is beyond the remit of this study. However, it is worth noting that the shift towards privatisation in England has affected most industries and sectors, of which the early years sector is no different. The privatisation of childcare is commonly justified as a tool for parental choice and for raising the quality of the entire system through competition (Neuman, 2005). However, the impact of privatisation on childcare staff has not yet been documented.

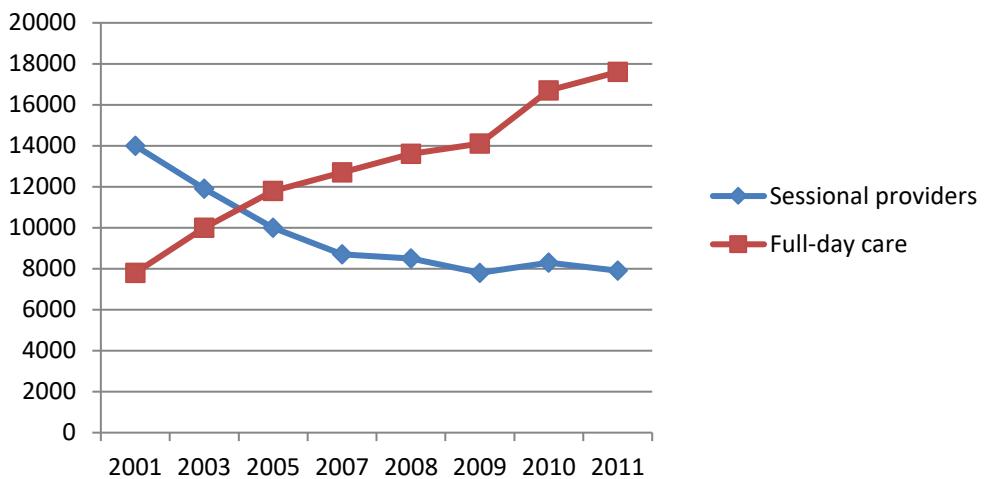
In 2015, the Conservatives won the general election, seeing the end of the coalition government. David Cameron remained Prime Minister. He resigned a year later, following the result of the Brexit vote. However, none of this change in the country's leadership had any great impact on views of the continued development of private markets and the support for a market model in early years care and education.

## 2.3 Demand, cost and staffing

Demand for childcare spaces has been intense in many areas of the country, and places for PDNs are often higher than a single salary. The Daycare Trust reviewed childcare costs in January 2011. They found increases in childcare fees were greater than the increases in the average wage (Daycare Trust, 2011). A full-time nursery place in a private setting costs around £12,000–£14,000 per year, depending on where in the country it is located. Settings in major cities in the south of England, such as London, are generally more expensive than settings in the north of the country, such as in Grimsby (Daycare Trust, 2011). This is a reflection of the house prices, cost of living and wages in these areas of England. The nursery fees in private settings are comparative to private school fees (Independent Schools Council, 2011). Fees are still charged in the voluntary sector if parents want additional hours on top of the government-funded hours. These fees are lower than in the private settings. The average fee for a VSPS setting in 2011 was about £3.40 per hour, or £3,670 per year (Daycare Trust, 2011).

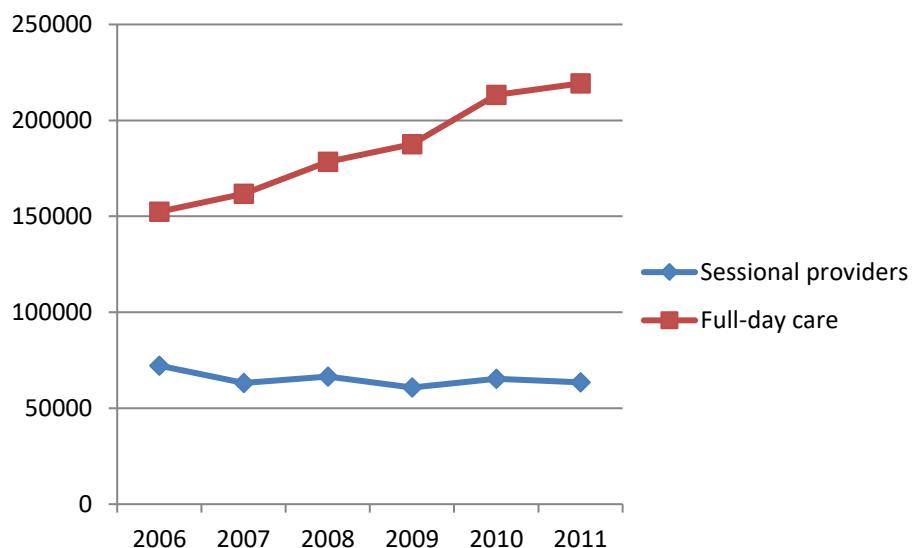
In 2011, 60% of Family Information Service (FIS) facilities across Britain reported a lack of childcare in the area. Only 12% of them said that there was sufficient childcare to meet the needs of working parents across their local authority (Daycare Trust, 2011). In 2011, the Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey estimated that the number of full-time childcare settings in England had increased by 39%. This was because of an increase in registrations and because sessional care started switching their registrations to full-day childcare, to allow them to be open for longer. The survey details that 61% of full-time childcare places were privately owned in 2011, with 39% owned by the voluntary sector.

The overall amount of early years provision is increasing. In 2010, there were 105,100 settings in total. One year later in 2011, there were 107,900 settings in total (Department for Education, 2013). However, within this total, sessional providers (VSPSs) fell by 5%, which was part of a continued downward trend of 19% from 2006 (Department for Education, 2013). Inversely, full-time childcare showed a 33% increase since 2007. In 2011, there were more than twice as many places offered by full-day childcare than any other provider type.



**Figure 2.1: Sessional day childcare provider and full-day childcare provider numbers 2001–2011**  
 (Department for Education, 2013)

The increase of PDN provision has created greater demand for staffing. Between 2006 and 2011, there was a total increase of 23% in early years practitioners in childcare. Of this, there was an increase of 44% in childcare staff working in PDN settings. This would suggest that PDN provision is the greatest employer of early years practitioners and that the demand for staff is on an upward trend.



**Figure 2.2: Staffing numbers 2006–2011**  
 (Department for Education, 2013)

Moss (2009) has written extensively on challenging the market model in early years provision. He believes that one negative impact of private childcare is the reduction of relationships between parents and early years practitioners to that of contractual relations. This is where two parties agree fees and services, evidenced by an offer and an acceptance of the offer. This then becomes an agreement, with a written contract and adhered to by terms and conditions. Moss (2009) describes this process as having the effect of devaluing the vital relationship between a caregiver and the children and their families.

One of the aims of this research is to explore if there are any differences in working in PDN and VSPS settings and to ask if the staff believe that their relationships with parents are contractually and financially defined, as Moss suggests.

## **2.4 Achieving quality through the workforce**

Studies into outcomes for children who have attended nursery (Sylva et al., 2008) demonstrate that those who have experienced time in high-quality settings fair better academically and socially than their peers. This is a long-term impact, with the effects of positive early years education impacting cognitive and social development throughout primary school. The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project (Sylva et al., 2008) found that the quality of the provision correlates directly to levels of development for children. Melhuish et al. (2008) suggest that the impact is even more sustained than defined in the EPPE project and believe that pre-school education quality is a significant predictor of Key Stage 2 performance in English and Mathematics.

There are many ways to determine quality in early years provision, such as environmental ratings (Sylva et al., 2006) or Ofsted grade descriptors. However, many researchers, such as Osgood (2012) and Nutbrown (2012), believe that the key aspect of high-quality provision is the quality of the staff.

The EPPE report was a large-scale report into pre-school education (Sylva et al., 2003). This research reported that settings with staff who have higher qualifications provide higher-quality provision and that the children who attend these settings make more progress than their peers attending lower-quality settings. The report suggests that the higher the qualifications of staff, the more progress children make. The Tickell report (2011) supports the concept that a

setting's quality is directly linked to staff qualifications. This report highlights the link between higher-qualified staff and the quality of provision, as well as the patchy system of qualifications and the lack of higher-qualified, such as degree-qualified, staff working in childcare, which has a direct impact on provision quality. Tickell's sentiments are echoed by Nutbrown (2012), who states:

*The qualification level of staff in the setting improves quality. (Nutbrown, 2012, p.14)*

The non-ministerial government organisation Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) has reported on the features of 'Good' and 'Outstanding' early years settings. In the report *Getting it right first time* (2013), Ofsted report that a commonality between 'Good' and 'Outstanding' settings is that highly qualified managers lead them. These strong leaders value having a well-qualified workforce.

*... the higher the qualification level, the better the quality of provision. (Ofsted, 2013, p.10)*

A separate report by Ofsted titled *Inspection outcomes of early years providers by staff qualifications* (2015) provides more-specific information about the impact of staff qualifications. This report states that non-domestic settings (such as PDNs and VSPSs) that have 75% or more of staff qualified to Level 3 or above are significantly more likely to achieve better inspection results than those with less-qualified staff.

**Table 2.1: Impact of staff qualifications on inspection outcomes**  
(Table taken from Ofsted, 2015)

	Outstanding judgement	Good judgement
75% of staff or more holding Level 3 qualifications or above	14%	71%
Less than 75% staff holding Level 3 qualifications	8%	69%

The view that staff qualifications equate to higher-quality provision is not just held by government organisations. The non-governmental charity organisation Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) offers advice and training to the early years workforce. They suggest that the key to high-quality provision is well-qualified and highly trained professionals (PACEY, 2016). It is abundantly clear that all researchers and early years

commentators believe that the quality of childcare and early years education is linked to the level of staff qualifications.

Cleveland et al. (2007) conducted a large-scale research project in Canada, which investigated the difference in quality between the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors. The research drew on the datasets of four other studies.

*The gross pattern is remarkably uniform. Everywhere, non-profits produce a higher quality of care in child care centres, whether measured by the Early Childhood Environments Rating Scale and the Infant Toddler Environments Rating Scale, or by the special scale developed to measure the quality of 'educational' child care in Quebec, or by the measures used by the City of Toronto. (Cleveland et al., 2007, p.14)*

This research from Canada suggests that for-profit organisations are of a lower quality than not-for-profit settings. This damning evidence cannot be generalised to the UK, as there has been no comparative research. However, it does highlight the need to further understand the differences between the PDN and VSPS provisions and to understand the impact of these differences on the children they aim to serve.

It is commonly suggested that the early years workforce suffers from high staff turnover. Scarr, Eisenberg and Deater-Deckard (1994) believe that high staff turnover impacts on children's ability to develop stable relationships with caregivers, which then impacts on their ability to feel secure and to begin to make progress. They believe that it is only through a stable workforce that high-quality provision can be achieved.

Littler and Salman (1984) explain their understanding as to why there is high staff turnover in the private sector. They say that the focus on profits means that budgets are managed through reducing salaries. The candidates attracted to the low salaries either have a lower level of education with limited career choices or see the work as a part-time option before securing their first choice of career.

Penn (1995) studied ten private settings in the 1990s in the UK, shortly after the major expansion of the sector. The settings in her research had only been open for a short time (four years). She investigated pay, conditions and in-service training opportunities for early years practitioners. This research was before the EYFS framework and before Ofsted inspection and registration requirements. At that time, she found a great diversity between the structure and

quality of PDN and VSPS provisions. Working conditions were found to be very poor in the PDN settings. Low pay and long working hours resulted in annual staff turnover of up to 90%. Whilst there have been major policy, curriculum and inspectorate changes since that time, it appears that challenging working conditions in PDN settings may have been an issue since their inception in the 1990s.

Payler and Georgeson (2013) have conducted research into childcare workers' participation in interprofessional practice. This study demonstrates a great variation in conditions of service and levels of qualifications within the workforce in different setting types. They highlight that many settings have varying economic statuses and historically differing purposes. This raises further questions about the impact of the working conditions for staff.

The Rumbold report (1990) states:

*Private day nurseries have not been the subject of any large-scale research and we have little information about the experiences they offer children. They are subject to the same regulatory requirements as other types of day care including day nurseries run by voluntary organisations. We urge local authorities, in exercising their regulatory duty, to keep in mind educational considerations. (Rumbold, 1990, p.13)*

Despite 27 years having passed since the publication of the Rumbold report (1990), there is still limited research focusing on the PDN sector and the impact that these provisions are having on children, staff or the sector as a whole. For this reason, this research is well timed and necessary to fill this void of understanding of the differences between the experiences of staff working in PDN and VSPS settings.

## Summary

This chapter began with a brief history of childcare in the UK and has described the development of the different types of provisions in the early years sector. It has detailed the political context of the research in order to contextualise the study, and it has defined the time when the research was conducted. The chapter has discussed the relationship between the quality of a setting and its staff. The chapter has provided the historical context of the split between VSPS and PDN provision types and has detailed the political factors influencing the childcare sector

## Chapter 3: Literature review

This chapter forms the literature review. It aims to define what the work involves for early years practitioners working in PDN and VSPS settings. It looks at the issues raised by other research and literature and considers the impact of training and qualifications on early years practitioners. The chapter reflects on recent changes by the government to professionalise the workforce and looks at literature about gender and the common association between motherhood and emotional labour in working with children. It reflects on how social class has an impact on the recruitment and retention of childcare staff.

These issues are brought together to reflect on how the current literature describes the vocational habitus of staff working in childcare and to consider how this may be similar or different in PDN and VSPS.

### 3.1 What is an early years practitioner?

Staff working in childcare have a large variety of titles, all of them describing very similar work. The titles vary depending on the sector of the work, and some titles are used more commonly than others. Alongside this complication, there are a range of types of childcare provision in England, such as childminders, private day care, pre-schools and maintained nurseries within school settings. There are also a range of management structures, including large and small nursery chains, limited companies, committee-led charities and government provision (Campbell-Barr, 2009). This makes for a complex system and provides confusion when trying to define and describe the workforce.

Vacancies for childcare workers advertised on local authority websites use a variety of titles for staff working with children under five years of age.

**Table 3.1: Titles for childcare workers in advertisements**

(Information taken from a variety of sources, including Hampshire County Council website, 2016; TES website, 2016; Nursery World Jobs, 2016. All accessed November 2016)

Private day nurseries	Voluntary sector pre-schools	Maintained sector (e.g. nurseries in a school and reception classes)	Other sectors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nursery assistant</li> <li>• Nursery nurse</li> <li>• Early years educator</li> <li>• Early years practitioner</li> <li>• Early years teacher</li> <li>• Room leader</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childcare assistant</li> <li>• Early years practitioner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early years professional</li> <li>• Teaching assistant</li> <li>• Nursery nurse</li> <li>• Early years apprentice</li> <li>• Nursery practitioner</li> <li>• Early years practitioner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nanny</li> <li>• Au pair</li> <li>• Childminder</li> <li>• Play worker</li> <li>• After-school club worker</li> </ul>

Authors and researchers writing about the early years workforce are equally divided about how to describe staff who work in childcare. Some examples of how childcare workers are labelled within prominent literature are as follows:

**Table 3.2: Titles for childcare workers used in prominent literature**

(Full references on reference pages)

Author	Title for childcare workers
Osgood (2012)	Nursery workers or nursery staff
Payler (2013)	Early years practitioners
Moss (2009)	Childcare workforce
Colley (2006)	Nursery nurses
Findlay, Findlay and Stewart (2009)	Early years workers
Powell and Gouch (2012)	Caregivers
Elfer (2012)	Nursery practitioners, nursery staff or early years workforce
Taggart (2011)	Early years practitioners
Page and Elfer (2013)	Practitioners
Boyer, Reimer and Irvine (2013)	Childcare workers or nursery workers

The myriad of parts of the childcare sector and titles for those who work in childcare have caused complications in finding one term to describe the participants in this research. I have decided to adopt the term 'early years practitioner', as this is the common title used for

recently advertised jobs in both the PDN and VSPS settings. Within this research, the description will be used to describe childcare workers in the PDN and VSPS settings, including those with a qualification, those working towards a qualification and those without a qualification.

Qualified early years practitioners often earn slightly more than their unqualified colleagues. Those without qualification are often titled 'assistants', although the work is very similar. See Table 3.4 for the pay difference, based on information from Salarytrack (2013). Job descriptions for an early years practitioner (titled 'nursery nurse') and a nursery assistant can be found in Appendix B and Appendix C, respectively. These documents are two local authority job descriptions. They illustrate the similarities and the few differences in the roles. A list of the common expectations and duties of early years practitioners can be found in Table 3.3 below.

Early years practitioners must adhere to government guidance and policy, such as the EYFS framework (2014) and *Every Child Matters* guidance (Department for Education and Skills, 2005). These describe the expectations for education and care and give specific requirements for the safeguarding of children. Urban (2008) describes the duties of early years practitioners as not only to provide care for young children but also to take into account educational, social and cultural requirements.

**Table 3.3: Duties**

(Information mostly taken from Department for Education, 2014)

Administration and other duties	Physical care of children	Emotional care of children	Education and care of children
Write reports on children, such as the compulsory two-year-old check	Change nappies and assist with toileting and toilet training	Provide a positive role model at all times  Model appropriate relationships with other adults and other children	Create a stimulating learning environment  Challenge children and scaffold learning in an age-appropriate manner
Carry out risk assessments	Feeding and food preparation for children	Form appropriate, relationships with children and provide comfort to any child who needs it	Observe and assess a child's progress in all areas of their development and keep records of their progress and achievements
Keep alert to any potential child-protection issues and be trained in safeguarding	Maintain a high standard of physical care for a child, such as ensuring hands, nose and face are clean	Help children form relationships with other adults and children	Support special needs and/or disabilities and children with English as an additional language
Follow the setting's policies and procedures	Effectively manage behaviour	Help children to develop a positive self-image	Encourage children to link sounds and letters and to begin to read and write
Maintain official records, such as records of medicine and injuries	Encourage physical health and encourage healthy choices	Communicate with parents about their child's progress and development (to be a key worker) and to be a point of contact for the family	Encourage children to explore a range of media and materials  Develop skills in counting, shapes, understanding numbers and calculating
Keep premises and equipment clean	Allow children time to explore, observe and find out about their environment		Plan and prepare purposeful play with both adult- and child-led opportunities
Support other staff where necessary			Work in partnership with other professionals
Attend staff meetings (which may be out of hours)			Teach within the six areas of learning as defined by the EYFS framework
Record evidence of children's progress			

An early years practitioner commonly earns just above minimum wage (Simon et al., 2015), and the role centralises around the physical, mental, emotional and educational care of children aged between the ages of six weeks and five years of age. Bourdieu (1998) describes salary as a direct reflection of the value that society places on work and its workers. If we adopt Bourdieu's (1998) view, this would suggest that being an early years practitioner is

considered a low-status and low-value position. Average salaries as described by Salarytrack (2013) show clear discrepancies between degree-qualified childcare and caring jobs, such as teachers, against those who are vocationally trained, such as early years practitioners (see Table 3.4).

**Table 3.4: Salary comparisons 2013** (Information from Salarytrack, 2013)

Profession	Salary	Qualifications
Teacher (holding QTS; school based)	£29,000	Degree trained
Nursery manager	£25,000	Vocational training
Nanny	£19,000	No formal training
Childminder	£17,781	No formal training
Care assistant (elderly and disabled care)	£15,950	Vocational training
Teaching assistant	£15,153	Vocational training
Shop assistant	£15,000	No formal training
Early years practitioners	£14,000	Vocational training
Cleaner	£13,616	No formal training
Nursery assistant	£13,000	No formal training

The minimum wage for 18- to 20-year-olds in 2015 was £5.13 per hour. For those aged 21 and over, it was £6.50 per hour (National Minimum Wage Rates, 2015). A qualified early years practitioner earns about £6.60 an hour, or £10,324 per annum (2012–2014 figures) (Simon et al., 2015). This is described as being below the living wage for the UK and is noted as being lower for workers employed in the private sector (Simon et al., 2015). Rolfe (2005) suggests that the low salary may be a contributing factor in the noted early years staffing crisis and believes this to be a central contributing factor to the high turnover of staff.

Staff turnover is notably high in childcare compared to similar caring professions. Rolfe (2005) suggests that the low pay and minimal benefits contribute to this. He further describes private settings as having the highest rate of turnover. Whilst it is undeniable that pay is low, staff are aware of this when they enter the workforce. Additionally, blaming low pay as the major factor for early years practitioners leaving their jobs does not explain differences in turnover between PDN and VSPS settings. The survey conducted for the provision and use of pre-school childcare in Britain (Simon et al., 2015) suggests that turnover is not as high as frequently reported, with annual staff turnover in PDNs at 12%. However, this study does highlight an issue with

recruitment, with as many as 24% of PDN settings actively trying to recruit. Staffing is still a major issue for the sector, especially for PDNs (Simon et al., 2015).

Describing pay as the only factor affecting staff retention and recruitment appears to be a simplistic view of the issue. This has not been explored in detail in the literature or research, despite the acknowledgement that the sector struggles with it. This research asks the staff if there is high turnover in their nursery and, if so, what they think contributes to this problem. This question aims to explore if high staff turnover is attributed to issues of pay or if there are more-complex reasons as to why there are recruitment and retention issues in childcare.

Rolfe (2005) describes the childcare sector as mostly employing young white women with low educational success and minimal qualifications. He suggests a twofold problem with this demographic. Firstly, many of these women leave the workforce to have their own children. Secondly, as average educational outcomes are rising, the supply of young girls with low educational qualifications is shrinking. Moss (2009) supports this view and believes that the issue of high staff turnover will only increase. He highlights the projected fall over the next decade of women with low educational qualifications who are attracted to low-qualified work, such as being early years practitioners, as the average school leaver increasingly has many more options open to them. Moss (2009) suggests that unless the job can be made more appealing to people with higher educational standards, there will be a shortage of labour supply in the near future. Research by Simon et al. (2015) suggests that low pay is not a factor in recruitment into childcare but that the people attracted to the work have little motivation to pursue additional training.

*Overall, the analysis points to the early years and childcare workforce coming from a particular social sector, young women who are not intending to progress on to higher education. (Simon et al., 2015, p.7)*

This may already be contributing to the recruitment and retention issues within the private childcare sector. However, this still does not adequately describe the differences in retention between the PDN and VSPS provisions.

Caroll, Smith and Oliver (2008) support Moss and Rolfe's views. They describe a situation of a diminishing pool of labour from which to recruit, despite a continually expanding childcare sector. Their discussion is based on the findings of their own research on 22 settings over an eight-month period. They interviewed both managers and practitioners and found that

childcare workers tended to leave school with few qualifications. The staff they interviewed joined the workforce after having been steered into childcare as one of the few career options open to them. This was mostly due to the fact that the job required no qualifications and offered on-the-job training. As fewer girls are leaving school with poor qualifications, other sectors, such as retail, have increased competition for this pool of low-qualified potential applicants.

This pool of labour is further diminished because the low pay and long hours do little to support working mothers. This means that potential recruits are narrowed to women with low academic achievements who have not yet had children. Caroll, Smith and Oliver (2008) highlight that childcare work does not lend itself to parents who need to care for their own children. Nutbrown (2012) believes that the way to improve recruitment and retention problems is to professionalise the workforce. She proposes that the job needs to be seen as a long-term career choice, with promotional opportunities and an ambition to pursue further qualifications and expertise.

Early years practitioners and early years teachers have similar roles yet vastly different pay scales (see Table 3.4). If pay scale equates to professional status, this would suggest that being an early years practitioner is not a profession but a job, whereas teaching, which is degree qualified, is a professional role. A professional position can be defined with regard to level of qualification, pay, status and power. Osgood (2012) discusses the concept of professionalism in her book *Narratives from the Nursery*. She conceptualises the term 'professionalism' as more than just issues of pay and degree qualifications but as having a gendered, raced and classed construction.

*As a highly gendered employment sector strongly associated with the affective realms of caring and nurturance, ECEC becomes understood as lacking in professionalism precisely because it is deemed hyper-feminine.*  
(Osgood, 2012, p.120)

However, early years teaching is most frequently a profession staffed mostly by women, which suggests that there is more than just gender involved in different views of professionalism between an early years practitioner and an early years teacher.

### 3.2 Qualifications and training

This section will describe the qualification pathways available to early years practitioners. It highlights the complex and confused qualification system that the industry currently faces and highlights how this system weakens the perception of early years work by those outside of the sector. The growing anxiety and lack of confidence in the current system will be explored, and the strengths and weaknesses of the current National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) system will be examined.

There are multiple qualifications currently accepted in England to work as a qualified early years practitioner. These qualifications are a mix of vocational and academic qualifications (Miller, 2008). In 2011, the Children's Workforce Development Council listed over 365 qualifications accepted to be employed as a qualified early years practitioner. These range from Level 2 (vocational) to Level 7 (post graduate). The review of childcare in 2012 entitled *More Great Childcare* (Truss, 2013) suggested that this proliferation of early years qualifications creates problems for employers, as they are unable to keep track of which qualifications have rigour and depth. McGillivray (2008) has suggested that this complex system of titles and training routes to be an early years practitioner has led to confusion about identity, as both the public and the childcare staff themselves are unclear on what is required to be a qualified childcare worker. This has created uncertainty about roles and responsibilities and has affected the public's understanding of the job.

In recognition of this confusion, the Department for Education attempted to streamline the amount of qualifications that would be accepted to be an early years practitioner in 2012. They created a website *Qualifications List for Those Delivering the Early Years Foundation Stage* (Early Learning and Childcare, 2013), where staff could check if their qualifications were still accepted as suitable qualifications and if additional training needed to be done to remain qualified. This process reduced the acceptable qualifications from 365 to 199, meaning that 166 qualifications were no longer acceptable. Whilst this move to reduce the amount of acceptable qualifications was an improvement, it is still a huge and unwieldy list. To add to the complexity, staff with no qualifications can work as nursery assistants and still be counted in the child-to-adult ratio, providing that there is a qualified staff member in the room (Department for Education, 2014). For students who started to train after September 2014, the government narrowed down the acceptable study pathway as a Level 3 qualification titled 'Early Years Educator'. This qualification follows specific criteria as described by the

government. Alongside this, to be considered qualified, students must also hold GCSEs in English and Maths at grade C or above (Early Years Educator, 2016).

The independent review *Foundations for Quality* (Nutbrown, 2012) was commissioned by the government to evaluate the state of the qualification system in the early years sector. The review looked at training for new applicants to childcare and for those already employed. It included a large-scale public consultation to gather evidence and considered how to restructure the workforce to address retention problems, through initiatives such as promotion progression into leadership roles. The review set out 19 recommendations to improve the quality of the early years sector. Professor Nutbrown was very complimentary of the work of childcare staff. However, she reported many flaws in the system that did not adequately support or equip early years practitioners for their role working with children.

*Some current qualifications lack rigour and depth, and quality is not consistent. I was concerned to find a considerable climate of mistrust in current early years qualifications, and anxiety, which I share on my reading of the evidence that standards have in some respects declined in recent years. (Nutbrown, 2012, p.5)*

She highlights issues with the current system and suggests that these issues are getting worse, with qualifications having little content or merit. The Daycare Trust (2009) suggests that being an early years practitioner has been historically characterised by a lack of training and development opportunities. This has been recognised by the Labour, coalition and Conservative governments. In an attempt to upskill and professionalise the workforce, degree-level qualifications have been introduced.

*The current emphasis on 'professionalising' the early years workforce is understood to entail more and better training, a clearer framework of qualifications, and an integrated early years service with a core of graduate workers. (Vincent and Braun, 2010, p.204)*

In 2001, this became the early years foundation degree. This was replaced in 2007 by a new qualification: early years professional status (EYPS). This gave graduates the equivalent to qualified teacher status (QTS), with a focus on the birth to four years age group. In 2013, this was again changed to become early years teacher (EYT). These initiatives have been successful at getting degree-qualified staff into settings. In 2014, the government declared that 42% of childcare provision had a staff member with QTS or EYPS in place (Taylor, 2014).

*The increase in qualification levels noted earlier suggests British policy initiatives to professionalise the workforce through increased qualification have been modestly successful at upskilling the British childcare workforce to the recommended levels. (Simon et al., 2016, p.15)*

Studies into the components of high-quality early years settings make explicit links to the abilities and qualifications of the staff. For example, the well-respected Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) (Clifford, Harms and Cryer, 2005) dedicates whole sections of the scale to measuring the effectiveness of staff, when making evaluations and measuring the quality of early childhood provision. Sylva et al. (2006) support this view, as they suggest that nursery staff qualifications have a direct impact on children's pre-reading progress and social development. Inversely, settings with low-qualified staff have poorer outcomes in aspects of children's social development. Whilst the link between early years practitioners and the quality of provision has been acknowledged (Osgood, 2012; Nutbrown, 2012), few studies have accessed early years practitioners' opinions about their own qualifications, or on how they view the quality and impact of training on their work.

The EYFS (Department for Education, 2014) recognised the importance of well-qualified staff and of the need and for ongoing professional development. Alongside higher-level degree qualifications, the government aims to improve the basic level of qualifications for all staff in childcare. The proportion of participants at Level 3 or above has increased and is continuing to do so (Nutbrown, 2012). NVQ 3 (early years educator) is roughly equivalent to A-level, which is the leaving qualification for 18-year-olds in mainstream education.

Whilst there is widespread agreement with the government's aims to get higher-qualified staff, such as graduates, into this workforce, Aspect's survey (2009) on EYPS indicates growing discontent within the workforce. The survey found that despite many people gaining EYPS, the pay does not reflect the additional qualification, at around £8–£9 per hour. This is only £1 more than vocationally trained staff. By comparison, a newly qualified teacher (NQT) with an equivalent qualification starts on a minimum of £16.80 an hour (£18.97 in inner London). This offers little incentive for staff to work towards a degree or to stay in the early years system if they gain their degree.

The introduction of the NVQ system in the mid-1990s allowed nursery staff to gain a qualification when they could not afford to take time off work (Calder, 1996). Whilst it was originally hoped that mature and experienced practitioners would use the NVQ system, young students have increasingly gained qualifications in this way. Calder (1996) identifies weaknesses in the NVQ system, as a process of accreditation that does not relate to the academic system of education.

The greatest criticism of the NVQ system is that the method of assessment is based on prescribed outcomes. This means that there are no opportunities for candidates to interact with research, to critically reflect on practice or to be innovative. There is no mechanism to promote new ideas and methodologies. Nutbrown (2012, p.6) states that many Level 3 childcare courses are “insufficient in content and standard” and that they need to be strengthened to include topics such as child development, play and special educational needs.

Students on an NVQ course do not have the opportunity to experience other types of settings, as all the work is carried out in their place of employment. This means that they become qualified without having experienced any other workplace. Nutbrown’s review (2012) identified this as a weakness in vocational pathways and recommended only settings with an Ofsted grading of ‘Good’ or above should be able to accept students on placement.

*Practice placements are an essential part of training and are the first experience many students get of working in early years settings. Students need to observe and work alongside practitioners whose practice is high quality and also need to be well supported while on placement. (Nutbrown, 2012, p.7)*

Osgood (2005) found that many early years practitioners, especially those in the private sector, had poor access to professional development training due to inflexible course delivery and high costs. The Nutbrown report (2012) found that early years practitioners struggled to access high-quality training to support and develop their skills. A high majority of practitioners who took part in the review (72%) cited costs of training and costs of cover staff as the main barriers to accessing courses and training. The report went on to make the recommendations that professional development should be an expectation of leaders and directors and that providing evidence of staff training should be a part of the Ofsted inspection framework (Nutbrown, 2012). Ofsted requirements for staff professional development are currently minimal, stating that opportunities should be provided but offering no information on what

these opportunities should consist of or who should be responsible for the cost of training and professional development (Department for Education, 2014, Section 3.20).

Despite the confusing qualifications system and low expectations on staff development, staff qualifications are showing an upward trend due to government initiatives. The proportion of paid staff in full-day care settings with at least a relevant Level 3 qualification increased from 72% in 2007 to 87% in 2013. The proportion with a Level 6 qualification increased from 4% in 2007 to 11% in 2011 (Department for Education, 2013). This demonstrates that government requirements do have an impact on staff training and qualifications.

### **3.3 Women and emotional labour**

Women have always been the dominant gender in childcare, and this is true of most caring occupations (Daycare Trust, 2008). This raises the question whether women are naturally more caring and hence suited to caring roles, or if there is more-complex, societal pressure for women to feel that they must fill caring roles and likewise for men to feel that they cannot (Reay, 1998).

Purvis (1989) highlights that the literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century represents women as the central pivot of family life and the person for whom the quality of a family would depend on. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this was considered a worthy and valued role and central to holding a family together and ensuring the health, wellbeing and success of the family. Purvis describes the woman's responsibility as a mother to provide an organised, stable and supportive environment for the family. This representation became the most common understanding of the role of women, especially mothers. Over time, this has become seen as a natural function of a woman (Purvis, 1989). This perception of motherhood, as a natural function of being a woman, has continued through the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the link between caring and motherhood has become a historical one.

Reay (1998) believes that motherhood is commonly seen as being easy and natural. This perception drastically simplifies the role of parenthood, and little attention has been drawn to the complexities of mothering. Reay believes that there is a lack of understanding or acknowledgement of the skills that have been learned by mothers through trial and error and through peer mentoring by spending time with other mothers. Broad assumptions that all

mothers are caring, loving and kind suggest that the work is a labour of love and is naturally inherent in women. Reay suggests that the view of mothers as caring has hidden the daily work of mothers and that emotional labour and physical labour have become seen as one function.

Working with young children has always been closely linked to mothering and so has been perceived as a job that comes naturally to women (Moss, 2009). This is despite the fact that many early years practitioners have not had children of their own and their only experience when entering the workforce is from their college-based or NVQ training. McGillivray (2008) proposes that the link between working as an early years practitioner and mothering affects the types of candidates encouraged to pursue a job in childcare. McGillivray believes that the work attracts those who naturally aspire to motherhood, inversely discouraging others, such as men or professionally driven women. Moss (2009) suggests that one weakness of this association between an early years practitioner and mothering is that it is perceived as natural and innate and thus requiring little training or education.

Smith (1992) supports this idea that caring has been considered natural and effortless to women. She describes caring as having been portrayed as an innate and intuitive skill for women. James (1992) conducted research into the care work of hospice nurses. She investigated the care work they participated in on a daily basis. This led her to define care as the sum of multiple concepts.

*Care = organisation + physical labour + emotional labour* (James, 1992, p.488)

Within this statement, she describes the organisation in a dual sense. She constructs it as meaning 'an organisation', including the sub-elements that make up an organisation, and the process of 'organising' or managing work processes. She defines physical labour as the aspect of the work that is easier to see and measure and hence is used in regard to grading performance and calculating rates of pay. These aspects of work are most often detailed in job descriptions, such as cleaning and looking after the physical bodily functions of clients. Lastly, she defines emotional labour as being the invisible aspect of care work that is not defined or measured with regard to performance or remuneration. She goes on to suggest that emotional labour is as demanding as physical and skilled work but is often unidentified.

*Emotional labour is about action and reaction, doing and being, and can be demanding and skilled work. The labourer is expected to respond to another person in a way which is personal to both of them but like other aspects of care it develops from the social relations of carer and cared-for and is shaped by the labour process. (James, 1992, p.500)*

James (1992) describes emotional labour as a personal exchange that for the worker may not be genuinely personal but appears to be so. This sort of exchange takes effort and is demanding of the worker, especially if it must be repeated throughout the working day. This study has an interest in the concept of emotional labour, as highlighted by James (1992), in the context of the work of early years practitioners.

One of the first researchers to define the term 'emotional labour' was Hochschild (1983). Her work centralised on the role of flight attendants and specifically on the training that recruits received on how to deal with emotional labour. She defines emotional labour as the act of managing emotion and performing in an appropriate way to support the illusion of the emotion you should be displaying. This is usually in opposition to the emotion actually being felt. She describes emotional labour as a disparity between what is really felt and what the worker should feel.

Within Hochschild's definition, emotional labour requires the worker to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others. Bridging this gap is achieved through two strategies: surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting involves changing the facial expression and tone of voice to the desired one. Deep acting is about changing inner emotions as an actor may do in order to access a more genuine response from the audience. Hochschild (1983) describes both surface acting and deep acting as being labour intensive and emotionally costly for the worker, which can lead to employee stress and burnout.

The weakness in Hochschild's work on emotional labour is that it does not acknowledge genuine emotional attachment that is given and received willingly by the employee, not as an act of deception but involving genuine reciprocation. Nor does she define the emotional cost of feeling genuine emotion when it is produced in a workforce. Diefendorff, Croyle and Gosserand (2005) go some way towards filling this void by identifying three strands of emotional labour: deep acting, surface acting and the expression of naturally felt emotions. They conducted a study involving nearly 300 participants in varied types of work. Participants

completed detailed questionnaires on their experiences of emotion at work. The results indicated that many workers could identify naturally felt emotions as a form of labour when utilised in a work context. The researchers also investigated antecedents to deep, surface and naturally felt emotions and described each as being a distinct strategy for displaying organisationally desired emotions.

Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006) support this identification of natural emotions, which was noticeably absent from Hochschild's original definition of emotional labour. They further highlight a lack of analysis regarding the joyful aspects of emotional labour in Hochschild's research, such as intrinsic rewards and aspects of work that made the participants feel genuinely joyful. They suggest that there is currently limited research on emotional labour as a positive aspect of a workforce and little to highlight the intrinsic rewards to be gained by an individual carer.

Kruml and Geddes (2000) look at emotional labour through a different lens and present the terms 'positive consonance' and 'negative consonance'. Positive consonance is described as the process of an employee spontaneously feeling and expressing what they are required to. This is a similar definition to that of Diefendorff, Croyle and Gosserand's (2005) concept of naturally felt emotion. Positive consonance does not create negative feelings or stress and so does not risk burnout for staff. Negative consonance is when the employee's feelings are at odds with what the organisation requires and so the employee's emotions are at odds with expectations. This results in the employee either employing surface acting strategies or not being able to fulfil the expected work criteria. Both result in dissonance and may lead to burnout. The description of positive and negative consonance focuses on the impact of emotional labour, rather than just the description of the types.

The difficulty identifying and measuring emotional labour highlights the ongoing debate about the intrinsic gender qualities of early childhood workers. Payne (2009) is of the opinion that emotional work is embodied in a worker's personality, which is formed because of their socialisation. As such, it cannot be identified as a skill. He goes on to say that if emotional labour is not a skill, it should not be identified or remunerated as such. He believes that emotional labour may be better seen as part of a person's ethical or moral self, rather than as a skill to be financially rewarded. Findlay, Findlay and Stewart (2009) support Payne's ideas.

*While often under-conceptualized, care work clearly comprises ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’, incorporating both technical and emotional/interpersonal skills, many of which are difficult to codify... indeed, many caring skills are not recognised as skills but as the natural, innate or acquired attributes of women. (Findlay, Findlay and Stewart, 2009, p.423)*

The complexity in defining and measuring these traits may describe why emotional labour is not formally identified in job descriptions (see Appendix C). Investigations into the emotional content of childcare work by Powell and Goouch (2012) and Boyer, Reimer and Irvine (2013) highlight the central aspect of emotional work in childcare. These studies also clearly indicate that there is an emotional cost to the childcare worker involved in this form of labour.

Early years practitioners’ work centralises on the emotional labour between the children and their key person. The key person system is a requirement of the EYFS framework (Department for Education, 2014) and aims to provide each child in childcare with an adult whom they can make a close emotional bond with. This is supported by the belief that close emotional bonds support children’s attachments, and hence their emotional wellbeing, as they move from a home environment (Elfer, 2012). There is some debate by authors such as Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (cited in Elfer, 2012) as to the value of the key person system and its attempt to replicate home relationships, but the key person system is widely supported not only in the UK but also in many other parts of Europe, the USA and Australia (Elfer, 2012). Page (2011) uses the term ‘professional love’ to describe the relationship between those paid to provide childcare, such as the key person, and the children they care for. This term describes the difference between ethical caring as done in a professional context and natural caring as done in a parental context. Her work suggests that those caring for children in a professional capacity need to be emotionally resilient to deal with the boundaries of loving children and caring for them in a professional manner.

Page and Elfer (2013) conducted research with participants who were key persons. Participants were asked to describe the relationships they had with children, as well as other aspects of their work that required emotional labour. The participants described the emotional complexity of forming relationships with children, especially with the additional complications of staff working a variety of hours, meaning that children have more than one key person.

Up to this point, the discussion on emotional labour has centralised on the relationship between the early years practitioners and the children they care for. However, there are other

relationships in a nursery that require emotional labour, such as the relationship between early years practitioner and parent. In the parent–key-person relationship, early years practitioners must always present a positive, eager, loving persona, despite possibly feeling tired and run down at the end of the day.

Participants in Boyer, Reimer and Irvine’s (2013) research described the emotional work with parents as complex and often difficult. Participants expressed feeling “dismay due to things parents did or did not do” (p.528). This included frustration when parents would not support addressing behavioural difficulties. These participants also identified the constant need to ensure that they do not cross the emotional line with parents. They described this as making a parent jealous that they were too close to the child or that the child would behave better for them than for their parent. Participants described the need to maintain appropriate boundaries, despite this being very difficult, as the children may have bonded very well to them. The early years practitioners also recognised and absorbed the emotional difficulties of families, such as the pain a mother feels when leaving her child at nursery, and reported holding back information from parents about children’s milestones in “an effort to curtail parental guilt” (p.534). This moderation of the relationship, protecting parents, caused an emotional strain on staff, feeling that they were the ones responsible for protecting families and their emotional wellbeing.

Page and Elfer’s (2013) research suggests that the culture and systems of the nursery often interfered with staff members’ ability to bond emotionally with children, despite the practitioners doing their utmost to support attachment. On top of this complexity of bonding with children, the participants reported needing to engage in emotional labour in response to management. The participants reported feeling “anger, abandonment, isolation, feeling overwhelmed” (Page and Elfer, 2013, p.562) in response to the organisational culture, such as arbitrary management decisions. They described controlling and suppressing their negative feelings in a desire to be professional.

Work by Boyer, Reimer, and Irvine (2013) suggested that early years practitioners experience several forms of emotional labour in their work. The research asked questions about the emotional labour and caring practices of 22 early years practitioners in five PDNs. This was supported by participant observations. They identified that emotional labour is a demanding aspect of the work that impacted the participants, and they described the result of emotional

labour as 'taxing' and 'emotionally draining' (Boyer, Reimer and Irvine, 2013, p.528). The participants spoke of getting told off by the management when they could not effectively manage their emotions and cried at work. There was a pressure to be able to contain emotions, especially when parents were around. Boyer, Reimer and Irvine (2013) describe a set of unwritten rules regarding emotional labour that was reinforced by the management. These unwritten rules defined the limits as to how much affection staff should show to children when at work. Staff were discouraged from telling children they loved them or from kissing them. These unwritten rules acted as emotional boundaries, which staff also used as a means of "emotional self-protection" (p.533).

Elfer (2012) discusses the lack of recognition that early years practitioners get in regard to the emotional labour they participate in. He proposes a need to formally recognise this part of their daily work and to develop work discussions as a form of professional reflection in order to support practitioners and draw attention to this part of their work. He found that professional discussions about emotional labour led to more-collaborative work between settings, leaving staff feeling supported. This research highlights a need to have greater acknowledgement and recognition of the emotional labour of early years practitioners. The work identifies many of the stresses caused by caring for children and suggests that this needs greater recognition from both within the workforce, such as by managers, and externally by policymakers.

There may also be considerable emotional labour in the process of being managed. This is manifested in staff ensuring that the management always see them in a positive light. Fineman (2000) identifies the role that the management plays in ensuring that employees' emotions are managed in a positive way in order for the organisation to run smoothly and be successful.

*Emotion work helps keep the organization organized, when emotion management fails so can the organization. (Fineman, 2000, p.5)*

When discussing the elements of care in a nurse's role, Smith (1992) suggests that emotional labour can be as intensive as technical labour, yet it is not readily recognised and valued by the management. She also describes the difficulty in costing emotional labour, as it is almost impossible to measure and quantify and is impossible to teach by a set of standards. Osgood (2005) describes emotional labour as not only being exploited financially but also in status.

*... the emotional labour working class women in childcare invest in their jobs has little exchange value in terms of status and respect in the fast changing world of edubusiness. (Osgood, 2005, p.290)*

Colley (2006) supports Osgood's sentiments, describing capitalism as defined by consumption and that within the childcare sector, care and emotional labour are the goods produced by women to be consumed by others. She says that this is a form of gender oppression, which assures subordination.

*It is likely to continue as long as capitalist edubusiness has an interest in making profits by offering motherly love for sale in the nursery. (Colley, 2006, p.26)*

Whilst studying the work of early years practitioners working in baby rooms, Powell and Goouch (2012) commented that the emotionality of the profession makes practitioners susceptible to manipulation and control by more-dominant groups, such as local authorities and the national government. This was displayed by participants quickly changing from having confidence in their own abilities and judgements to having a sense of being overlooked, undervalued and powerless.

Taggart (2011) delves into the ethics of emotional labour, more specifically the exploitation of practitioners engaging in emotional labour. The vocational nature of working with children, or the belief among early years practitioners that it is a calling to work with children, is ethically challenging.

*The call to vocation, as in all professions, is also a double-edged sword, often synonymous with self-sacrifice or burnout rather than job satisfaction... The limits of a personal ethic of care become evident in the moral burden which individual practitioners are expected to shoulder on behalf of society as a whole. (Taggart, 2011, p.86)*

The double-edged sword of showing love, empathy and joy at work contrasts with lists of professional standards and descriptions of what a professional job looks like. Taggart (2011) expresses the need to make caring the central focus of early years work by encouraging the workforce to develop a 'critical understanding' of their emotional work and to reinforce this as an essential component of their work. This involves understanding, developing and reflecting on the nature of care work, as has been done in other caring professions, such as nursing and social work.

### 3.4 Social class, habitus and doxa

The labour-intensive aspect of being an early years practitioner has led several researchers to state that the workforce comprises working-class women who serve the needs of middle- and upper-class families (Colley, 2003: Osgood, 2005).

*Traditionally the workforce in the UK has been an under-qualified, underpaid group of working-class women... (Vincent and Braun, 2010, p.204)*

The question of why working-class girls continue to get working-class, gender-stereotyped jobs despite equal opportunity policies and open access to training has been raised by researchers such as Bates (1991). Her research explores how students in vocational training for caring for elderly people had very few other options open to them due to low school grades. For these girls, the equal opportunities only existed in policy papers, as their lived reality was limited options when entering the workforce. For working-class girls who had been raised to have working-class aspirations and ideals, working-class, gender-stereotyped jobs in caring were seen as a better option to manual labour, such as cleaning, or the other option of marriage and becoming a young mother.

Bourdieu's (1984) work on social theory describes why working-class girls may continue to get working-class jobs. Habitus has been described by Bourdieu as the set of mental structures that are embedded within an individual. They are the internal representations of external structures and make up our thoughts, tastes, beliefs, interests and understandings of the world around us. Habitus is created by the socialisation process by family, culture and education. Our habitus is fluid as we have more experiences and as we develop greater understandings and have more experiences of the world. Bourdieu (1984) describes how habitus is developed and influenced through social, economic and cultural capital. Social capital is a description of who an individual knows, who knows them and the networks they have access to. Social capital is restricted to the groups or fields that an individual has access to. Cultural capital is the knowledge of how to behave in different social contexts. Each field, whether it be education, art, religion or law, has its own set of rules and associated knowledge. Each field has its own set of practices and power relationship. An individual's economic capital will also influence the fields they can access and can most simply be described as the economic assets held by a person. This means that those with less money cannot enter the same fields as those who are more privileged economically can. These factors all affect the development of cultural capital,

which teaches social norms of different fields. The combination of types of culture develops our habitus and within this our doxa.

*... primary experience of the social world is that of doxa, an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident. (Bourdieu, 1984, p.471)*

This is our understanding of how to be. It is the common beliefs or popular opinion of the group. The doxa is the rules of the field and is a subconscious and unquestioned truth. It is doxa that allows a person to feel at home in their habitus and is very hard to see, as it is part of their mental fabric. The habitus and its associated doxa constrain an individual and explain why most people find it hard to move from their social class grouping.

*Objective limits become a sense of limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by experience of objective limits, a 'sense of one's place' which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places and so forth from which one is excluded. (Bourdieu, 1984, p.471)*

The habitus constrains us but it does not determine our thoughts and actions. It is through being reflective that we become aware of our habitus and then we can observe social fields more objectively. Bourdieu's ideas go some way to describing why working-class girls tend to end up in working-class jobs, and why girls who have been raised with an understanding that mothering is natural to women end up in caring roles such as childcare work.

Ball (2003) describes a feature of class as the choices and exclusions of choice that a group may have. For example, people from working-class backgrounds may have less choice in deciding which school they send their children to, due to a lack of transport. Choosing a school is dependent on being mobile and being able to afford the transport costs. A person's class centralises around their family interactions, social networks and social institutions. Social class is interwoven with who a person is and is reflected in how they measure self-worth, their attitudes to others and their value systems. Colley (2003) describes the role of caring for children as an expectation of women. However, the role of caring for other people's children is usually the task of working-class women.

*However important they are, these tasks are not highly valued in patriarchal capitalist society, and hence are low-paid and low-status. (Colley, 2003, p.7)*

Osgood (2009) suggests that government policy does not address how a nursery worker who is also a mother can herself access affordable childcare. The cost of childcare in England in 2015 in the private sector could not be accessed by an early years practitioner on an average of £6.20 an hour (£49.60 per day before tax). It is likely that a mother would earn more on unemployment benefits rather than put her child in care and work as an early years practitioner (Osgood, 2009). These figures certainly support the notion that only those on a professional salary can afford private childcare or, to put it another way, those not in working-class jobs. This entrenches the system of working-class women serving the needs of middle-class families.

Brooker (2010) studied the relationship between parents and their child's key person (nominated early years practitioner) in two London settings. Her work suggests that the dynamics of a middle-class parent and a working-class early years practitioner are one of uneven power balance. She described a situation where parents, as the customers, have power over early years practitioners, thus reinforcing the social divide. Ball (2003) suggests that this domination of the childcare market by the middle and upper classes means that a disempowered working class have no access to or voice in policy development. As a result, the middle class can directly affect education policies to suit their own interests and needs. Osgood (2005) supports this notion when she states that working-class women are powerless in the face of top-down policy development and implementation. She paints a bleak picture of childcare work.

*... it can be argued that childcare remains the domain of working class women precisely because nobody else wants to do it. (Osgood, 2005, p.290)*

This thesis will explore the histories and social backgrounds of the participants to see if the notion of working-class women being attracted to becoming early years practitioners holds true for the participants of this study.

### **3.5 Working identity, vocational habitus and careership**

Identity is a multidimensional concept, reflecting numerous shifting themes. Many concepts are closely related to identity, including working identity, self-identity, vocational habitus and careership. These topics are deeply entwined and include structural, social and individual

psychological components (Kirpal, 2004). Identities change through time and can have an impact on workers' health and stress levels.

Many factors influence the development of an individual's working identity, such as training opportunities, management style and experiences of emotional labour. Working identity is not a fixed state, but changes over time.

*... identity had many components and layers* (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998, p.168)

Engaging in reflecting on and thinking about working identities and work engagement has been demonstrated to improved organisational outcomes through factors like increasing employee motivation (Popova-Nowak, 2010). A positive working identity appears to lead to greater retention of staff.

Defining identity as a single construct is difficult due to the many changing facets involved. Kirk and Wall (2010) describe identity as a continued struggle, rather than a stable entity. This is because of the many external and internal influences that can sway identity, and these factors can change rapidly over time. The process of forming an identity is not static but constantly changes, as the process of gaining experience in both private and professional lives alters identity. Popova-Nowak (2010) identifies a variety of terms that are used to describe working identity, such as 'occupational identity', causing overlap of concepts and notions. She describes working identity as a multidimensional work-based self-concept that shapes the behaviours of individuals as they work. It is this identity that helps individuals to adopt learned professional skills and to internalise organisational norms. She describes the construction of working identity as a combination of life experiences, work skills, organisational context, and work culture and practices.

Watson (2008) defines working identity as the person we see reflected in the eyes of others. We manage our identities to influence how others see us, which in turn becomes how we see ourselves. Whilst a person's habitus may be a subconscious feature present in a variety of contexts and environments, working identity is more open to flux, influenced by a variety of factors, such as occupational context, the effectiveness of the team, feeling valued at work, the experience of being managed and career prospects.

Kirpal (2004) describes occupational or working identity as being a multidimensional notion that includes structural, social and individual psychological components. He suggests elements such as the company, occupation, professional community, work team, work environment, and the actions or processes of the work as directly influencing working identity. He suggests that working identity reflects a person's feeling of value and so is vital in order to have a highly functioning workforce. Husso and Hirvonen (2012) describe this link between self-identity and work as being particularly strong in jobs that require emotional work, with a close association between caring work and self-identity, as is seen for early years practitioners.

Hochschild's (1983) study on airline workers demonstrated that emotional labour can affect the wellbeing and performance of workers and that lower performance is linked with a negative working identity. She links emotional labour to worker burnout, which results in a higher incidence of stress-related leave and subsequently high staff turnover.

Fineman (2000) suggests that acts of management can be instrumental in affecting how employees view their work. These are described as organisational phenomena that result in feelings of being controlled.

*The formal (and informal) techniques of control – such as appraisal procedures, surveillance methods, performance assessments, rules of negotiation – are organizational phenomena that are lived through feelings of being controlled or controlling others. (Fineman, 2000, p.8)*

Styles of management can therefore directly affect the development of a positive or negative working identity. Hochschild (1983) describes top-down management as maintaining a hierarchy through suppressing democracy and by suppressing envy and resentment at the bottom of the hierarchy through secrets. The people at the bottom are never allowed to know how much others earn or what other privileges they enjoy. The management hold secret details of how promotions are awarded and what individuals must do in order to aspire for promotion. This style of management has a detrimental effect on working identity, causing stress and negativity at work. Career prospects within a company can also influence an individual's working identity (Popova-Nowak, 2010).

Harlos and Pinder (2000, cited in Fineman, 2000) describe interaction injustice as having a negative effect on working identity. This is the mistreatment between an employee and an authority figure and includes continually criticising but rarely praising staff, which causes

frustration, depression and stress. They describe the result of interaction injustice as an inability to make decisions, a loss of self-worth, feeling trapped due to low self-esteem, and emotional swings. If these interactions are common in the early years workforce, it may go some way to explaining the high staff turnover reported in the early years sector. This will be explored further in the data analysis in Chapters 5 and 6.

In Chapter 1, the historical account outlining the formation of the two different types of provision demonstrated that the two provision types derived from different needs and different motivations. The VSPSSs were originally set up to give children opportunities to play and to develop skills to prepare them to move on to school. PDNs were developed in response to providing longer hours of childcare to support parents in returning to work. Whilst the boundaries between the two may now be blurred, they had different starting points and objectives. Reflecting on this, the assumption has been made that the structures of these two types of organisations and the management of them may well differ. In consideration of these potential differences, a review of organisational theory and management structures is necessary.

Organisational theory was described by Max Weber, who developed the bureaucratic theory when he made observations of 19<sup>th</sup>-century businesses and government agencies. This theory has been the forefather of others, including the development organisation theory in education (Bush, 2015). Bush (2015) describes organisation theory in education and the impact this has on leadership. He describes four central constructs that define organisation and leadership theory: goals, structure, culture and context.

The goals are described as aims and purpose. This considers who sets the goals and who is responsible for them. The structure considers vertical and horizontal structures and the flexibility within the structures. This may be seen as the difference between top-down and collegial management styles. The culture is the ethos, the unspoken feel of a place, and considers how it is developed, sustained and modified. The context is the size of the organisation, where it is placed and whom it serves. It describes the link between the organisation and the external environment (Bush, 2015).

Bush (2015) describes leadership models that are defined by their differences in goals, structures, cultures and contexts. Managerial leadership is a formally structured model, also known as top-down leadership. This model is derived from Weber's notions of bureaucracy.

This model supports a hierarchical structure with formal chains of command. This type of manager is goal orientated, with each person within the hierarchy doing a specific task that reflects their expertise. Target-setting is a reflection of this management style, as this is so closely linked to goals. Participative leadership sees that the team are empowered to influence the decision-making within the organisation. This means that the team have ownership over decisions and the model is highly democratic. This model has similarities to distributed leadership, where staff with expertise lead in designated areas, making use of their skills and sharing the decision-making process. These models and the four central constructs will be used in the discussion on management in the analysis chapters.

Jovanovic (2013) studied staff retention of early years practitioners in Australia, specifically those working in PDNs. Her research made use of 28 interviews with early childhood educators. The research focused on why staff turnover was so much higher in PDN settings than in any other caring profession. Her research identified three main factors that contributed to staff leaving the workforce. Firstly, legislative, structural and operational requirements inhibited the early years educators' collaboration with other areas of the sector. This left the practitioners feeling professionally unfulfilled and isolated. Secondly, long hours affected staff ability to achieve a suitable work-life balance. Thirdly, there was a negative impact on staff of top-down management. This referred specifically to the management making decisions for staff about training and development, without consulting the staff about their interests or needs. Jovanovic (2013) illustrated that when staff are told which training to attend, without any choice, they are not enthused about attending. This in turn has an impact on staff retention. Giving staff the choice to attend courses that interest them resulted in higher levels of motivation to stay in the job. This could be because training chosen by staff helps to develop expertise that reflects their interests. Hence, staff take more responsibility in their work.

Understanding Bourdieu's concept of habitus is an important preliminary step in understanding the concept of vocational habitus. Bourdieu describes habitus as a cultural habitat that is internalised and influences us subconsciously in how we act, think and feel (Bourdieu, 1998). The habitus is a set of culturally determined dispositions that have no representative content and at no stage pass through consciousness. The formation of our habitus is influenced by our upbringing and involves variables such as our social class, family make-up, education, gender, nationality, experiences with different social groups and personal experiences (Bourdieu, 1998). The habitus is durable over time and transposable, meaning that it can be applied to a variety of social situations (Maton, 2012). The habitus is influenced by

material conditions, as well as beliefs, perceptions and feelings. This, however, is still related to the field in which we live. Thus, the role of the field, or the environment, is an essential element of interaction with the habitus (Maton, 2012).

*Habitus therefore brings together both objective social and subjective personal experiences.* (Maton, 2012, p.52)

The habitus has an unconscious dimension; it is second nature and difficult for an individual to identify, as it permeates so deeply into their belief system and culture. It is something we may only become aware of if we are in a new environment.

Colley (2006) has used Bourdieu's concept of habitus to describe the process of becoming the right person for the job as developing vocational habitus. It is the characteristics, culture and history of a person that allow them to fit in with the culture of a workplace. It is the process of reinforcing predispositions such as gender, background and class, in line with the demands of the workforce. Vocational habitus is very similar to habitus but is specifically focused on the culture and experience of life in a working environment.

*Vocational habitus involves developing not only a 'sense' of how to be, but also 'sensibility': requisite feelings and morals and the capacity for emotional labour.* (Colley et al., 2003, p.471)

Developing vocational habitus begins in training and impacts staff members' ability to feel a sense of belonging. It helps staff to identify themselves with the workforce.

Bates (1991) conducted seminal research on female students training for a qualification in care work for the elderly. She conducted an ethnographic study that focused on the social processes that occurred for the students throughout their training. She observed dramatic changes in students' attitudes to their work as they progressed through their college studies. This could be considered as the process of developing their vocational habitus. Bates' conclusions described the characteristics that the successful students displayed. She also detailed the attitudinal change that allowed the students to deal with the difficult aspects of their work, such as dealing with intimate care needs and working with violent and often abusive clients. Success in training was defined by students' social backgrounds, history and educational experiences.

In response to Bates's (1991) research, Colley (2003, 2006) conducted a similar study on nursery nursing students' experiences of training in their first year of college. She interviewed six female students in their first year of their college course. She also interviewed their tutor and gained her perspective on the curriculum and the success of the students. Colley's data was collected through interviews, questionnaires and her own observational notes. The aims were to investigate how students perceived themselves as they progressed through the course; to gain insights into their experiences as they came to understand the role of nursery nursing; and to document the process of developing vocational habitus.

Participants in Colley's study described themselves as 'nice' girls and had distanced themselves from those they grouped as 'rough'. Their language, attitudes and high levels of self-care closely reflected the industry's regularly advertised image of early years practitioners as being loving, kind and gentle, as well as having good morals (Colley, 2006). As the students' training progressed, a contradiction arose between the image that the students had of what an early years practitioner should be and the reality of the job.

*The pragmatic detachment required to cope with 'puke', 'pee' and 'punches' is mitigated by the idealised image of the perfectly sensitive and gentle nursery nurse, and by the deeply caring culture created by college tutors.*  
(Colley, 2003, p.4)

As the year progressed, it became clear that students who possessed certain characteristics and dispositions were more suitable than others. Those less suitable left the course or transferred to other care work courses, such as care work for the elderly. In a similar summation to Bates's (1991) research, Colley drew conclusions about the type of person more successful in the training programme.

*Being female and upper working class, with happy experiences of being cared for by both parents, and a lack of 'hardening' experiences or 'toughness', appears to predispose girls to cope with the demands of vocational culture in childcare in the appropriate manner.* (Colley, 2003, p.6)

This description of early years practitioners' characteristics contrasts with Bates's (1991) research of care girls (elderly care), who were described as needing characteristics of 'toughness' and experiences throughout their lives that had 'hardened' them in order to be successful in caring for the elderly. Colley (2003) describes the students as 'upper working class', which she defines as having parents who had created a stable home life where the girls

had never been without the things they needed. This would suggest that in two similar caring professions, there are characteristics and life experiences that lead to success in each of these two jobs and that these characteristics and experiences are quite different.

Despite the messy and unpleasant aspects of the job, college tutors in Colley's study (2006) continued to portray the profession as one that changed children's lives and had a high moral quality. They described it as a vocation that was a deeply worthwhile pursuit. Colley interpreted this as having the effect of increasing the students' commitment to the job, which in turn helped them to deal with the emotional tensions they faced in the workplace (Colley, 2006).

Vincent and Braun (2010) used Colley's concept of vocational habitus (2006) in their own study of early years practitioners' training in college. Their findings were very similar to Colley's and describe participants' thinking processes as they transitioned from those who had achieved poorly at school to wanting to succeed in their childcare studies. This process saw participants reflect on their language, attitudes and clothing as they developed a desire to fit into the common conception of what a person who works with young children should be. Vincent and Braun (2010) describe this as a "redemptive process" (p.212). These findings support the notion of vocational habitus and the need to grow into and accept the persona of a childcare worker.

Colley (2006) describes the subtle processes of encouraging emotions, such as caring and nurturing, throughout training. Tutors subtly discouraged traits such as assertiveness and aggression. Many of the students had started the course with higher aspirations for teaching and nursing but had not received the required school grades, and vocational training was a second choice. Colley describes childcare as an attractive choice for working-class girls with low academic success, as it is viewed as preferable to other mundane or labour-intensive work choices, such as cleaning. She describes the powerful images of nannies working for elite families and serving the wealthiest, as Princess Diana did before marrying Prince Charles. This commonly held view of working with young children, as being wholesome and worthwhile, seems to be an attraction for young, working-class women (Colley, 2006). The development of vocational habitus is interlinked with class and gender dynamics, as these must also correlate in order for a person to feel a sense of belonging. This may explain why working-class girls are attracted to childcare, as it fits within their habitus.

Understanding habitus may help to explain why working-class women are attracted to caring jobs that have low pay and poor work conditions. The topic is embedded in issues of gender, social class and societal beliefs that women are able to care and nurture without any qualifications. It also raises issues about how discourse surrounding the work, especially from within government and further education, influences the types of people who may be attracted to the work. All of these issues impact on the formation of vocational habitus as a culture is developed within a workplace.

Hodkinson (2008) uses the term 'careership' to describe career decision-making. His work, spanning 20 years, followed a large variety of people in their careers and their decision-making processes when entering the workforce. Using Bourdieu's theory of fields, careership theory describes the relationship between a person and the fields they inhabit as providing the horizons for action in which the individual sees themselves. The interactions among a large variety of variables, such as social environments, geographical location, employment field, class, gender, ethnicity and age, all impact the career a person chooses (Hodkinson, 2008). These areas all play a part in the process, but the power that each has is not equal. Some areas have a much greater influence on choices, such as the influence of a person of importance to the individual. This means that if a family member has worked in the job or has strongly supported the individual to pursue a job, this has a strong influence on the choices made. Many of these influences are subconscious to the individual, meaning that they struggle to articulate what led them to make the career choices they have (Hodkinson, 2008). The concept of careership is interested primarily in the decision-making process behind making a choice in work. Colley's vocational habitus is about the process of fitting into that career: a description of how you absorb and reflect the job and become part of the job. Both vocational habitus and careership reflect aspects of gender, class and environment, and both describe how a person's thinking is influenced by a variety of influences. These theories describe why working-class girls get working-class jobs, despite the variety of opportunities open to them.

Osgood (2006) has written about the role that government discourse has played in shaping perceptions of the workforce. She believes that the government rhetoric about the early years workforce has had an impact on public understanding of the profession. Mandates, which constantly promote the need to upskill the workforce, have constructed an image of early years practitioners as a workforce that is weak and unprofessional. The tone of the government discourse suggests that early years practitioners are 'lacking' and in need of transformation through new initiatives and top-down measures (Payler and Locke, 2013).

Some of these measures would include the introduction of newer qualifications that head towards a more-professional workforce (Osgood, 2012).

Looking at the *Every Child Matters* guidance (Department for Education and Skills, 2005), Osgood (2006) highlights how the system was portrayed as needing change through a sustained programme of top-down reform. This implies that nursery staff were lacking and in need of transformation by others with greater knowledge. She describes this strategy as detailing the ideal people to revitalise the workforce as working-class or single mothers. With the labelling of potential early years practitioners in a gendered way, and highlighting personal attributes that reflect motherhood, rather than skills, qualifications or knowledge, the workforce has come to be seen as an extension of motherhood. The government's National Careers Service website (National Careers Service, 2012) has a page dedicated to introducing childcare to potential candidates. The quality stated as needed for the childcare workforce is a warm, caring and patient nature. This same skill is not listed on the pages for nursery teacher, primary school teacher or children's nurse. In the main, women staff all of these professions, and all require warmth, care and patience. However, elements that are most closely linked to mothering and emotional labour are overtly labelled on the early years practitioners description only. This reinforces the message that the job does not require qualifications or professional attributes but is a more-vocational calling, reliant on personality and inner traits. It suggests that the workforce do not need to be skilled but rather should fit a specific and very gendered view of inner attributes. Participants in Vincent and Braun's (2010) study of childcare students in college confirmed their belief that the work is vocational.

*... childcare is a vocation, a career that one is in because of a generalised love of children, and a desire to 'help'. In return, comes not concrete rewards, but a sense of well-being and contentment. (Vincent and Braun, 2010, p.208)*

This attitude, supported mostly by those in childcare, does little to support the professionalisation of the workforce and continues to reinforce the gendered and low-skilled image of the work.

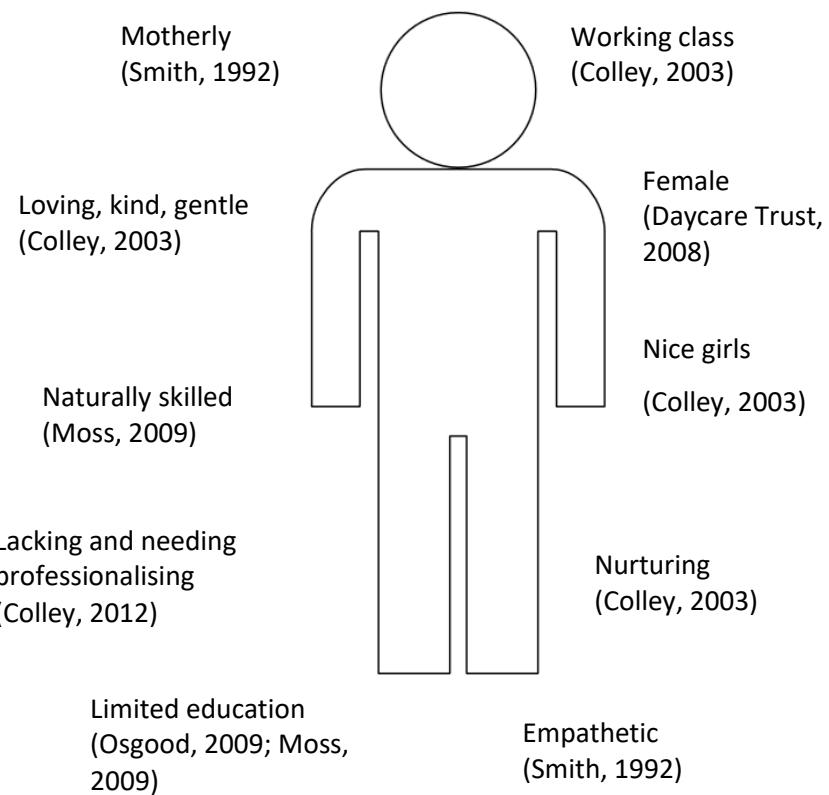
Working identity and vocational habitus are so closely linked that they are almost impossible to define separately. The process of developing vocational habitus can lead to the formation of identity, which may be positive or negative. Defining working identity is not a simple task. There is no single agreed description of what contributes to identity formation. Kirpal (2004)

suggests that elements such as the company, occupation, professional community, team, work environment, and the actions or processes of the work may directly influence working identity. Husso and Hirvonen (2012) describe the link between self-identity and work as being particularly strong in jobs that require emotional work, with a close association between caring work and self-identity. This is due to the personal investment that people make with their work and how this relates to their sense of self.

## **Summary**

This chapter has explored the research and literature surrounding early years practitioners' work. It has considered elements that may impact the formation of vocational habitus, such as tasks and duties, salary, qualifications and emotional labour. It has considered different definitions of emotional labour and has reflected on the pool that the workforce draws on as working-class women with few career options open to them. The chapter has discussed potential reasons for the high turnover of staff and has addressed potential reasons for this.

A diagram of the keywords raised in this chapter used by authors to describe early years practitioners is presented in Figure 3.2. The keywords were summarised and used as the initial areas to cover when developing the interview questions. These themes guided the responses provided by the participants in this study and hence investigated whether the experiences of the participants are reflected in previous literature and research.



**Figure 3.1: Literature themes**



## Chapter 4: Design, methodology and methods

This chapter details the methodological basis of the study and the method chosen for the data collection. The rationale for designing the research project as a qualitative survey is provided, and some differences between this approach and other methodologies will be presented. The chapter will also justify the use of semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection. It will discuss the ethical considerations made throughout the research and will conclude by presenting the contextual information about each of the settings and the individual participants who contributed their stories.

Designing this research project was not a linear process. It was more of a cyclical process, with many changes of direction and constant revisions. To an outsider, it may appear that the decision-making process regarding the theoretical framework was straightforward and simplistic. In fact, it was an arduous process that saw me repeatedly question the aims and purpose of the research. As I spent time reflecting on how to explore identity and working experience, it became clear that a qualitative survey was the most suitable theoretical framework, as discussed below.

### 4.1 Qualitative survey

This study aimed to gather an in-depth, detailed description of early years practitioners' experiences of their work. The focus was to draw out meaning from the participants' experiences and form an understanding of the joys and pressures of being an early years practitioner. One of the end goals was to give voice to a previously unheard workforce and to allow the participants to develop an understanding of their own working identities. The collection of experiences was then used comparatively for participants working in the PDN and VSPS sectors.

The focus on depth and detail, rather than generalisations of a greater population, required an interpretative approach. This means that the heart of the study was social interactions and the individual reactions and meanings of people. Reality is understood as a social construct that is fluid and highly dependent on the individual's interpretation of that reality. An individual's

prior experiences and understanding of life will impact on their interpretation and understanding of each situation (Creswell, 2003). This means that two people will have a different experience of the same situation.

The interpretative view of research as adopted in this study is removed from positivist ideals of scientific verifications of logic. This study relies on qualitative data and, as a qualitative researcher, I have sought to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which a set of stories intersect (Glesne, 1999). The interpretivist paradigm suggests that reality is constructed through the meanings and understandings developed through social interactions and experience (Creswell, 2003). This assumes that reality is not external to people and their experiences but is created through interactions with others.

Dialogue is critical to the interpretivist paradigm as this is where understandings between people are developed (Clandinin, 2006). This means that reality and the truth are constructed by those involved in the process and cannot be replicated. Interpretations of reality and truth are dependent on language as an expression of these experiences. Defining truth, as a universal description, is ultimately unattainable, as this truth, as unveiled within the research, is unique to the time and people in which it was constructed and cannot be replicated (Bold, 2012). Whilst data cannot be generalised, as each context, timeframe and experience is unique, a set of individual stories can be used to make some reflections on a group. Etherington (2004) supports this idea by explaining the value of individual stories as parts of a mosaic that can be put together to tell the story of a group.

As a qualitative researcher, I have assumed a subjective epistemology. This implies that people cannot separate themselves from what they know. Hence, the researcher and the participants are linked, forming a unique relationship reflected in one moment in time. The research analysis becomes a reflection of how the researcher understands themselves and others in the world (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). This means that the research cannot be replicated, as the personality of the researcher is an integral feature of the relationships within the research and hence the outcomes of the research.

This study was a qualitative survey. A survey is a method of gathering information from a sample of people. This is not to be confused with a survey that is interested in quantitative

outcomes, such as measuring the number of people with similar views or characteristics. A qualitative survey focuses on the diversity of people, not the distribution (Jansen, 2010). In a qualitative survey, topics and categories are identified through analysis of the raw data.

*This type of survey does not count the number of people with the same characteristic (value of variable) but it establishes the meaningful variation (relevant dimensions and values) within that population. (Jansen, 2010)*

The deep involvement of the researcher and the impact they have on the research are described as a subjective methodology. This may be considered a weakness when applying positivist ideals; so, in order to avoid bias or misinterpretation when using a subjective methodology, the researcher should demonstrate an awareness of how they have evaluated their own thoughts, feelings, beliefs and perceptions (Robson, 2002). They must reflect on how their personal situation and experiences impact on their understanding of the reality expressed throughout the research.

*... the researcher and the researched in a particular study are in relationship with each other and that both parties will learn and change in the encounter. (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007, p.9)*

Etherington (2004) describes the process of a researcher reflecting on how they may have impacted the research process and the data analysis as reflexivity. The process of reflexivity allows for issues of validity to be addressed. Reflexivity is a process where the researcher provides information about their social, cultural, historical, racial and sexual context to allow the reader to understand the context of the research and to identify the major influences that may have impacted the work. Denzin and Lincoln (2012) state that reflexivity is the process of understanding the location, history, context and researcher and how they impact on any claims of knowledge. Glesne (1999) suggests that having an awareness of the researcher's subjectivity and monitoring it throughout the research are important to be able to accurately report findings to readers of the finished work.

In order to support the process of being reflexive, I have provided a small autobiographical account, which forms Appendix H. This describes my position in relation to my history, upbringing, professional experiences and inherent bias due to my gender and cultural experiences. This will help to describe and define my values and beliefs at the specific moment

in time in which the research was conducted. Partasi (2013) defines this process as important to support transparency in values, beliefs, research processes and research outcomes. This short piece of autobiographical writing included in the appendices provides contextual information and describes my positioning within the field of early years education. It also acknowledges my understanding of the impact that I have had on the research and the participants, which helped to create a unique experience that cannot be replicated.

Developing an understanding of Dewey's theory of experience is essential to understand the importance of the interaction between the researcher and the participants. Dewey describes the ontology of experience as an interaction of two parts: continuity and interaction (Dewey, 1938 cited in Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Continuity is the understanding that each experience a person has will influence their future in a positive or negative way. Interaction is then how a person's experience impacts the present situation. This means that experience is a changing stream that is characterised by the continuous interaction of thought with the personal, social and material environment. Experience relies on interactions with subject and object, between self and world. As this theory of experience is understood, we can see that the purpose of qualitative inquiry is not to represent a person's reality as a separate entity but to generate a new experience and to document this experience as a new phenomenon.

Whilst this research was not a narrative inquiry, it had sympathies with this methodology, as it aimed to gather and reflect on participants' stories of their work experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe three dimensions that they feel are necessary components of narrative inquiry. I adopted these in the design of this study as a qualitative survey, as they helped to ground the work. The first is the personal and social interaction between the researcher and the participants. The second is the time dimension, which includes the past, present and future. The third is the place dimension, describing the specific place and context in which the research was conducted. It is essential to consider these three dimensions in order to defend the subjective nature of the work.

In considering the time dimension, the relationship between the participants and the researcher is situated in a particular moment, which cannot be replicated or revisited. This means that the context in which the research was conducted is central to the research and must be described and detailed in order to contextualise the research (Bold, 2012).

The place element is evidenced in this research through the vignettes. Place pays attention to the location of the interviews. In some of the interviews, the management gave place for the interviews to be held as a priority, and other managers felt that this was less of a priority. Whether the interviews were conducted in a quiet, ready-made space or on the floor in a corridor is important. It speaks of the value placed on the staff and their place within the work environment.

The element of personal and social interaction pays attention to the interactions and their social nature (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). It places importance on the individuals and the interactions. Dewey's theory gives credit to everyday experience as an important and valued part of lived experiences. The evidence for these personal interactions can be seen in the interview transcriptions, with evidence of the interviews being conversational, giving elements of control to both parties. It is also evidenced within the analysis and the interpretation of meaning as presented by me throughout this thesis. Please see Appendix I for two samples of interview transcripts.

## 4.2 Data collection, access and ethical considerations

The method that was considered the most suitable for collecting participants' views was semi-structured interviews. Robson (2002) suggests that semi-structured interviews are appropriate where an individual's story can represent the perceptions of a whole group. They allow for some element of transferability, as it is assumed that an individual's response is often similar to the views of their peers.

Semi-structured interviews allow more flexibility than other methods, such as structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews encourage new topics to arise and to be explored in a way that structured interviews do not. They allow for lines of inquiry to be modified and for the interviewer to follow up interesting responses and to explore motives in detail. This cannot be done in written methods such as questionnaires (Robson, 2002). It also gives the participants an element of control over the direction of the discussion. This helps them to feel more at ease and to see the interview as more of a discussion than a formal interview. In this way, it is less of an interrogation and more of a conversation.

*... a semi-structured interview can lead to narrative-like responses, depending*

*on the nature and the purpose of the research. In addition, the semi-structured interview provides the flexibility to detour from the planned course of action and follow a line of interest, while at the same time keeping the original focus and purpose of the research in mind; it therefore allows for new insights to emerge. (Bold, 2012, p.100)*

Semi-structured interviews allowed me to respond to the participants' non-verbal cues and to modify the direction of the discussion accordingly. This flexibility required a level of skill and experience on my part, and my understanding and experience of the early years sector were vital for this role. I was very aware throughout the interviews that the method is a two-way process, as both the interviewer and the participant are involved in sharing information. As the researcher, I was not a passive data collector. Many factors influenced how the interviews were conducted, including elements of my personality, age, education, social class (or perceived social class) and gender. All these elements had the potential to impact on how the participants related to me and thus affected the way that the interviews played out.

*Gender relationships, age and emotional factors all play a part in the nature of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Transference of feelings may occur in either direction, and they may be at an unconscious level but still have an impact on the interaction. (Bold, 2012, p.103)*

The data collection took place over a six-month period in 2013. The interviews were recorded on an MP3 digital voice recorder and transcribed manually into word-processing software. As a single researcher, I conducted and transcribed each of the interviews. I also wrote field notes for each of the settings. These notes described the building and staff facilities, including the nursery décor and layout. There were occasional miscellaneous observations, such as the signage around the staffroom. Within the analysis, these are presented as the vignettes that described my initial impressions about the building and the atmosphere of each nursery. The vignettes can be found later in this chapter.

Prior to the interviews, the participants were given a list of questions as a guide to the areas that may be discussed. It was made clear that other topics may arise (see Appendix D and Appendix E for interview questions). Participants were given an information sheet about the research (see Appendix F) and asked to give written consent for the interviews (see Appendix G). I decided to give the questions ahead of time so that the participants could think about the areas to be discussed and to avoid them getting nervous about what might be covered. Many

of the questions reflected the themes that had surfaced during the literature review. They were used as a starting point, and participants were free to discuss any ideas that arose throughout the interview that were not on the list of questions.

I determined it necessary to adopt a flexible approach to encourage participants to feel confident to freely express their thoughts around their work (Drever, 1995). I agree with Thomas (1993), who says that questions ‘written in stone’ can become a crutch for the researcher, which slows them down and does not allow them to dig below the surface. It was important to be flexible in order to explore issues of identity thoroughly and to be able to access the parts of working life that were important to the participants. Allowing the participants to have a conversation, rather than answering a rigid set of questions, allowed them to tell their stories.

The interviews lasted 30–50 minutes, depending on the participants’ willingness to keep talking. Information on the participants is presented later in this chapter. Throughout the interviews, I constantly reviewed how confident and comfortable the staff appeared to be and reflected on how they were reacting to the interviews. A few of the interviews were constrained by lunch breaks, as staff were not given any other time by their managers to do the interviews. Two of the interviews were conducted in the rooms as children slept, as participants were not allowed to take time away from their work. See Appendix I for two examples of the transcribed interviews: one from a PDN and one from a VSPS.

The time between initial contact and data collection was three months. In each of the settings, I had a meeting with the manager shortly after initial contact had been made. This was followed up by a small presentation to all staff at the next staff meeting. This presentation involved describing the research, introducing myself and providing written information with more details about the aims and purpose of the research. This was done to explain the motivations for the research and to make it clear that my association was independent of any other groups, such as the local authority or Ofsted. Those interested in participating were asked to express their interest to their manager within the next few days, which I followed up with a phone call. Attending the staff meeting also gave me an opportunity to get a feel for the whole group’s dynamics and to see how the managers presented my research and me to the staff. Josselson (2007) highlights the need to be aware of participants agreeing to be part of the research who may have had subtle coercion from the management or elsewhere. It was

also important to be reflective of the participants' motivations to support the research, as these may suggest their own agendas (Josselson, 2007).

Interview dates and times were always agreed in advance. These interviews were frequently cancelled due to staff difficulties or other complications. Nursery settings are busy environments, and any aspect of the daily work could alter whether a staff member could be released for interview or not. Some examples of things that caused cancellations were staff calling in sick, new children settling in and once because windy conditions outside meant that the children were not calm and focused and they needed all staff in the rooms. The last-minute cancellations happened many times, often as I stood at the door at the agreed time. These cancellations almost doubled the time I had allocated to data collection.

Three of the four settings agreed to let participants be interviewed during work hours, with other staff covering them in the rooms. Only one setting requested that interviews take place during staff lunch hours, for which they were not remunerated in any way. Two participants were interviewed whilst working in baby rooms whilst the babies slept, as the staff could not be released at any other time.

Participants were made aware of my history and experience within early years. This was considered important in order for the participants to see me as having some understanding of the experiences of early years practitioners. Josselson (2007) details the importance of a researcher being transparent about their interests in order to help to form an alliance with the participants. My experience within the sector meant that I was able to access, enter and interpret the participants' experiences in a way that a person with no experience of the sector could have done. This information was shared at the introductory meetings held before the participants volunteered to join the research.

Ethical aspects were considered to ensure that no one was harmed during the research process or from the publication of findings connected to this study. The ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and of the University of Southampton were followed at all times. The Southampton University Ethics Committee granted ethical approval in July 2012. Considerations were made to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and to ensure the settings' identities were protected throughout the thesis and in associated publications. Consideration was made to maintain the highest ethical procedures at

all stages of the research. This is in line with the view of Josselson (2007), who highlights the need for every aspect of a project to be touched by the ethics of the research relationship. She describes the need for each researcher to adopt an ethical attitude towards research at all points of the process, including during publication, and keeping data for future projects to which the participant and the researcher may not have considered at the time of the initial data collection.

The managers signed consent forms on behalf of the nurseries, and the participants signed individual consent forms before being interviewed. Each participant was informed of their right to withdraw at any time. They were also asked for permission for the interviews to be recorded on a handheld MP3 recorder. All participants were provided with the contact for the Research Governance Office, should they want additional advice. They were also given my contact number for further information and feedback about the research. However, no one made use of this contact information. The participants were offered the opportunity to read through the transcripts of their interviews, but no one requested this.

In order to protect the identities of the participants and the settings, the research thesis describes the location of the study as the South East of England. All names have been changed or removed in all aspects of the data, publications and research presentations. All recordings of interviews were transcribed by the researcher and kept on a private computer, which is password protected. Any people, places or settings named by the interviews were not transcribed but were recorded in the transcript as (name). All aspects of Southampton University's Data Protection Policy were adhered to at all times.

The moral aspects of ethics, including honesty, trustworthiness and credibility, were vitally important throughout the research. Whilst trying to avoid the positivistic notions of validity, it is important to ensure that trustworthiness and veracity are promoted throughout a qualitative study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss four elements that are important in qualitative research to ensure the trustworthiness of the research study: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. An additional three areas described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) are threats to validity in qualitative-based studies. Each of these concepts of reactivity, respondent bias and

researcher bias will be addressed in more detail, specific to the data within this study.

### **Reactivity**

Reactivity refers to the influence of the researcher's presence on the setting and specifically to the behaviour of those within the setting. This is closely connected to observations, where the process of being observed affects the behaviour of those involved. This research did not involve observation. However, the interviews were not a naturalistic situation, and I had a marked impact on some of the respondents. For example, there were expressions of nervousness by the participants.

*R: (Laughs). I am nervous; I don't know what to say. (Laughs) (5SPDN)*

At the start of the interviews, answers were frequently short with limited detail, suggesting that the participants were unsure of me and needed to gain confidence in the process of being interviewed.

*I: So, you are a nursery assistant?*

*R: Yeah.*

*I: How is a nursery assistant different to a nursery nurse?*

*R: Don't know; I wouldn't know because I am not a nursery nurse.  
(3SPDN)*

In order to deal with this, I used my interpersonal skills to help the participants to feel at ease and to adapt each interview in response to the participant's interests and worries. Whilst this did not stop the impact of reactivity, I did reflect on its importance and attempted to minimise the impact on the data collection.

### **Respondent bias**

Respondent bias can be described as the participant's inability or unwillingness to provide accurate or honest answers. This may be due to a lack of trust in the interview or may be due to the participant's drive to seem educated on a topic or their willingness to provide an answer that they may not actually feel.

It is difficult to gauge any level of respondent bias from the data, as this can only really be known by the participants themselves. There is evidence that the participants were happy to answer that they did not know something, suggesting that they were not under pressure to

make up answers.

*I: What do you think created that?*

*R: I don't know. (3VSPS1)*

*I: So, if someone came up to you and said "my daughter wants to be a nursery nurse. Can you give her some advice? Can you talk to her?", what would you say?*

*R: Gosh, ummm, I don't know. (4VSPS1)*

Whilst it is difficult to make assumptions about respondent bias, I was constantly aware of the need to ensure that the participants understood my neutral position and the fact that their answers were anonymous and would not impact on their work. The participants were also encouraged to provide short answers or to suggest that they did not know, encouraging them to be comfortable providing the answers they wanted to.

### **Researcher bias**

Robson (2002) highlights that the main threat to the trustworthiness of data is the interpretation of the researcher made through the analysis process. The inherent subjective bias of the researcher, created by their biography of experience, provides a challenge to proving the veracity of interpretation. Robson goes on to describe that the only way this can be overcome is by clearly demonstrating how the end product was achieved and by the researcher being reflexive about the impact they have had on the interpretation of the data. The researcher must justify the steps taken in the analysis and when drawing conclusions about findings. This has been done by providing details of how the data was collected and analysed and through explicit acknowledgement of the subjective impact of me as a researcher on the study. The short autobiographical account in Appendix H has further supported this.

There was some bias evident in the data when areas that were of interest to me were pursued, even when they were not areas raised by the participants. An example of this may be my frequent reference to Ofsted and the stress that the organisation may cause staff.

*I: Where do you feel the pressure for that paperwork is coming from? Is it from Ofsted? Is it from the local authority? Who do you think is imposing it and creating all this stress?*

My own professional experience, within schools and as an Ofsted inspector, suggested that inspections caused considerable stress for staff. However, this was not supported by the

responses of the participants, who did not express a great deal of anxiety about Ofsted inspections.

*I: Ummm, what is your experience of Ofsted and inspections?*

*R: Ummm, I don't mind them. (3VSPS1)*

This demonstrated that the experience of inspections in a school setting, as I had experienced as a teacher, was markedly different for staff in early years settings. Whilst this bias was evident in the research questions, it did not impact the findings, as the data did not support my notions. This is an example of where the data led the findings, rather than my own bias, supporting the interpretive nature of this inquiry.

The nature of a qualitative survey suggests that it cannot be free of bias and interpretation. However, this is what provides the detail and depth to the findings, which could not be achieved if a positivistic approach had been used. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) sum this up when they state:

*... no reading is free of interpretation and, in fact, that even at the stage of procuring the text, especially in the dialogical act of conducting a life-story interview, explicit and implicit processes of communicating, understanding and explaining constantly take place. The illusion that we have a static text of narrative material, and then begin a separate process of reading and interpreting it, is far from the truth. (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998, p.166)*

There is an additional complication when using an interpretive approach in that the findings presented become the researcher's interpretation of the interviews. The participants did not have a role in interpreting the meaning of what was said. The collaboration between interviewer and participant ends at the conclusion of the interview, and the interpretation is performed solely by the researcher (Josselson, 2007). This is ethically defensible by the researcher demonstrating a clear reflexive approach, stating any bias, the aims and the researcher's positioning within the field of knowledge. Josselson (2007) highlights that the researcher is in a position to relate the meanings of an individual's story to larger categories within the field under study, which the individual is unable to do with their own interests in their own personal story.

Josselson (2007) suggests that there is always an ethical risk in this style of research that the participants may not like what is said about them in the analysis. Whilst the participants can be given an opportunity to check their transcripts, as was offered to the participants of this study, the process of interpreting and analysing the data may not present the same image as the participants may have of themselves. This complication is difficult to overcome. The researcher must ensure that participants understand what the published format will be, for example a PhD thesis or a published book, and participants must have an understanding of the process of interpretation that their interviews will undergo. The researcher must also be sensitive when writing up the findings so that it is done in a respectful and professional manner.

### **4.3 Analysis**

I transcribed all the data, and transcripts were typed as Word documents. These lengthy interviews needed to be analysed in a way that would search out the most useful information. Etherington (2004) describes four types of analysis: content analysis, conversational analysis, grounded theory and thematic analysis. Each of these methodologies responds to the data in different ways, with their eventual outcomes having different emphasis.

One major theme throughout this thesis lies in the search for commonalities and differences in responses between two different setting types. Thematic analysis was the approach that best suited this outcome. Boyatzis (1998) defines thematic analysis as looking for patterns. Labelling, defining or describing the pattern allows interpretation to be made. The other types of analysis were discounted for various reasons, as described in more detail below.

**Table 4.1: Analysis methodologies** (Taken from Etherington, 2004).

Type of analysis	Reason it was not appropriate for this study
Content analysis	Content analysis focuses on counting the features of the speech content or the non-verbal aspects of interactions. This methodology is usually quantitative in nature and looks for patterns in the content. This methodology would not have allowed me to focus on the meanings and experiences of the participants.
Conversational analysis	Conversational analysis is the study of social interaction. The analysis looks at verbal and non-verbal aspects of conversations. It looks at patterns of interaction. This methodology does not suit a pre-arranged interview situation, as used in this study, and is more suited to the analysis of general conversations.
Grounded theory	There were many aspects of grounded theory replicated within this study. For example, the data was reviewed, and common themes and ideas were identified to form concepts. However, the difference occurred at the end of the process. Ground theory concentrates on forming new theory from the data. My focus was on hearing stories. This means that the research diverted from the pure form of grounded theory, although there were certainly elements of this methodology throughout my study.

Clarke and Braun (2013) describe thematic analysis as a method that works with a variety of theoretical frameworks, perspectives and research questions and can produce data- or theory-driven analysis. Thematic analysis relies on several processes. These are:

1. Familiarisation with the data.
2. Coding and searching for themes.
3. Reviewing themes.
4. Defining and naming themes.
5. Writing up.

Each of these areas will now be discussed in detail as it relates to this study.

#### **Familiarisation with the data**

Spending time looking at the data and being immersed in it are important in order to develop a clear understanding of what is being said. Within this study, the process of transcription offered an excellent opportunity to be immersed in the data. Etherington (2004) highlights the importance of transcription, as it provides an opportunity for thorough submersion in the data.

This in turn supports the process of analysis. The process of typing out the interviews helps, as it slows down the pace, meaning that the listening process is more intense. It became important for me as the researcher to maintain contact with the stories by transcribing them myself. I discovered this, as (pressed for time) I paid someone to transcribe one interview for me. I then needed to spend considerable time re-immersing myself and re-transcribing this interview, as I felt that I had lost contact with it. I also had to correct much of the transcription to make the layout the same as my other interviews. This led me to understand that I needed to do the work myself, even though it was a slow and difficult process.

### **Coding**

Coding is the process of collecting similar ideas together and looking for patterns in the issues discussed by the participants. After the long process of interview transcription, NVivo 10 (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2012) was used as a tool to help with coding and sorting the mass of data into categories. The use of NVivo was deemed necessary to add speed and flexibility to the process of analysis. Gubrium and Holstein (2001) describe coding as the first analytic step, which moves the research from description towards the conceptualisation of description.

Coding is the process of highlighting the most important and relevant information and paying less attention to the information that is less relevant. Clarke and Braun (2013) describe the coding process as an analytic system, rather than just a method of data reduction. Whilst one of the outcomes may be reduction in the data, coding is a complex process of decision-making on the part of the researcher. My codes were redefined, combined or deleted several times. The process of sifting through the codes helped me to clarify what I was seeing and to identify what the data was telling me.

My initial codes were the themes used in the research questions. These were based on subject matter taken from the literature review and from my own knowledge of early years and the research questions.

*Themes come both from the data (an inductive approach) and from the investigator's prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (a priori approach). (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, p.88)*

Interviews were read and sectioned into these codes (see Appendix J). When all the interviews

had been read, each code was considered in detail. These themes were then extended or combined and new codes were created to represent ideas arising from the participants themselves. New codes were added where necessary and others were deleted. This resulted in the classification of codes. Ryan and Bernard (2003) say that the classification of codes can be done when concepts can be compared against one another and they appear to contain a similar phenomenon. This process happened several times until the data had been slimmed down to a usable format. An example of this is the initial ideas of class, working identity and vocational habitus were combined to create a new code of aspirations. Later, this was re-coded to become influences on working identity. These changes represented information that was gained through gaining data and re-reading data.

The process of coding was repeated many times until the themes were finalised using an inductive approach to the findings. Appendix J provides a diagram summary of the coding process. Each of the stages in the diagram represents a stage of thinking. The first tier was the ideas gained from the literature review. Some of these were written to test if the themes identified in literature would be the same in my work, such as the link of quality of care to staff qualifications. Others were written to try and address gaps in the literature, such as working identity. The second tier in the diagram became the themes for the interviews. These were loose and gave themes for questions for the semi-structured interviews. The third tier is the initial reactions to the interviews, having transcribed and read them. Some tentative links were made between arising codes, such as the link between 'what makes a good early years practitioner' and 'personal reflections of self and work'. At this stage, these ideas were not clearly defined, but seemed to be linked. The lines connecting the codes demonstrate these links. The forth tier sees the introduction of more codes, as the data was sifted into smaller, more specific categories. For example, paperwork appears as its own code. This was because this was mentioned several times by participants and so needed to be identified as a finding. Other areas, such as Personal reflections of self and work, have developed into three codes, Personal history, Self-perceptions and Reflections on the work. This was in recognition of the complexity of the responses, and teasing out the nuanced differences of responses. The final section, or 5<sup>th</sup> tier, shows my thinking of how to present the coded information in a clear way. This tier makes the link to the research questions, with the codes clustered around them. The final section was not led by the data, but by a need to present the information in a readable way. Although this diagram is divided into five sections, the application was not so clear, with it being a cyclical and continuous process.

The process of searching for themes within the coding formalised the ideas that were running through the codes (Clarke and Braun, 2013), identifying how codes were linked, how frequently themes were discussed and how they were discussed. Understanding the relationships among the themes and seeing the emerging patterns allowed me to focus on the bigger picture. This was when I could begin to review the data as a whole, rather than as subsections. Ryan and Bernard (2003) describe several ways to identify themes, including looking for repetition, indigenous typologies, metaphors and analogies, transitions between topics, and similarities and differences. Throughout the coding process, I used repetition as a way to identify themes. This means looking for ideas that repeatedly occur and grouping these ideas together. For example, participants were not asked directly about their emotional links to work, but this came up repeatedly as they spoke about rewards of their work.

### **Reviewing themes**

This is the point where the researcher stands back and looks again at the whole emerging picture. The researcher then considers if the themes tell a convincing and compelling story about the data and begins to define the nature of each individual theme. In my research, I believe this happened not as a one-off event but at regular intervals throughout the analysis process.

### **Defining and naming themes**

This is the process of making comparisons and identifying similarities, which are solidified into constructs and named as such. This is where connections are made to the research questions and comparisons are made between themes. This was particularly important for identifying similarities and differences in responses between PDN and VSPS participants. Ryan and Bernard (2003) state that it is the degree of strength of a theme that leads to it being named or identified as a subtheme. They also state that not all themes have equal weight and that they may relate to each other in different ways. However, the importance lies in the identification and naming of these themes. This process involves a judgement on the part of the researcher, and justifying these judgements is less about validity and more about making the judgement process explicit and clear in order for the reader to understand and then respond to this process (Ryan and Bernard, 2003).

### **Writing up**

This final step is the weaving together of the analysed data, using extracts to tell a coherent and persuasive story. This is the process of developing and presenting a thesis. The outcome is where the researcher must tell the story, ensuring that the data can be represented in a way that demonstrates that it is reliable.

An interview does not stand alone but is contextualised in the time and place it is undertaken. It is also part of the wider set of shared understandings of the set of participants as a group being observed. Roberts (2002) describes this as the process of the researcher being immersed within the surrounding discourse of the topic being studied.

Erben (1998) highlights the importance of utilising imagination when analysing qualitative data.

*The majority of time spent in presenting qualitative research is not used in replicating data but in its interpretation. To perform this interpretation the researcher is required to employ imagination by which we mean the ability of mind to speculate upon and to link and assemble ideas related to the research text. (Erben, 1998, p.9)*

Using imagination involves knowing what is important when sifting through the data. This was reliant on my own knowledge and experience of the workforce, as well as my knowledge gained through conducting the literature review and immersing myself in other research.

*Imagination is the vehicle the researcher employs to aid recognition of significant moments in the data, to relate these to each other and to the overall lives of the subjects (Erben, 1998, p.10)*

Erben (1998) suggests that it is essential that imagination be fixed in empirical sources and so grounded in the data. Imagination allows the researcher to draw conclusions from the research that are neither given directly in the data nor arrived at through numerical reasoning.

Boyatzis (1998) discusses projection as an obstacle to effective thematic analysis. Projection is when the researcher may cast their own values onto the participants and unknowingly ask them questions in a way that the researcher gets the answers they want. It is important that the researcher is aware of projection and focuses on making questions as unbiased as possible. This is not easy to do, as subjective bias is difficult to identify in yourself. Being aware of the potential problem of projection, I made a conscious effort not to interpret too much meaning

into each individual response. I found this easier to do with the passage of time. As I forgot the more-personal details about the interviews, such as how I felt on the day, the connection I made with the participant and the emotion they displayed through body language, the easier I found it to listen to the words. Some interviews were very memorable due to the personal connections I felt to the individuals, and this needed time to be diluted so as not to read too much into answers but to re-listen with fresh ears to what was being said.

#### **4.4 Research context and sample**

In order for readers to have confidence in a qualitative study, they must feel some sort of connection to the participants' stories. They must be able to transfer the study findings to their own context and be able to recognise some sort of truth. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that researchers must provide a 'thick description' of their study subjects, in order for future readers to decide if the findings are applicable to their own situation. To achieve this within this thesis, each setting will be described, as will each participant in terms of age and experience. This aims to help to create a picture of each nursery and the people who staff it. This will also help the reader to have an impression of each of the settings and to have a more rounded understanding of each participant. A small vignette of my opinions and first impressions of each setting will also be provided to help to set the scene in more detail.

The data set consisted of 25 interviews in four settings. Two settings were PDN settings and the other two were VSPSs. The research was conducted in South East England, in an affluent and mostly white, middle-class area. This area was chosen in response to my commutable distance, rather than for any specific research-driven purpose. The local area is made up of small market towns and villages, is surrounded by major motorways and is within 40 miles of three major cities.

Prior to seeking settings to participate in the study, I defined some basic criteria for the sample. The criteria were that each setting must be Ofsted registered and must have been in operation for a number of years. The number of interviews in each setting needed to be similar, and the participants needed to be currently employed in childcare. I also wanted an equal number of VSPSs and PDNs in order to make the comparisons fair. In order to reflect the childcare staff population, I aimed to recruit participants with a variety of qualifications, who were a variety of ages and who held a variety of experience within the sample.

Robson (2002) describes the best way to define the size of a sample is when data can reach saturation. This means that you continue to add to the sample until no new information can be gained. However, this was not practical or possible in this study. Time limits, as well as limited interest from settings to join the study, as described below, had an impact on the sample.

Gaining access to settings was one of the most difficult aspects of the research. This process relied heavily on personal skills and my ability to quickly gain trust from the management and early years practitioners. In order to gain access, I initially called on my own contacts within the early years sector. This secured access to three of the settings. It was clear that personal introductions encouraged gatekeepers, such as managers and directors, to feel more secure in the researcher's intentions. Initial suspicion about the motivations for research was high. This could have been fuelled by several factors. Firstly, the child-protection and safeguarding agenda has greatly impacted the security of people accessing settings. As a researcher, I had a DBS (police check) in place, but none of the settings approached had ever participated in research. Very few staff or managers had ever interacted with research. Most of them had not attended university and did not understand the value of research. This resulted in them questioning my motivations. Some participants struggled to understand why someone would want to conduct a PhD. There was great surprise when they found out that I was doing the PhD for myself and not as a requirement for work. They struggled to understand the desire to pursue an academic interest for no financial gain. Suspicions may also have been high due to experiences of Ofsted and the local authority, which have a top-down, judgemental relationship with childcare providers. Of course, the participants and settings also received nothing in return for their participation, meaning that, as a researcher, I was heavily dependent on good will.

Several settings expressed an interest in supporting the research but did not commit to making a date for me to go to see them. This meant that many of my initial contacts were dead ends, so initial visits and phone calls were often wasted. As a researcher, this was frustrating, and for a long time I wondered if the study would come to an end due to a lack of participants.

In order to secure a fourth setting, I sent out 30 introductory letters to settings within a 15-mile radius of my home. This resulted in three replies: two with negative responses and one

inviting me to a meeting with the manager to discuss the research further. This resulted in securing the fourth nursery.

The variance in the sample had a potential effect on the data. The settings were different sizes, with the smallest having seven staff and the largest having 44. In each, approximately the same amount of interviews was conducted, but the larger setting had more staff to volunteer. Overall, this was deemed less important than meeting the original sample criteria described above.

Pseudonyms for the locations have been used, and major identifying features have been removed to support anonymity. The names chosen to identify each setting are fictional. Each of the settings was allocated an abbreviated title to match codes to. They were as follows:

Large private day nursery – LPDN  
Small private day nursery – SPDN  
Voluntary sector pre-school 1 – VSPS1  
Voluntary sector pre-school 2 – VSPS2

Within each of these abbreviated titles, each participant was then given a number within their nursery description. For example, the first participant in the LPDN setting became 1LPDN. The first participant in VSPS1 became 1VSPS1. This meant that each participant gained an anonymous code description to be used throughout the research. Their names were not recorded, in line with the ethical guidance approved by the University of Southampton.

The 25 participants ranged in age from 18 to 60 years, with the average age being 34 years. They worked in childcare settings of different shapes and sizes. Some worked with babies, some with older children. The age range of the children was from six months to five years. Some of the participants worked full time and some part time. The majority of the participants worked as a key person to a group of children, and some had additional responsibilities, such as being a room leader or a deputy of the setting. All but three of the participants had a childcare qualification at Level 2 or above, and two held an early years degree.

The majority of the participants were white women, with the exception of one white British man and one Asian woman from South Africa. This was not a design of the research but a

reflection on the workforce in the settings where the research was conducted. The participants were early years practitioners (qualified and unqualified) who were working in a pre-school or day nursery during the time of the data collection. Participation was voluntary, and there were no specific gender or age targeted groups. The following information is provided to describe each of the settings and includes a short vignette of my initial observations of each setting.

## **Little Froggies Day Nursery (SPDN)**

Little Froggies is a private nursery and is part of an established chain that has been in operation for over 20 years. The nursery accepts children from two months to five years of age. A teacher set up the first nursery in the chain, but after expanding to four sites, it was sold off to a larger company. The chain of four settings employs about 50 staff in total. The site that agreed to be part of the research employs seven staff and is the smallest and newest nursery in the chain. All staff volunteered to be interviewed.

Little Froggies is located in a new and purpose-built port-a-cabin-style building, which is light and clean with open floor spaces. It is located in the grounds of a large secondary school and was originally set up by the school as a childminding facility for the school staff. The main clients who use the nursery are parents who work at the secondary school. Children in the local area take up other places. The nursery is open from 7:30am to 6:00pm all year round. It has a small but well-presented outdoor area, and children enjoy a small staff team due to the limited number of children who attend. The nursery was registered to have 24 children but at the time of the research was struggling to fill places and usually had no more than eight children attending. The nursery had been open for four years at the time of the research and had two managers in post since opening.

The nursery had a variable grading history from Ofsted over three inspections. The first inspection in 2009 resulted in an 'Unsatisfactory' (Level 4 and lowest) grading. This was followed by a grade of 'Good' (Level 2) in 2010. Shortly after this inspection, there was a change in manager. The most recent inspection in 2013 resulted in a grading of 'Requires Improvement' (Level 3).

### **Vignette**

*There is a spacious car park available and the nursery is well sign posted. I walk up*

*to the building, which is a clean and contemporary modular structure. The building is modern, with curved edges, coloured panels, large windows and many doors. It is clearly new, and two sides of the building are surrounded by outdoor space for the children. The whole nursery is surrounded by a new picket fence. Small, sculpted conifers stand in silver pots by the doorway, and a small plaque identifying the 'Investors in People' Bronze status is beside the doorbell. As I wait to be let in, I can see that the garden is well tended and full of plastic bikes, trikes, spades and buckets.*

*The manager welcomes me with a smile and leads me into the main room, where several staff sit together on the floor, watching babies and toddlers as they move around the room. The staff are young and wear matching uniforms of black trousers, flat shoes and bright t-shirts, emblazoned with the nursery logo. They look at me shyly, unsure of my position. One staff member is changing nappies on the floor, children queuing up for their turn. Another staff member is in the kitchen, cleaning plates and cups.*

*I am asked if the staff room is okay, which is small but neat. A coffee machine sits in the corner and I am offered a drink. Muted sounds of babies and children greet me through the closed door. The room is very small: no more than two people can sit in it, and then they could almost touch each wall from sitting. The space is also used to store boxes of toys in plastic boxes on ceiling-high shelves.*

*The initial meeting with the manager is brief and to the point. She is happy for me to attend the staff meeting to discuss my research. This is held the next week, one evening, after the children have gone.*

*The staff look tired as I present my research at the next staff meeting. I worry that I am keeping them there when they all want to get home after a long day. The staff sit in a row on children's chairs collected from around the nursery. Most of the staff are very young and seem to have limited understanding of or interest in research. I talk for about ten minutes and no one asks any questions. I leave my paperwork, with a promise to call in about a week. They all remain and their meeting continues. I feel a little desolate as I leave and am concerned that they will not participate. They certainly did not seem interested in the information I shared. The small group had listened politely, but I held little hope as I went home after the meeting.*

*When I phoned a week later, I was very surprised to find that all the staff were willing to participate. The manager said that she was happy for staff to be interviewed at the nursery, but they would need to agree to do this in their lunch breaks. Her small staff team meant that she did not feel that she could lose any staff from the ratio. My spirits were lifted as I realised I had gained six participants. We agreed a time and date for the first interview and the process began.*

The following table is a summary of the information gained from each of the participants from Little Froggies Day Nursery. This information was gained before the interviews started.

**Table 4.2: Little Froggies Day Nursery Participants (SPDN)**

Pseudonym	Position	Qualification	Years as an early years practitioner	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Other caring experiences
1SPDN	Deputy	NVQ 3	10	F	27	White British	Own children
2SPDN	Early years practitioner	NVQ 2	2	F	19	White British	Often cared for siblings
3SPDN	Nursery assistant	None	2	F	19	White British	Own children
4SPDN	Senior early years practitioner	BTEC Level 3	2	F	19	White British	None
5SPDN	Nursery assistant	NVQ 2	2	F	20	White British	None
6SPDN	Manager	NVQ 3	18	F	37	White British	None

## **Sparks Day Nursery (LPDN)**

Sparks Day Nursery is a purpose-built, single-storey building. It is part of one of the largest chains in the country. The nursery is very large and is registered for 150 children from two months to five years of age. As a purpose-built nursery, the rooms are spacious, light and well resourced. It operates from a business park and its clients are professional parents working within the business park. The nursery is not within walking distance of any housing and is not served by bus routes, so clients bring their children in by car and then go to work. The clients use the nursery for its convenience to their place of work, rather than as a link to their local community. This means that children come from a large area, including many surrounding towns and villages. The nursery has been open for 13 years. The current manager had been in place for a year. There had been at least five managers in place since the nursery opened.

In 2009, an Ofsted inspection found Sparks to be 'Unsatisfactory' (Level 4, lowest). In response to this, the company brought in an experienced area manager, who then successfully led the

nursery to an 'Outstanding' judgement (Level 1, highest) in 2010. This was the judgement still in place during the interviews. However, shortly after the data was collected, this manager moved to another company. The subsequent inspection in 2014 received a grading of 'Good' (Level 2).

Sparks is open from 7:30am to 6:00pm and employs 44 staff. The number of children on roll dipped significantly following the 'Unsatisfactory' grading but has improved following the 'Outstanding' grading.

Shortly after the interviews were conducted, the company was sold to another large chain. This created one of the largest day care chains in the UK, controlling over 200 day care settings within the UK. This change prompted the manager to move, and the deputy manager took over as the new manager.

### **Vignette**

*The nursery has its own large car park, and the building blends in well with the other office premises in the area. It is modern with large windows and is spacious and light. A member of staff, who asks me to wait in a large reception area, meets me at the door.*

*After a few minutes, the manager, wearing a suit and looking like a businessman, meets me. He asks if I would like a tour of the nursery before we sit and chat and I gladly take him up on this offer. The nursery is composed of a clean but sterile corridor filled with posters and information for parents. The corridor leads to doors, which are closed, and there is almost the same feel as I get in a hospital or medical facility. There is a slight smell of disinfectant and there are no sounds of children, due to the heavy closed doors.*

*Each room has children playing with age-appropriate toys on the floor or the tables. Adults are in pairs talking to each other or are busy doing tasks such as cleaning tables, sweeping the floor or washing plates and cups. Each room is very well resourced with expensive-looking furniture that matches and coordinates with the muted colour scheme. Staff wear coordinated uniforms, with the colour of each indicating their seniority. All rooms access a garden space where children play with water, sand and paint or run around and ride tricycles. The corridors link around in a large square, and the tour ends back at the front desk.*

*During the meeting with the manager, he makes it clear that he is an enthusiastic supporter of research and believes that the profession in general would benefit from more research. He is very happy to lend his support and will release any*

*staff that choose to participate during the day.*

*I attend the staff meeting and am initially overwhelmed by the amount of staff present. Around 40 staff members, most of them very young, sit on the floor, crammed in the front reception area. The meeting is held in the evening, shortly after many of them have finished their work. They have been given time for a quick trip to a local takeaway, and many of them are eating burgers and chips as they sit on the floor. They are rowdy, talk loudly and frequently squeal. The manager shouts at them to all be quiet and I immediately feel that I am addressing a class of secondary school children. I feel uncomfortable that they sit on the floor, whereas I have been given a chair. It feels as if there are very clear messages of hierarchy, with senior staff standing or on chairs, and the rest of the staff on the floor. Many of the girls whisper and giggle as I give my information, and, at one stage, the manager shouts at them to be quiet.*

*Staff ask questions at the end of my talk, mostly about if they need to do interviews in their lunch breaks. They want reassurance that any answers they give would remain confidential. I am a little shocked at how the meeting was conducted and wonder how the staff feel, sitting on the floor and being spoken down to by others.*

*I turn up for my first set of interviews. The manager shows me to the staff room, which is cramped and full of stored toys and other miscellaneous items, such as the Hoover and fold-up tables. Two small chairs are brought from the pre-school room.*

*The first participant is very young and looks nervous. She holds the edge of the chair and looks at the floor. I try to put her at ease but it is difficult and I acutely feel the age and power dynamic difference, with me being a middle-aged, experienced practitioner in a senior position and her a teenager in her first job. She quickly warms to the interview, and after a short time we are chatting confidently.*

The following table is a summary of the information gained from each of the participants from Sparks Day Nursery. This information was gained before the interviews started.

**Table 4.3: Sparks Day Nursery participants (LPDN)**

Pseudonym	Position	Qualification	Years as an early years practitioner	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Other caring experiences
1LPDN	Early years practitioner	NVQ3	2	F	18	White British	None
2LPDN	Early years practitioner	NVQ3	2	F	18	White British	None
3LPDN	Early years practitioner	NVQ3	1	F	19	White British	None
4LPDN	Manager	NNEB	17	M	40	White British	Own children
5LPDN	Nursery assistant	None	2	F	37	White British	Nanny
6LPDN	Room leader	BTEC Level 3	3	F	20	White British	None

### **Thompson Village Pre-school (VSPS1)**

Thompson Village Pre-school is accommodated in an old, prefabricated building, which has been painted brightly with children's murals. The large and well-tended outdoor area has a variety of equipment, including a wooden play hut and climbing frame, established trees, and many natural resources, such as willow tunnels and play houses. The building is old, with several attachments, which have been added over the 45 years it has been in operation. The building looks worn but well maintained. The pre-school employs seven early years practitioners, as well as an apprentice. It is open from 9:00am to 4:00pm term time only and takes children from two years to five years. It also runs a holiday club for children 2–8 years of age. Most children attend on a sessional basis, mornings or afternoons. The pre-school is registered for 32 children and is situated very close to a school. It is considered the feeder pre-school for children who will attend this school.

The pre-school is run by a committee of volunteers and is run under charitable status, meaning that it is non-profit-making. The current manager has been in place for five years. Under her management, the pre-school received an 'Outstanding' judgement (Level 1, highest) from Ofsted in 2011. At the previous inspection in 2007, the Ofsted grading was 'Good' (Level 2). Staff turnover is very low, and most staff have been at the pre-school for a long time, the longest having worked there for 20 years. Subsequent to the data collection, the pre-school

had another Ofsted inspection and managed to retain its 'Outstanding' status.

## Vignette

*I ring the bell on a tall wooden gate, decorated with a bright sign showing the name of the nursery. I can't see through the fence but I can hear young children playing, running, squealing and giggling. A smiling, middle-aged woman greets me at the gate and invites me in. As I walk through the vibrant garden, the children are playing on bikes and equipment. Adults are dotted around, sitting and playing with the children. The atmosphere is calm, joyful and focused, and both the children and the adults seem to be engaged in purposeful activities.*

*I am shown into an office after passing through an old but well-resourced portable building filled with tables of activities. Children are painting, eating fruit and toast together, building, using computers, and putting on coats and changing shoes to go outside. The building is one large space that children move freely around, and there are no closed doors or areas that children cannot access, except for the office space where the interview is conducted.*

*I am offered tea and I sit in a warm and comfortable space. The manager is friendly and relaxed and listens carefully to my proposal. She very quickly offers me unlimited access to the pre-school and says that she will offer as much support as I need. We agree that I can attend the next staff meeting, the next evening, to see if the staff are interested in participating in the research.*

*At the staff meeting, the adults all sit around a table on children's chairs. It is impossible to tell any form of hierarchy, as the staff seem very relaxed with each other, making tea and sharing biscuits. They listen attentively to my proposal and ask a few questions. By the end of my talk, they all say that they would like to contribute. I tell them that they can think about it and let me know at a later date. They convince me that they do not need to think about it and that they are all happy to be interviewed. The atmosphere is very relaxed and I feel that the staff are very supportive of any new or interesting ideas. I leave them to their meeting and feel confident that this will be another successful set of participants.*

*On the day of the first interview, I am given a warm welcome. Children are active and bustle around as I walk through the garden. Indoors, there are toys all around the place and children are moving to things they want from one place to the next. I am led to a small, quiet room that staff say they use for staff lunches and small group interventions, such as speech therapy. I am*

*told we can sit here as long as needed and not to rush through the interviews. I am offered tea, which is brought by a friendly member of staff who makes me feel very welcome. A middle-aged early years practitioner wearing jeans and a t-shirt joins me for the first interview. She tells me that she is nervous but her body language is relaxed, with her arms unfolded; she looks me in the face and her shoulders are relaxed.*

*The interview quickly turns into a conversation, with both interviewer and interviewee laughing, frequently joking and moving comfortably away from the questions. As the interview ends, the experience seems over too soon. We both express thanks for sharing the interview. I feel at ease here and wonder if the lesser age gap between us played a part in this.*

The following table is a summary of the information gained from each of the participants from Thompson Village Pre-school. This information was gained before the interviews started.

**Table 4.4: Thompson Village Pre-school participants (VSPS1)**

Pseudonym	Position	Qualification	Years as an early years practitioner	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Other caring experiences
1VSPS1	Deputy	NVQ 3	12	F	41	White British	None
2VSPS1	Early years practitioner	NVQ 3	6	F	25	White British	None
3VSPS1	Early years practitioner	NVQ 3	2	F	45	White British	Own children
4VSPS1	Early years practitioner	NVQ 3	2	F	38	White British	None
5VSPS1	Early years practitioner	NVQ 3	35	F	60	White British	None
6VSPS1	Early years practitioner	NVQ 3	4	F	28	White British	None
7 VSPS1	Manager	Early years degree	32	F	53	White British	Own children

## **Ducks and Drakes Pre-school (VSPS2)**

The building that houses Ducks and Drakes Pre-school is very dated, as it is a pre-war temporary building. It is wooden clad and looks like it needs considerable maintenance, with plants sprouting out of cracked guttering and moss on the roof. The pre-school does not have

exclusive use of the building. Other rooms are sublet to other community groups, such as the local citizens advice office. Mature trees and parkland surround the building. A well-designed outdoor area surrounds most of the building and provides a variety of cubbyholes for children to play in. It has a strong natural theme, with very few plastic toys. There are sandpits and areas for children to plant flowers and vegetables.

Ducks and Drakes Pre-school has been operating for 43 years. It is a non-profit organisation and is managed by a committee of parents. The pre-school is registered for 45 children and takes children from two years to five years of age. It is open from 8:45am to 4:00pm. The pre-school currently operates a waiting list for two-year-olds and has a very good reputation in the local community. The current manager has worked at the pre-school for 17 years, having worked her way up from an unqualified 'mother's helper'. There are ten staff working in the pre-school.

Ofsted rated Ducks and Drakes as 'Outstanding' (highest grading) in 2011. After the data collection in 2015, it received a 'Good' grading (second highest grading). Staff turnover is very low, and most staff started out as volunteers many years previously, helping out when their children attended the pre-school.

### **Vignette**

*My first impression of the building is how old it is. Not old as in historic but old as in falling down. It is a wooden-clad, pre-war, temporary building with plants sprouting from the gutters. The door leads to a dingy corridor, and signs on the wall suggest that the building is multi-use. Advertising for legal aid and a food bank suggests that the building is not used exclusively for the pre-school but is also used by community groups. The corridor leads to a door, which is locked, with a small window. Ringing the doorbell, the floor shakes with the footsteps of children running by and laughter can be heard through the doorway. A lady in her 50s smiles as she opens the door, and she makes me feel very welcome. As I step inside the setting, a bright and well-organised environment replaces the initial negative impression of a dilapidated building.*

*There are tables with exciting activities, such as shaving foam and brushes, ribbon threading, play dough and construction toys. Children's drawings and paintings cover the walls, alongside photos of children playing with their friends. The children happily mill from one large room to another, which provides additional carpet activities such as cars, dolls and number cards. The*

*lady introduces herself, but she does not mention her title in the nursery. It is unclear if she is the manager, a senior member of staff or someone more junior.*

*The staff member gives me a tour of the nursery. The garden is beautiful: full of established trees, vegetable beds and exploring trails. Staff can be seen in every area, all of them playing with children or leading an activity at a table. The staff are markedly older and the atmosphere is calm and focused. Staff wear casual clothes: jeans and jumpers and different coloured tabards over their clothes. The manager explains that each colour represents the children's key groups, helping staff to form close relationships with a particular group of children.*

*My original impressions of an old building are quickly replaced by the clearly cared-for nursery environment, and I feel ashamed of my initial judgements based on the exterior of the building. Children are busy and playing intently. As we go inside, delicious smells come from the kitchen, where the children are baking homemade bread. The children excitedly tell me what they have done and the staff and I laugh at their enthusiasm. The children have little nervousness of me as a visitor and are clearly used to a stream of new faces.*

*The manager sits with me in her office for an extended time as I introduce my research. She says I am welcome to conduct as many interviews as I need, and she will release staff accordingly. She is happy for me to come to the next staff meeting and to speak to the staff directly. The next meeting will be held in two weeks.*

*All the staff are seated around a single table on children's chairs for the staff meeting. One staff member sits on a large table and explains that she has a bad knee and so can't sit on the little chairs. Staff drink tea and coffee, and it is still unclear to me who are the senior staff and who are the junior staff. They are an animated group who talk and laugh freely.*

*The staff listen attentively to my proposal and ask thought-provoking questions, such as "What do you hope to achieve with this research?" The presentation goes on longer than I had anticipated, as the topic seems to have raised issues for the staff and they have their own discussions, such as the differences they perceive between PDN and VSPS settings. The manager allows the conversation to go on, and it seems that they all express their ideas freely. Some seem very opinionated and others not so much, but they all talk. By the time I leave, the majority have committed to an interview, and some have said that they will think about it. I feel that it has been a very positive experience.*

*On the day of the first interview, the manager apologises for the lack of space and asks if it is okay if I sit in the office, which is unheated, but she offers a small blow heater. The office is small and cluttered with many files, but there is*

*enough space for the interview. The first staff member is confident and says that she is excited to be able to contribute. She introduces herself as a deputy and says that she has worked there for over 20 years. I tell her that it is an honour to meet someone who has worked in childcare for such a long time and she blushes. She says that she loves it and could not do anything else. And so the first interview begins.*

The following table is a summary of the information gained from each of the participants from Ducks and Drakes Pre-school. This information was gained before the interviews started.

**Table 4.5: Ducks and Drakes Pre-school participants (VSPS2)**

Pseudonym	Position	Qualification	Years as an early years practitioner	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Other caring experiences
1VSPS2	Manager	NVQ3	24	F	57	White British	None
2VSPS2	Deputy	NVQ3	25	F	55	White British	Own children
3VSPS2	Senior early years practitioner (EYPS)	Early years degree	20	F	56	White British	Own children Nanny
4VSPS2	Nursery assistant	NVQ2	2	F	33	Indian (from Africa)	None
5VSPS2	Early years practitioner	NVQ3	6	F	41	White British	None
6VSPS2	Early years practitioner	Apprentice	6 months	F	38	White British	Own children

## Summary

This chapter has discussed the research design, method and methodology. The chapter details how the use of a qualitative survey and thematic analysis provided detailed and rich information about the working lives of early years practitioners. This method and methodology were chosen to address the two research questions.

The chapter went on to clarify the ethics protocol followed throughout the research. It also described how settings and interviewees were approached to join the study and the process of

data collection, including some reflections on the process of data collection, such as difficulties accessing settings. The chapter concluded by giving a brief description of each of the settings and the participants, as well as offering some vignettes of the researcher's reflections and impressions of each of the settings. These act to offer detail and bring each setting to life in the reader's mind.



## Chapter 5: Influences on working identity

This chapter presents the data in relation to the first research question: what influences early years practitioners' working identities?

This chapter considers the participants' ideas on what they felt made them early years practitioners. These elements helped the participants to develop vocational habitus and a feeling of belonging in their workplaces. The chapter also considers the elements that had the opposite effect, making them feel uncomfortable or impacting their identities in a negative way.

The chapter considers the participants' histories and life stories, the working environment, the impact of being part of a supportive or unsupportive team, the impact of professional development and feedback on identity, and how the daily work of emotional labour impacts early years practitioners' passion in their work.

### 5.1 Biographies and life stories

Many authors have contributed ideas within their research on how the life experiences of an individual lead them to choose to work in childcare. These ideas have been used in publications to create an image of childcare workers. Colley (2003) describes the participants of her study as they progressed through a childcare course as 'upper working class'. She defines this as having parents who created a stable home life where the girls had never been without the things they needed. Colley says that these students considered themselves to have the attributes needed to be early years practitioners, as they were not rough and had been brought up with a good sense of morality. This allowed them to be nurturing and patient with the young children they would work with. Caroll, Smith and Oliver (2008) describe the life experiences of early years practitioners as young women who have achieved poorly in school and who choose the work for intrinsic rewards over pay or status.

The data in this section will be used to challenge or support some of the ideas from other literature, as discussed more fully in Chapters 2 and 3. This section considers the participants' histories, self-perceptions and reflections on their work. It asks if early years practitioners are from similar backgrounds and explores the decision to work in childcare.

The data suggests that the early years practitioners within this study had broadly similar histories. This included having had previous experiences caring for children, either within the family or with their own children.

*... yeah, well, since I was little, my mum always did childminding and I have always been around kids. I have loads of younger cousins and my sisters do childcare; my family is all about children and stuff, so I have always been interested through that. (2SPDN)*

The participants also had a broadly similar social class grouping, which resonates with Colley's findings (2003) mentioned above. Colley described her participants' parents as working in higher-paid, semi-skilled work. She exemplifies this as clerical staff or police officers. The participants' families in Colley's study lived in "leafier suburbs of the city" (Colley, 2006, p.23). The participants in this study were asked to provide a small amount of biographical information, including their fathers' professions. This aimed to draw comparisons with Colley's findings about social class structures in the profession.

Using the father's profession alone to define social class must be done with caution, as class incorporates socio-economic status, culture, education, behaviour and dress (Chron, 2014). Relying on data on the father's profession to define someone's class does not take into consideration the other elements that make up a class description. However, it does go some way to supporting assumptions that early years practitioners are from working-class backgrounds and helps to explore the participant's class positioning.

The fathers of the participants in this study worked in a variety of professions, which have been identified as blue-collar jobs and white-collar jobs. These reflect manual labour (blue collar; generally considered working class) and non-manual work (white collar; generally considered middle class). Chron (2014) describes the difference as:

*White collar work requires formal education... blue collar workers employed in skilled trades receive vocational training. (Chron, 2014)*

Seven participants did not provide an answer to this question. This left 18 responses. A summary of the responses is provided in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1: Fathers' professions**

Working-class or blue-collar jobs	Middle-class or white-collar jobs
Builder (4 responses) Lorry driver (3 responses) Security guard (1 response) Carpenter (1 response) Car salesman (1 response) Handyman (1 response) Gardener (1 response) Painter and decorator (1 response) Printer (1 response)	Engineer (2 responses) Prison officer (1 response) Teacher (1 response)
<b>Total responses: 14</b>	<b>Total responses: 4</b>

These findings suggest that the majority of the participants in this study came from blue-collar, or working-class, backgrounds. This supports the findings of Colley (2003), who suggests that early years students come from 'upper-working-class families'. However, the specific definition of 'upper' or 'lower' working class was not explored in this study. I acknowledged that the difference between working class and middle class may not reflect income, as blue-collar jobs frequently pay higher than white-collar jobs. However, they do somewhat represent different class distinctions and habitus.

Social class has been discussed in detail in Chapter 2, including describing working-class girls as having been raised with little academic aspiration. This description implied that working-class girls choose gender-stereotyped jobs in caring, as they have limited other choice (Bates, 1991). Certainly, many of the participants expressed having limited aspirations when they finished school, and many did not know what they wanted to do. Working with children seemed fun, and they had limited other guidance as to what else they may be able to do. Childcare reflected their previous positive experiences of children, and childcare's low entry requirements and constant recruitment drives meant that it was an easy way to enter the workforce.

*Because I always liked working with children, I suppose. I don't know really... (Laughs) I don't know. I finished school and I didn't really know what else to do. (5SPDN)*

The participants were asked to explain how they had entered the workforce. They described a variety of pathways and circumstances. Their answers did not reflect other studies' simplistic explanations that childcare workers entered the workforce due to limited options available to them because of poor school results (Rolfe, 2005) and (Caroll, Smith and Oliver, 2008).

The findings in this study show that the participants fit into four main entry pathways into nursery nursing:

- It was a first choice, having always wanted to work with children.
- Those who wanted a professional job like teaching but could not make the grades to get in.
- They fell into the work.
- As a secondary career, often after having children.

Each of these entry routes will now be explored further, looking at the data provided by the participants of this study.

#### **It was a first choice, having always wanted to work with children**

Some of the participants said that they had always wanted to work with children. Entering childcare was their first choice and a rationalised decision. Most of these participants had studied for a childcare qualification through college and had applied for a place as soon as they had finished their compulsory schooling.

*Well, I have always wanted to work with children since I was about five. I have always wanted to work with children, so I thought it would be a nice thing to do, and then, yeah, I started college. I loved being in college and stuff, and then I did one of my placements at the nursery and then I got the job. (6LPDN)*

For some, this was a reflection of their positive experiences with children, having had experience caring for nieces and nephews or younger siblings. These positive experiences had sparked an interest in working with children and had led them to believe that working with children would be a positive and fulfilling job.

This group of participants felt that studying a childcare course would be within their abilities but did not suggest that childcare was the only course that they could get into. They described the career path as their first choice, rather than the only option.

*I went to college as soon as I left school at 16, yeah, and decided to do childcare 'cause I liked children, ummm... and at the time I think it was just like an easy course really. (2VSPS1)*

*I: Ummm, did you always want to be an early years practitioner?  
R: Yeah, from when I left school. (1LPDN)*

These participants had made a conscious decision to go into childcare, and most had chosen a college qualification, rather than vocational training in a nursery. They had entered the workforce directly after training. Many of them had been offered jobs whilst they were doing placements for their courses. This may suggest that there was such a shortage of early years practitioners that they were snapped up whilst still in training.

#### **Those who wanted a professional job like teaching but could not make the grades to get in**

Several of the participants had wanted, or still wanted, to enter a professional career. These participants did not have the required grades to do so, so becoming early years practitioners became a second choice. For most of this group, their original ambition was to work with children in a professional capacity in jobs such as teaching.

*I wanted to be a teacher when I finished school, not school, finished university, I wanted to be a primary school teacher and I applied for postgraduate training for that and I didn't get accepted. (3VSPS2)*

Nursery nursing allowed this group to work with children, even though they had not been able to follow their first choice. Several of these participants still had hopes that they would return to study after improving their grades and would fulfil their hopes of gaining a degree and a professional qualification. They saw nursery nursing as a stepping stone towards obtaining a professional qualification.

*Ummm... I guess I just always wanted to work with children. And... I don't know really... I just wanted to work with children. I may want to further it by possibly teaching or doing something further from the qualification I've got... but that hasn't happened as yet, but it definitely*

*will. (1SPDN)*

*R: Ummm, I have always liked working with children and I have always wanted to be a teacher, so I thought doing the childcare qualification would be the best way into it.*

*I: And do you still see that as happening?*

*R: Yeah, I would still like to be a teacher and obviously do this until I go to uni.*

*I: So you never planned for this to be a long-term thing?*

*R: No, just for one or two years until, because I haven't got my Maths GCSE, so it's just until I get that really. (4SPDN)*

It is difficult to gauge how many of the participants would actually make this transition from a vocational job to academic study. At least three of the participants from this research did manage to do this, subsequent to their interviews. One trained further in early years and obtained a BA (Hons) in early years (5SPDN); another became a midwife (3SPDN) and one became a nurse (6LPDN). It is difficult to draw conclusions on how entering a job as a second choice impacted on working identity and whether these participants felt negative about their working experiences. It is clear that the participants in this group always felt that nursery nursing would be a short-term option. This impacted how they perceived their commitment to their work and their interest in developing long-term skills in working with young children.

One participant explained that she had become pregnant whilst still at school and was a single mother. This had disrupted her plans to go to university when she left school. She described using nursery nursing as fitting around her young child's needs but never lost sight of her ambitions to go to university. She saw nursery nursing as a stepping stone to where she wanted to be.

*R: ...I want to go to college so hopefully when (her child) has gone to school, I can go to uni like I had planned to do in the first place, umm, either, I haven't quite decided yet, either to do nursing, but I don't know whether that's, ummm, whether I would be able to fit that round (child's name) because of the night shifts and stuff, but maybe teaching, or be a social worker. (3SPDN)*

I had contact with this participant after the study: she wrote to let me know that she had been offered a place at university and was studying to be a nurse. A second participant told a similar story, of having a family bereavement that meant she had not been able to gain the grades she knew she was capable of. She used her time working as an early years practitioner to return to

night school, improve her grades and then enter university.

The stories from this group provide a more-complex description than the one provided by authors such as Rolfe (2005) and Caroll, Smith and Oliver (2008), who suggest that early years practitioners have low achievement at school and have limited options available to them. This group were very able academically but had experienced situations in their lives that had disrupted their plans. There was a perception within this group that working as an early years practitioner would not be too taxing, allowing them to have some time working before returning to pursuing their original ambitions.

### **Fell into the work**

Some of the participants described falling into the job. This group felt that they had not participated in any active decision-making process to become early years practitioners. The findings of Caroll, Smith and Oliver (2008) resonate with some of the participants; the researchers suggest that childcare workers tend to leave school with few qualifications and have been steered into childcare as one of the few career options open to them.

*I think, I think it's just, when I left school in the 1990s, for me and a lot of my friends who didn't know what we wanted to do, but we had had experience with younger brothers or sisters or friends of families with babies, it was an easy option. It was, I will look after children, I know I love children, how, you know, you don't think of it as, as difficult. (4VSPS1)*

Some ended up in childcare because it was easy to get into. This meant that they did not really need to think about or prepare for this transition, as they could just walk into the job. Caroll, Smith and Oliver (2008) suggest that childcare is seen as suitable for those with limited education. For some of this group of participants, this may have been the case. It was an attractive option because it was simple and straightforward, although they did not express low academic achievement but more an interest in finding a job that required minimal effort.

*I came out of, well... I went to sixth form and then I did a year, got my GCSEs and I didn't want to do it anymore, so I just wanted to get a job and the easiest thing to do was childcare. (3SPDN)*

Several participants struggled to identify how they had ended up in the job. It was not lack of choice or a focused decision. They described it more as something they had drifted into.

Childcare presented a passive opportunity that did not require a great deal of decision-making or preparation. These participants did not suggest that they had no other option than childcare, but rather that they had no clear indication of what they wanted to do. They described just floating along and somehow ending up in childcare.

*Ummm, to be honest, I was kind of floating around in a load of jobs like charging around, not really knowing what I wanted to do. I always wanted to look after children though and I've always helped out and stuff. I kind of fell head first into it and loved it. So, I'm quite lucky. (3LPDN)*

However, this group did express a desire to work with children and felt that interacting with children was a positive aspect of the job. It is difficult to ascertain if they had ended up in childcare as they had limited options, but the participants certainly did not express this.

### **Secondary career, often after having children**

Some of the participants went into childcare as a second career. The majority of this group had left their original occupations after having their own children.

*... because of my oldest boy, my middle child coming here, and he found it really hard to settle and, with the hours, the childcare costs, all that, it doesn't make sense to go back to work full time. (5VSPS2)*

When it was time to return to work, this group did not return to their original occupations but chose to become early years practitioners. This was for one of two reasons. Firstly, they had come to enjoy working with children through their own experiences of being parents; secondly, the work provided the flexibility of working within school hours. Most of this group were working in VSPS settings. This was most likely because VSPS frequently take on and work with volunteers and frequently open during term time and school hours. This group of mothers becomes a pool of potential staff from which to recruit when a vacancy arises.

*My eldest child, who is now 31 this year, she came here at the age of three, so they roped me in to help with the committee so I started doing that, and then from the committee they started saying "Would you like to come and help out just as a volunteer?"... I used to come and help out on trips and that and then they offered me a job, just two mornings a week. So I took that and then I started doing my, ummm, training from there. (1VSPS2)*

*This, this job came about for me because, ummm, my eldest son, who is 20 in May, came here. He, ummm, I originally put him in, back to the good old days, for two sessions a week and he started here, again in the good old days, when he was three. So you didn't have any of these two-year-olds, so when he was three he was doing two sessions a week and I would come in as a parent to volunteer help and I was approached by a member of staff here at the time. (1VSPS1)*

These participants felt that the experience of becoming a mother was a training ground for becoming an early years practitioner. They felt that the experience of being a mother had given them the skills they needed to work in childcare.

*... for me working here, having had children, and that experience can't get much more knowledgeable. (4VSPS1)*

The participants were asked to reflect on the traits that they felt a good early years practitioner must have. They used a variety of words to describe the qualities that they felt were important. The individual words from these descriptions were collected with conjunctions and connectives removed and were used to create a visual representation in a Wordle (see Figure 5.1). A Wordle takes all of the words and represents them according to the amount of times used. The larger the words, the more frequently they were used.

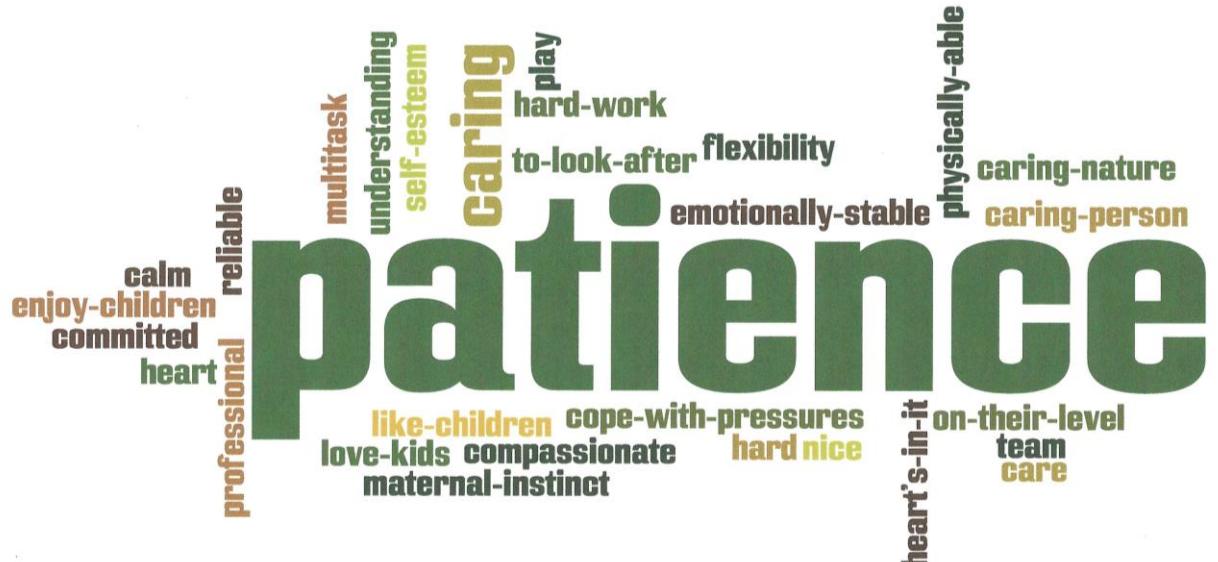


Figure 5.1: Words used to describe a good early years practitioner

The participants felt strongly that attributes such as being patient, caring, reliable and committed were innate characteristics that reflected who they were. Some felt that the skills needed to be an effective early years practitioner were part of their personality, rather than a skillset gained through training.

*... it is just within your personality. (5VSPS1)*

*It's more about the desire and motivation to make life, lives better for children. (4LPDN)*

This may go some way to describing why qualifications and training are not seen as especially important within the childcare industry and why innate traits are regarded as more important than professional development and qualifications. A manager confirmed this notion when he described what he looked for during recruitment. He felt that personal qualities were more important than qualifications. He believed that you cannot train to be an early years practitioner unless you already have an innate set of characteristics.

*Their own self-esteem needs to be high. You've got to be able to cope with the pressures that the job entails; those qualities outweigh any qualification that you could get. If you haven't got any of them but you do have a qualification, then what's the point? (4LPDN)*

The managers and practitioners expressed the idea that certain traits should be innate in order to be a good early years practitioner. If this perception of what a staff member should be is reinforced internally, as well as through recruitment, by the management, this would impact the working identities of staff. Employees who do not seem to possess or display these traits may feel pressured by others and may struggle to be accepted within the workforce. This is a form of self-regulation that protects the working identities of those already in childcare.

Participants in this study were asked to reflect on their decisions to work in childcare. This was done to gauge their reflections on their working identities, both positive and negative. The majority of the participants described their working lives as being a very positive part of their lives. They looked back on the decision to work with children and become early years practitioners as a good one.

*Oh, I'm happy with, that's why I am still here. I love the job, I love working here and it fits my lifestyle and everything like that. (1VSPS2)*

When asked if they would recommend the career to others, they felt positive, saying that it was a good job. However, they did feel that the salary is a limiting factor.

*... it's not a highly paid job, and it should be. But that's, that would be my first thing, but I would obviously say how much I enjoy my job and how much if they really love children that they'll get from it. (2VSPS1)*

However, despite these positive reflections of their jobs, staff with children expressed the dismay that they would feel if their children chose to be early years practitioners. They felt that their children could do better in their career choices.

*I: Yeah, so when your immediate reaction was "no way" for your daughter.*

*R: (Laughs) Yeah.*

*I: Why is that?*

*R: Based on the amount of paperwork I do, based on the amount of things I go through each day I am kind of like "No, you've got brains, you don't need to do what I am doing." I kind of want to push her. (1LPDN)*

*I would not want my children to be a nursery nurse and that's sad. (4LPDN)*

The feeling that the work was a suitable choice for them but not for their children suggests that they felt that the job has limited potential. Although these participants said that they were happy in their work, they wanted their children to have more from their working lives and to make better use of the opportunities offered to them. This presents a contradiction that is difficult to unpick. It may be a reflection of their own sense of self-worth: that they settled for something that they did not feel was good enough for their children, or it might simply be that all parents want more for their children than they had for themselves. It is difficult to decipher the meaning behind these comments, but it is an interesting reflection on the working identities of these participants.

Long-serving staff in the VSPSs reflected on how their jobs had changed over time. They felt that constant changes had caused a large impact on their work and in turn on how they felt about their work. This suggests that these staff members had needed to develop and change their working identities throughout their working lives. The participants felt that the greatest

catalyst for change within the VSPSs was the financial pressure for both parents to work. This was partly in response to the government's drive for women to return to work after having children.

*When I first started, all my friends, nobody went to work, not women, the man was the breadwinner. Now it's totally, totally different. We have to be there for the parents who are working, yeah. (1VSPS2)*

Having both parents working means that there is no longer a pool of volunteers to support. Traditionally, a pre-school was managed by a committee, and the manager and one or two other staff members were paid, with the majority of the cover coming from volunteer parents. Now all staff members are paid and qualified, with volunteers offering additional help for special days and events.

*It's all changed. The paperwork side has definitely, everything to do with that. When we, years ago, when we used to come in, we used to say "okay, what are we going to put out today?" and we used to just get a box of something out on the floor and we used to sit and we'd play with the children and then "oh, we are going to go and do a painting." And we would just get the paints out and do that. Now it's all more structured and, although it's self-select on everything we still put in place, this is what we'd like to do, you know, like we've had an outing planned one day and we used to just say "oh, let's go out to the park." You know, so it is totally different now, totally different. (1VSPS2)*

This slow professionalisation of the job from a group of mothers who reacted daily to children's needs, with no planning or preparation, to a highly monitored job, with new child-protection legislation, inspection criteria, qualifications and parental pressures, had a large impact on the working identities of the staff who had worked in childcare for two decades or more. The pressure was felt most acutely in the VSPSs, who had to change their structure to compete with the private sector. The participants working in the VSPSs reflected on how pre-schools are under pressure to be open for longer hours and to take younger children (funded two-year-olds). They need to accept these challenges in order to be competitive in the early years marketplace.

*I: And you've had to change, so you've had to change, you take two-year-olds now, you've had to extend your hours, you run holiday clubs.*

*R: Hmm, that has all gradually come in, yeah, all gradually come in over the years. But we have always tried, always tried to be one step ahead. Like when they started introducing the flexible 15 hours, you know we were one of the first groups to do it, we said "yeah". They said we've got the 15 hours but nobody did the flexible times, so we said we would do it, we would give*

*it a try and it was fantastic and we haven't looked back. We were one of the first groups to take the, ummm, two-year olds, the ones that get funded, you know, so the early years entitlement it's called now, it used to be called 10 to 2, but we were one of the first groups to take those children and I have had no problem with it, it's really good.*

*I: Yeah.*

*R: Yeah, so.*

*I: So you have to stay ahead of the game almost is the key to your survival?*

*R: Definitely, definitely yeah. (1VSPS2)*

Longer-serving staff in the PDN settings also spoke of changes they had noticed over time. One manager reflected on how things had changed from when he was in the rooms working directly with children.

*Ahhh, yeah, it's my own personal experience of being a nursery nurse compared to what the girls do now, it's a lot less fun. Ummm, I know the paperwork side is a cliché, but it's, it's a, a truth, that we did virtually none ahhh, but we had a great time with the children. The, the rules, I mean after my first job, 13 months I was a nursery nurse, then room leader, then deputy manager, all in the same period. And I went for another deputy role at another nursery chain and one of the questions I was asked was about the ratios and what they were, and I didn't know what they were (Laughs). We didn't... if someone didn't come to work, they didn't come to work. No one was sent to replace them, but, so nowadays it's, it's so much legislation, so much focus on health and safety, mostly for the right reasons, but accountability has changed. And the paperwork is... it's there for a reason but it is, it's, it's made the role ahhh, very different. (4LPDN)*

It is difficult to gauge if the changes they spoke of had made the participants feel more positive or negative about their work, but they did reflect on needing to change their working practices and being able to accept the changes as they arose.

Some of the participants commented on how their own experience of their work was so different to the common understanding of the work of an early years practitioner. They described a situation where they felt that their work was important and challenging but felt that others who had never worked in the childcare industry thought that it was easy.

*I just think we are so undervalued. As... you know... people think we just come to work to play and that is so wrong. There is so much more. I wish we could have the same status as... you know... I wish we were just able to live up to... at the end of the day, we're teaching them. It doesn't matter what you're teaching them... it might be language, like their first word. You are still teaching. (1SPDN)*

*I don't know, I just think that, that people need to realise that it's not a career for a dropout like, it's not, it's something that if you're the right type of person then it can be amazing, definitely, and more people need to realise that. (3LPDN)*

This impacted on their working identities, as they felt at odds with other people's views, which made them feel defensive and protective of their work. These participants felt a need for others to understand how important and rewarding their work was. Words such as 'undervalued' and 'dropout' speak of a conflict in identity for how the staff felt about themselves compared to the external pressures they felt.

## 5.2 Working environment and team

This section considers how the physical and emotional working environment impacts on working identity. It details responses about the importance of team dynamics and relationships with colleagues, as well as the physical aspects of the work environment, such as room size and working temperature.

The impact of the working environment on early years practitioners is an area overlooked by other studies. This is an oversight, as the working environment was an area that some of the participants in this study gave the most emotive responses about. The EYFS framework (Department for Education 2014) provides requirements about the work environment for staff. As one example, it states that there must be separate toilet facilities for adults and an area for staff to take breaks away from children. However, these requirements are limited, and other working conditions, such as hours worked, are up to the employer. Other aspects, such as environmental health, and health and safety legislation, must still be adhered to, but Ofsted does not monitor these. As a result, many parts of the working environment are designated and monitored by the management.

Work environments that were uncomfortable and challenging had a large impact on the participants, who expressed frustration over uncomfortable working conditions. The responses about uncomfortable working conditions all came from participants in the PDN settings. They talked emotionally about the physical environments they worked in and the impacts they had on them and their colleagues. In a few cases, staff felt that the physical spaces in which they

worked were too small. This created stress and anxiety. This issue arose several times during the interview for one participant. She worked in a room of toddlers and could frequently have 12 children and two additional adults in a room that measured 1.5 metres in width by 6 metres in length. That makes 15 people in a 9m<sup>2</sup> space. These people could potentially use the room for ten and a half hours a day, from 7:30am to 6:00pm.

*Well, if you have got six children and two members of staff in this tiny room, it's horrible. It's hot... it's hot in the summer, it's hot up here and it's cramped. The children fall over, the table doesn't fit six people comfortably; in the winter it is horrible because it is freezing and you can't warm it up. (6LPDN)*

This aspect of the physical working environment caused her considerable stress. She also felt that it affected the children in a detrimental way and went on to say that if she had a child, she would never let them be cared for in such a small space.

*I: And you said earlier that you would never send your child here. What would be your reason for that?*

*R: It's not the staff, it's, like, I wouldn't ever want my child to come in this room because it is ridiculously tiny, you know, in actual fact most rooms... babies is alright, but in the other groups it's quite small for 12 children. (6LPDN)*

This stress of working in such a small and unsuitable room made her unhappy at work.

Comments about small working spaces did not arise in the VSPS settings. This may be because PDN settings tend to segregate children by age groups. Children remain in their rooms for the majority of the day, only mixing with other children outdoors. As a result, staff have a much smaller area in which to work. In VSPSs, generally, children and staff access the whole floor space available in the building and are not segregated. However, they also do not care for babies, and the age of the children allows them greater mobility in a larger space. One staff member from a VSPS setting talked about the advantages of having mixed-age children in the one open space.

*... if you've got a sibling who is two and one who is four and a half, they will blend when they want to and they will do their own things when they want to, and I think it is nice for them to have that freedom. (2VSPS1)*

In all of the settings, the participants described the physical environment as busy. My own field

notes described staff rooms as cluttered, with very little allocation for staff belongings. Staff rooms were often used as storage spaces for other items, such as spare furniture and toys. In all of the settings, staff were provided with tea- and coffee-making facilities and a few soft chairs. It is an EYFS requirement that there is an area allocated for staff.

*Providers must also ensure there is... an area in group settings for staff to take breaks away from areas being used by children. (Department for Education, 2014, Section 3.61)*

In each nursery, this was provided, although it was not always a comfortable or suitable space. In one of the PDN settings (Little Froggies Day Nursery), the management had a heavy influence on the space. For example, there were handwritten signs posted around the staff room. These signs instructed staff what they could and could not do and were mostly very authoritative and negative.

*I: Umm, I have noticed a lot of signs about.*

*R: Yeah, and they are quite negative signs as well; it's always like don't do this, don't do that or you need to do this.*

*I: Ummm, would the manager come and speak to you directly?*

*R: No, she will just put up signs. (4SPDN)*

There were several signs telling staff to empty the dishwasher when it was finished and not to stack things on the sink. Signs told staff to hang their coats up and to clean up. In the toilets, there were signs instructing staff to change the toilet roll when it was empty. The manager justified this as saying that she could not moan at the staff all the time, so the signs were there to remind staff of what was expected. She did not see them as a negative part of the environment. However, staff felt that they set an oppressive tone. Often, signs were written in capital letters, with many exclamation marks, expressing anger and suggesting a shouting tone. The manager felt that this was a necessary part of her job and said that she spent a large amount of her time moaning at staff (6SPDN).

In both the PDN and VSPS settings, staff talked about tidying the nursery. Some staff in the PDN settings spoke of the pressure from the management to keep the rooms tidy.

*I: Do you feel under pressure to keep the rooms spick and span?*

*R: Oh, yeah. Completely under pressure, especially now when we are due an Ofsted inspection and they will come round and be "oh, it's not good enough".*

(2LPDN)

Overall, the physical environment did impact how staff felt about their work. Those in small and uncomfortable spaces were more frustrated and unhappy. Those who felt that the space was dominated by negative messages of control from the management felt overly controlled and berated. Whilst this study provides a glimpse into the impact of the physical working environment on childcare staff, it is an area that would benefit from more investigation, as it was an area only touched on lightly within this study.

Data from this research and other literature, such as that written by Colley (2003), demonstrates that early years practitioners have similar class histories. It has been suggested that working-class girls may not be able to get other types of work, but this concept was not supported by this study, as discussed earlier. It may be that staff feel most comfortable with other staff from similar social backgrounds to themselves, as class identities are linked to a sense of socio-cultural and occupational orientation, thus reflecting their habitus. Kirpal (2004) suggests that the working team is vital for positive work experiences and that being able to feel part of this group may be a central factor to support early years practitioners in forming their vocational habitus.

All staff expressed the importance of their team and their colleagues. Feeling part of a positive team was an important factor for the participants in this study; when teams were not working well together, this created stress for staff.

*... if they (staff) work well together then you can get a brilliant atmosphere in the room and the children are happy, and it's really good, and everything kind of flows and everyone knows their jobs and what they are doing and what they are not. (1LPDN)*

*...yeah, we all help one another. It's a good team. (5VSPS1)*

A staff member who had worked in more than one nursery spoke of the difference she had noticed in team dynamics in different workplaces and how this impacted her feelings about work.

*I personally know here I have got a really decent team of people around me. Umm, when somebody's ill or somebody's off, you know, or something's*

*happened in their life, everyone pulls together and kind of, it makes everyone work that bit harder, and they pull together and they pick up the pieces and you, you deal with it. Whereas in the other place, it felt like everyone was going "Well, I'm not doing it; why should I do it? Why doesn't she have to stay?" And I think that's the difference. (3VSPS1)*

She described further a difference in attitude in her previous working experience. Her quote suggests distrust among colleagues, creating an environment where they worked against each other, rather than as a team. This impacted how she felt about her work, and her working identity changed.

*There was a lot more friction between, I found a lot more cattiness between staff in, in that setting, which I hate, I just don't like that sort of behaviour, ummm, even down to the you know, managers being kind of like catty... (3VSPS1)*

Participants in each of the settings suggested that working as a close and supportive team contributed to greater work satisfaction and overall happiness. This suggests that collaborative group working supports individuals and creates a feeling of wellbeing and satisfaction. One participant described this in more detail as all the staff being delegated tasks and having an opportunity to contribute, hence feeling that they are an instrumental part of the team.

*We work as a team. Everybody, we all, like the rotas I do, everybody does all the jobs, so you don't come in on a Monday and for the rest of the week you are the person stuck in room 2 or, you know, just doing that there. We all do different things, on the door, different people do snacks, you know. We try a different person out in the garden, you know, we swap the toilets. We all do our own key children for nappy changing and toileting, different key people doing the stories; it's all shared out, everybody does everything. We find that works well. (1VSPS2)*

This quote may also reflect a management style where staff have more-flexible roles and the system is less hierarchical than a top-down model. This will be discussed further in Chapter 6 when looking at differences in management styles.

Overall, the work environment and the team did have an impact on how the early years practitioners experienced their work. Those in stressful working environments were unhappier, and those that felt they were part of supportive teams expressed greater happiness in their work.

### 5.3 Emotional labour and mothering

Chapter 3 identified the link that authors frequently make between mothering and the work of early years practitioners (McGillivray, 2008). This belief perceives working with children as being natural and easy for women. This belief devalues the work, as it is considered natural and innate for women, requiring limited skill – a concept contested by authors such as Nutbrown (2012) and Osgood (2012), who believe that this image does not reflect the amount of skill and professionalism required to work with young children. Regardless of the argument about links to mothering, it is undeniable that the caring aspect of the job involves a large amount of emotional labour between the children and the staff. This section considers how the participants reflected on the emotional labour they participated in on a daily basis and how they felt it impacted their working identities.

Some of the participants in this study supported the idea suggested by Smith (1992) that nursery nursing is an extension of motherhood. They felt that the skills they had learned being mothers made them good early years practitioners. They felt that they had a deeper understanding of children's emotional needs: a skill they had developed when they had their own children.

*You can feel whenever they are upset. You just feel that pain like only a mum can feel, so when they hurt you hurt... (3NFP1)*

There was a feeling from some of these participants that children are best cared for by their mothers and that a mother's role is to be there for her children at all times. They felt that children should not really be in childcare, which created a conflict, as it was their line of work that supported mothers to return to work. The participants that held these views had stayed at home with their children, and they struggled to understand why other mothers would not make the same choice they had.

*You know, my daughter always says to me, 'cause I think children should be at home with their mums, and my daughter says to me "well, why are you in this profession then?" and I said "because if their mums can't look after them then I will". (5NFP1)*

This participant suggested that she is filling a gap that these children's own mothers cannot. There is a tone to her response suggesting that her work allows her to rescue these children

from a void, as if their mothers have abandoned them. This participant seemed to justify her disagreement with childcare by explaining her work as having a very high moral value.

For the women who had entered childcare after their children had grown up, the transition into motherhood may have created for them a positive identity. This may have encouraged them to recreate this, or to capitalise on it, in a paid capacity in childcare. The participants themselves then perpetuated the belief that nursery nursing is more suited to women, as it is a way of protecting their own identities and their own reasons for entering the workforce.

*I think it's interesting that it is women who do this, because of their caring nature and also because, I'm not being critical, but we can multitask and that's two of the main things that are needed to look after children, to be able to care and obviously to be able to multitask and have all these things running through your head. "Yes, I will read a book with you, but I just need to get the paints" or "Oh, you've done a poo, have you?" You can go across four things within, like, 30 seconds, can't you?! (5VSPS2)*

This participant felt that women are able to cope with a large variety of tasks at one time and that they can do them with efficiency whilst maintaining a caring manner. She described this as an essential part of being a successful early years practitioner. She was also verbalising her belief that men cannot do these things. If this were the dominant view of the majority of the staff, it would then be very difficult for a male practitioner to feel accepted and valued in this workplace.

Some of the participants had started their working lives doing jobs unrelated to childcare but had become unhappy in their work. They sought out childcare as a second career, as they felt that it would offer them more fulfilment.

*Umm, well I've worked in, umm, a few other roles, mainly office-based roles, which I didn't really particularly enjoy... ahhh, didn't particularly enjoy it, got to the age of 25 was working at, ummm, in Milbank in Westminster for the Ministry of Agriculture, really exciting job – not! Ahhh, was walking to work one day and I just had a flash of inspiration actually saying I should go do something else, and for some reason it just came to me that it's childcare. (4LPDN)*

*I used to work here at the (name) hotel as well. I used to plan weddings there, yeah. And then I couldn't take it anymore (Laughs) and then I realised, okay, I am not enjoying this, so I started working with kids. (4VSPS2)*

Both of these participants had come into nursery nursing as older staff: one in her mid-20s and the other in her 30s. Entering childcare had been an informed decision, having already experienced working life. This would suggest that the moral aspect of the work was important to these participants. It also suggests that engaging in emotional labour was rewarding and offered more fulfilment than other types of work, such as office work. These participants are another example of a profile of an early years practitioner that does not fit the simplistic descriptions provided by Rolfe (2005) and Caroll, Smith and Oliver (2008) of low-achieving girls with limited other options open to them.

Within the workforce, staff supported the belief that to be a good early years practitioner, you must be dedicated and self-sacrificing, with an understanding that the job has a vocational calling. This was such a strong feeling among the participants that they spoke with disdain of colleagues who they felt were not committed to the job in the same way.

*I have seen so many people, ummm, go into it but they don't, it doesn't feel like they really want to be there, it's just a job, umm, and I remember feeling a bit like "Where's your maternal instinct?" (3VSPS1)*

A feeling of the work being a vocation or as a way of being paid for something they would do anyway through other avenues in their lives, such as mothering or caring for family, made the participants more accepting of the low pay. They valued highly the reward of positive emotional bonds with children and placed less value on the financial aspects of their work. This was linked to maternal instinct, which was highly valued. Staff who valued the money over the vocational aspect of their work were not regarded highly by their peers.

*Yeah, that, that is a problem with some of them, ummm, and some, certainly, if it isn't a vocation, and I think childcare is a vocation, if it is just a filling in, it's just money, it's just a job, it's very hard to motivate them into thinking outside the box and becoming passionate about it. I think you've got to be passionate about this job, 'cause you don't get paid enough... (7VSPS1)*

Colley (2003) saw this attitude reflected by participants in her own research. She observed that "acceptance of low pay is taken as a sign of genuine commitment to caring for others" (Colley, 2003, p.3). In this way, it becomes part of the burden of caring, and this somehow adds value to their own sense of self-worth in the job they have chosen.

## 5.4 Aspirations

This section considers the participants' aspirations either within the workforce or in other career pathways.

Overall, the participants in this study did not have strong aspirations for promotion within the childcare industry. Many of the participants did not express any desire for promotion and were happy in the positions they were in.

*I don't feel like I need to push myself any more. In fact, if this was the job I did for the rest of my life, I would be quite happy to stay. It's funny, isn't it?*  
 (3VSPS1)

Some of the participants wanted promotion but did not want to go as high as manager, as they felt that this would take them away from the children. Working directly with children was a great motivator for the staff, and they did not like the idea of spending their days in an office. These participants felt that moving into management would mean moving away from children, which was the main reason they had come into the job.

*I: So, you are not interested in management; you are quite happy with the deputy level and staying in the room?*

*R: Yes... I think... yeah... I like to be with the children. I think if you are managing, a huge chunk of your time is taken away from the children, and then I think from that point of view, you might as well get an office job, if that makes... without being disrespectful to (manager's name) or anything*  
 (1VSPS1, deputy)

Many of the participants aligned management with an office job. They did not view the manager as having much involvement with children. They believed that managing is a wholly different job and that managers somehow lose out by not having the daily emotional connections with children.

*And I do still at the minute love working here, so I can't see myself leaving the career at the minute. But, obviously, I want to go higher, so yeah, one day I would quite like to be a manager. But that might change 'cause I don't, I don't, like, 'cause I love being with the kids, I don't know if I would enjoy it so much doing the paperwork side of it, rather than spending the time in the room with the children... so I might change.* (2SPDN)

Some of the participants expressed a lack of understanding of what a manager does, so they

found it difficult to see themselves ever doing it. They did feel that the role of deputy manager still involved working with children, and there was a better understanding of this role in their settings and a greater aspiration to be deputies.

*I: So, you have aspirations to keep progressing?*

*R: Yeah. I want to progress up the ladder.*

*I: Yeah, do you think one day in the future you would like to be a manager?*

*R: Ummm (Laughs), I don't know, I think 'cause I don't know, like being a manager you're not really with the children a lot; there is just more paperwork to do, so I don't know. It depends if it changes.*

*I: Yeah. So, you like, you, you would like to stay with the children.*

*R: Yeah. Maybe deputy manager, but not manager. (2LPDN)*

One participant had a taste of promotion but did not like it and showed no aspiration to be permanently promoted.

*R: No ummm, I don't want to take on the role of being the room coordinator: it's too much hassle and I don't want it.*

*I: So what puts you off? The paperwork or the responsibility?*

*R: The whole thing, I just can't do that. It's just not me, I, this week has been bad enough, I am not doing it again. (1SPDN)*

A few of the participants did have aspirations to be promoted and work up to manager or would not rule it out as a possibility.

*R: Yeah... I want to go further. I am doing my Level 3, so with that I would like to be a room leader or something like that, and I have always said I want to be a manager and run my own nursery and stuff. (2SPDN)*

Some of the participants felt that they would not want to stay in childcare long term, so they had no aspirations for promotion. They felt that it was not worth investing time and energy in training and development if they had no desire to stay in the workforce.

*I do still really want to work with children. I really enjoy working with children, but the whole nursery thing is not nice for the kids and it's not nice for us, so it will be something else I think. (5SPDN)*

Some of them held onto aspirations to secure more-professional jobs, such as teaching, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. These participants showed an aspiration to progress to professional careers but not within childcare. Their lack of desire to stay in childcare or to gain

an early years degree suggests that they did not consider this a professional option.

*I have, I've thought about it a lot. I mean, I've kind of thought that maybe I'd like to train to be a teacher one day. I mean to, I know... just... I know, my friend's doing it and she says "oh I think you'd be great at it." And I think I, I would, but it is just the thought of how hard it would be to get there that scares me off it sometimes, but I think I would love to teach like foundation stage or something like that. (2VSPS1)*

Among these participants, those who had the ability and the desire to achieve degree qualifications were planning to move out of the industry to other professions, such as teaching or nursing. This means that within this group of participants, despite the government pushing for and funding professional qualifications in early years, they did not consider this an attractive option. This attitude results in gradually filtering the most academically able staff away from childcare and into other professions.

*I: Is it right that you have decided to leave and go to university.*

*R: Yep.*

*I: So if you hadn't made that decision, would you ever have seen yourself being here in five or ten years?*

*R: No, no. (6LPDN)*

There was an attitude among some of the staff of wanting promotion but not actively seeking it. They had a passive attitude towards promotion, almost as if they were happy where they were but would consider promotion if it came their way. This resonates with some of the earlier descriptions of how some of them passively fell into the workforce.

*Well, if a vacancy came up, I would obviously talk to (name) and talk about putting in an application for it, obviously ask him as well to see if I've got what I need to do. (3LPDN)*

The managers also had mixed views on promotion. One manager aspired to move beyond his current management responsibility to a position where he could influence childcare on a wider scale.

*I keep thinking there's one massive job in me. I don't know what it's going to be, but there is one really massive, massive job in me. It's not my next job, it might be, you never know, but there is one really, really big job. I would love to get hold of a really big nursery chain and ahhh, or get to that point where I had a lot, where I could really have an influence on childcare. I think I've got that, that, that in me,*

*so, ummm, yeah, I will continue ploughing away on that one, and I think it will come, ummm, but there is one big job in me, not sure what it is. (4LPDN)*

Another had no desire to stay in childcare management and did not view her position as a long-term aspiration.

*I: Would you like to still be a manager here in ten years' time?*

*R: No. I would really, my dream kind of job is something along the forest school lines... you know, even if it's not connected with children... just... I don't know, that would be my dream. (6SPDN)*

Although there were mixed views about promotion, overall, there was no strong aspiration from the participants in this study. The majority of the participants expressed either happiness in the positions they were in or a desire to leave childcare for something else. Those who showed aspiration and drive for a professional career did not consider childcare an option and had plans to move on to other professions after gaining a degree.



## Chapter 6: Similarities and differences of work experiences between early years practitioners in PDN and VSPS settings

This chapter explores similar and different responses among the participants, especially between the PDN and VSPS settings. This chapter will answer the research question: how are early years practitioners' working experiences similar or different in PDN and VSPS settings?

The participants spoke about many parts of their work in a similar way, regardless of the types of nurseries they were working in. There were also considerable differences in experiences between the PDN and VSPS participants. The headlines of the similarities and differences are summarised below.

**Table 6.1: Similarities and differences in responses**

Similarities	Differences
Tasks that needed to be done	Age and time working in childcare
Experiences of paperwork overload	Frustrations at work
Relationships with parents	Hours and pay
Rewards of the job	Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being managed</li> <li>• Being a manager</li> </ul>
Ofsted, EYFS and policy experiences	Recruitment/turnover
Qualifications	Opportunities for professional development

### 6.1 Similarities

There were many similarities in the work experiences of the participating early years practitioners, regardless of the setting. Firstly, they expressed similarities in the tasks they

completed on a day-to-day basis. These tasks were reflected in their job descriptions (see Appendices B and C) and revolved around preparing for the day, cleaning up, paperwork, working with the children and other administrative duties. They were considered external to the work of actually playing with and interacting with the children.

**Table 6.2: Tasks in PDN and VSPS settings**

Preparation and cleaning up	Paperwork	Children	Administrative duties
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting milk ready</li> <li>• Laying tables</li> <li>• Setting out activities</li> <li>• Cleaning tables</li> <li>• Mopping floors</li> <li>• Cleaning bathrooms</li> <li>• Cleaning kitchen</li> <li>• Taking out bins</li> <li>• Cleaning toys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completing learning journey books</li> <li>• Conducting observations</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Completing health and safety paperwork</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving snacks, tea and lunch</li> <li>• Checking nappies</li> <li>• Taking children to the garden</li> <li>• Making sure children are happy</li> <li>• Leading group time</li> <li>• Soothing crying children</li> <li>• Playing with children</li> <li>• Helping children to get dressed/changed</li> <li>• Administering first aid</li> <li>• Keeping children safe (e.g. stopping them putting things in their mouths)</li> <li>• Helping children to do activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing staff</li> <li>• Conducting appraisals</li> <li>• Answering the phone</li> <li>• Covering other staff</li> <li>• Making rotas</li> <li>• Billing admissions</li> <li>• Talking to parents</li> </ul>

The next sections describe the similarities that were most commonly expressed by the participants. They reflect the areas of work that they discussed the most and the areas that were discussed as having greatest importance in their working lives.

### 6.1.1 Cleaning

Although the lists of tasks were very similar, participants from the PDN settings placed greater emphasis on the cleaning aspect of their work.

*We have got to clean the tables, the chairs, the floor, mop the floor, clean the bathrooms and the kitchen, the bins have to be taken out, ummm, and toys have to be cleaned and shelves and stuff like that. There is a lot of cleaning that has to be done when they are asleep... (2LPDN)*

When this issue was explored further, the participants stated that the VSPS settings employ cleaners in the evenings to do the heavy cleaning tasks, such as the toilets, vacuuming, mopping floors and removing rubbish. Staff in the VSPS settings were expected to do the lighter cleaning duties throughout the day, such as wiping down tables and clearing up after meals, but not the heavier duties. Staff in the PDN centres were expected to do all the cleaning. This cleaning was to be done during working hours whilst the children were still in the rooms. This caused difficulties when doing the larger cleaning tasks, such as mopping the floors. Whilst this indicates a difference in responses, participants in both sectors still mentioned cleaning as part of their everyday work.

The physical aspects of the work had a negative effect on the PDN staff, as the jobs left them feeling tired. Along with longer hours worked in the PDN sector, staff were resentful about the amount of cleaning to be done.

*... we have all said, they should have cleaners, they should have a certain amount of staff to do this, but we don't. We all have jobs and we get told to do everything. (5LPDN)*

*More time is spent on paperwork, cleaning, doing the dishwasher, doing the laundry when you should be with the children (6LPDN).*

Cleaning was a negative experience for all of the participants, although this was more pronounced for the PDN staff. Whilst cleaning features in most nursery job descriptions (see Appendices B and Appendix C), this may be interpreted differently in different settings. It would seem that there is a cost-cutting element to not employing cleaners, and this was a key feature of the settings driven by profit.

### 6.1.2 Paperwork

Most of the participants mentioned paperwork at some point in their interviews. It clearly had a large impact on their working lives. The participants who had been in the job for an extended period commented on how paperwork expectations had dramatically changed over time.

*...all the policies and procedures, they've all changed. There were nowhere as many policies and procedures as what there is now. Drowning in paperwork. Drowning in the paperwork is a big thing. I think if a lot of people, if they*

*knew the amount of paperwork, they really wouldn't bother. 'Cause it kind of takes over from you actually caring for the children, and you kind of think why am I looking after the children when I have all this paperwork to do? (1LPDN)*

The vast majority of the participants felt that paperwork had improved provision for children, even though it had increased their workload. In this regard, they saw it as a necessary evil.

*Well, I think our paperwork is quite effective in informing parents what their children do when they are in pre-school. I think, from that point of view, it is really important. (3VSPS2)*

Despite paperwork expectations rising over the years, there have been no changes in daily routines, and staff are rarely given planning or preparation time. Examples of the paperwork that staff must complete are plans, risk assessments, observations, assessments and reports.

*I don't know, I don't know really, I just wish it wasn't this way. I mean, there is a lot of paperwork to be done as well, and it just seems there is too much paperwork and not enough focus on the children. (6LPDN)*

The driving force of this increase in paperwork is a more focused approach to accountability, due to pressures of meeting Ofsted requirements. This means that staff frequently do paperwork at home or during lunch breaks.

*No, I think it is a burden. It's a burden. And being 100% dedicated, I am happy to do that at home, so, but I know a lot of people don't get their paperwork done because they won't take it home. (5VSPS1)*

There were some differences raised between VSPS and PDN settings in regard to remuneration for this additional workload. Many of the VSPS participants reported being paid an allowance for this, whereas the PDN settings did not. Overall, paperwork caused considerable stress for all staff, even though they knew that it was an important aspect of their work.

### **6.1.3 Relationships with parents**

Overall, the participants in the PDN and VSPS settings felt that their relationships with parents were positive.

*... they can see that you have a bond with their child, and I think most parents are grateful that when they go off to work or whatever they are doing that there is, like, another figure that steps in that knows your child.*  
(1VSPS1)

Brooker (2010) suggests that relationships between early years practitioners and parents represent an uneven power balance that reinforces the social divide between working class and middle class. The participants of this study did not reiterate this. Instead, they described these relationships in a positive way, suggesting that parents were respectful of them and their work and often relied on them for advice.

*I: Do you ever find the relationship with the parents stressful?*  
*R: I haven't come across that yet. The parents I have had so far have been really nice, really approachable, so... (1LPDN)*

One staff member discussed how the relationship with parents was one of trust that often went beyond the nursery, into friendships or private agreements, such as babysitting.

*... parents will ring me for a cup of coffee on a Saturday morning and, like, "please come over and help me with my child." And you do, you make massive bonds with parents and children, and I do think they respect you.*  
(3LPDN)

A manager reflected on the complexities of these relationships and the impact they have on workplace confidentiality. He felt that this was exacerbated with younger, immature members of staff.

*It, it, it's extremely difficult. You are trying to encourage these girls to have healthy relationships with these parents, which is, is, is with social media as well can make it even harder, friends on Facebook, ummm, and babysitting is another one. It, it, they cross that line and go into someone's house on a Friday, Saturday night, have a glass of wine with them and have a laugh. They come to the nursery on Monday and their relationship has changed. And now it's becoming more of a friendship than a professional one. Ummm, staff have a need to tell the parents what is going on in the nursery, in a negative way, and parents absorb and have a need to know because their child is at the nursery. And the staff will very selfishly feed that need to those parents to make that member of staff feel better and to distance the problems of the nursery from them as an individual. Ummm, and you know, not in all cases by any stretch, but when it happens it is a real problem. It's very difficult, but there are so many blurred lines there. You get parents who were friends with them before*

*they even started in the nursery and it's, it's a difficult place, it's a big, big problem. (4LPDN)*

There were differences expressed regarding the 'show' presented to parents as they dropped off and collected their children. Participants from the PDN settings were under pressure to make sure parents saw a polished version of their everyday work. This meant that at the times when children were dropped off and picked up, staff did not engage in cleaning duties but instead interacted with the children in an organised and well-planned room. This 'show' was also repeated if a potential new client had booked a visit to look around the nursery. Staff in the PDN settings would be warned in advance when these viewings would happen, so they could ensure the parents saw a polished view of the nursery.

*And like on a visit and everything, it's all different. We have got to set up the room and act like everything is perfect, whereas normally with the children, it is messy... (4SPDN)*

The participants felt that this 'show' was not a reflection of what went on throughout the rest of the day. Staff were told explicitly how to behave and what to say by the management.

*I have got upset before and I had to stay in the room and then parents have then asked me if I was okay, and I was told by my manager to, just to say that I have got conjunctivitis. (4SPDN)*

This level of control by the management had a negative effect on staff, who felt that they had to conform to expectations, rather than be natural with the children and the parents. This caused pressure and staff were uncomfortable with this situation. However, they had learned to suppress their inner feelings and to play along with this show. This demonstrates high engagement with emotional labour and strategies of surface acting, as described by Hochschild (1983).

*When they turn up, everyone is smiley and happy, and at the end of the day, everyone is smiley and happy. But it's like, you put the face on, just like for a show around you, put the face on... you do the talk and you do everything you are supposed to do... you sell it, that's what it is... but as you are having a show around in here, you are thinking "come on, hurry up because I have got to write my books and I have got to do this and I've got to do that", and they are there just going "na na na"... like this... (5LPDN)*

The participants in the PDN settings felt that this show to parents extended to creating an

image that the staff were happy and well cared for at work. There was a feeling that parents were not aware of the conditions they worked under, especially about their low salaries or working conditions. The participants felt that this was because the nursery looked so nice and appeared to be so well resourced. They felt that parents had assumed that the fees they had paid for childcare went directly to staff.

*Yeah... yeah... yeah... I think they also assume we are on more than we are, because of the fees they pay, you know... (1SPDN)*

Although the staff felt aggrieved by this, they still continued to support this story, never crossing the line and telling parents what their work was really like. It seemed that maintaining the image and reputation of the nursery was a strong part of their vocational habitus.

The idea of putting on a show for parents was not discussed by participants in the VSPS settings. In fact, comments often supported transparency between parents and staff. VSPS staff felt that it was important that parents had a good understanding of how the pre-school operated throughout the day. The routine did not change if parents came to look around, and staff did not change any of their practices when parents arrived.

*And it is something I'll always say to them, that, you know, (name) came here before I worked here and I can honestly say they are all fantastic staff. The children are so looked after and things, and I, like I say, I saw that before I worked here, so I, it wasn't me being biased because I work here – that is my true statement as a mum. (4VSPS1)*

This represented a difference in attitude passed down from managers to their staff. Providing a polished appearance seemed to be more important when there was a need to attract fee-paying clients. This customer care attitude was not so evident in the VSPS settings and so did not impact staff working experiences as it did in the PDN settings.

Some negativity was expressed by participants regarding the demands that parents put on them. Older staff stated that the level of demand had increased over time. This feeling that parents were increasingly expecting higher standards was reflected in both the PDN and VSPS settings.

*One thing we've got is parents who are very, very demanding. I have one of my parents who if my books are not done two days after the start of the*

*term, they're like "Where is their achievement book?" and I am thinking I went away last week and I had a weekend, you know (Laughs), and they are absolutely "Why isn't it there?" (2VSPS2)*

This expectation from parents may be a reflection of their understanding of childcare as a contractual agreement and appears to be a consequence of the consumer attitude to childcare that has been created as the childcare market has developed. Participants in the PDN settings discussed selling the nursery services and putting on a 'face' until parents leave. This is an example of surface acting, as described by Hochschild (1983).

Overall, the participants felt that their relationships with parents were positive. They felt that the parents respected them, although parents appeared to be more demanding than they had been in the past. Managers viewed the relationships between staff and parents slightly differently and were concerned about inappropriate relationships that could have a negative impact on the nursery.

#### 6.1.4 Rewards and emotional labour

The participants unanimously described working with children as the greatest reward of their jobs. They clearly articulated the emotional aspects of their work in regard to children and saw this as the driving force behind them wanting to be early years practitioners.

The participants identified different aspects of working with children as rewarding, including teaching them new things, bonding with them, watching them grow, doing activities with them and watching them respond positively to the nursery environment.

*The best parts of my job are just interacting with the children: that's the bit I love the most. (5VSPS2)*

*It is... I... I like, I obviously like... you love, love being with the children, otherwise you shouldn't be here (Laughs). (1VSPS1)*

Several participants mentioned the longer-term relationships that were built with the families as a reward and described this as a long-term fulfilment.

*Ohhh, I get great satisfaction from, at the end, when, when you see some of the children come in and because I have been here so long I have seen*

*families, I have seen so many families go through, and there is that pride, yeah... There is something about seeing what happens later on with those children and knowing you had input from the beginning, and that to me is why I am here. (2VSPS2)*

Many of the participants mentioned that they liked the pace of the day and the variety of the work, as no two days were the same. They enjoyed the fact that the time flew by and there was no monotony in their work.

*Uh, it, I love working with the babies 'cause no two days are the same. (1LPDN)*

One participant felt that her job was much more exciting than some other options, such as administrative work.

*... it's the best job, like if you're the right person, you can get so much out of it. Just think of all those miserable people who are sat behind a computer who are hating life and hate to get out of bed on a Monday morning, not realising that there are so many better opportunities out there if you find a job that you like. (3LPDN)*

The participants felt most rewarded in their work when they were allowed to spend time with children. For many of the participants, this was the initial attraction to the job, and this interest in watching children succeed and building relationships with them did not diminish throughout their time working with children.

The participants spoke freely about the emotional aspect of their work, although they did not label this labour. Some of the staff did indicate the need to be good at emotional labour and recognised it as a component of their work, suggesting a recognition that emotional labour does not always come naturally.

*So when you are feeling rough, feeling sick or your college has just upset you or you know your husband has said something horrible on the phone, or you are really angry with one child and you've got to turn to another child and you have got to put on that face, that, that is quite, ummm, difficult. (4VSPS2)*

All of the staff highly valued their relationships with children and described this part of their work as central to everything they did. This contradicts Hochschild's (1983) description of emotional labour as a negative aspect of working life. Her descriptions of surface acting and

deep acting do not correlate well with the emotional labour described by the participants of this study, who described it as a positive aspect of their work that gave them great satisfaction. It is more appropriate to adopt Kruml and Geddes' (2000) descriptions of emotional labour as encompassing aspects of positive and negative consonance, as described in Chapter 3.

It is necessary to revisit these terms prior to discussing them in relation to the data. Positive consonance is when an employee spontaneously feels and expresses what they are required to express, similar to Diefendorff, Croyle and Gosserand's (2005) concept of naturally felt emotion. Negative consonance is when the employee's feelings are at odds with the organisation's requirements. This creates a conflict for employees between their real emotions and work expectations. This then results in staff employing surface acting strategies, as described by Hochschild (1983), and may result in burnout.

Working with children was the central attraction to the job. I asked the participants about the qualities they needed to be good early years practitioners. The participants used emotionally laden words, such as being caring and compassionate. They suggested that these skills are innate and are a reflection of personality, rather than learned skills. The participants seemed unaware of the emotional labour attached to their work and considered it part of their personal characteristics, rather than a labour-intensive task.

*But qualities, you gotta be caring, is one of the top ones towards children definitely, compassionate and working in a team and all those things, yeah, you've got to like children and understand them, you know, want to come to work. (1VSPS2)*

*I think you gotta have, well, patience, that's one of them, but not the most important, you've gotta just love kids. (4VSPS2)*

*Patience... er... above all I think patience is a good one because... with children if you haven't got patience in the first place, they pick up on it and, you know, it becomes like a tug of war... (6VSPS2)*

Patience was an attribute spoken of a lot and is represented in the Figure 5.1 Wordle. I have taken a selection of short quotes that participants used in the interviews related to emotional work. I have done this to highlight some of the references that the participants made to the emotional aspect of their work. The vast majority of these quotes were made in

direct reference to children.



**Figure 6.1: Emotional words used by the participants**

Staff spoke of their sadness when it was time for the children move on. This suggests that the bonds with children are real, not just an act for work.

*I: How do you feel when the children move up?*

*R: Really sad... I get really sad. I've actually cried a couple of times, and that is not even a lie (Laughs). (3LPDN)*

This strong emotional connection to the children was more than an aspect of the work that could be turned on and off. The participants expressed it as a very important aspect of feeling rewarded in their jobs.

*To be quite honest, if you want to be a nursery nurse you, you, you do it for the love, you don't do it for the pay. (5VSPS)*

The emotional aspects of their work led to positive consonance and positive working identities. The participants struggled to identify this aspect of their work as a skill or a task to be

completed. They were so immersed in the importance of forming positive emotional bonds with children that they described their work as a vocation. They believed that the ability to care and form emotional bonds was something innate that they were driven to do. Their work was expressed as an element of sacrifice, almost a suggestion that the job and the commitment to it should consume everything they do.

*The main thing is to love the children, and to be interested in them, and to put them absolutely first. (3VSPS2)*

One staff member reflected that this vocation was linked to other aspects of her life and that she has an innate need to care for others.

*Caring... you need to be, that's... it's got to be inbred, you want to care, you want to look after, ummm, and, ummm, that's, that's my life, not just children, I want to look after everybody and make everybody's lives a bit better. (5VSPS1)*

It is perhaps this feeling of nursery nursing as a vocation and an innate desire that allows early years practitioners to accept such low pay and poor work conditions.

*You have got to be committed, otherwise you are doing the child an injustice, you shouldn't be here. They need the best and if you are not going to commit 100%, for you and the child, 'cause you do need, as I already mentioned earlier with the bad things, you do need to have that commitment. Otherwise, you are not going to enjoy yourself and you're not really being the best for that position, 'cause the children who are relying on you won't get that from you. (5VSPS2).*

The staff reported genuine and reciprocal positive relationships with children, and they considered this an intrinsic reward. They considered this intrinsic reward positive enough, so they were more accepting of the low salary. There were expressions of self-sacrifice for the greater good of children and the wider community.

Negative consonance can lead directly to a negative working identity, as it creates a situation where the employee's feelings are at odds with the expectations of the organisation and the managers (Kruml and Geddes, 2000). This causes disharmony between the employee's real emotions and the expectations of work. Negative consonance may cause employees to use strategies that lead to stress and burnout.

Tasks that pulled the staff away from the children caused them anxiety and stress, as they did not feel that they were doing the most important part of their job well. Cleaning was the most frequently reported job that took the staff away from working with the children. The participants who were required to do a great deal of cleaning felt the highest levels of dissatisfaction.

*I: What are some of the domestic duties you do?*  
*R: Cleaning the room, making the lunch, washing up after lunch.*  
*I: When you say cleaning the room, do you mean putting toys away?*  
*R: No, hoovering and mopping.*  
*I: Hoovering and mopping?*  
*R: Yeah, cleaning the shelves and cleaning the windows.*  
*I: And do you think that is part of your role?*  
*R: No, I suppose not really.*  
*I: That's not what you came into nursery nursing to do, so it came as a bit of a shock?*  
*R: Yeah.*  
*I: Ummm, and what impact do all the jobs have?*  
*R: Well, it takes you away from the children.*  
*I: And how does that affect them?*  
*R: They're not getting enough attention, which makes them misbehave, and you're rushing around and you are so stressed out, so when they want something, you just haven't got the time to sit down and do it. (5SPDN)*

*Tidying the kitchen, like, that takes you away from, that could be an extra half an hour activity with the children or something... yeah, so the little jobs we're meant to do alongside our normal job are a lot of time out. (2SPDN)*

Overall, the emotional labour that the participants participated in with the children on a daily basis was very important to the staff. Having time to make good bonds with children and to spend good amounts of time with them offered the staff more incentives and rewards than other aspects, such as the pay or the working environment. When staff were unable to focus on the emotional labour due to other pressures, such as cleaning, they felt frustrated and unhappy.

### 6.1.5 Ofsted, EYFS and policy experiences

Ofsted inspections are a part of working life in the early years sector. Inspections are infrequent; however, the implications of an inspection affect everyone. When the participants were asked about their experiences, the responses suggested that inspections had been a

nerve-wracking but positive experience. Overall, the participants felt that the inspection process was important for ensuring quality in the sector.

*... it was a positive experience, yeah. It was really nice; she was such a nice lady. (1VSPS2)*

*I: Have you had any experiences of Ofsted? Have you ever been through the inspections?*

*R: Yes.*

*I: And how did you find that process?*

*R: It was fine. (1LPDN)*

One participant stood alone as not being in support of inspections.

*I think they are awful, I think they are awful things, ummm, I think everyone is petrified, they don't know what to say, what's right, what's wrong, you know, and I, I think it's a rotten system in as much as they don't give you, ummm, you know, when I was managerial they would say "Oh, that, that paperwork's not right", but they didn't give you any examples of what they wanted because they didn't want all schools to be uniform, but if they did it that way they would make your life a lot easier 'cause you would have some sort of format of what, what would pass. (5VSPS1)*

She went on to say that she did feel inspections were important but could not understand what was wrong with the old system of local authority inspections. When questioned as to why she believed this was a better system, she replied:

*Because, you know, they would basically come in and tell you what they needed and, you know, it was very easy going to put those things in place and then they would come back and see if it was done. There was none of this 'Pass' or 'Fail' or 'Outstanding' or... (Laughs) (5VSPS1)*

Her comments suggested that she felt that Ofsted made judgements but there was no longer any one to turn to for support of what to do to improve. She felt that judgements were made and then the setting was left to work it out on its own.

Participants made little comment on the EYFS framework or other policies and requirements, such as safeguarding. Only one manager discussed what he identified as a weakness in the EYFS framework.

*I think since EYFS came in, EYFS has been good for good nurseries, I don't*

*think it's been good for poor-quality nurseries, and there are a lot of those. Nurseries that struggle. Struggle with EYFS, 'cause you've got to be able to, it's not a "These are ten things you need to do in your nursery" list; it's open to a thousand different interpretations by a thousand different people. I think good people interpret it in a good way and poor-quality people interpret it in a different way and, ummm, I think it's helped but it's a struggle and I think it asks too much of the quality of staff that I have. You've got to understand child development, you've got to understand children, you've got to understand why they are the way they are, what they can achieve, umm, yeah. If every single member of staff in our nursery all did a one- or two-year college course in children and then came into it, it would be great, but they don't. (4LPDN)*

In this, he suggests that the framework is presented for those with a level of knowledge and competence that this manager does not believe his staff have. As a result, they cannot access it fully. This manager suggests that the EYFS framework needs to be more prescriptive. This may be a reflection of the type of staff attracted to the workforce or the qualifications they have, rather than a reflection of the framework.

### 6.1.6 Qualifications

Feelings about qualifications were standard across all four settings. Generally, the participants felt that the NVQ had taught them very little. They believed it to be a system of accreditation for the knowledge they already had.

*I: What do you feel about the NVQ? Do you think it gives you everything you need?*

*R: Not really, no, I've not, I don't think it does. I think she comes in and sees what I am doing and it feels like, in that, it's, yep, you're doing it right. I feel I'm learning through being here, not through doing a course. (4VSPS1)*

Staff talked about the NVQ as being a formal recognition of what they already knew. The qualification provided a confirmation that increased their confidence in their work.

*I felt that everything I did for my NVQ I already knew how to do, and it was just more getting a certificate to say it. I felt that just the experience, I just felt, I felt like I knew what I was doing anyway and I wouldn't say that once I had passed that I felt I was doing any better at my job. (2VSPS1)*

There was a different attitude expressed about college-based courses and higher-level degree

courses. Two participants who had undertaken degree qualifications said that doing it had had a positive impact on their self-esteem, giving them the confidence and the voice to do things they thought were right.

*Well, from my point of view, the EYPS came in. It was a fantastic thing because suddenly there was a chance to become qualified at a higher level without really having to do a huge training course. And also, I was easily accepted onto it because I had the right background and so that, that made a real difference to my view of myself and what I do here. And I think, I, I've, my attitude changed a lot through that process. (3VSPS2)*

Older staff reflected on the old National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) qualification, which had some prestige. This qualification was two years' college training and had quite a high level of academic requirements for entry.

*At the time, it was highly respected; we were presented with nurses' brooches and had, you know, had the initials, but over the years it's, ummm, has been downgraded quite a bit. Ummm, perhaps because it hasn't kept up with modern ways of thinking, I don't know, I don't know where it lost its way. Obviously funding has been part of that. You know there wasn't the funding to have everyone at college for two years and, and we have to modernise. (5VSPS1)*

Staff felt that the NVQ had not taught them anything but it had given their previous knowledge formal accreditation. Qualifications seemed to have little impact on knowledge but a big impact on confidence.

*When I, when I did my Level 2 and I passed, other than the maths and the English, which were a challenge, well not so much the English, but they were more the focus, I was a bit like, I've passed. I don't know what I did, but I've passed it and I think, well, I must just be doing my job right and I'm good at my job and I find it quite easy. And for me to get a qualification was a big, big thing for me, you know and... it, it's, that's how it felt. (4VSPS1)*

One manager described the NVQ as a system where applicants cannot fail, giving little meaning to the qualification. As a manager, this meant that he did not assume because someone was qualified that they were competent.

*I interviewed a woman who worked for one of the big training providers once. She said that basically they get staff to, ummm, they ask a girl how*

*to make up a bottle and she says “I don’t know” and then you say “well, ummm, surely you would first start by washing your hands, get the bottle, wash it up, and then do this and then do that.” And she would write it all down, and then turn around and give it to the girl, who would sign it. Now that was about five or six years ago, but that has stuck with me and I don’t think, ahhh, things have changed drastically since then... and that they all get through it. And, and the quality of people I’ve seen put through a Level 2 and 3 qualification is staggering, in this nursery and my last job, consistently. (4LPDN)*

This experience resulted in him having little faith in the qualification system. The majority of staff felt that the process of gaining qualifications did little to challenge or extend their knowledge but it did raise their confidence. However, senior staff placed little confidence in staff with NVQ qualifications and still felt that a staff member’s ability was more related to their innate skills, rather than skills taught through qualifications. These responses support Nutbrown’s (2012) assertions that there is little confidence in the current system of qualifications in the early years sector.

## 6.2 Differences

Whilst there were many similarities in the working experiences of staff in the PDN and VSPS settings, there were also many different experiences. The greatest differences included staff age, level of experience, the process of being managed and professional development opportunities. These differences suggest that staff in PDN and VSPS settings have very different work experiences. Many of the issues were discussed with high levels of emotion, and some of the issues were raised repeatedly, suggesting that they had a high impact on staff. Each of these will now be explored in detail.

### 6.2.1 Age and time working in childcare

The average age of the participants in the two setting types was very different. There was almost a 25-year age gap between the average ages of the two groups, with the youngest staff working in the PDN settings and the older staff working in the VSPS settings. There was also a large gap in the length of time working in childcare of nearly eight years. This demonstrates that the VSPS staff in this study were more mature and more experienced than the staff in the

PDN settings.

**Table 6.3: Ages of research participants and years as early years practitioners**

	SPDN	LPDN	PDN average	VSPS1	VSPS2	VSPS average
Average age of participants	23.5	25.3	<b>24.4</b>	41.4	46.6	<b>44.0</b>
Average years working as an early years practitioner	6	4.5	<b>5.25</b>	13.2	12.9	<b>13.05</b>

It is difficult to gauge the impact of these differences. However, it is apparent that the staffing demographic was very different between the PDN and VSPS settings. This raises many questions about why VSPS settings manage to attract older staff and why older staff are not working in the PDN settings. It also appears that staff in the VSPSs are staying longer in the workforce, as they are more experienced by over double the amount of time working as early years practitioners.

## 6.2.2 Frustrations

The participants were asked to describe the parts of their jobs they disliked and the aspects that caused them frustration in their work. The VSPS staff expressed frustration with the unpleasant, physical aspects of the job, such as wiping noses and cleaning bottoms.

*... well, you've got the really demeaning-ish, sometimes, kind of jobs like changing pants and poo and things like that, but you just, and snotty noses things like that, but it's part of the job. (2VSPS1)*

Although this was expressed as a frustration of the job, it did not seem to have a marked impact on staff in a negative way. They seemed to accept these duties as part of their day-to-day work.

The participants in the PDN settings expressed a greater level of unhappiness in their work in general and some were very unhappy, feeling a strong desire to leave nursery nursing as soon as they could. They complained about pay, hours, paperwork, cleaning, the process of being

managed and overall workload. Some felt so negatively about their work that they said they wanted to leave.

*Everyone you speak to is either doing their qualification and then looking for a job or actively looking for a job now, and like myself, I am not happy and I am looking for a job. (4SPDN)*

This contrasted starkly to the VSPS staff, who often spoke in glowing terms about their work and how much they enjoyed it.

*I love working here... I always have done. (1VSPS1)*

*...'cause it's just something that I enjoy doing. I am like, yay, I am working today. (4VSPS2)*

One of the reasons the PDN participants gave for their unhappiness was the constant pressure of a large workload, which impacted on the time they had available to play with the children. Staff in the PDN settings felt that the pressure of the job meant that they were not able to spend sufficient time with the children. This made them feel that they were failing the children, and this made them feel unsuccessful and unhappy at work.

*... it's the daily grind, and then you get given a little bit more to do and a little bit more to do. I think it is slowly taking its toll. You get to the point where you have to say "I am not spending enough time with the children and doing things with them." You are too busy doing other things. (5LPDN)*

Many of the tasks that created pressure were unrelated directly to the children but involved paperwork, such as planning, writing up observations, writing risk assessments and writing up reports, and cleaning. Workload was often doubled when staff were away and not replaced with temporary staff. In some settings, staff absence was quite high, so it often fell on the staff to share out this workload.

*Yeah, yeah, it's like you're trying to tidy up, you're covering people's breaks, cleaning, things like that. Tidying the kitchen, like, that takes you away from, that could be an extra half an hour activity with the children or something... yeah, so the little jobs we're meant to do alongside our normal job are a lot of time out. (2SPDN)*

Many of the jobs that took staff away from the children were related to cleaning, as discussed at the start of this chapter. As staff in the PDN settings had to do the heavy cleaning, such as washing windows, vacuuming the floor and mopping the floors, they were very conscious that they were not playing with and interacting with the children. This situation was stressful, and staff felt that they could never get everything done. Whilst they did not report any issues of being out of the legal adult-to-child ratio with, there was still a shortage of staff to cover all the additional duties.

*Well!... ummm, doing all the folders, I know they have to be done to obviously keep a record, but I think we should be given time out of the room to do them, rather than be expected to do it within the room, and obviously I don't like being over ratio because it's against the law, and the amount of cleaning we have to do because we have to clean the room after snack, then after lunch again, and then after tea again, and it's expected to be completely like mopped, swept, hoovered every day before we leave, so... (4SPDN)*

It seems that all the settings in this study adhered to EYFS ratio requirements but were concerned about the other duties that took staff away from children. This was most evident in the two PDN settings.

### 6.2.3 Hours and pay

The participants in the PDN settings worked longer hours than the participants in the VSPS settings did. The VSPS participants who worked full time reported working about 7–8-hour days or 35–40-hour weeks. The participants in the PDN settings reported working 9–10-hour days or 45–50 hours a week, despite their contractual hours being 40 hours a week (see Appendix C).

Senior staff in the PDN settings often had to work even longer hours, in order to ensure that there was a senior member of staff in the building throughout the day. If there was only one senior staff member available, they would need to be at work when the nursery opened and when it closed.

*... as a deputy manager it would be 7:30am to about 5:30pm and then possibly until 6 if someone has booked for extra hours. Our nursery is open from half seven to six. (1SPDN)*

Most of the VSPS settings were open term time only, closing for about 18 weeks a year. These staff often worked in holiday clubs, but this was regarded as an external contract, which was optional. The PDN participants worked on a 52-week a year contract, with four weeks a year annual holiday, as found in most working contracts. However, there was a disparity between contracted hours and actual working hours, as discussed below. In annual terms, this meant that the PDN participants worked about 2,400 hours per annum and the VSPS participants worked about 1,360 hours per annum. There was little pay difference between the PDN staff and the VSPS staff, despite the PDN staff working much longer hours.

The long working hours left the PDN staff feeling drained, and they spoke of feeling tired all the time. This had a knock-on effect on their personal lives, as they felt too tired to do much when they got home.

*Really tired... yeah. I am useless when I get home; I can't do anything.*  
(5SPDN)

One participant working at a VSPS pre-school began her working life in a PDN nursery. She reflected on her experiences in the earlier part of her working life, specifically regarding working hours and holidays:

*I just felt like it was constant: went to work when it was dark and came home when it was dark. It was really full on, and I was only 16 still, so it did seem a lot.* (2VSPS1)

She then reflected on her current work, in a VSPS setting:

*... I feel that the hours aren't so stressful and obviously you're term time and, I mean, my hours, are quite, I do quite a lot but not nearly on the level of nursery...* (2VSPS1)

Staff in the PDN settings worked longer than their contractual hours on a daily basis. This was an expectation and was rarely paid as overtime. The staff suggested that their contractual work hours were from when children came into the room to when they left. However, staff were expected to be at work before and after this time to set up and tidy away.

*I: What would your normal hours be?*

*R: Ummm, 8:15 to 5:30, but obviously we are expected to be put on either a late or an early or sometimes both in that week. And then, ummm, we are meant to be in the room at ten past eight, even though we don't get paid until quarter past, so every day we have got to be at least here by 8 really. (4SPDN)*

Ratio constraints meant that staff needed to be on site at all times and frequently had to stay on the premises for their lunch breaks, even though they were not paid for this time. Staff did not seem to argue this and understood it as just an expectation of working in a nursery. This seemed to be accepted as part of the culture of a day nursery, and accepting this was part of their process of developing vocational habitus.

*Some nursery nurses can get their time back by going early, but then again that depends on ratios. If ratios are not covered then they can't go... ummm... so then they have to take it in their lunch hour, an extra 15 minutes here or there... or... ummm.... worst case scenario, it gets put through the wages, but it depends upon which site you work at. If you are in a small team, then it is a lot harder to take back the hours than if you are in a big team. (1SPDN)*

The issue of working overtime was not raised by the VSPS participants, who expressed having good levels of flexibility and high levels of support regarding time off work (1VSPS2).

Staff in the VSPS settings found it much easier to manage their other commitments, such as appointments or collecting children from school. This was important to the staff, and they valued being able to combine work and other parts of their lives.

This flexibility, or lack of it, may explain why the PDN settings had younger staff, who generally had not yet started their own families and could manage the longer hours. They were less restricted to the caring and time demands of having families of their own. Some staff in the VSPS settings did express the importance of having work that offered them flexibility when their children needed them.

*It needs to be something that I can fit around my children, erm, because I'm the only one who can be there for them. (6VSPS2)*

The interviewees who worked in the PDN settings expressed anxiety about pay. They acknowledged that their pay was low but had understood this when they applied for the job. However, when their pay was delayed or not paid at all, they felt great stress and anxiety.

*I think 'cause they don't get paid properly, a lot of people, when they start, when I did as well, they don't get paid for two months and it took two months to get paid. And a lot of people don't get paid on time and they need the money or they get paid wrong and they have emergency tax if they don't sort it out, ummm. So pay is a big one why people walk out. (2LPDN)*

Salaries being paid late seemed to create greater stress than the overall low pay. However, low pay had a large impact on the PDN and VSPS staff who did not have additional means of support, such as living at home with parents or having a partner to support them. This meant that these staff had to find additional work in order to get by.

*I mean, for me being at home with a husband who has got a good job, you know, we have got our own place and things, it's not so bad, you know. I tend to use my wage for like luxury things, I suppose, like the car needs replacing or doing something to. I think if somebody's not in, if they haven't got a partner maybe, in such a good job, then, yeah... you wouldn't necessarily work in a pre-school for financial reasons, I don't think. (1VSPS1)*

A manager in one of the PDN settings agreed that the low pay was a problem for staff. She felt that the low pay deterred the right people from entering the profession. Having a job with a low salary meant that you needed support structures in place, such as a partner earning a decent wage, living at home with parents or being able to claim some government benefits.

*... we have got some staff who are married, so they are okay, or they've got partners. I've got a couple of members of staff that, umm, they can claim tax credit and things like that because they are on their own, so they can make it up like that and then work as many hours as they can and another member of staff who still lives at home with her mum, you know, so it's a cheap way of living. (1VSPS2)*

This would suggest that pay affects the type of people who can work as early years practitioners. Those who did not have working partners or did not still live with their parents struggled to make ends meet. This must also have an impact on recruitment, as the pool of potential candidates is reduced. One participant, who was in her late 30s, shared a house with a friend. She worked full time as an early years practitioner but explained the implication of the low salary.

*Yeah... I have to then... I've got three cleaning jobs on top of this and I am only just getting by. I am looking at a fourth cleaning job. (5LPDN)*

Despite struggling on a low salary, there was an air of resignation about pay. There seemed to be an understanding and acceptance that caring for children would be poorly paid and that this was unlikely to change.

*... but I knew that when I went into nursery nursing. I knew that I wasn't going to be paid an awful lot of money, so I didn't come into nursery nursing thinking, oh right, I will eventually be on 40,000. I knew that was never ever going to happen, so I came into that, with that knowledge that I was never going to be able to buy a Porsche or whatever... (6SPDN)*

One manager (4LPDN) described the complexities of paying minimum salary to staff. He felt that the salary impacted on the type of applicants attracted to the work, and he explained that salaries have stayed the same whilst minimum salary has gone up, narrowing the gap between the two. When I asked why companies did not then put up salaries, he described complexities in the government-imposed ratios for adults to children, meaning that they could not financially afford to pay anything above minimum salary.

*... there are very few industries for the income that we have here who would need the same staffing that we have here, so your, your, you know, ummm, salary percentages can be anywhere between sort of 50 to 70%, sometimes even higher than that of your income, as a percentage of your income, and when, when it is right up in your 70% before you've even spent on anything else, or on anyone else, the pressure on staff salaries is, is immense, and ahhh, you can't do anything else other than offer low rates of pay and there is no desire from within the industry to increase that. (4LPDN)*

However, this does not fully address the issue, as ratios have remained steady for many years, yet fees to parents continue to go up. VSPS settings face the same ratio requirements yet manage to pay staff higher salaries. The issue he did not address is that PDN settings also pay shareholders and owners. This is not a financial burden faced by VSPS settings.

There are added complications when paying staff minimum salary. Differences in minimum wage for different ages mean that some younger qualified staff earn less than unqualified older staff. This devalues the qualification, and staff do not see any reason to pursue a qualification.

*I: How does the pay impact on you?*

*R: I have no money (Laughs)... and the two people who are unqualified are getting more than me as well.*

*I: Why is that?*

*R: Because they are over 21.*

*I: And what has that got to do with it?*

*R: There is a different minimum pay thing.*

*I: So because they are on minimum wage, they are earning more than you as a qualified member of staff?*

*R: Yeah. (5SPDN)*

There did not seem to be many perks offered to the participants in either the PDN or VSPS settings. There were no opportunities for overtime or additional earnings, and salaries were not negotiable. Some staff discussed earning an additional week of leave if they were in the company for more than five years.

*If you are here for five years or more, I think it's five years, you get an extra week. (1SPDN)*

The same participant mentioned the provision of tea and coffee, but she did not consider this a great incentive.

*... well, having tea and coffee is one of the things they write down on the job description. If it's a benefit, I don't see it as a benefit. (1SPDN)*

There were however, marked differences between the PDN and VSPS settings in what staff considered infringements on their normal working lives. For example, having to pay for training affected staff attitudes towards it, as did having to train in their own time, such as evenings or weekends.

*I: Did you have to attend the first aid?*

*R: Yeah.*

*I: And was it done in work hours or after work hours?*

*R: No. It was done after work hours.*

*I: And were you reimbursed for that time?*

*R: No. No pay and no time back. (1SPDN)*

Some staff did not get sick pay or maternity pay above the government allocation, and neither did their companies contribute to a pension scheme.

*I: So, what happens if you are sick?*

*R: You don't get paid.*

*I: You don't get paid? Ummm... what then happens in maternity leave?*

*R: Ummm, just statutory.*

*I: Statutory maternity pay.*

*R: Yep, yeah.*

*I: And do you have a staff pension?*

*R: No. (1SPDN)*

This meant that the staff had no rewards above their basic pay. The participants felt that pay had a large impact on their lives.

*R: You can have someone who is just brilliant at their job and brilliant with kids.*

*They're not going to go into childcare whatsoever or teaching... because of the pay...*

*I: So the pay has a massive impact on your life?*

*R: I think so. (1SPDN)*

This participant had recently returned from maternity leave and was struggling with the financial implications of this.

Overall, levels of pay and the hours staff worked were markedly different in the PDN and VSPS sectors. Whilst the VSPS staff seemed content with their pay and felt that their working hours offered them flexibility, the PDN staff did not. Arrangements for overtime worked and issues such as pay not given on the agreed dates caused considerable stress for staff in the VSPS settings. Low pay in both the PDN and VSPS settings did have an impact on the type of people who could afford to work in childcare. Early years practitioners who lived independently and had no partners were burdened with working two or more jobs in order to get by.

## 6.2.4 Management

Many of the frustrations discussed by the PDN staff, and much of the unhappiness they expressed, were directly related to the process of being managed. Many staff in both types of settings talked about the importance of having a supportive manager as central to a harmonious team.

*If the management are approachable, then things, I think, seem to go*

*along a lot smoother. (1LPDN)*

The views of both the managers and those being managed were different between the PDN and VSPS participants. It became clear that there were different styles of management within the two setting types. These management styles impacted on the working experiences of staff in different ways.

The participants in the two PDN settings spoke differently about the process of being managed. Whilst both settings' staff expressed issues about management, there was greater discontent with Little Froggies (SPDN). This would suggest that there were specific management issues within this setting.

When talking about the process of being managed, the participants in the PDN settings expressed feelings of anxiety and stress caused when issues were not addressed or properly controlled by the management. This stress spilled over to their home lives and affected them deeply.

*I don't know... it's not so much the job itself: it's more that because we are all so unhappy, and everything is so negative all the time, I get home and I can't even move, like, I know it sounds horrible, but I can't even be bothered with my own child because I am stressed out and things have been said that shouldn't have been said. And, like, most of the time I go home upset because something has been said or someone has spoken to me how I would personally never speak to anyone, and then I just think I cannot be bothered with my own child, I just want to go to bed because I am just knackered and I don't want to do anything. (3SPDN)*

The participants discussed the process of being managed with strong emotion. They said that they felt like they were always in trouble and always felt as if they were not good enough, or as if they had done something wrong.

*... you just don't bother doing anything because you will just get told off for doing it... I always seem to be doing something wrong. (3SPDN)*

The problems that the participants identified were specifically centred on the way that the management spoke to and interacted with them. This had an impact on how they felt at work.

*R: ... it's just like all the snide comments made all the time, stuff like that, like, I*

*just think, like, people shouldn't be spoken to like that for a start.*

*I: Are you talking about the other staff or the management?*

*R: Ummm, certain members of staff and the management as well. I just think no one should be spoken to like that and things should not have been said, like, the things that have been said to me, I've actually gone home in tears because, like, certain things have been said that shouldn't have been said. (3SPDN)*

There was a strong feeling of disengagement from the management. The participants did not discuss the managers as 'one of them' but saw their managers as controlling forces that were frequently harsh and negative.

*Just like... well, they make out like... when I had my interview, they made out like ahhh, everything was perfect, and we will always help you and help you do your NVQ and, like, when you need help with it and you're stuck, we will help you, and then when we actually started it, the manager actually turned around and said "Do you think I have got time to help you? I haven't got time to do that. I struggle with my own stuff to do without helping you." So that, for one, it was... well, it was made clear that she didn't have time to help us do it and that if we wanted it, we would have to do it ourselves and that was it. (3SPDN)*

These sorts of comments made staff feel that they could not use the managers for guidance or support. This created a divide, where the workforce on the floor got on with the work and had minimal to no interactions with the managers. The participants described the management as office staff who demonstrated little understanding of what the practitioners' work involved. This was despite them all having been early years practitioners at the start of their careers and having worked their way up the career ladder.

*... you would think the higher-level managers would understand because they have been in the job role before, but they don't. Now they are out of it, and out of the nurseries. (1SPDN)*

Staff in the PDN settings did not speak respectfully of the management. They felt that the managers had given up on the important work of being with children, almost as if the managers had sold themselves out. Staff did not seem to know what the managers did all day, as this was never communicated to them.

*... to be honest, the managers here don't do a lot really, and I would rather be with the children than sat in an office. (4SPDN)*

The lack of transparency about the managers' work created a cloak of distrust. The management felt largely inaccessible to staff, and they had limited relationships with them. Staff sometimes discussed managers with disdain, as if they had somehow lowered their standards when they became managers.

*Initially, I thought I would work my way up and become management, but now I think there couldn't be anything worse than being management and staying in this company. (6LPDN)*

Staff felt that the day-to-day concerns were left unaddressed by the management. Small issues would slowly manifest and escalate until they were large burdens for the staff. This resulted in low morale and unhappiness. When asked why they did not complain to the management or make their feelings known, they responded:

*You would just be told it is your job. Nothing would happen really; you just would have to get on. There is no point complaining 'cause nothing ever gets done. (6LPDN)*

One participant felt that not being listened to was a major cause of stress for staff.

*I: What do you think is creating the stress? The hours? The children?  
R: Probably the hours or they're not, ummm, being listened to. (2LPDN)*

This dislocation from the management meant that staff felt that they had no one to go to with issues or worries or if they needed help to resolve an issue.

*... I think what's the point of going and taking it further because you know you are not going to get anywhere. There is no... person right at the end who can deal with it. (5LPDN)*

*R: I understand you have to go through a chain and... if a manager can't deal with it, then you are passed on to higher up, but I do feel you are fobbed off all the time, and, you know, let's just tell her this and then she will be quiet for a whilst and she will be alright then...*

*I: So you don't feel your concerns are taken seriously?*

*R: I don't think they are. I don't think they are but... maybe that's the same everywhere you go. (5LPDN)*

This suggests that the staff did not see their managers as part of their working teams but as a level of hierarchy beyond their level of contact. Both of the PDN settings' managers had access to human resources support and administrative support, as well as directors above them. It is difficult to ascertain if their roles were meant to be purely administrative or if this is just how the staff perceived their roles. Either way, staff felt that there was little direct day-to-day support for them from the managers in the PDN settings.

The PDN staff felt that the management had developed a culture of secrecy. The participants felt that the management actively discouraged staff from talking about certain things, such as their pay, with their colleagues. This created a level of unhappiness and mistrust. Staff were suspicious of the management and had become resentful about why issues were not open and transparent.

*It's all secret, hush hush. Ummm... they say they work towards a scale, but, ummm... because you're not meant to be discussing wages, and so...*  
(1SPDN)

*...and we are not allowed to talk about pay either. (4SPDN)*

Staff felt that many rules were arbitrary and influenced by the mood of the manager or the person involved. They discussed the unease at rules that seemed to change, and they felt that rules were made up as the managers went along. Staff struggled to see sense in the system.

*Yeah, and it's just like different rules for different people... it's like no one is really quite sure what the rule is, so they just kind of change it.*  
(5SPDN)

This meant that staff felt nervous of the management and were never sure when they would next be in trouble. They were unclear of what they could do and what they should not do.

*... you are tiptoeing around all the time thinking should I do that or should I not, will I get into trouble... (5SPDN)*

This created a vocational habitus of secrecy and distrust. Some staff in the PDN settings felt that their age and lack of experience were used against them, as they were unclear what they should accept and what they should fight. They felt that the management used their lack of life

experience against them.

*When I started here, I didn't know what it was like to work full time or what it is like to work in a nursery. So you just assume that's right and then as you get further along, like, people who are older than me and have been here longer, it's not that, well, as you start doing things, you think, actually, that's not right... (3SPDN)*

The participants felt disempowered, as they did not know how to argue against things that seemed unjust. Several staff had never had a contract or a job description. Despite this, they worked long hours (most over 45 hours a week), received salaries at minimum wage and were expected to stay late with no notice or overtime payments. This was exploitative and often illegal, but the staff did not know how to challenge or address these issues, as they had limited work experience.

*I: You don't have a contract? So why would you feel obliged to give 12 weeks' notice, if you haven't got a contract?*

*R: Well (manager's name), said by accepting wages, you are accepting the contract, even if we haven't signed one.*

*I: So you have been told by the manager that by accepting a wage, you are agreeing to the contract and it is legally binding?*

*R: Hmm.*

*I: Do you believe that?*

*R: I don't know (Laughs)... I don't understand all these things (Laughs). (5SPDN)*

One company had placed very strict conditions on staff giving notice to leave (Little Froggies, SPDN), saying that staff needed to give three months' notice. Staff who challenged this and said that they would leave before the three months were told that they would not get references. This made them feel trapped in their jobs, and many were unsure of how to get out of a job that they did not enjoy.

*R: Yeah, and how we have to give three months' notice or whatever it is.*

*I: You have to give three months' notice?*

*R: Yeah.*

*I: And what happens if you don't give three months' notice?*

*R: I don't know. It will affect your reference, won't it? I don't know. (5SPDN)*

Staff described an 'us against them' attitude to the management. They spoke of petty issues that were not managed and escalated to such an extent that it deeply affected them. The

participants felt that the management were 'out to get them'.

*R: Yeah. Yeah. Sometimes it's like they are just out to get you, I mean, the cutlery is hidden if we don't put it away.*

*I: So if you don't put....*

*R: It really isn't helpful.*

*I: If you don't put cutlery away properly, it is hidden?*

*R: Yep.*

*I: Why is that?*

*R: Yeah, instead of being helpful and just taking maybe a mug that has been left on the side and thinking oh, yeah, obviously the girls didn't have time to take it back so I will pop it over, it is hidden. And the bin has been confiscated as well.*

*I: The bin has been confiscated?*

*R: The bin has been confiscated because it wasn't cleaned. The lid was a little bit dirty, and the staffroom bin has been confiscated altogether.*

*I: And what... how does that affect the staff?*

*R: No one can... the morale is like ridiculously low, and no one can be bothered. So, you just feel like everything, all the other stuff that we do, is not appreciated. But the little things, you know, we might forget about cleaning the bin lid or we might forget to take our mug back and then it's like ahhh, my God, it's such a big thing. But when we've like, you know, the rooms are always kept clean and tidy, and the garden is always kept clean and tidy at the end of the day, and we're like, that is never really picked up on. It's the little stupid things that are picked up on. (6LPDN)*

This seemed an extreme reaction by the manager and it had a deep impact on how the staff felt about their work. There was a high importance put on the domestic aspects of the work, such as cleaning, and very little emphasis by the management on how the staff were with the children. The same manager (6SPDN) from Little Froggies did not seem to speak to staff directly about her concerns but relied instead on putting up signs to berate the staff.

*I: Umm, I have noticed a lot of signs about.*

*R: Yeah, and they are quite negative signs as well; it's always like don't do this, don't do that or you need to do this.*

*I: Ummm, would the manager come and speak to you directly?*

*R: No, she will just put up signs. (4SPDN)*

The lack of direct communication between the manager and her staff widened the gap between them, with staff feeling even more unable to approach her for advice or support. Staff felt that the manager did not have the time to speak to them directly, and this made them feel unimportant. Staff talked about feeling belittled by the management. This meant that they did not feel like professionals or as highly regarded members of the workplace but

like children who needed to be controlled and ‘told off’.

*Well... I mean... like, pretty much every other day, someone will ask someone... management... something, and you will just get snapped at, or spoken to like you are a child. (6LPDN)*

*I can't remember the last time someone said something positive to me. It's always “Don't do this” or “Don't do that”, “Make sure you do this”, like, “Don't wash up those paint pots here, do it over there” and “Make sure you clean that up when you have finished.” That kind of like...*

*I: And what impact does that sort of thing have on the staff?*

*R: Well... it is stupid really. I mean, I am going to clean it when I am finished if they just give me a minute, but, don't know, it's just making negative comments like that all the time, it just gets you after a while. It just makes me not want to bother. I just think I am just not going to do anything with the kids cause all I get if I do is moaned at, like being told “Don't use too much of that paper cause that's all we've got and we are not getting any more” and “Well, once it's gone, it's gone” and that's the attitude... (3SPDN)*

One participant expressed her frustration at being ignored by the management and not being acknowledged when she expressed an interest in training or promotion.

*R: The thing that made me really cross was when the new manager came now he said to me “oh”. Well, I said I want the training to be room supervisor and he was like “oh, yeah, we will give you the training” and everything and then he made someone else room supervisor.*

*I: Okay, so you had expressed a desire for more training?*

*R: Oh yes, I expressed a desire for more training but I just haven't been given it. (2LPDN)*

This staff member felt invisible to the management, who just paid her lip service. She reported having only had one appraisal in the two years she had worked there.

*R: I had one appraisal a long, about, about six, or 12 months ago, but it wasn't a proper appraisal because like it was with the deputy manager that was then and she had just then, it was really difficult like, the manager, the deputy manager left and the manager had just made someone a deputy manager and she wasn't, she was just like an acting deputy manager and she was the only one that did it and like the thing that really annoyed me she promised me all this stuff, all this training and she promised me, she promised me I'd get training for room supervisor and stuff like that and nothing happened after that.*

*I: Right.*

*R: She told me to type it up but then she got demoted to room supervisor.*

*I: She told you to type it up.*

*R: Yeah.*

*I: Your own appraisal.*

*R: Yeah. She said I had to type it up and she didn't say anything because she got demoted back to room supervisor 'cause we got a new deputy manager and manager, ummm, and then nothing happened. (2LPDN)*

This participant suggested that constant changes in the management team had affected the appraisal system. Her desires for promotion were shared and then forgotten as the management changed. Other participants' experiences of supervision and appraisal will be explored more fully later in the chapter.

When staff felt that the management could not be accessed to help them with day-to-day issues, staff would find their own solutions, which contributed to the weakening of communication between the manager and the staff and deepened the 'us against them' divide.

*Well, when the managers can't be bothered to help us, like, to cover breaks and stuff like that, ummm, when they can't be bothered to come and do it, they just leave us, and we just sort it out ourselves. (3SPDN)*

The participants felt that the management saw them as just one part of the adult-to-child ratio. They felt that the managers did not see them as trusted and valued member of staff but as numbers needed to ensure that the settings stayed within the legal adult-to-child ratio.

*... I am just a body. (2LPDN)*

Managers frequently used the legal adult-to-child ratio as a reason why staff could not leave the building when their shifts ended, needed to work extra days or needed to stay on the premises during their lunch breaks.

*R: ...obviously I do a late a week, which is till 6 o'clock, and I get told that means I can have an hour lunch break and then that's quarter of an hour.*

*I: So, that hour lunch break, I have been told in the past you can't leave the building.*

*R: Yeah, for the ratio.*

*I: So you have to take overtime added to your lunchtime and you have to remain in the building?*

*R: Yeah. (4SPDN)*

This acted as a way of controlling staff, which left them feeling disempowered. Even their unpaid time was controlled by the management, taking away any freedoms the staff had. They felt that they had no say and no control, and there was a sense of alienation and disempowerment.

The culmination of feeling alienated, belittled and that the management were 'out to get them' resulted in low morale. The participants discussed feeling tired, fed up and emotionally low. This impacted on the way they worked, mostly expressed as a feeling of 'can't be bothered' and displayed in an act of resigned compliance. This resulted in the staff doing the bare minimum. There seemed to be little emphasis on educational quality, more of just getting through the jobs that mattered, such as keeping the place clean.

*I: And are you worried about being told off. Is that something that happens frequently?*

*R: Yeah. But for silly little things, like having paint on my uniform and stuff like that. I almost get to the point where I think I won't do any painting with the kids because if I do I will get paint on myself and then I will be in trouble, so it's so pointless... I don't think there is anyone who isn't fed up... you get to the point where you have had so many little knocks, like, nothing is good. When I started, I absolutely loved it; I did loads of stuff and it was so much fun, but it gets to the point where you have been knocked down and down and down until eventually you think I really can't be bothered any more. (5SPDN)*

*... yeah, it's just the way you are treated. If you are not treated very nicely and you are not valued, then you're not gonna want to do the best you can, basically, and it's not going to help the morale. (6LPDN)*

There was a core feeling for these staff that they were constantly diverted from their primary purpose. Certainly, these managers seemed to put pressures on staff that did divert them from caring for and teaching the children. Some of the participants who expressed being unhappy felt that this was how all work was, as if being unhappy and stressed was what work was like in all workplaces. This made them feel trapped and acted as a barrier to leaving to find different jobs. They had also developed a belief that this was what all work in childcare was like, despite having no other working experiences to compare it with.

*R: It's rubbish. Really bad... I just think people are not appreciated, like they are not thanked or appreciated, and it doesn't take much to thank people at the end of the day.*

*I: So why do they stay?*

*R: I guess... I guess... it's the whole... is the grass greener on the other side?  
A lot of people who work as nursery nurses are younger girls. You won't, you know... you very seldom go into a nursery and see, you know, a whole nursery full of mature women. There is obviously a reason for that.*

*(1SPDN)*

This participant expressed the belief that you would not see a nursery of older staff. However, in the VSPS settings, this is exactly what you would see, with the average staff age of 44 years. 1SPDN had only experienced a workforce of young and relatively inexperienced staff, and it was difficult for her to imagine anything else. Her reference to "is the grass greener on the other side?" reflects her own understanding of working in childcare. She had the assumption that this was as good as it gets. There appeared to be a lack of awareness in the PDN settings about the wider workforce outside of their own settings. They assumed that all childcare work was the same and that their experiences were those of all early years practitioners. This led them to feeling trapped.

Many of the participants in the PDN settings saw the issues at work as beyond their ability to change or improve. Their experiences had developed into a self-resignation that working life was oppressive, stressful and out of their control. The feelings of tiredness, low self-esteem and weaknesses in the management in PDN settings impacted the running of the nurseries in many ways. Staff talked of major problems, which staff kept hidden from the children's parents. Whilst staff felt so much despair at the management, they still kept their thoughts to themselves and did not share the settings' weaknesses and their daily frustrations with the clients, the parents of the children they cared for.

*R: I just don't like the way it is run. You know, there is never enough money to buy, never enough money to buy appropriate resources, like, we have just run out of washing powder for four days and we have had to wash the kids' sheets in just hot water, with no washing powder, and I just think, I just... I wouldn't want to send my child here.*

*I: And why do you think, how do you think the parents would react if they knew?*

*R: I think they would be fuming, the amount of money they have to pay. I mean, they are paying £48.80 a day and still there is not enough washing powder for the sheets. (6LPDN)*

There was an understanding that work frustrations were not to be shared with parents. This suggests that the culture of secrecy extended to many areas of the settings. The

staff may have been unhappy, but they did as they were asked and ensured that the parents were unaware of the issues that were affecting the settings and their children.

The participants in the VSPS settings described their managers and the process of being managed in a very different way. The VSPS staff described their managers as present in their everyday work. They seemed to feel that the managers were senior members of staff but played an important part in the day-to-day work with the children. Staff valued the managers who managed to find time to be with the children.

*I think (manager's name) is really fortunate in that she can still be with the children some of the time, but I think a lot of managers don't: that contact is gone. (1VSPS1)*

The VSPS staff felt that their managers were leading practitioners and mentors to them, not only in their day-to-day work but also through the process of gaining their qualifications and doing training.

*(Manager's name) is just so supportive about me with my training and with the Level 3, she's, she's, I guess I would say she is really my mentor. (Name) has helped me a lot with my course. She was just there like "you can do this, come on, you can do this", and even when I am nervous about something, she is like "But you are good, of course you can." (4VSPS2)*

This made staff feel that their managers were knowledgeable and people to look up to. This gave them confidence in the management. One participant from a VSPS setting had started her working life in a PDN nursery. She compared the management from the start of her working days to the support she was receiving in her current job in the VSPS setting.

*Oh... well, I feel so supported by (manager's name) here. I feel if there was anything more, if I wanted to go on further training, she would always support me, whereas I didn't feel that I had that support before. I felt I was just a member of the team there, you know, just to make up the ratios, and here I feel if there was anything I wanted to do, then (manager's name) would make it possible. (2VSPS 1)*

This member of staff clearly reflected on the impact of different management styles. She felt that she was well supported and known as an individual in her current job, whereas in the PDN setting, she had been unsupported and had believed that her purpose was just to fill the ratio.

This directly impacted on how she felt about her work.

Senior staff in the VSPS settings described delegated or collegial-style management. This meant that responsibilities were shared out among senior staff, creating a senior management team. This provided opportunities for staff to develop expertise, as well as to share the leadership load.

*We, (name), (name) and myself, are sort of the three main, we're called the senior staff team, so we actually run it. Right, so (name) is the deputy manager, (name) oversees all the, she does all of the planning, so she has one day in the office on a Friday. She does all the planning and all of the development areas and everything with the children, so she does all of that and then I do all of the rotas and everything else. (1VSPS2)*

In the VSPS settings, the multi-level management teams allowed the decision-making process to be shared. This meant that there was more than one person that staff could go to with a concern or a worry. It also meant that the pastoral aspect of managing staff was evenly distributed.

The management in the VSPS settings spent considerable time with the children, either working with and being responsible for children as a key person or as cover for staff who were ill or doing other tasks, such as paperwork.

*Ummm, most of my days begin with the children. I do a, ummm, a start off with ratios for a morning session, which involves doing the activity whether it be inside or outside, singing, tidying and tidying and tidying... Ah, I do one-to-one with one of our little girls, ummm, playing really, but also at the same time keeping an eye on where everybody is and what everybody's doing, see if we need more staff out or in. It's constantly thinking about where everybody is, what needs to be done and playing with the children, talking with the children, which is the best part really. And by lunch time I am in the office and, ummm, I do all my admin stuff, bits and pieces from the afternoon onwards, and also I am sleep monitor then. If someone goes to sleep, I am usually watching them because they are in here, so it's easier for me to keep an eye on them. (7VSPS1)*

This is a key difference to the management in the PDN settings, who rarely spent time with the children and rarely covered for staff, meaning that their role was office based.

*I: What percentage of your day or your week would you say you spend on paperwork?*

*R: About 90% of it.*

*I: So the vast majority?*

*R: Yeah. (6SPDN)*

Having a manager that staff felt that they could approach supported positive consonance about work. Such participants described a strong feeling of being part of a team. They did not feel alone, or as part of a ratio, but as valid members of a team.

*... but we're all a close team, and I'd say, you know, if, if I had any worries about anything, I could go to (manager's name) straight away. (6VSPS1)*

*It is very much a team. (1VSPS2)*

The feeling of being part of an effective and harmonious team had a positive impact on staff sense of belonging and self-worth and was a vital part of creating positive consonance.

The managers were interviewed to gain their perspectives on working life. Each of them had been an early years practitioner at the start of their career, and some still considered themselves to be so but now working in a managerial capacity. The managers in the VSPS settings felt that they needed to stay hands-on in order to be positive role models for staff. They felt that this part of their work made them more accepted by the team and broke down any barriers between them as managers and staff on the floor.

*... I feel positively strongly that if I don't do the stuff I'm asking the staff to do, I don't know how hard it is when they moan back to me. (7VSPS1)*

This was not echoed so much by the managers in the PDN settings, who felt that their role was more office based. One manager in a PDN described the things she did during her day.

*R: So, it's like either doing invoices or making sure the wages are done or writing letters to parents... ummm... (the deputy) is very good, she helps out with lots; she does the allocation and things like that.*

*I: Hmm.*

*R: Ummm... health and safety, you know the risk assessments, things like that. (6SPDN)*

The other manager from the PDN sector explained the importance of visiting the rooms on a

daily basis but described how this could easily be squeezed out of the day by other aspects of the work, such as paperwork expectations and deadlines.

*Yeah, it's essential (to be in the rooms), but it's the one thing that goes 'cause if you... it's black and white, you have to get the fees off parents, it's black and white you have to get the invoices off to them, it's black and white you have to respond to any e-mails, it's black and white you, ahhh, you have to do any number of things, apply for early years grants, blah, blah, blah, it could go on forever and what, what goes is, ummm, if you don't go into the rooms one day, no one notices, so nobody, I mean the staff in the rooms know, but no one else knows. Ofsted don't know, parents don't know, ummm, your bosses don't know. You could do it for a day, you could do it for a week, you could do it for two weeks. I know several managers who the staff never see them, ummm, so it's easy to do this job for a certain amount of time without ever going into the rooms, or going into the rooms but not doing anything, so just showing your face but not really challenging anyone. (4LPDN)*

This manager discussed many tasks, which were mostly administrative, that ate away at his time as a manager. Whilst he acknowledged the importance of being in the rooms and with staff, he also identified how easy it was not to do this. He believed that the directors and higher-level managers placed emphasis on paperwork, as this was what they chased up and demanded from him. Sending invoices to parents and collecting fees were central parts of his work. The senior-level managers had limited interest in how each room was running or how the staff were working as a team, so the pressure was on the manager to prioritise the financial and administrative aspects of running the business. He also stressed the importance of visiting rooms on a daily basis, but he did not refer to having time to actually work with the children. He used the phrase “showing your face but not really challenging anyone”, suggesting that he did not see visiting rooms as important in order to interact with children and to model best practice to his staff, but rather to check that staff were doing what they should be doing.

One of the managers in a VSPS setting had prior experience managing a PDN setting. She reflected on the differences in managing the two and the overall differences in the workplace culture.

*R: I spent no time with the children in the private setting, and it is very money orientated. The staff are treated shockingly, used and abused really. They are paid the minimum wage because it is all money led and we were, we were like good cop and bad cop as directors. I was the good, kind one, and the other director was the grouchy one who was winding everybody up, so everybody would come to me to moan about her, ummm, I think it's the money, it's a money thing, it's the cutting corners, ahhh...*

*I: And what impact does that, ummm, have on the quality of the setting?*

*R: Ummm, massive, massively, because there are corners being cut. So the children don't get the care they need, I feel from a supervision point of view, your ratios, the number of staff, making sure the staff are motivated. If the staff are not treated very well, they are not motivated, so they just stand around and do not engage with the children. (7VSPS1)*

This manager highlighted her belief that staff were central to everything. She felt that treating staff well kept them motivated and engaged. Her belief that the people of the nursery were the most important aspect of the work described a culture of people rather than profit.

The managers in both the PDN and VSPS settings had their own frustrations at work, which were different to staff frustrations. They discussed juggling many responsibilities and the associated pressure of being the one in charge.

*I feel like I'm juggling all the time, all the balls in the air, from wanting to spend time with the children, wanting, having to coach the staff, sometimes, knowing there is a shedload of paperwork that needs sorting out in there and... it's the juggling of all the stuff. (1VSPS2)*

The managers in the PDN and VSPS settings all expressed how complex and pressured a job it was. One manager felt that she did not want to manage any more. Like her staff, she felt trapped in the job, being unsure what else she could do. So, she continued with her role, even though she did not want to do it.

*R: ... I don't think I want to be a manager, to be honest with you... if I could earn what I do now, where I didn't have to manage anyone, I would love it.*

*I: Is it, is managing staff quite wearing?*

*R: Yeah. But you know, it's, it's the whole thing, it's like you've got the responsibility of all the children, all the staff...*

*I: Yeah.*

*R: ...the parents come to you with all their complaints. 'Cause as a manager, that's all, you don't get the fun stuff. (6SPDN)*

This manager discussed the pressure of managing others and how her motivation to remain as a manager was purely because of the higher salary. She reflected on having fallen into the post of manager after being persuaded by the directors to step up.

*... I had to be pushed into it... I never wanted to become a room manager, I never wanted to become a deputy, I never wanted to become manager (Laughs). (6SPDN)*

This manager had worked in the same nursery for 18 years, having been offered the job after a college training placement. She had never worked in any other nursery and had never worked in any other type of job. She felt that her role offered her little satisfaction but had no idea what else she wanted to do. She had no aspirations to move on. She felt that she needed the salary and was too old to retrain for any other job, although she was only 37 years of age at the time of the interview.

*R: Yeah. I can't afford to start again. At my age as well, it's also... you know, I don't want to go into a room of, like, 20-year-olds. (6SPDN)*

This participant was the manager of Little Froggies, and it was her staff who suffered the most-pronounced feelings of low morale and dissatisfaction at work. The majority of the participants interviewed at Little Froggies said that they were looking for different jobs. The manager had created high levels of tension between her as the manager and her staff, which dramatically impacted how the early years practitioners felt about their work, with high levels of negative consonance. This manager seemed unable to reflect on this or to judge how she was perceived by others as a manager.

*I: Would you say you are respected in your role?*

*R: Ah...*

*I: In general, by parents, staff, community...*

*R: ... that's a difficult one. I don't see the parents 'cause I am out here; I don't think I see the parents enough as it is, and sometimes I don't think I have that connection with parents because I kind of don't see them. Unless I am over there... (6SPDN)*

This manager rarely left her office, even to interact with parents. She did not seem to think that building relationships with parents or getting to know them was her responsibility. She did not prioritise going over to meet parents. She blamed this lack of interaction on the location of her office, rather than as her responsibility to forge relationships.

*When my office was where we are now, I used to see parents a lot more, and I felt more a part of the team, sort of like I felt more on level with the parents. (6SPDN)*

It is true that her office was in a different building to the nursery, but they were only a few metres apart, constituting little physical barrier. This passive attitude towards making and

sustaining relationships extended to her staff, supporting the staff feeling that the manager was not interested or involved in their work. This management style created a culture of disassociation, where the manager and the staff worked in separate circles, rarely understanding each other's agendas or pressures.

The managers from the VSPS sector had both received further training since becoming managers. They felt that this had supported them in their capacity to manage staff, and it gave them more confidence in their work.

*I: You've done the foundation degree, you're doing the degree?*

*R: Yes, I am just topping up to the full degree.*

*I: And that extra training has...*

*R: It gives you confidence, and the courage of your convictions... I can do this.*

*I've got the piece of paper that says I can do this, I can do this. (7VSPS1)*

The two managers in the PDN settings had learned about management on the job and reported copying the systems of a mentor, rather than having any external training.

*I: Have you ever been part of any type of mentoring programme?*

*R: Only informally, with a manager once for about three months, but no, not really. (4LPDN)*

Most of the managers had worked their way up the system, starting as assistants or coming straight from college as early years practitioners. Many of them had remained with the same companies for most of their working lives. This meant that they did not have any experiences of other settings or other management styles than those they had experienced themselves. The style of management was often a replication of the management they had experienced. There were limited opportunities for new managers to reflect if this style was positive or negative or to understand any other childcare philosophies or practices beyond their own companies. This also meant that managerial habits were passed along, from manager to staff, until there was an acceptance that this was how it was always done. An example of this was the attitude towards staff supervision and the appraisal system. One manager in the PDN sector admitted having very few appraisals in his working life, and he replicated this practice with his own staff.

*I: Are you, do you get appraisals? How does that system work as a manager?*

*R: Ah, I first became a manager in 2002, and I think I have had one or two in that time. So very rarely, but also with my foot, when the boot has been on*

*the other foot, as a regional manager, I didn't really carry them out either. It's one of those, it just doesn't tend to happen 'cause there are just so many other pressures all the time, and that's in various different roles in various different companies. Umm, it, they are, and in some ways you get almost ongoing appraisals when you are a manager 'cause you do get a feeling, you can tell when, when they are happy and not happy with you, you can tell when there are problems and when there are not. (4LPDN)*

This manager suggested that there was no need for an appraisal system, as he could tell if his bosses were happy or not happy and likewise could tell if there was a problem with staff or not. However, this attitude did not correlate with the staff feeling of being managed, who felt that the managers did not understand their issues or when there were problems.

There appears to be a difference in the attitudes of managers between the PDN and VSPS settings about the processes of supervising staff. This attitude extended further to the value placed on staff training and development. The managers in the PDN settings felt that it was unnecessary and placed little importance on ensuring that staff attended training and development. One manager reflected this when discussing his own training.

*... all throughout my career, I have had really difficult challenges in childcare. I have always learned from them, so I haven't done any formal training. I haven't felt the need to do it, and it hasn't done me any harm either. (4LPDN)*

The managers working in the PDN settings had an attitude that staff were more dispensable, probably reinforced by the constant turnover of staff, and felt that training happened on the job, rather than through attending externally run courses. There seemed to be little interest in interacting with the wider early years world, and there was a focus on self-sufficiency.

The VSPS settings, who held on to staff for a long time, felt that staff development was essential to keeping staff well trained and motivated in their work. The comments from VSPS staff will be discussed in more detail below in the section about professional development.

It was noticeable that the managers in the PDN and VSPS settings spoke about their staff in different ways. The two VSPS managers spoke highly of their teams and the individuals within the teams, and overall they reflected a positive working environment.

*... the staff we have feel valued and, in my opinion, the staff are our biggest asset; they are our biggest resource for the children, so if they are looked after, respected*

*and valued, they will stay and they will work better. (7VSPS1)*

*Everybody here enjoys coming to work and says, yeah they have their ups and downs, but most people really like it here. (1VSPS2)*

The two managers in the PDN settings spoke about their staff with a different tone. They spoke in negative ways that reinforced the 'us against them' attitude expressed by the staff.

*... too self-centred these girls, a lot of them these days. (4LPDN)*

*Not wanting to sound too old... but I sometimes... there are a lot of younger people these days who are coming into a job who think, and I am not just talking about this profession either because I have heard it from other people too, where they come in and think they know it all, and they shouldn't be doing this or shouldn't be doing that and they don't realise they have to start at the bottom and work up. (6SPDN)*

These managers seemed to have little connection with the staff or empathy or understanding. There seemed to be a culture of separation between the managers and their staff in the PDN settings. This impacted on how the management treated their staff and the types of daily interactions that happened between them. The PDN managers relied on a top-down management structure, and the VSPS managers worked hard on creating a collegial approach. This seemed to happen subconsciously and seemed to reflect a deeper ethos about the purpose of the provision.

### **6.2.5 Recruitment/turnover**

The two setting types faced different levels of staff turnover. This impacted recruitment in different ways, as there was a different level of need. The managers of the VSPS settings reported a very low turnover of staff.

*I: And what's your staff turnover like here?*

*R: Ummm, I think there has been three... people since I have been here.*

*I: And how long have you been here?*

*R: Five years? (7VSPS1)*

*I: And your turnover?*

*R: Our turnover is not too bad; in fact it is very good. (2VSPS2)*

Some staff in the VSPS settings had worked in the same pre-school for over 20 years (7VSPS1, 5VSPS1 and 1VSPS2). When the VSPS settings did have vacancies, they relied on taking on people known to them, rather than advertising for outsiders as in the common recruitment system.

*So they said I could volunteer here and after I volunteered here for hardly any time at all, they said would I consider working here, and so I came to work here, and so I never really had a proper interview or applied for the job. (3VSPS2)*

Vacancies in the VSPS settings rarely came up, and if someone wanted to reduce their hours or leave, their position was usually filled by adding hours to part-time staff contracts or by taking on an exceptionally good volunteer. Alongside this, the managers of the VSPS settings reported being swamped by people wanting to work for them. The managers reported being sent curriculum vitae weekly, even when they were not advertising.

*... I get CVs nearly every week. People e-mail them in, they post them in, they ring me up. I've got a drawer full of them. (1VSPS1)*

*They come knocking, saying "have you got any jobs?" (7VSPS1)*

One manager felt that this was because the setting was so well known and had been established for such a long time. She felt that it had a strong reputation for looking after staff, and many people were attracted to this. I asked why they had such low staff turnover compared to private settings, which can be up to 40% annually.

*It's partly because we are older, I think. The staff at day care are younger and there is a lot of maternity leave and to leave and be... somewhere else, ummm, I think people are happy in their work basically. (3VSPS2)*

The PDN settings had a very different situation in both turnover and recruitment.

*I: And is there high staff turnover?*

*R: Ummm... yeah... there is starting to be... yeah. (6LPDN)*

In one case, the PDN manager reported having low turnover but then described eight out of 45 staff 'moving on' in five months. This figure is very high when compared with the figures discussed by the VSPS settings of losing three staff in five years.

*I: So, what's, what's your staff turnover like?*

*R: Umm, at the moment here, it is quite low. Ah, we've been, when I first came here in October, I think we moved on about eight or nine people. (4LPDN)*

This would suggest that the concept of 'high staff turnover' is measured differently in different sectors. If the PDN manager considered 17% staff turnover in five months low, this would suggest that he has seen turnover much higher than this at a different point in time.

Recruiting suitable staff was a difficult task for the PDN settings. They did not report being handed CVs or having people phone them asking if they had any work. One manager talked very openly about the issues around recruiting staff.

*... recruitment of decent staff is really difficult. I think this nursery has had over 150 applicants since last January, January 2012, say in a 15-month period. It's not bad, and that's not with continuous advertising either.*  
*(4LPDN)*

*I: ... what's it like recruiting at the moment?*

*R: Very difficult.*

*I: Is it difficult to get qualified staff or is it difficult to get staff in general?*

*R: Any staff really. (6SPDN)*

He suggested that recruitment and advertising were almost continuous. This meant that the recruitment of staff was a task that took a large part of the manager's time. This same manager then went on to paint a grim picture about the quality of applicants he did get.

*There are plenty of people knocking around, but the, the quality, the lower end of the quality of that spectrum is absolutely, you know, as appalling... you would never, they would never... they are unemployable people. Umm, but I have known a number of unemployable people be employed in nurseries. These are people who would not get a job anywhere, in ah, Tesco's, work anywhere else, and then they come and work in nurseries. (4LPDN)*

He described the impact of taking on unsuitable people. Unsuitable potential staff needed a lot of support in order to meet their own personal needs. This had an impact on the level of care and education that they could provide to the children in their care. He described a set of applicants who are attracted to working with children in order to support their own emotional needs. They believe that working with children will fulfil their own desire to feel loved.

*But there are, in every single nursery I have worked at or had any involvement in, there are a significant number of girls with really low self-esteem and it has impacted on the children's lives in some way, shape or form. It's, it's a massive problem... (4LPDN)*

The continuous issue of finding suitable candidates for jobs was a battle for the management. The image of nursery nursing as playing with children created a misunderstanding of what the work involved. This lack of understanding of all the aspects of the work and the physicality of the work attracted the wrong type of applicant and led to many of them leaving quickly as they came to understand what the work involved.

*You've got to be able to cope with the pressure; physically you've got to cope with it, which is another increasing problem, ummm, about the health and wellbeing and weight of some of the staff, which is something I have noticed has gone up so much over the years, so physically they have got to be up for it, they've got to really, they have got to be emotionally stable to look after children, not to need the children more than the children need them. (4LPDN)*

I asked this manager if he felt that applicants with a qualification brought a higher quality of work to the setting. He placed little importance on qualifications, as he felt that the quality of the qualifications was so low.

*The quality of people I've seen put through a Level 2 and 3 qualification is staggering, in this nursery and my last job, consistently. (4LPDN)*

Instead, he looked for other qualities, such as enthusiasm and willingness to learn and develop, and he had the attitude that he would need to retrain staff into the nursery's way of doing things, whether they had a qualification or not.

*They need to have, their own self-esteem needs to be high; you've got to be able to cope with the pressures that the job entails. Those qualities outweigh any qualification that you could get. (4LPDN)*

The managers in the PDN and VSPS agreed that there had been a change in the pool of potential staff over time and that the attitudes of young people now entering the workforce caused them difficulties. Employing staff who did not see childcare as a lifelong career resulted in higher staff turnover than they had previously experienced.

*... because staff are not staying, well from my experience, from what I am seeing, staff are not staying as long, you know, they are not learning about the families, and the other thing is staff are now travelling in... going back a few years, staff would have come from the local community, they are not now. (2VSPS2)*

The feeling that childcare and nursery nursing was a gap-year job, until they felt ready to follow further qualifications or decided what they wanted to do with the rest of their lives, was confirmed by several of the participants (e.g. 4SPDN).

The combination of the easy entry into the workforce and the desperate need by some settings for any type of staff encouraged staff to see nursery nursing as a short-term option. They saw it as an opportunity to make money whilst they gained other qualifications in the evenings, or whilst they had a gap year, before committing themselves to a lifelong career. This has an effect on the settings, which were unable to develop expertise and experience with long-serving staff. It also had a bearing on staff attitudes to work, as they did not feel a need to develop and show commitment.

All of these factors affected staff turnover and recruitment. Whilst the VSPS settings had little to no issues with recruitment, this was not the case with the PDN settings, which described recruitment as a constant struggle. Low-quality applicants, many of whom were not suitable to work with children, created additional work, as they either quickly left their jobs or needed constant supervision and disciplinary actions. All of this affected management time. This cycle of employing unsuitable people and them leaving deepened the recruitment crisis. It also had an impact on the working environment, as more able staff had to carry the workload of unsuitable staff, increasing stress and tension in the workplace.

### **6.2.6 Supervision and professional development**

Professional development and supervision are two closely connected ideas within early years. Supervision is usually a set of meetings throughout the year between the employer and an employee. Once a year, the supervision meeting is formalised to form an appraisal, where work performance is formally reviewed and future goals are set together. Appraisals and supervision are also used to identify training needs and future aspirations (The Workforce

Improvement Team, 2015). Attending courses and gaining qualifications support the professional development of an individual and support the development of expertise for the setting as a whole (Nutbrown, 2012). It is a requirement of the EYFS framework that staff are regularly supervised and offered opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge (Department for Education, 2014).

Attitudes towards supervision were very different in the PDN and VSPS sectors. All of the participants reported having supervision and appraisals of some kind, although often not regularly. For some of the participants, this had only been done once or twice over several years. Some reported only having one supervision session since they had started with their nursery several years previously, whilst others reported it as a regular event.

*I find it supportive, yes. I think in our appraisals to be told, ummm, you've done really well in this, it gives you a real oomph to go back out there and think. It just gives you such a good feeling that you are doing it right, that you have been told you are doing it right by someone that is in authority to say that, that they have acknowledged that. (4VSPS1)*

Whilst the participants reported having had supervision, there was a clear difference in its perceived effectiveness between the VSPS and PDN settings. Participants from the PDN settings felt that the appraisals were irregular and often tokenistic, with little to no impact on their work or working lives. 1SPDN reported that the supervision was a good time to air concerns but that nothing was ever followed up and there was never any training offered.

*It gives us time to be able to air those (concerns), but I don't necessarily think they are doing what they are supposed to be doing in thinking let's see where this person is, let's see how we can push them further... yeah... do some training, you know. (1SPDN)*

The PDN staff had negative experiences of appraisal. 2LPDN reported an unsatisfactory experience of her supervision. Having only had one supervision in the several years since she started working in the nursery, she found that the process had caused her more frustration and anxiety than if it had not been done at all. During her appraisal, she was promised training opportunities that never eventuated, leaving her feeling angry and frustrated. This process of having conversations about professional development and then having those opportunities taken away negatively affected this participant. New managers disregarded old promises, and this resulted in this staff member feeling overlooked. This made her feel that the whole

appraisal system was a waste of her time. She also reported odd expectations from managers, such as the expectation that she type up her own appraisal. This devalued the appraisal process and left her feeling unimportant and devalued. Other participants in the PDN sector echoed feeling frustrated with supervision. They felt that whatever was said in an appraisal, or whatever they asked for regarding their frustrations or desires for professional development, would not be acted upon.

*I: Have you had an appraisal?*

*R: Ummm, yeah... I had one... it must have been about six months ago now.*

*I: And how did that support your training or your skills?*

*R: It didn't really make a difference, to be honest. Anything I say, they don't do anything about.*

*I: And were targets set?*

*R: Yeah, but they don't get reviewed or anything. (4SPDN)*

*R: Ahhh, yeah, we do have our appraisals every year.*

*I: And has that supported you? Have you had targets set?*

*R: Ah, yeah, they are set and then nothing else is really said about it or about them.*

*I: So a bit like training then?*

*R: Yeah, nothing ever comes out of it.*

*I: So, each year when you have your appraisal, what happens if those targets haven't been met or they haven't done what they have promised?*

*R: Ah, nothing really. (6LPDN)*

Supervisions were being done to meet the statutory requirements of the EYFS framework, which requires that staff have regular supervision. Inspectors check these requirements, so managers are keen to ensure that they are done. However, the effectiveness and impact of these supervisions on staff in the PDN settings seemed to be minimal.

The VSPS settings' managers had a different perspective on performance management, which was completed on a regular cycle and seemed to be highly valued. On top of annual supervisions, managers held six-weekly meetings with each staff member to ensure that communication lines were open and issues were dealt with quickly.

*It's good, yeah. You get feedback about things and little niggly things 'cause I, I don't actually work out there with them every day, I am sort of cut off a bit, so I get the feedback from that. (1VSPS1, manager)*

The experience for the VSPS staff was also more positive than for their PDN colleagues. A staff

member of a VSPS setting suggested that it offered her an opportunity to talk through things; overall, she found it to be a positive and valuable part of her working life.

*... it really works for all of us, I think, because I go into them thinking I don't have much to say and then before I know it I have been in there for two hours because we then just end up talking about all sorts of things.*  
(2VSPS1)

Staff in the VSPS settings who were set targets felt that they helped them to improve their work practice. They felt that the process of supervision and appraisal supported their professional development.

*I: ...does she set you targets for the next one, how does that work, or do you set your own targets?*  
*R: Ummm, no, ummm, yeah, we sit there and say what we think we can do better in and what we'd like to do better in, ummm, things like that, so...*  
*I: So you find it's a positive experience and it supports you professionally?*  
(4VSPS1)

Staff in the PDN and VSPS settings had different training opportunities. The VSPS staff talked of accessing a lot of training, and it was an expectation that they would attend courses and take responsibility for their professional development.

*We do lots of, there is always an opportunity for lots of training. I have kept up to date with my special needs training; we've done maths, language and literacy, ummm... physical ones you know, food hygiene. That was one I wanted to do for quite a few years, and I managed to do that last year, so that was good.* (1VSPS1)

The VSPS staff were motivated to attend courses, as they were paid for attending or were given time off in the working day to attend.

*No, if it falls in your own time and you want to do it, you can do it, but you are paid. The same for network meetings: we're paid for those.* (1VSPS1)

The manager of a VSPS setting discussed having a training plan for the staff at the pre-school, which encompassed all of the staff. On a yearly basis, she would look at weaknesses in the staff as a whole team and then look at which courses were available in order to help to develop specialisms. She would then approach staff to see if they were interested in attending these courses. In this way, dealing with staff development was a planned, strategic activity.

She described staff training as a priority for her as a manager.

*I: So, do you feel training is important for staff?*

*R: Very important, yeah; we've always done loads of training. (1VSPS2)*

This forward planning made staff training a priority and demonstrated her commitment to ensuring that staff were continually improving their practice.

There was a different experience for staff in the PDN settings. Training opportunities rarely came up; if they did, staff were not paid for undertaking the training. Likewise, if the course was on a weekend or an evening, they were not offered any time back.

Frequently, they also had to pay to attend the courses themselves.

*... we have to then pay for the training as well. Not only do we have to pay for the training, but we don't get paid for the time whilst we do it...*  
(1SPDN)

*... you did the, the course, and it was maybe out of your own time but you didn't get paid for it and you didn't get time back, so it was a bit, well, why I am I doing it. (1LPDN)*

Mostly, staff in the PDN settings had very limited access to training. They described being promised training but never being booked on any courses.

*... they don't give reasons, they just say "yeah, yeah, okay, we will put you on that" and then they never get round to it, and every time you say they say "yeah, yeah, yeah, we will get that sorted", and two years down the line I've still not gone on any other training. (6LPDN)*

*I: What if there was a course you wanted to do?*

*R: Yeah, I asked a couple of times if I could do an English as a second language course when (child's name) started, but nothing really came of it, and I did ask if I could do a managing positive behaviour course and she said yeah, but that was the last I heard of that.*

*I: So nothing came of it.*

*R: No. (5SPDN)*

The PDN settings seemed to have the more introspective view that training was not necessary and that managers could keep staff on track. This impacted on how valued the staff felt and added to their belief that they were just there to fill ratios and were not worthy of training and

development. This added to their understanding of the work as being a short-term job.

Staff felt that managers who allowed them to attend training valued them. In opposition to this, those who attended training in their own time or who had to pay for training, such as in the PDN settings, felt undervalued. Issues of training availability were not just financial but represented a greater belief in the value and worth of training.

## **Summary**

This chapter has explored in detail the similarities and the considerable differences in experiences for staff working in PDN and VSPS settings. The similarities in working experiences in both types of provision included a broadly similar experience of the daily tasks they were required to do. Experiences of the burden of paperwork were the same, with most of the participants disliking the paperwork load but understanding the need for it. Experiences of working with parents were positive for most staff, as were their experiences with Ofsted, using the EYFS framework and using other policy documents.

All staff were overwhelmingly rewarded by their relationships and interactions with children. The high element of emotional labour was considered a very positive part of their work. For most staff, this element of their work was the greatest motivational factor for entering the job and the overriding reason for staying in childcare. Lastly, the majority of staff had very similar, negative experiences of early years qualifications, feeling that they did little to support them or prepare them for the job.

The differences in working experiences between the PDN and VSPS participants were considerable. The ages and experiences of staff were different in the two setting types, with the older and more-experienced staff working in the VSPS settings. There were vast differences in the hours and salaries between the two types of settings, with those in the PDN settings working much longer hours for similar pay to their VSPS colleagues.

The PDN participants struggled with a larger workload, as they were responsible for a great deal of heavy cleaning, which the VSPS staff were not involved in. Major differences existed in the organisational structures and the responsibilities of managers, which had a direct impact on staff and how they felt about their work. For example, the managers in the PDN settings needed to complete a lot of administrative duties, such as creating invoices and pursuing

outstanding payments, which the VSPS managers were less involved in. The experiences of both the managers and those being managed were different, with a more-negative response being expressed by those in the PDN settings.

There were considerable differences in staff turnover and the recruitment process, with major recruitment problems expressed by the PDN managers. The VSPS managers had very low staff turnover and very rarely needed to recruit publicly, as they relied on employing existing volunteers and extending part-time contracts. People wishing to work for them frequently approached them, offering up their CVs. This happened even if they did not have a vacancy, allowing the managers to have a large choice of applicants. The PDN settings had a different situation, and the managers frequently needed to advertise vacancies and to employ almost anyone who applied, as they had great difficulty recruiting.

The last difference explored revolved around staff supervision and professional development opportunities. Staff in the VSPS settings had frequent training opportunities and were supervised regularly. This process made staff feel valued and encouraged them to develop a long-term view of their work. The PDN staff had infrequent or no opportunities to attend courses. This led to them seeing their work as a short-term option, before moving on to a long-term career in a different sector. This created a recruitment and retention crisis in the PDN sector, which was not reflected in the VSPS settings.



## Chapter 7: Discussion

This study set out to explore the working experiences of early years practitioners in two different setting types. In order to address this aim, the study focused on two research questions:

1. What influences early years practitioners' working identities?
2. How are early years practitioners' working experiences similar or different in PDN and VSPS settings?

The research utilised 25 semi-structured interviews in four early years settings to answer these questions.

The two preceding chapters presented the results as they applied to the research questions. It is within the findings that the relationship between the two research questions becomes clear. The working experiences of early years practitioners are different in PDN and VSPS settings, and these differences affect the type of working identity that is formed.

This chapter will discuss the results and will consider the implications of the new knowledge gained from this research. The chapter will conclude by discussing the limitations of the study and identifying potential future research.

### 7.1 Working identity

The central theme of this research was exploring the working identities of early years practitioners and considering the differences in identities in two different types of settings. Research on working identity is valuable, as the development of a positive working identity leads to greater staff retention and overall work satisfaction (Popova-Nowak, 2010).

Working identity has been considered in a generalised sense in this study, dividing experiences between PDN and VSPS settings. It is important to remember that each participant had his or her own personal working identity. This study cannot represent or claim to represent each participant's working identity. However, the participants did express commonalities about their working lives, which differed between the PDN and VSPS settings. The commonalities of

responses have been given greater weight than individual responses, and these formed the analysis as presented in the previous two chapters.

The data clearly demonstrates that the working experiences and working identities of staff in the VSPS and PDN settings were different. The PDN staff were unhappier with many aspects of their work. The VSPS staff were more settled and did not express a desire to leave their jobs. The elements that impact working identity, such as organisational context, staff team, feeling valued, management and career prospects, had an influence on all staff, regardless of the type of setting they worked in. It was in the differences of these experiences that working identities were different.

Popova-Nowak's work (2010) demonstrates the influence of general life experiences on working identity. It is notable that the two setting types had different staff demographics, with the VSPSs having older, more-experienced staff than the PDNs did. Differences in life experiences and previous work or school experiences affected how the participants felt about their work. The older, more-mature staff in the VSPSs expressed more happiness in their work. It is difficult to say if this was because of their age, setting type or a wholly different reason. Whatever this may be, the age difference of 20 years between the two groups is substantial. Related to this is the difference in years worked in childcare, with a difference of 7.8 years more for the VSPS staff. It is unclear from the data as to why older women worked in the VSPS settings and younger women worked in the PDNs. This is a potential subject for future research.

There may be some connection between the high level of recruitment needed in the PDNs and their lack of older staff. The difference in the ages and experiences of staff between the two setting types has not been identified in previous research. This is important, as managers need to reflect on their staff teams. Those with unstable staff and high staff turnover may benefit from attracting more-mature staff. However, if older, more-experienced staff do not apply for jobs in PDN settings, then perhaps this is a reflection of working conditions that older, more-experienced staff will not tolerate. The participants in the PDN settings spoke negatively of the long hours they worked and about being spoken to badly by the management. This type of working experience is less likely to be tolerated by a more-mature, -confident and -experienced employee. The key differences in the ages and experiences of the early years practitioners between the settings appear to have had a marked difference on many elements

of working identity identified by Kirpal (2004), such as the experience of the working team, the work culture and the impact of management.

Much of the research in the literature review makes claims about the class grouping and educational histories of early years practitioners. This is described by Bourdieu (1998) as habitus and is used to describe why working-class girls get working-class jobs. The participants in this study had broadly similar backgrounds, or habitus, having been raised in upper-working-class families and with previous experiences caring for children before working in childcare. These findings were in many ways similar to existing literature, which portrays early years practitioners as young women from working-class backgrounds, with low educational qualifications and limited aspirations (Rolfe, 2005; Moss, 2009). This finding was not different in the VSPS and PDN settings and can be generalised to the participants of this study. The participants also reflected the attributes described by Colley (2006): being 'nice girls' with good morals who felt they were kind, gentle and loving. Colley et al. (2003) describe early years practitioners as having specific elements, such as similar upbringings, social classes, belief systems and cultures, that are integral to developing vocational habitus – the process of becoming the right person for the job.

If it can be said that early years practitioners are recruited from within this profile, this affects how companies and managers should target recruitment. Whilst there is a drive to get more degree-qualified staff within settings, it may be that these staff progress from a vocational qualification to a degree, rather than being recruited to childcare after completing a degree. Certainly, many of the participants who aspired to go on to university did not have any desire to return to childcare. This causes complications, as the government is striving to make the job more attractive to graduates (Truss, 2013). Many of the participants in this study working in the PDN settings did not see working in early years as a long-term option, and they did not see it as work to return to after university. There is scope to further explore in research why VSPSs have more success in retaining staff, as well as attracting older staff. Understanding this could be central in reducing the current recruitment crisis reported in early years (Moss, 2009; Caroll, Smith and Oliver, 2008).

## 7.2 Organisational Context

The organisational contexts of the settings had a marked impact on the identities of the participants. The organisational context considers the structures, resources, functions,

behaviour, culture and management of an organisation (Popova-Nowak, 2010). The clearest difference between the two setting types was evident in their organisational structures. Whilst boundaries about the purposes of different types of childcare settings are blurred, there is a fundamental difference in their purpose. These differences have existed since PDNs entered the sector in great numbers in the 1990s. Most private nurseries are run on a market model, with a clear hierarchy with directors and shareholders or owners at the top. This organisational structure has a clear emphasis on profit and competition with other providers (Moss, 2009). Whilst many VSPSs have needed to adopt a more business-like approach in order to compete with PDNs, their structure is fundamentally different. A voluntary committee of parents manages most pre-schools. Whilst finance is important to keep VSPSs running, most operate on a non-profit basis, and many of them are registered as charities.

This change in emphasis on organisational structure, running for profit or not for profit, has had a large impact on the working conditions for staff. This has deeply affected their working experiences and hence their working identities. Participants in the PDN settings spoke of a lack of resources, such as washing powder, paint and craft materials. They spoke of managers being very harsh on them if the managers perceived materials being used wastefully. The staff expressed frustration at this and suggested that they were expected to cover this situation up from parents, for whom they had to provide a show about how the nursery was operating. These sentiments were not expressed by any of the participants in the VSPS settings. Whilst it may appear that money was tighter in the PDN settings, parents of children in the PDN settings were paying vastly higher fees than parents of children in the VSPSs were. Making the assumption that staff costs, rent and other expenditures such as gas, food and electricity are basically the same across settings (and this was not explored in this research, but there is no reason why they should not be comparable), there must be greater costs or pressure for more profit within the PDN settings. Whilst it may appear that the two types of provision are meeting the needs of different families, a deeper scrutiny of the issue suggests that the workforce is suffering from these structural differences.

Neoliberalism considers the effect of political movements towards the privatisation of previously publically owned commodities (Goodfellow, 2005). Neoliberalism considers developing a competitive marketplace to be the greatest model for economic and individual success. Those who support the neoliberal movement would suggest that privatisation creates competition, which in turn creates quality and choice within the market. The development of

the PDN sector within childcare is an example of neoliberalisation. The introduction of private settings to the childcare industry over the past 25 years has raised some ethical dilemmas not previously faced in the childcare sector.

*The construction of childcare service provision as an industry where products are made, and industry ventures or businesses are purchased, is alien to a humanistic appreciation of the child. This raises the issue of who is the client of the provision of childcare... (Goodfellow, 2005, p.60)*

Whilst the two provisions, PDN and VSPS, appear to work well side by side, deeper scrutiny shows that this is not the case. Registrations within the two provisions demonstrate that PDN settings are on the increase and VSPS settings are on the decrease (see Figure 2.1, Chapter 2). The competitive nature of this new marketplace has meant that pre-schools need to change their practices in order to survive. Rather than having two different types of provision, offering more choice for parents, the field is narrowing, with one model quickly overtaking the other. If the current trend in registrations continues, there is a potential for VSPSs to vanish from the childcare scene due to an inability to compete within this new market model.

The shift towards a profit-driven market model has altered the early years scene from one that focused on the care and education of young children to one where the primary focus is to meet the needs of working parents and to fill the wider remit of government expectations for working families. This changes the basic philosophy about the purpose and aim of early years care and education, from focusing on preparing children for the move to formal schooling, with an educational focus, to providing childcare support for working families.

*The suggestion here is that when placed in the context of childcare, services within private and corporate childcare centres are more likely to view shareholders and/or parents as their clients than they are the children. (Goodfellow, 2005, p.60)*

Jokovich (2002) points out that whilst there are Ofsted regulations regarding quality of care and education, there is no regulation system created from within the market. It could be argued that the Ofsted regulations are so stringent that there is no necessity for internal regulation. However, this means that there is little requirement for settings to come together to create models of best practice within the sector. There is evidence within this study that managers do not pursue any aspects of work not specifically detailed in Ofsted regulations. For

example, training courses that are mandatory by Ofsted requirements, such as first aid, child protection and food hygiene, are completed, but training that supports staff knowledge but is non-statutory training, such as pedagogy, child development or behaviour management, is not accessed. This was most evident in the PDN settings, where staff described very limited or no training and professional development. The lack of engagement with training and other systems of support leaves settings isolated, in a cycle of repeating poor management practices, as there is no process of professional reflection. It also leaves individual practitioners feeling isolated, not benefitting from mentoring or peer support. Practitioners develop a very narrow view of what childcare, especially outstanding childcare, can look like. This was evident when the PDN participants suggested that there was no point changing jobs, despite them being unhappy, as they thought that all nurseries were the same (1SPDN).

The literature review demonstrates that there is little research into the movements of the childcare market and even less into the impact of these market developments on staff within the sector (Ball, 2007). Kilderry (2006) poses some challenging questions about this market development within the early years education system when asking to what extent early childhood education/care should be run for profit or if it should be a commodity owned by the community. She raises questions about the ethical principles of having early childhood services being reduced to a shareholder trading activity with stocks traded alongside other market commodities. Although the moral aspects of privatisation have not been a feature of this study, it is an aspect of the discussion around the neoliberalisation of the early years sector that cannot be ignored. There are also worrying indications from other research, such as that conducted by Cleveland et al. (2007), that suggests that quality is lower in PDN settings. This area would benefit from further research within the English model of early years care and education.

It can be proposed that when there is a need to pay shareholders and to reduce costs to improve profits, staff salaries become a target for cost cutting. These issues flag up potential problems for the long-term development of the childcare sector, especially as competitive pressures from the private sector are resulting in fewer pre-schools. It is possible that VSPS settings may eventually be squeezed out of the marketplace or may need to change their organisational structures to survive in the competitive, profit-driven marketplace of early years care and education.

There is a gap in the literature and empirical research centring on the impact of the physical working environment on nursery staff. The findings of this research demonstrate that the work environment does have an impact on staff, particularly if the environment is challenging. Small rooms with too many children made staff feel unhappy in their work, leaving staff feeling stressed. In one setting, the staff spaces were full of negative signs put up by the management, which made them feel like they were being constantly controlled and not trusted. Whilst this may highlight a specific weakness in management, it did have a negative impact on the working identities of the staff within that setting who felt the management were out to get them. These staff felt untrusted and spoke negatively about their work. Staff who are not offered a suitable working environment are more prone to stress and are more likely to have negative working identities. This needs to be considered carefully by the management, as it places undue stress on staff.

The team of people whom individuals worked with influenced their levels of happiness at work. Those with a positive and supportive team, who worked well together and supported each other, reported more satisfaction in work. Those who worked in a fragmented and unsupportive team expressed dissatisfaction with their work. This finding is in line with Kirpal (2004) who links close working teams to positive working identity. The management, and the process of being managed, directly influenced the workings of a team. The managers who developed and supported their teams had staff who reported more-positive feelings about work. Those who did not support their staff and based themselves in the office, away from children and staff, had much higher staff team dissatisfaction. In this study, those in the VSPS settings spoke highly of their teams and the support they offered. This was not evident in the PDN teams, who seemed to feel less supported by their colleagues.

Managers who want to create a supportive and harmonious team need to consider the level of contact that they have with their staff. This seemed to be challenging in the PDNs, where a top-down hierarchy appeared to impact how much contact the managers had with staff and children. The 'us and them' divide had the greatest negative effect on staff. The level of contact with the manager in both formal (appraisal, mentoring and training offered) and informal ways (speaking face to face on a daily basis and managers finding time for staff) made the biggest impact on how the team came together and how they supported each other.

The managers did not directly speak of the need to develop and build a positive team. The

literature on the quality of early years settings focuses on the qualifications of staff (Nutbrown, 2012; Osgood, 2012). However, this research suggests that the nature of the team and the cohesion between the staff team and the management may also have an influence on quality. A disempowered team with a low sense of cohesion and self-worth cannot possibly perform to a high standard. It is clear from the data that feeling valued and having positive rewards from work are central to developing a positive working identity. Kirpal (2004) highlights this, describing working identity as a reflection of a worker's feeling of value.

### 7.3 Emotional Labour

The data overwhelmingly demonstrates the importance of emotional labour to early years practitioners' sense of value in the work they do. The emotional labour and links to mothering were clearly articulated by the participants as positive parts of their work. They viewed their emotional links to the children as a great motivator and as the most rewarding aspect of their work. Rather than seeing the emotional content of their work as a drain, the participants felt that this was rewarding.

The participants actively reinforced the links between motherhood and their work and felt that it was an essential component. Research, such as that conducted by Hochschild (1983), espouses the links between motherhood and the caring professions as a weakness, but this was not supported by the participants of this research, who found that the emotional labour they participated in on a daily basis was positive and the reason they had entered childcare. This finding highlights the importance of staff having strong emotional connections to their work, as this is the main factor of positive consonance for staff.

In recognition of the importance of emotional labour to the positive identities of early years practitioners, this aspect of their work would benefit from being identified and supported. Payler and Georgeson (2013) discuss the difficulties that the early years workforce have in articulating and justifying their implicit skills, practices and knowledge. This may explain why the participants struggled to identify the caring aspects of their work as a skill, instead describing it as an innate ability. Links to attributes of mothering were perpetuated and celebrated by the participants. They felt that the link to mothering was key to being a good early years practitioner. In order to support these positive rewards, childcare staff should not be removed from working with children by doing heavy cleaning and other tasks, such as

gardening and washing. Other staff, such as cleaners, are better placed to do these tasks, just as administrators are best placed to support managers with paperwork, allowing them to be in the rooms with children. Removing early years practitioners from working with children causes them stress and negative consonance with work. Cutting costs by making childcare staff do cleaning work makes them unhappy and affects their ability to work effectively with children. Whilst it may appear to be a financially sound decision, it contributes to unhappiness at work, resulting in staff eventually leaving childcare. The financial costs of recruitment negate the savings in employing cleaning staff.

In recognition of the value and importance of the emotional labour that early years practitioners participate in on a daily basis, staff would benefit from support and training in this area. This should be part of training courses for those entering the workforce, as well as part of continued professional development for existing staff. Elfer (2012) discusses the need to formally recognise emotional labour and to develop work discussions and reflective practices about this aspect of the work. This is a concept that the findings of this research support. By identifying and developing this aspect of the work, early years practitioners would develop a greater understanding of their working rewards and could identify and hone this set of skills. Page (2011) discusses the importance of staff being supported to develop an understanding of professional love and to understand how this differs from parental love. Page believes that a good understanding of this helps staff to develop the emotional resilience necessary to have a long and rewarding career working with children.

## 7.4 Management

Different perspectives on the role of the manager within the two setting types had a strong influence on whether staff were happy at work and directly contributed to whether staff felt valued. Different models of educational leadership as described by Bush (2015) were presented in Chapter 3. They were managerial leadership, participative leadership and distributed leadership. Using this model as a basis, it can be seen that there were differences in management structures within the PDN and VSPS settings.

The PDN participants used language about their managers that would describe them as displaying a managerial leadership style. They used words that demonstrated the hierarchical nature of the company, such as 'chain' (5LPDN), and phrases such as 'passed higher up' (5LPDN). Staff in the PDNs described their colleagues, especially those in senior positions, in

regard to their work positions, such as manager, deputy manager and room leader. Bush (2015) describes this as a formally structured model, also known as top-down management. This model is derived from Weber's notions of bureaucracy, supporting a hierarchical structure with formal chains of command. Work roles are hierarchical, with very clear job descriptions. This type of manager is goal orientated, with each person within the hierarchy doing a specific task that reflects their expertise. Leaders exercise control over others using discipline, and target-setting is a reflection of this management style.

This style explains why managers in the PDNs were removed from staff and children and did not get immersed in the work of the early years practitioners. The PDN participants felt that this style of leadership made staff feel isolated from the management, as previously discussed.

In contrast, the VSPS participants used words that suggest that their managers used either participative leadership or distributed leadership. This contrasts with the staff in the VSPSs, who called their managers by their names and never seemed to identify the deputies, although there was a named person in this post. Bush (2015) defines participative leadership as the team being empowered to influence the decision-making within the organisation. This means that the team have ownership over decisions and the model is highly democratic. With many similarities, the distributed leadership model is where staff with expertise lead in designated areas, making use of their skills and sharing the decision-making process. This was evidenced when participants said things like "(manager's name)... is just so supportive" (4VSPS2), "I feel so supported" (2VSPS1), "It is very much a team" (1VSPS2) and "... we're all a close team" (6VSPS1). These phrases highlight the view that the whole team is central to the success of the setting and suggest that the manager coordinates this but is not the only person holding responsibility. These staff spoke of a senior team who had different responsibilities, offering the staff a team of people whom they could approach if they had concerns. Each of these senior people also had areas of responsibility, sharing the leadership load, such as one senior staff member in charge of planning and another in charge of rotas (1VSPS2). The importance of the team has been discussed by Kirpal (2004) as an essential part of developing positive working identity.

The experiences of these early years practitioners suggest that managers should develop a 'hands-on' approach, working in the rooms and working directly with children. Such managers have better, more-positive relationships with their staff. Managers need to consider the

importance of being present in the rooms and their role working with children, as this supports the mentoring of staff. It also breaks down the ‘us and them’ divide, which was apparent in settings where managers were in the office. A manager who is present on a daily basis is seen as a leading professional, rather than an administrator tied up in the office.

In order for this to happen, especially in PDN settings, managers must have administrative support, to allow them the time needed to be in the rooms and working with children. This will ensure that they are making the most of their skills working with children and leading staff, and administrators will do the paperwork. Managers should never underestimate the impact of staff feeling that they understand their work and that they are interested in what they do on a daily basis. When a staff member feels that they are “just a body” (2LPDN), used to fill a ratio, their commitment to their work is challenged and they feel little long-term obligation to their work. This can be negated by managers being present and visible and by mentoring best practice with children.

Management in the VSPS settings was more collegial than in the PDN settings, with managers having a more hands-on approach with children. The managers modelled best practice to their staff, reinforcing their expectations on a daily basis. Likewise, staff were empowered to take on responsibility for expertise in the setting, and this ensured a culture of self-reflection and development. The managers had also had different levels of training in the role as manager. The two managers in the VSPS settings had higher-level qualifications, such as degrees, and had done training courses specific to leadership and management. Inversely, the managers in the PDN settings had followed the models of management that they had seen when they were more-junior members of staff. The PDN managers placed little value on additional qualifications or management training. The impact of this was reproduced in their attitudes towards training and developing their own staff. It seems that the PDN settings tended to recycle styles of management, and there was little evidence of innovation or interaction with new ideas, research or pedagogy.

Staff in the VSPS settings expressed happiness in their work and saw themselves as staying in the same settings for an extended time. Overall, these staff did not express a desire to move on or find any other work. In opposition to this, staff in the PDN settings saw their work as a short-term option. Those that were in the job for longer than a few years felt trapped and felt that they could not leave due to controlling factors imposed by the management, such as very

long notice periods. They also had a belief that working life was the same in any nursery and so there was no point leaving, as it would be the same in any job. This led staff to believe that there were no better options in the wider world of childcare.

Harlos and Pinder (2000, cited in Fineman, 2000) describe interaction injustice as mistreatment between an employee and an authority figure. This includes continually criticising but rarely praising staff, which causes frustration, depression and stress. Belittling staff, indirect communication (such as writing negative signs around the staff areas) and not being accessible to staff have a very negative impact on the development of a positive working identity. Harlos and Pinder describe the result of interaction injustice as an inability for staff to make decisions, a loss of self-worth, feeling trapped due to low self-esteem, and emotional swings.

PDN staff describe their management as depending on secrecy, which is reinforced through a powerful hierarchy. An example of this is staff being discouraged from talking about pay or training opportunities. Hochschild (1983) describes top-down management as maintaining a hierarchy through suppressing democracy and creating envy and resentment at the bottom of the hierarchy through secrets. The people at the bottom are never allowed to know how much others earn or what other privileges they enjoy. The management hold secret details of how promotions are awarded and what individuals must do in order to aspire for promotion. Arbitrary decisions about things like promotion deeply unsettle the staff. As a result, they become very untrusting of the management and develop an 'us against them' divide.

Leadership and management had an overwhelming effect on staff identity. Clear differences in management style were apparent between the PDN and VSPS sectors. Not all of these issues can be related to the financial implications of needing to make a profit. Some of the issues, such as a lack of robust appraisals in the PDN sector, stem from inadequate management training for those whose roles change from early years practitioners to managers. It is clear that the effectiveness of the management team has a massive impact on the working experiences of their staff and so should be considered a priority in order to ensure that staff and staff teams work effectively and develop positive and long-term attitudes towards their work. Managers need training themselves on how to manage staff and need to develop a reflective attitude as to the impact they have on their staff. The differences in management styles may be a contributing factor in the difference in turnover between staff in PDN and VSPS settings. Hochschild (1983) suggests that a negative working identity can lead to worker

burnout and a higher incidence of stress-related leave and subsequently high staff turnover. This finding is central to identifying contributing factors to the recruitment crisis in the early years workforce.

Strong criticism of the qualification system by Nutbrown (2012) and Calder (1996) suggests that there is limited respect for childcare qualifications. The participants in both the PDN and VSPS settings were negative about the qualification system: an attitude that supports the literature, suggesting that there is little confidence in the current system of qualifications in childcare.

The participants generally felt that the NVQ had not adequately extended their knowledge or challenged their learning. Staff in both the PDN and VSPS settings felt that they had learned about the job whilst doing it, so the qualification had been recognition of skills, rather than a learning experience. The qualification seemed to offer limited challenge, and participants saw it as a necessity to be qualified, rather than as an opportunity to learn and develop. The government has been focusing on getting degree-qualified staff into settings, and this has been supported through new courses with different entry pathways, supporting existing staff in training whilst they work. The literature review has demonstrated that this is having a positive impact on the quality of provision. However, there seems to be limited attention placed on the training opportunities for those entering the workforce. Despite discontentment with the NVQ system being voiced in research (Nutbrown, 2012) and by staff, there appears to be little government action to change this.

There were more discrepancies with the participants' attitudes towards professional development outside of the NVQ system. Osgood (2005) found that many early years practitioners, especially in the private sector, had poor access to professional development training due to inflexible course delivery and high cost. The Nutbrown report (2012) found that early years practitioners struggled to access high-quality training to support and develop their skills. This was the case for staff in the PDN sector in this research, who reported having minimal additional training, other than mandatory courses, such as first aid. This research did not ask the management why staff in the PDN settings could not attend training. The participants suggested that their managers did not value it, as they were not booked on courses that they requested. There were additional barriers placed on staff from the PDN settings, such as having to pay for their courses and finding their own time to do them. This

suggests that the financial implications of courses, including paying for staff to cover those on training, are a central reason as to why PDN staff do not have the same training opportunities as their peers in VSPSs. This returns to the additional pressures of making a profit in the PDN settings, meaning that investing in staff is given a low priority.

Staff in the VSPS had many opportunities to attend courses and to follow their interests. Many of the participants in this study spoke of frequently attending training. Courses were paid for by the VSPS nurseries, and staff either attended in working hours or had their time paid back. The managers in the VSPS settings regarded training as a high priority for staff and ensured that they had access to regular training opportunities. Staff who were offered training felt valued and empowered to develop expertise, and this may have contributed to the retention of staff in these settings.

Offering training and opportunities for staff to develop expertise and skills should be a priority for all managers. Staff who undertake regular training can develop skills and qualifications and can take on additional responsibilities and feel valued. A robust appraisal and supervision system that helps to identify training interests and needs is essential in order to develop staff confidence in the management. Appraisals and supervision sessions that are used as tick-box exercises frustrate staff and make them feel worthless. Managers need to ensure that anything offered to staff is followed up, as a lack of follow-through makes staff feel that the management team cannot be trusted. This impacts how the team work together.

Due to these differences, the profiles and work trajectories of staff in the two workforces were very different. In the VSPS settings, confident, mature staff were positive role models for new and younger members of staff. Recruitment and staff turnover were minimal and did not require a great deal of management time. These settings could choose from the best applicants and reported very limited issues related to poor-quality staff. In the PDN settings, recruiting high-quality staff was a constant challenge. Staff turnover was extremely high, as were levels of dissatisfaction at work. This created a permanent challenge for the managers, who were constantly battling with staff issues and spent a great deal of time on recruitment.

Rolfe (2005) and Moss (2009) highlight a decreasing labour force putting pressure on recruitment in an industry that faces high staff turnover. The findings of this study partially

support this but the findings indicate a clear difference between the PDN and VSPS settings. Whilst the PDN settings suggested that they struggled with high staff turnover and issues with recruiting high-quality staff, the opposite situation was expressed by the managers in the VSPS settings. This suggests that the literature around recruitment and turnover is not wholly accurate of the early years sector and perhaps only represents issues faced by the PDN sector. This has been discussed in the preceding chapters in some detail. The discussion should now centre on why one part of the sector has no issues with recruiting and retaining staff and the other part of the sector has continued problems. This focus was beyond the remit of this study, as the issue was not explored in enough depth, and would benefit from further scrutiny in future research. One manager highlighted the potentially dangerous situation of employing unsuitable people, as there were no other applicants. This admission raises great concern for child protection, quality of education and longevity of the workforce and highlights the importance of this issue.



## Chapter 8: Conclusion

This research considered the similarities and differences of working experience between PDN and VSPS settings and it explored how working in these settings affects staff working identity. This research is a unique study into the workforce of early years practitioners that develops an understanding of the working experiences of childcare staff in two different types of settings. The data consisted of 25 semi-structured interviews in four locations.

The study has highlighted previously unknown findings about early years practitioners' working identity. The experiences of working in VSPS and PDN within the settings in this study were different. Staff did share similar tasks in their day-to-day work and they all demonstrated a strong vocational and emotional link to their work. However, there are strong differences in the experiences of being managed.

Staff working in the PDN demonstrated greater unhappiness in work and many saw the work as a short-term position. Staff retention was an issue in the PDN settings and managers spent considerable resources on recruitment. The staff in PDN settings were younger, less qualified and enjoyed fewer work benefits such as professional development. Managers expressed a different perspective of their staff and considered their roles as mentors differently. VSPS managers considered their role modelling pedagogy to staff as vital. PDN did not share this view and rarely worked with children or interacted with staff within the rooms.

In summary, the conclusions found in this study are;

- VSPS and PDN attract a different type of staff with older, more experienced staff working in VSPS.
- Staff enter childcare from a variety of pathways and assuming they have no other options open to them is a simplistic view of the workforce. There are varied views of the work with those in PDN often seeing it as a short-term job before finding something else. Staff in VSPS viewed their work as permanent.
- The work environment and the team were very important to working identity formation.

- Emotional connection to children was the strongest motivation for staff. Feeling unable to make this connection with children, by constantly needing to do jobs such as cleaning and paperwork, left staff feeling negative about their work. Staff had a very strong belief in the vocational nature of childcare and they felt this was important.
- Aspirations to be promoted within childcare were not strong.
- There are many similarities working in childcare regardless of the type of setting. The similarities include the day-to-day tasks such as paperwork demands, relating to parents, experiences with Ofsted, the EYFS and other policy documents.
- Most staff deemed qualifications as being ineffective.
- Managers had the biggest impact on staff feeling positive or negative about their work.
- PDN staff were much worse off in regards to pay, hours worked and training opportunities.
- Different organisational structures and management styles are evident in the two types of settings. This had an impact on staff working identity.
- Differences in recruitment, retention, appraisals and professional development were evident in the two types of setting.

The implications of these findings are important on a policy, managerial and employee level and these findings offer a unique view of the current situation in childcare. This work develops an understanding of the differences that exist between provision types and highlights areas that may be causing recruitment and retention issues in the sector.

## **8.1 Implications**

The findings of this study have implications on early years for individual settings, as well as the sector as a whole. The implications for individual settings, or micro implications will be discussed first, and then a wider look at macro implications for the childcare sector will be considered.

The experiences of nursery nurses suggest that the managers that have a 'hands-on' approach, working in the rooms, and working directly with children, have a better, more positive relationship with their staff. Managers need to consider the importance of working with the children as this encourages mentoring of staff. The manager is then seen as a leading

professional rather than an administrator tied up in the office. However, in order for this to happen, especially in FP settings, the managers must have administration support, to allow the time needed to be in the rooms and working with children. This will ensure they are making the most of their skills in childcare and administrators will do the paperwork. Managers should never underestimate the impact of staff feeling they understand their work and that they are interested in what they do on a daily basis. When staff feel they are just a body, used to fill a ratio, their commitment to their work is challenged and they feel little long-term obligation to their work. This can be negated by managers being present and visible and by mentoring best practice with children.

Managers should be very conscious of how they interact with their staff on a daily basis. Belittling staff, indirect communication (such as through signage) and not being accessible to staff has a very negative impact on the development of vocational habitus. New managers should have access to management training to help them understand the implications of their daily interactions with staff. Managers should actively develop close working teams within their settings. Those who reported having a supportive team reported less stress and anxiety at work, and remained in their jobs for longer.

Nursery nursing staff should not be removed from working with the children by doing heavy clearing and other tasks, such as gardening and washing. Other staff, such as cleaners, are better placed to do these tasks, just as administrators are best place supporting managers with paperwork, allowing them to be in the rooms with the children. Removing nursery nurses from working with children causes them stress and negative consonance with work. Cutting costs by making nursery nurses do cleaning work makes them unhappy and affects their ability to work effectively with children. Whilst this may appear to be a financially sound decision, it contributes to unhappiness at work, resulting in staff leaving. The financial costs of recruitment negates savings in employing cleaning staff.

Staff who are overworked through excessive hours have negative consonance with their work . Staff talked about this with more emotion than about low pay or poor working conditions. Whilst many companies may not be able to pay staff more, they can re-consider the impact of

staff burn out from working long days. This issue is a contributor to high staff turnover.

Staff training and opportunities to develop expertise and skill should be a priority for all managers. Staff who enjoy regular training can develop skills and qualifications and take on additional responsibilities and feel valued. A robust appraisal and supervision system that helps to identify training interests and needs is essential in order to develop staff confidence in the management. In opposition, appraisals and supervision that are used as a tick box, frustrates staff and makes them feel worthless. Managers need to ensure anything offered to staff is followed up as lack of follow through makes staff feel the management team cannot be trusted. This impacts how the team work together.

Attracting the right applicants to the workforce has got to be a priority for management teams in order to stem the recruitment crisis within the FP sector. This needs to be done by targeting the type of applicant the workforce are most likely to come from, and then ensure staff are supported and trained, to encourage them to remain in the workforce. Those responsible for recruitment should have a good understanding of the attributes of a successful nursery nurse, and recruit along these lines.

The majority of the issues raised as implications for this research centralise around effective management. Clear differences in management style are apparent between the FP and the NFP sector. Not all of these issues can be related to the financial implications of needing to make a profit. Some of the issues, such as lack of robust appraisals in the FP sector, stem from inadequate management training for those whose roles change from nursery nurses' to managers. It is clear that the effectiveness of the management team has a massive impact on the working experiences of their staff, and so should be considered a priority in order to ensure staff and staff teams work effectively and develop positive and long-term attitudes towards their work.

## 8.2 Study limitations and reflections

Whilst I did all I could to be robust in all aspects of my approach to this research, invariably

there were limitations. There will be many PDN and VSPS settings with contradictory stories to tell. Due to the subjective nature of this type of research, the results cannot be generalised. Rather than striving for a positivistic notion of validity, a reflexive approach was adopted. Identifying and embracing the subjective nature of this study were central to this research, although that means that there are limitations as to how the findings can be interpreted and applied to other provisions.

The focus of the research evolved throughout the data collection. This was mostly in response to the interview process and to me actively reflecting on the responses as each interview was conducted. On reflection, some of the questions would have benefitted from being more focused on individual stories. This would have provided greater depth around some of the issues. A collection of interviews, over time, from fewer participants may have produced a more in-depth study with tighter focus. For example, it would have been beneficial to explore the impact of emotional labour in more depth with each of the participants. This was not done, as the importance of this aspect only became apparent as the participants began to give the same response.

The subject of management had the potential for deeper investigation. At the time of data collection, I had not anticipated the huge effect that the management were having on the early years practitioners and their working experiences. With several of the managers, I felt that many issues, such as the relationships they held with their staff, were not explored in enough detail. Doing this would have provided a greater opportunity to analyse this part of early years practitioners' working lives in depth. There was also no opportunity to interview area managers or directors and committee members. I would have liked to gain their perspectives on the process of managing and the impact that this has on working identity. I would have liked to gain the perspectives of a higher tier of managers to explore the stresses and strains of managing a childcare company. I would have liked to gain their views on training and staff development, as there may have been greater constraints that were not apparent only by talking to managers and staff.

Time restrictions posed the greatest limitation on the study. Being a single researcher faced with the complexities of getting stories in a short timeframe meant that I had to take what I could get. This was exemplified by the fact that it was so difficult to access participants and the

time they could offer for interviews was short. Returning for multiple interviews may have provided greater depth to individual stories, but this was not possible.

The process of conducting research was a steep learning curve. Despite extensive reading on how to conduct interviews and the research process, the process was lengthy, and I encountered many problems that I had not anticipated. For example, I had not expected so many interviews to be cancelled without notice, and I had not anticipated how much time it would take to collect the data. This is part of the learning process of a PhD, and it was an apprenticeship into an awareness of the complexities of conducting research.

Deciphering the audio recordings was more difficult than I had anticipated. I was not prepared for how much meaning is conveyed through gestures and facial expressions. In two cases, I found interpreting the speech on the MP3 player an agonising process, yet on the days of the interviews, I do not recall having any confusion about what each participant was saying. It certainly helped having conducted each interview personally, as I could remember the process of each interview. This aided the transcription process but did not eradicate all of the problems.

I found it difficult not to be too emotive in interviews, and more than once I found myself giving my opinions on certain issues. This was especially the case with older or more-experienced participants, who I felt I made connections with. In order to deal with this, I had to concentrate on becoming less involved in the discussion. I found it a challenge to make the interview an informal discussion without leading too much, as I am naturally a leader. I became acutely aware of how my confidence, opinions, outspoken nature and personality may bias each participant and the interview. Researching can be a lonely process, and I found it difficult not to get involved in conversation with those who were interested in the topics I was exploring. In the analysis, I was conscious of any comments and questions that could have been too leading and ensured that the responses used in the analysis were led by the participants' own stories. I developed a greater understanding of the role of the researcher through personally conducting the interviews. The nuances of quickly gaining the participants' trust but not leading the conversation are a fine art that I need to practise.

At times, I felt very humbled by the stories that people shared with me, many of which never

made it to the thesis discussion. I felt that some stories were too personal and would certainly jeopardise the anonymity of anyone who knew the participants. I did not include these stories or notes of these stories in the transcriptions. Many times, people told me these stories when they knew the MP3 recorder was off, and I assured them at the time that this information would not be included in the research. Some staff felt so overwhelmed by things that had happened to them at work that they felt the need to let off steam or to share with someone who knew childcare but was not involved in the nursery. At times, I felt like a counsellor and just assumed this role as part of the process of listening to people. One of the participants told me that the process of the interview had felt like therapy. Josselson (2007) describes one positive aspect of participating in research for the participant as disclosure, which may lead to growth-promoting self-reflection.

It was hard to hear that some staff were unable to discuss any joy or reward in their positions and often talked in tones of sadness, as if they had somehow been let down or perhaps had been beaten down. Having someone to talk to about their work was a new but rewarding process for many of the participants.

At times, the complexities of balancing home, full-time work and academic life seemed unbearable, and the process seemed endless and pointless. However, once the interviews began, I felt bolstered, as if I had a responsibility to the participants to ensure that the story I had to tell was as accurate as it could be. Not completing the study would have been a disservice to those who had given me their time and shared with me their stories. It was during the data collection that I knew that the project would be completed at any cost. The human interaction of interviewing gave me motivation to complete my thesis.

I became increasingly aware that as a researcher, you cannot be passive, no matter how much you try to remove yourself. There is no doubt I had an influence on the dynamics of the settings and on several individuals whom I interacted with. The process of asking questions led the participants down a path of reflection that they had not previously encountered.

*... the encounter itself inevitably has an impact on the interviewee's life in the sense that it will lead to some rethinking or added meaning making as the interviewee, after the interview, reflects on his/her own words. (Josselson, 2007, p.546)*

Since the interviews were conducted, seven participants in the PDN settings (that I know about) have resigned. All have gone on to college to pursue different careers. Although there is nothing to suggest that this may not have been the case without me meeting them and conducting this research, I do suspect that speaking about their work and recognising how frustrated and unhappy they were spurned them into action.

Two participants were accepted to study nursing degrees, and one participant left her job to study an early years degree. She later returned to childcare but decided to move from the PDN sector to the VSPS sector. Some of these participants have contacted me to tell me of their decisions to move on and get further qualifications. One thanked me, saying that it was our discussion that led her to question why she passively accepted poor working conditions and poor treatment by the manager. One went on further to acknowledge me on the first page of her dissertation, which was a great honour. This has been personally rewarding, but there is no doubt that the process of the research has had implications for some of the individuals.

My years of personal experience within the field have allowed me to have an in-depth understanding of settings and the work of early years practitioners. However, there were also disadvantages. Robson (2002) details these as being uncomfortably close to the situations discussed. This was especially the case when confidential issues came up. This problem became unavoidable when one participant shared a safeguarding concern with me. This participant raised the concerns with me, as she felt that her manager would not listen to her and worried that they may cover up the situation. She was also concerned about the complexities of raising issues about a more senior colleague. She did not know who else to turn to and felt that I was an appropriate outsider to share her concerns with, as she felt that I had some authority and experience within early years. This put me in the dilemma of addressing the issue with the management and potentially jeopardising my research or ignoring a situation that may be putting children at risk.

Having dedicated my working life to children, I decided to address the issue directly with the management. Luckily, they acted professionally and dealt with the situation immediately. However, it could have turned out very differently and I could have lost one of the settings and a selection of interviews. This situation did raise ethical questions around breaching confidence that I was not prepared for. Despite robust and complex ethical applications being granted by

the university, this process did not transfer smoothly into the realities of working life. This situation taught me a valuable lesson about ensuring that as a researcher I am very clear on my ethical and moral standing.

### **8.3 Future research**

The outcomes of this research may have created more questions than they have answered, but this point may be true of all research. Spending time with the early years staff and reading literature about the workforce highlighted how early years practitioners' work is mostly unrepresented. Whilst there is a wealth of information about how young children learn, there is very little information about the people who provide their care and education. There is certainly room for more research on the staffing and management of early years settings.

The literature review identified that there have been some studies into the early years workforce. However, these are scarce, and many gaps remain in the knowledge surrounding early years practitioners' working identities and experiences of work. Colley (2003) conducted qualitative research on the experiences of early years practitioners in training. Most other studies, such as the NZCER (2002) paper, which compared the quality of PDN and VSPS settings, were quantitative, large-scale studies and did not focus on the individual stories of early years practitioners or on gaining their reflections of their work. In contrast, this study centred on the individual stories of early years practitioners and was a qualitative study. It explored participants' working identities and the elements of their work that caused them frustration and satisfaction. Whilst the role of early years practitioner may have similar job descriptions between PDN and VSPS settings, the reality of working in these two types of settings is very different.

This research has highlighted differences in management styles between PDN and VSPS settings and a difference in working experiences within the staff in each of these setting types. There is a need for much greater understanding of the management systems, philosophies and motivations of those who own private settings. For example, do directors see early childhood care and education as a positive business investment with healthy profit margins? On the other hand, are they driven by a desire to work with children to be a wider part of the education system? I would be very interested to understand the experiences of private nursery owners in the field of early years work and to explore their journeys into owning early years

settings. I would like to fully understand the motivations for opening private settings and to hear the experiences and stories of owners and directors in private childcare.

This research has deliberately avoided making judgements or comments about the quality of each nursery. However, with the evidence about the differences between PDNs and VSPSs, the question that is raised is whether any of these issues have an impact on the quality of care and education for children. Exploring how PDN and VSPS settings perform nationally in Ofsted grading would make an interesting comparison.

There has been much reflection on the high turnover and the recruitment crisis in the early years workforce. Authors such as Littler and Salman (1984), Rolfe (2005) and Moss (2009) discuss the implications of high staff turnover and discuss the worsening of the recruitment crisis due to a diminishing pool of people attracted to the workforce. However, these authors have not explored turnover and recruitment in different types of provision. This research has demonstrated discrepancies in both turnover and recruitment between PDN and VSPS settings. Whilst the PDN settings had considerable recruitment issues, especially in regard to employing suitable people, this was not the case in the VSPS settings, which had very low turnover. This finding highlights very different situations regarding recruitment and suggests that the negative picture highlighted by authors such as Littler and Salman (1984), Rolfe (2005) and Moss (2009) only applies to part of the industry. The reasons for the differences in retention and recruitment were explored and created a complex picture of staff satisfaction, highlighting factors that create stress at work. These elements may be used in future research to make suggestions for addressing the shortcomings in PDN recruitment and retention.

This research has highlighted the contradiction of the current view of the role of emotional labour in childcare. Research by authors such as Hochschild (1983) has suggested that emotional labour has a negative impact on working identity. However, participants in this study expressed it as being the most rewarding aspect of their work. There has been little research into the effects of emotional labour in caring professions, such as working with children. It seems that the presence of emotional labour is the motivating factor for staff in childcare; in fact, when staff are removed from interacting with children at an emotional level, through cleaning and paperwork tasks, their levels of dissatisfaction with their work increase. However, emotional labour is still an unrecognised aspect of early years practitioners' work. Although the participants could reflect on the personal satisfaction they received from working

with children and developing emotional bonds with them, they did not recognise this as a form of labour. Instead, they labelled this work as a vocation and felt that the qualities needed to be successful with emotional labour were innate, rather than learned. The early years practitioners perpetuated an understanding of what was needed to be good at the job as holding an inner set of competences, and this allowed them to accept low pay and poor working conditions. The link between mothering and being an early years practitioner was entrenched in the minds of the participants. They saw their abilities to 'mother' the children as a vital part of their role. The participants did not see their role as a professional one, of qualifications, skills and training, but as innate and natural. Future research could explore if more-qualified staff, such as those holding early years degrees, still perpetuate this feeling that their work is an extension of motherhood or if they have developed a more-professional view of their role.

Overall, there is a need for more research centring on the staff who make up the childcare sector. As the profile of childcare provision continues to be under high levels of scrutiny and attracts high levels of political interest, this is more important than in any other time in the history of childcare. With a potentially diminishing number of recruits attracted to the work but greater demand, understanding the nuances of staff recruitment and retention is essential in order to ensure that children continue to receive high levels of care and education between the ages of zero and five years.

#### **8.4 Concluding remarks**

The objective of this study was to answer two research questions, the first centring on exploring elements of early years working identities and the second on examining the similarities and differences of working experiences between VSPS and PDN settings. The findings provide new knowledge about the work of early years practitioners.

This study explored the working experiences of early years practitioners. The results clearly demonstrate a difference of experience for the staff, depending on the structure of the setting. The two groups show very different staffing profiles, as well as very different levels of commitment to the work, different levels of dissatisfaction and different levels of staff turnover. Alongside these findings, this research has challenged the current representation of early years practitioners and demonstrates that staff are dedicated women who highly value

the emotional connections they make with children and who see their work as a vocation. The research leads to further questions about the future of childcare, with registrations in the thriving for-profit sector overtaking registrations for VSPS settings, and ponders how staffing issues and high turnover in the PDN sector are affecting the quality of care and education for our youngest children in England.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: History of early years education and care in the UK

Date	Event
1816	Robert Owen established the first nursery school in the UK. It was in New Lanark in Scotland (1771–1858) and was set up for the children of cotton mill workers.
1870	First Education Act published.
1900	3–5-year-olds began to attend school. By the 1900s, 43% of 3–5-year-olds were in school.
1911	Margaret McMillan established an open-air nursery for poor children in Deptford.
1918	Maternity and Child Welfare Act brought in subsidies for welfare centres, health visitors, food for pregnant and nursing mothers and children under five, crèches and playgroups.
1945	End of the second World War. Women began to get paid jobs to fill the roles left by the shortage of men. This meant that women needed to make long-term childcare arrangements. NNEB founded to provide training for a professional childcare qualification.
1960s	Pre-schools Playgroups Association founded. Women began to look after each other's children in community spaces, such as village halls, so that they could work and children could socialise.
1970s	Pre-schools Playgroups Association received government funding. The Thatcher government proposed that nursery education would be provided for all who wanted it, saying that by 1980, there would be nursery school places for 50% of three-year-olds and 90% of four-year-olds. However, this was not forthcoming because of the economic recession.
1989	Children's Act 1989 published.
1990	Rumbold report <i>Starting with Quality</i> published. This report recommended that nursery provision be expanded to meet demand. This then led to private settings being able to access government funding, and the boom in private provision began.
1994	NNEB and Council for Early Years merged into one qualifying body.
1996	Voucher scheme for free childcare entitlements set up by the Conservative government.
1996	Economic activity of women with children under five rose to a record high of 54%. Provision in the independent sector, such as PDN nurseries, increased dramatically.
1997	Voucher scheme abolished by Labour government. Foundation stage document providing the first early years curriculum launched.
1998	Launch of National Childcare Strategy (New Labour), which included Sure Start. This had the aim of "giving children the best possible start in life" through the improvement of childcare, early education, health and family support, with an emphasis on outreach and community development. This led to the development of children's centres in all communities (Department for Education and Employment, 1997).

2000	Foundation stage curriculum released and became legislation.
2001	National Standards for under-eight day care and childminding services introduced. Ofsted take over inspections of all early years provision, including childminders. CACHE qualification formed.
2003	Green paper <i>Every Child Matters</i> published, which led to the 2004 Children's Act.
2004	<i>Birth to Three</i> document released, providing the first curriculum for children aged 0–3 years.
2004 (Dec)	A ten-year strategy for childcare is published (Labour government), titled <i>Every Child Matters</i> . This commits funding for free nursery education for all 3–4-year-olds.
2004	Work on Childcare Act commenced.
2006	Childcare Act passed into law. This Act detailed secure and sufficient childcare for parents, provided advice and training for providers, laid out inspection specifications, and integrated care and education frameworks under one arrangement.
2008	EYFS introduced, providing a framework for the care and education of children aged 0–5 years of age.
2011	EYFS reviewed by Dame Clare Tickell.
2012	Statutory framework for EYFS released. Nutbrown report <i>Foundations for Quality</i> published.
2013	<i>More Great Childcare</i> report published. EYFS profile handbook published.
2014	Reporting requirements put in place for compulsory two-year-old progress check to be done in childcare settings. Statutory framework for EYFS updated.
2015	Two-year-old early education entitlement began, providing funded nursery places for vulnerable two-year-olds. Pupil premium extended down to three-year-old children. Government announces funding for three-year-olds to go up from 15 to 30 hours free childcare per week.

## **Appendix B: Job description: nursery assistant**

**Purpose of job:** to contribute a high standard of physical, emotional, social and intellectual care for children in the nursery.

### **Main duties:**

- To contribute to a programme of activities suitable to the age range of children in your area in conjunction with other staff
- To keep a proper record of achievement file on your key children for parents
- Work alongside parents of special needs children to give full integration in the nursery
- Support all staff and engage in a good staff team
- Liaise with and support parents and other family members
- To attend ALL out of working hours activities, e.g. training, monthly staff' meetings, parents' evenings, summer fair, Christmas party, etc.
- To be flexible within the working practices of nursery. Be prepared to help where needed, including undertaking certain domestic jobs within the nursery, e.g. preparation of snack meals, cleaning of equipment, etc.
- Work alongside the manager and staff team to ensure that the philosophy behind the project is fulfilled
- Recording accidents in the accident book. Ensure the manager has installed the report before the parent receives it
- Look upon the nursery as a 'whole', be constantly aware of the needs of the children
- Ensure each child is collected by someone known to the nursery
- To respect the confidentiality of information received
- To develop your role within the team, especially with regard to your position as a keyworker

### **Specific child care tasks:**

- The preparation and completion of activities to suit the child's stage of development
- To ensure that mealtimes are a time of pleasant social sharing
- Washing and changing children as required
- Providing comfort and warmth to a poorly child
- To ensure the provision of a high quality environment to meet the needs of individual children from differing cultures and religious backgrounds and stages of development
- To be aware of the high profile of the nursery and to uphold its standards at all times

Sample job description taken from Hampshire County Council website (2013).



## Appendix C: Job description: qualified nursery nurse

### **Job title:** nursery nurse

**Reporting relationships:** reporting directly to the nursery manager. Will be responsible for the functional management of up to two nursery assistants.

### **Purpose of job:**

- to provide a high standard of physical, emotional, social and intellectual care for children placed in the nursery
- to give support to other staff in the nursery
- to implement the daily routine within the nursery

### **Main duties and tasks:**

- plan and implement a programme of activities suitable to the age range of children in your area, in conjunction with other staff
- regularly evaluate the children's development and keep a record on your key children for parents
- work with parents of children with special needs to give full integration in the nursery
- support all staff to maintain a good team working relationship
- liaise with and support parents and other family members
- work alongside the manager and staff team to ensure that the philosophy behind the nursery is fulfilled
- ensure that children are collected by someone known to the nursery
- to develop your role within the team, especially with regard to your work as a keyworker
- to prepare and complete activities to suit the child's stage of development
- washing and changing children as required
- providing comfort to poorly a child
- to provide support and direction to nursery assistants under your supervision
- to be flexible with the working practices of the nursery. Be prepared to help when other areas of the nursery may be short or with domestic duties, or other duties as specified by the nursery manager

### **Practical requirements:**

- shift work of 8 hours per day between 8am-6pm
- to be involved in occasional out of working hours activities as appropriate and as directed by the manager

Sample job description for a nursery nurse taken from Hampshire County Council website (2013).



## **Appendix D: Interview questions**

### **Daily life: rewards and challenges**

Explain to me what you do on a daily basis.

What are the best parts of your job?

What are the worst parts of your job?

### **Aspirations**

Did you always want to be an early years practitioner?

Would you recommend this career to anyone you know?

Describe where you would like to be in five years.

### **Qualifications**

What are your qualifications?

Where/how did you qualify?

Do you ever want to be a manager or be promoted? Why / why not? If yes, how will you achieve this?

What training have you done since you first qualified?

How do you go about accessing training that interests you?

Do you feel that your training was sufficient for the job?

### **Policy and curriculum**

How much of your time do you spend on paperwork?

How do you hear about changes in curriculum and policy or early years?

What are your experiences of Ofsted inspections?

How well do you feel you know the EYFS framework and how to implement it?

Who do you go to if you don't understand something?

### **Reflections on the job**

What makes a good early years practitioner?

Why do you do this job?

Has your job turned out the way you thought it would?

Did you always want to be an early years practitioner?

Have you worked in any other settings? If so, how was the job the same or different?

Do you feel that parents and the community respect you?

How is your performance managed day to day and formally?

Has your job changed much over the time you have worked as an early years practitioner?



## **Appendix E: Manager interview questions**

How many staff are employed here?

What are their qualifications?

How often do staff attend training, and what training do they attend?

Describe the staff turnover (e.g. how long do participants stay?).

Tell me about the process of recruiting staff.

Is recruitment difficult?

How did you become a manager? What was your career path?

What additional training did you receive when you became a manager?

How have you acquired the skills needed to be a manager?

What do you think of the quality of staff coming out of college or the NVQ these days?

Describe the decision-making process in the nursery.



## **Appendix F: Participant information sheet**

### **Views from behind the stair guard: a study of early years practitioners' working lives.**

Researcher: Natasha Crellin

Ethics number: 222978828

**Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form.**

#### **What is the research about?**

As well as working as a teacher, I am a student at Southampton University studying for my PhD. My research is about the working lives of early years practitioners.

In order to gain information for my research, I am looking for early years practitioners to interview so that I can gain an understanding of your work on a daily basis. The questions will centre on daily routines, career progression and how you came to become an early years practitioner.

My work is self-funded, which means that I am doing this study for my own interest and have no ties to any company or organisation. I can only use all the information gained for research purposes. None of the information collected will be passed on to the nursery or the managers or directors.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

I am asking early years practitioners in a variety of settings to volunteer to be interviewed. Everyone who volunteers will be interviewed, but there is no pressure to volunteer. Interviews take between 30 minutes and an hour and will be conducted out of working hours (such as before or after work or in your lunch break).

#### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you choose to take part, we will arrange a time that is convenient for us both. You will be given a copy of the questions before the interview so that you can think about what you might like to say. The interview will be very informal, and we may discuss more questions than the ones given before the interview, depending on how the conversation goes. If you agree, I will record the interview on a small digital voice recorder; otherwise, I will take notes.

#### **Are there any benefits in my taking part?**

There are no short-term benefits to you taking part. However, I believe that early years practitioners are very keen to see their skills and hard work recognised in a more-professional manner than they currently are. The work of early years practitioners has not been researched very thoroughly, so I hope to address this lack of research through my PhD. By participating, you will be helping to support one of the first pieces of research into your work, which aims to highlight many of the issues of being an early years practitioner.

#### **Are there any risks involved?**

I will do my utmost to ensure your confidentiality. No names or identifying features will be described in the final thesis. In order to minimise any form of identification, descriptions will be vague; for example, a nursery may be described as "a small nursery chain in England", and a

participant may be described as “a Level 3 early years practitioner working as a room leader”.

**Will my participation be confidential?**

I will be complying with the Data Protection Act and the Southampton University Ethics Committee regarding the storage of information gained in the interviews. All data, such as interview transcripts, will be stored on a password-protected computer.

**What happens if I change my mind?**

You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, and you do not need to give a reason for doing so. If this is before the interview, we will cancel the session. If you have already had your interview, the information given will be deleted and not used in the study. Choosing to participate or not wishing to participate will not have any impact on your employment.

**What happens if something goes wrong?**

If during or after the research you need to make a complaint about me or the research, you should contact the Southampton University Ethics Committee. The contact details are:

Ros Edwards  
University Ethics Committee  
University of Southampton  
Building 32  
Southampton  
SO17 1BJ  
United Kingdom

**Where can I get more information?**

If at any time you have more questions about the research, please get in touch. My details are:

E-mail: [n.crellin@fsmail.net](mailto:n.crellin@fsmail.net) Tel: 07402843340

## Appendix G: Consent forms

### CONSENT FORM FOR NURSERY PARTICIPATION FROM SETTING MANAGEMENT

**Study title:** Views from behind the stair guard: a study of early years practitioners' working lives.

**Researcher name:** Natasha Crellin

**Study reference:** 222978828

*Please initial the boxes if you agree with the statements:*

I have read and understood the participant information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I am happy for Natasha Crellin to approach nursery participants about participating in the research project.

I am happy for Natasha Crellin to take anonymous field notes about the daily routines and practices of the nursery.

#### ***Data Protection***

*I understand that information collected about the nursery in this study will be stored on a password-protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.*

Name of manager (print name).....

Signature of manager.....

Date.....



## CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

**Study title:** Views from behind the stair guard: a study of early years practitioners' working lives.

**Researcher name:** Natasha Crellin

**Study reference:** 222978828

*Please initial the boxes if you agree with the statements:*

I have read and understood the participant information sheet and have  
had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may  
withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected.

I agree to have my interview audio-recorded.

### ***Data Protection***

*I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password-protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.*

Name of participant (print name).....

Signature of participant.....

Date.....



## Appendix H: Autobiographical account

In order to support reflexivity, I have written a brief autobiographical account that will go some way to describing my subjective positioning within this research project. Several authors discuss components of reflexivity with different subheadings. I have chosen to use Etherington's (2004) elements that impact subjective understanding, including cultural, social, historical, racial and sexual elements.

I was born in 1972 and spent all of my childhood growing up in Canberra, Australia. As the oldest of two children, I was born into a family of two white, working parents. My father held a professional, degree-qualified job and worked in the same government organisation for over 40 years. My mother worked in a variety of jobs, mostly low-level hospital administration. We were always financially comfortable but not rich. As children, we never wanted for anything. I would describe our family as a white, middle-class family living in suburban Australia.

When I grew up in the 1970s, the vast majority of children in Canberra went to their local primary schools. With the exception of a small handful of children who attended religious or private schools, the local schools catered for the children within their catchment areas. I attended my local pre-school, primary school, high school and college. Choice in education was not a well-defined concept in the 1970s and 1980s in Australia. The very large majority of children attended their closest schools. The schools were well resourced and the teaching was considered good by the vast majority of parents. Parents had minimal input or say into the education of their children, and most families were supportive of the education offered.

The schools in Canberra were multicultural. The majority of families were white, but there was a good percentage of Chinese, Indian, Greek, Italian and black children. I feel that I grew up in a multicultural society. Canberra was a planned capital city, which was named and declared in 1911. This makes it historically a new city, with a limited heritage. Skilled and unskilled people from a large range of nationalities were brought in to develop Canberra as a city in the 1950s and 1960s. It is the political capital and houses the majority of the national departments, such as the Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Health. My dad was attracted to Canberra for the employment opportunities, and he emigrated from the UK on a £10 one-way scheme and was well supported by the Australian government to set up a new life in Canberra. Incentives such as subsidised government mortgage schemes saw new families move to the area and quickly settle into new developments in rapidly developing suburbs.

My friends and I had a strong acceptance and enjoyment of a large group of culturally

diverse people. This caused me some confusion when I moved to the UK, where a person's social background and even accent can influence the opportunities they may have. Despite having a mix of races, heritages and nationalities in my class, most of my friends were white. I have spent the majority of my life socialising with white, English-speaking people. Whilst I am very accepting of multiculturalism and enjoy working and relating to people from different cultures, this has not heavily infiltrated my social circles, meaning that multiculturalism is not yet as integrated as I initially felt it might have been.

Most of my friends' parents had at least one parent who was degree educated. In all of my friends' families, both mums and dads worked. This was a reflection of the social grouping and the financial needs in Canberra at the time. Jobs were opening up for young professionals who had moved to Canberra. Housing was heavily subsidised by the government in order to attract people to Canberra. Schools, sports facilities, shops and houses were all still relatively new. All of my friends' parents owned their own houses, mostly from government-subsidised loans. In most households, at least one parent worked for the government. These jobs attracted people to move to and settle in Canberra.

With everyone attending local schools, there was also a mix of wealth, with children from workless families and those from wealthy backgrounds all attending together. As a child growing up in Australia, I had no understanding of class. I still feel that Australia is a largely classless society compared to the UK. Whilst there are rich and poor people, making the transition between these is a matter of work experiences and luck, rather than the family you are born into.

For me growing up as a white woman, I felt that I had as many opportunities as everyone else around me. I never considered myself of any particular class or group. My peers and I chose our careers based on educational accomplishment, interest and motivation. It was certainly an upbringing believing that we could be whatever we set our minds to.

I never considered that I would become a feminist while growing up in Canberra. It never occurred to me that I did not have the same opportunities as my male counterparts. It was not until I was 18, when I began to travel the world, that I realised that this was not the same for all women. Having spent time in Africa, India and Nepal, I began to appreciate how unique my upbringing in Canberra was. It was only through my doctoral studies that I began to identify myself as a feminist and to develop an understanding that many women had not been raised with the same understanding of equality that I had. As an immigrant to the UK, I was shocked to find that some English women did not see their future potential the way I had done growing up in Australia. I began to realise that many women in the UK were still constrained by their class and gender labels, despite growing up in an age of equality and having experienced good-quality education themselves. This is possibly true in Australia; however, growing up,

this was not my experience, so I had never considered myself less able as a woman.

My choice to go to university and become a teacher was entirely my decision. I decided on teaching based on two criteria. I wanted a job that I could do anywhere in the world, as I had a taste and strong desire for continuing to travel, and I wanted professional status to support my aspiration to be financially independent. Teaching suited these criteria perfectly. I also enjoyed working with children and felt that their energy and enthusiasm for life somewhat mirrored my own. After getting my degree in Canberra, I immediately travelled to Kenya, and, after several years teaching, then to England. My desires to travel and be a professional were suitably achieved, and my desire for more education eventually led me down the path of my Master's degree and subsequently a PhD.

In my working life, I have moved from primary classroom teaching to specialising in early years. I have worked as a lecturer, early years consultant and early years inspector. My working career has centred on the English curriculum and the British education system. All of these elements have affected my subjective positioning in relation to my own research. I came into my PhD studies as a white woman who is well educated and well travelled. I am a feminist who believes in empowering women and equal rights for both genders. I have a strong belief in the emancipatory powers of education and have strong feelings towards the importance of high-quality early years education.



## Appendix I: Sample interview transcripts

### 5SPDN

Ethnicity: White

Gender: Female

Age: 20

How long has she been an early years practitioner? Three years

How long in this nursery? Three years

Father's profession: Office worker

Her salary: £12,000

Other jobs worked: Shop assistant

Hours worked per week: 50 hours

Education: NVQ2

Other information: Interviewee lives at home with her mum and dad

I: Can you just explain to me your job role and some of the duties you do on a daily basis.

R: (Laughs). I am nervous; I don't know what to say (Laughs).

I: Are you a nursery assistant?

R: I am a nursery assistant, yeah (Laughs).

I: And what qualifications do you have?

R: I have a Level 2 NVQ.

I: And you are working towards Level 3?

R: Yeah.

I: So, ummm, what made you decide to go into nursery nursing?

R: Because I always liked working with children, I suppose. I don't know really... (Laughs) I don't know. I finished school and I didn't really know what else to do.

I: Did you not get any careers advice? Or... at school?

R: Yeah.

I: Did you do any work experience?

R: No.

I: No work experience?

R: Well, I worked at Budgens (Laughs). I went to college, and I did like half a college course, but it was rubbish.

I: So you started college but you didn't enjoy it?

R: Yeah.

I: So then how did you end up in nursery nursing? Did you have friends that did it?

R: Oh, actually I went to Connexions, or something.

I: Oh yeah.

R: And they gave me a whole bunch of... and like talked about what I might like to do, and I told them I might like to work with children and they gave me like a big list of nurseries and phone numbers in the area.

I: Yeah.

R: And I rang up.

I: This one? Was this the first nursery you worked in?

R: Yeah.

I: And then you did your Level 2 while you worked here?

R: Yeah.

I: And now you are going on to your Level 3?

R: Yeah.

I: So how long have you worked here?

R: Nearly three years.

I: I didn't know you had been here longer than (staff member name).

R: I was here, yeah, a lot longer than (staff member name). I was here, and then I left, and then I came back again.

I: Why did you leave the first time?

R: To go back and do A-levels.

I: And did you do them?

R: No (Laughs). The thing is, I really just wanted to do art and I didn't want to do anything else but they don't let you just do art, they make you do other things. So I didn't... I got about half way through and I thought oh, this is rubbish.

I: And then you came back?

R: And then I came back.

I: And now you are doing your Level 3?

R: Yeah.

I: So what do you do on a daily basis? You care for the children...

R: Yeah... come in, settle them into the room.

I: What age group are you working with?

R: Twos to threes.

I: Twos to threes. So, has nursery nursing been what you thought it was going to be?

R: No.

I: In what ways is it different?

R: There is a lot less being with the children and playing with the children than I thought. I expected to be doing some painting and doing some songs, but, actually, most of it is rushing about making it tidy and getting all the paperwork done and the books done.

I: So there are a lot of jobs that you do that take you away from the children?

R: Yeah.

I: So, ummm... give me an example of some of those.

R: Ummm.

I: What are those books?

R: So they have a book where we write down what they have done in the day, like their sleep, lunch and other food and things like that.

I: Is that for the parents?

R: Yeah. And then we have their development files, which are for observations and stuff. And, yeah, getting art work up on the wall, washing up after lunch and trying to keep everything organised and stuff like that.

I: Would you say there are a lot of domestic duties?

R: Yeah.

I: What are some of the domestic duties you do?

R: Cleaning the room, making the lunch, washing up after lunch.

I: When you say cleaning the room, do you mean putting toys away?

R: No, hoovering and mopping.

I: Hoovering and mopping?

R: Yeah, cleaning the shelves and cleaning the windows.

I: And did you think that was part of your role?

R: No, I suppose not really.

I: That's not what you came into nursery nursing to do, so it came as a bit of a shock?

R: Yeah.

I: Ummm, and what impact do all the jobs have?

R: Well, it takes you away from the children.

I: And how does that affect them?

R: They're not getting enough attention, which makes them misbehave, and you're rushing around and you are so stressed out, so when they want something, you just haven't got the time to sit down and do it.

I: So you think their behaviour is impacted by the lack of attention?

R: Yeah.

I: So you have worked in Budgens before. How does that compare workwise? Obviously the jobs are different.

R: They are really different, yeah.

I: What about the way you were treated as a member of staff?

R: It was, it was much, much better at Budgens. Everything was kind of organised and sorted at Budgens. If there was a rule, then that was the rule. Do you know what I mean? Like if you wanted holiday, then you would fill in a form and they would send you a form back saying whether or not you could have your holiday. There was no, kind of, I don't know...

I: So is it disorganised here?

R: Yeah, definitely.

I: So does that make you feel like, a bit unsure of what's going on?

R: Yeah.

I: Do you have any other examples of disorganisation? So your holidays are a hard thing to do?

R: Yeah, and it's just like different rules for different people, like I was always told if you are unqualified, then you can't be left alone with the children, but then (name) and (name) are always left. Even though I did my Level 2... then they were both allowed to be left on their own. It's like no one is really quite sure what the rule is, so they just kind of change it.

I: And who makes those rules?

R: Managers, I suppose.

I: So do you think the managers make... sort of... arbitrary decisions? They're not set in stone?

R: Yeah.

I: And on what basis do they make those decisions? Favouritism or... ability?

R: In some ways, yeah, and on what they can be bothered to do. Like we had our window locked because we left it open, but then (manager's name) had that gate open wide when she was in the office, but that was okay. It's just... it's just silly.

I: And how does that make you feel as a member of staff?

R: ... not very important, I suppose... I don't know.

I: Is it hard to know what's expected?

R: Yeah... that's the one! (Laughs)... but it is, you know, because you think, can I do this, can't I do this, it's like...

I: Do you or do the staff feel nervous at times?

R: Yeah.

I: And how does that impact your work?

R: Because you are tip-toeing around all the time, thinking should I do that or should I not, will I get into trouble...

I: So do you not think you are treated like a professional?

R: No... totally not.

I: And are you worried about being told off? Is that something that happens frequently?

R: Yeah. But for silly little things like having paint on my uniform and stuff like that. I almost get to the point where I think I won't do any painting with the kids because if I do I will get paint on myself and then I will be in trouble, so it's so pointless...

I: And how often is that balanced with praise?

R: You very rarely get anybody saying anything nice, very, very rarely.

I: So what impact does that have on the staff, on the ethos if you like, and the morale?

R: Everyone is pretty fed up.

I: Fed up?

R: I don't think there is anyone who isn't fed up... you get to the point where you have had so many little knocks, like, nothing is good. When I started, I absolutely loved it; I did loads of stuff and it was so much fun, but it gets to the point where you have been knocked down and down and down until eventually you think I really can't be bothered any more.

I: So, what's the long-term future for you in nursery nursing then? It doesn't sound very positive. Do you think you will be here in five years' time?

R: No.

I: In a year's time?

R: Hopefully not.

I: So you are in a position where you would like to leave as soon as you could?

R: Yeah.

I: And do you want to stay in nursery nursing or have you had enough of nursery nursing?

R: I do still really want to work with children. I really enjoy working with children, but the whole nursery thing is not nice for the kids and it's not nice for us, so it will be something else I think.

I: And do you feel tired each day? Is it a tiring job?

R: Really tired, yeah. I am useless when I get home; I can't do anything.

I: So, what's the worst part of the job?

R: I don't know really. Probably not having the time to do what you want to do with the children. I feel I am not really very nice to the children most of the time because I just don't have the time to do it.

I: And what then would be the best part?

R: Going home (Both laugh)... Ummm, working with the people I work with is nice.

I: So you enjoy working with your colleagues?

R: Yeah, but then it's not always been like that to be fair...

I: Tell me, what... you have been here three years, what... ummm, training and extra skills... what training courses have you done or in what way have your skills been supported? I mean, you have done your Level 2 and now you are doing your Level 3...

R: Yeah, and I have done a first aid course and the safeguarding children course.

I: And they are both mandatory.

R: What does that mean?

I: It means you have to do them by law.

R: Yeah

I: Any other courses?

R: No.

I: What if there was a course you wanted to do? Say you were interested in special needs or Montessori education.

R: Yeah, I asked a couple of times if I could do an English as a second language course when (child's name) started, but nothing really came of it, and I did ask if I could do a managing positive behaviour course and she said yeah, but that was the last I heard of that.

I: So nothing came of it.

R: No.

I: Okay. Ummm... and is it right that your first aid training you had to pay for yourselves and do in your own time?

R: I did have to pay for it, yeah.

I: And to do it in your own time?

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah, and what about the other course? Was that in your own time?

R: The safeguarding, yeah, that was in my own time.

I: What happens if you do overtime, what happens then?

R: Nothing.

I: Do you ever get overtime paid?

R: The only reason you do overtime is because you care about it and you want to get whatever it is you are doing done, but never....

I: So, ummm... how does that compare to Budgens?

R: At Budgens, if you did overtime, you got paid for it, and they would say "thanks very much for doing that". Here, we hardly ever leave at half past five... like the amount of times people have had half their lunch or missed a couple of breaks because we've had visits and things and no one is ever paid for it. But then like (name) did that first aid course and she shouldn't have had to pay for it because she had already paid for her first one. But because she is leaving, they have charged her, and they didn't even tell her they were going to do that.

I: So they are just changing the rules again?

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: So... I mean the impression is all pretty grim, so why is it that you stay?

R: Because it's difficult to find another job when you are working really long hours.

I: So would you say the long hours and how tired you feel make it very difficult for you to find something else?

R: Yeah, and how we have to give two months' notice or whatever it is.

I: You have to give two months' notice?

R: Yeah.

I: And what happens if you don't give two months' notice?

R: I don't know. It will affect your reference, won't it? I don't know.

I: So there seems to be a lot of... a lack of clarity about what happens if this happens, or if that happens. You know, there is no clear structure. For example, when you qualify to Level 3, will you get a pay rise?

R: Yeah, I should do.

I: Do you know that?

R: No.

I: So you're not sure?

R: No.

I: Ummm... so what would it take for you to just... what would be the final straw?

R: As soon as I get another job really.

I: Do you think it has affected your self-esteem being here?

R: Yeah, lots, yeah. Like when I first started, I thought I was quite good at it. All the kids liked me and it was good fun, but like as you get more and more into it, and you get more and more responsibility, the more often you go home and think the kids have

had a horrible day, I have had a horrible day and...

I: Would you ever consider trying it at a different day nursery?

R: I don't know... because I have only ever worked here, it is hard to tell if anywhere else is any different really, so... maybe... maybe a pre-school or something like that.

I: So maybe a pre-school that wasn't private?

R: Yeah, or a government-based place.

I: Have you ever thought of being teaching assistant or anything like that?

R: Ummm... I would quite like to do that.

I: So, have you ever had an appraisal?

R: Yeah.

I: And how did that support you?

R: It was alright.

I: Were you set some targets?

R: I can't remember now, it was such a long time ago. When they did everybody else, they forgot me.

I: So do you not have one every year?

R: Yeah, we are supposed to but I haven't had one this year.

I: Do you have a contract?

R: No.

I: You don't have a contract? So why would you feel obliged to give eight weeks' notice, if you haven't got a contract?

R: Well (manager's name), said by accepting wages, you are accepting the contract, even if we haven't signed one.

I: So you have been told by the manager that by accepting a wage, you are agreeing to the contract and it is legally binding?

R: Hmmmm.

I: Do you believe that?

R: I don't know (Laughs)... I don't understand all these things (Laughs).

I: Would you say that generally it is quite a young staff?

R: Yeah.

I: And because of that, it is very easy to just believe what you are told.

R: Yeah.

I: And do you think it is a conscious decision to employ staff members who are young?

R: Oh yeah, definitely. Because surely if you had the choice between someone who is 20 and who has never worked anywhere compared to someone who is say 40 and has

two kids of their own, that older person is going to be better as a rule, aren't they, but everyone's young.

I: Do you think the pay has anything to do with that?

R: Yeah.

I: How does the pay impact on you?

R: I have no money (Laughs)... and the two people who are unqualified are getting more than me as well.

I: Why is that?

R: Because they are over 21.

I: And what has that got to do with it?

R: There is a different minimum pay thing.

I: So because they are on minimum wage, they are earning more than you as a qualified member of staff?

R: Yeah.

I: How old are you?

R: 20.

I: And do you mind me asking what you're on?

R: I don't actually know (Laughs) I don't know how much it is a year.

I: Would you say it's about £13,000 or less?

R: Less than that. I think it's £12,000 and something. It is just about £800 a month.

I: So when you are 21, your salary will have to go up?

R: It will go up, yeah.

I: So how do you feel knowing you have done some qualifications and there are unqualified staff who are on more than you?

R: Really annoyed, to be honest. Yeah, cause it's hard work, and like (name) gets more than me, and she is allowed to be left alone with the children, but when I did my Level 2 and was nearly finished, I was not allowed to be left, but she was, and she is getting paid more than me, so what was the point in doing it really?

I: And what about the bonus system? Is that the same? Is it arbitrary? You don't know?

R: Yeah, you don't know. We are not allowed to talk about it. It's all very...

I: So you are actively discouraged from talking about money?

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: ...you're depressing me, (name) (Laughs).

R: Yeah... sorry (Laughs).

I: So you see this as a short-term position?

R: Yeah.

I: But you would still like to be working with children, but not doing this?

R: Yeah.

I: Do you think a person who has a family to support could do this job?

R: No... not really.

I: So they aim at attracting the young people who still live at home?

R: Well you just could not afford it, unless you have a very rich husband.

I: So what hours do you work?

R: Quarter past eight until half past five.

I: But you are expected to do longer than that?

R: Yeah. You are supposed to be in the room by ten past eight, but normally people are in by about eight, aren't they, and they don't get out until six o'clock.

I: I think that's all my questions really. Is there anything you want to add about the working lives of early years practitioners?

R: No, not really.

I: What would you say if you had a friend who wanted to be an early years practitioner?

R: I would tell them not to do it... yeah... I would say do something else.

I: So you have no inclination to go back to Budgens?

R: (Laughs)... maybe not full time... good old Budgens... they were the good old days (Laughs).

I: Did you do that when you were a student?

R: Yeah.

I: I will turn it off now, (name).

Interview ends.

Postscript: This member of staff has left the nursery and is now working in a not-for-profit pre-school.

2VSPS1

Ethnicity: White

Gender: Female

Age: 25

How long has she been an early years practitioner? Six years

How long in this nursery? Three years

Father's profession: Prison officer

Her salary: £12,000 pro rata

Other jobs worked: Hairdresser

Hours worked per week: 30 hours

Education: NVQ3

I: So you went to college...

R: I went to college as soon as I left school at 16, yeah, and decided to do childcare 'cause I liked children, ummm... and at the time I think it was just like an easy course really, umm... and then sort of got bored halfway through, but my mum and dad sort of said "finish it, 'cause you never know, you might need it to fall back on" and at that point I thought naaa, I want to go be a hairdresser. But I did finish it and as it happens... well, it was a good thing I did (Laughs).

I: And did you, so... were you advised... when you wanted to do childcare, did you get any advice, like careers advice?

R: Ummm...

I: How did you... or did you just say "I like children and that is what I want to do."

R: Yeah, it was more that, it was more that I enjoyed being around children and thought it would be quite a fun job.

I: And did you have an image in your mind of playing with children?

R: Yeah, just all day long, just playing and having all the fun bits, when actually there is so much more involved in it.

I: So when you actually got on to the job, or did a placement, was it what you thought it would be? Or slightly different?

R: No, well, I mean when I did my work experience at college, I went to (nursery name) where (manager's name) used to run...

I: Oh yeah.

R: And ummm, I, I really enjoyed it there with all the different age ranges, and then I went to a primary school and did, sort of, foundation stage there, which I loved, so that... work experience, you don't really get the whole... obviously paperwork side of it, so I did really enjoy that.

I: Yep.

R: But then I left and went to work in a full-time nursery.

I: Was that a private nursery?

R: Private nursery, and it was a lot harder, obviously, working from seven in the morning to five at night or eight till six.

I: Yep.

R: And the atmosphere is different when you are a member of the staff.

I: So what did you find really challenging about that?

R: The long hours, I think, the really long hours and things, but I loved working with the different age ranges, it was, it was really good fun, but I did find it challenging the really long days.

I: Yeah... and not much holiday.

R: No, four weeks holiday a year. I just felt like it was constant: went to work when it was dark and came home when it was dark. It was really full on, and I was only 16 still, so it did seem a lot.

I: And then you left childcare?

R: Yeah, I worked there for about two years and then left it completely. 'Cause I just sort of, I didn't really enjoy that job very much, so I just had enough of the whole thing completely and went and just got a few different jobs, like working in a retail shops and a hair salon for a while, which I really did like and then I left there and applied here.

I: So what made you decide to come back? Was it your connection with (manager's name) or...?

R: No, because I didn't really have much to do with (manager's name) when I was at (nursery name), it was more her partner who I dealt with, but, ummm... I just... I really missed working with children. I mean because, ahhh, my sister, my sister's got a four-year-old girl, who I spend loads of time with, and just sort of being around her, I thought, I really miss interacting with children and, like, even when people came in to get their hair cut and bring their children, I would be, I would find myself playing with the children and I just missed it. And I knew that I didn't want to go back to a nursery, but I thought, oh, I've always known someone who ran (nursery name) a while ago and I always thought I'd always quite like to work there and I just rang up to see if there were any jobs and then got a call to say there was.

I: So how would you say this job compares to the private setting?

R: Completely different, I think, because I feel that the hours aren't so stressful and obviously you're term time and, I mean, my hours, are quite, I do quite a lot but not nearly on the level of nursery. And I find you've got obviously less children of the age ranges but I find them two completely different settings, preschool and nursery are just completely...

I: And do you... would you say you enjoy this more?

R: Yeah, definitely, I love it here and I just find that also the atmosphere with the staff, because, there... I was working with a lot of young girls before, I found, but now I am the youngest member of staff and I find it's completely different: everyone is much more mature and just gets on.

I: And what impact does that have on morale?

R: Here?

I: Yeah

R: Oh, it makes, every... it makes every... I think the children probably just... get from us that we all have a great relationship and I think it... it really... it really just makes us all just have a good time when we are here.

I: And how do you feel about, ummm... if you compare the two environments? With... ummm, support, professional support that you get as a staff member?

R: Oh... well I feel so supported by (manager's name) here. I feel if there was anything more, if I wanted to go on further training, she would always support me, whereas I didn't feel that I had that support before. I felt I was just a member of the team there, you know, just to make up the ratios, and here I feel if there was anything I wanted to do, then (manager's name) would make it possible.

I: So, if you in your old job say... ummm, wanted to do some training, what would have been the... how would you have gone about that? Or was it just something that was just not possible?

R: Well... I think... ummm, at that time, I just didn't want to, but it would have been possible but not as easily as it would be here. It would have been a lot more in my own time, whereas here it's always, it's always like when I did my level, my NVQ Level 3, it was always incorporated into my working day.

I: Okay, so if you wanted to do a course you might have to do it on the weekend or after hours?

R: Yeah, where possible.

I: And... but here...

R: But I didn't really get...

I: You get paid.

R: Yes... always... and we are always going off out on training courses, whereas I didn't feel, I mean it could have been because of my age, but I didn't feel I was encouraged to go on courses and further my learning, whereas here I feel it is so current; we are always learning more and going on courses.

I: Excellent, and if you... ummm, if you, just changing the subject slightly, if you think about appraisal, or supervisions, or whatever you call it here, so here I believe you have meetings...

R: Supervisory meetings every term, yeah.

I: And in that time you can raise any issues, you can talk about any training you would like to do and perhaps targets are set for you, is that right?

R: Yeah.

I: And perhaps you want to try something new... was that the same for you in the private setting?

R: No, I've never had one before, ever really. And, I mean, here it is a great opportunity to sort of, 'cause you just don't get time in the day to have these chats, and, I mean, like, I want to do some more SEN training and it's a good opportunity, and then (manager's name) knows that's what I want to do and then she looks into it for us.

I: Excellent, so you feel that system is quite supportive?

R: I really do; it really works for all of us, I think, because I go into them thinking I don't have much to say and then before I know it I have been in there for two hours because we then just end up taking about all kinds of things.

I: Yeah, brilliant, ummm, we have sort of leapt around and you have answered loads of my ideas already, so thank you.

R: That's alright.

I: So can I, can I, I just go back, what, so thinking of this job here. Can you give me a little rundown of your daily work? What you do on a day-to-day basis.

R: Well, I mean there are so many, so many different things to say really. I mean, obviously, playing with the children, and, but there are a lot of things that do take you away from that as well because we have, our, we... some of us will have a craft activity one day and I supervise certain afternoon sessions or morning sessions, in which case I am not specifically put anywhere. I will be sort of floating around to make sure everything's going smoothly or I will be out in the garden if I am not, or in the kitchen doing snack... nappies. It's kind of, kind of the same as I would at a nursery I would say, but... just... so many things, I mean, I don't really know how to, I would never have the same day, I'd say.

I: Did you find, ummm, I mean, my experience of day nurseries is you tend to be in one smallish room and that's your world.

R: Yes, I think that is a good way to explain it.

I: Would you feel that here the environment and the, the coverage is a lot...

R: I think it is so much more free-flowing, I really do. I mean, like, we will do snack from 10 o'clock, it will go on till 11:00, and they just come and go as they please... I feel like it is much more sort of time slotted in a nursery and here we, they will be outside from 9:30 sometimes right up until 11:30. And they can come in and out and I feel it's, like you say, you were boxed off to certain rooms. The other children from different age groups wouldn't mix very often.

I: Why do you think that is?

R: Ummm, I just think because of the way that nurseries are structured that it keeps the age ranges together to do different areas... kind of learning I guess.

I: And what impact do you think that has on the children?

R: Ummm, I don't think it is probably great for them. I mean, if they've got a sibling in the elder room, they don't really see each other throughout the day, and I think that is quite upsetting.

I: So you feel that the, sort of mixed, I know you have a shorter age group here, but there are still different ages.

R: Yeah... and I mean...

I: And that sort of free flow?

R: Yeah, still from about two and a half and if you've got a sibling who is two and one

who is four and a half, they will blend when they want to and they will do their own things when they want to, and I think it is nice for them to have that freedom.

I: Yeah, lovely.

R: I do like the mix of all the children and I think it probably helps the younger ones with their confidence.

I: Yes... yeah, they can model for each other...

R: Yeah, exactly.

I: ... and copy each other's behaviour.

R: Yeah, I think it really works well.

I: Lovely... ummm, what do you think in this job, what are the best parts of your job?

R: Just being with the children, I just so, so enjoy being with the children and seeing when they get things, they learn things from us. I enjoy, well, I love doing craft activities with them, and making cards and things like for Mother's Day.

I: Yeah.

R: I love doing that, but I love doing group time as well, seeing that they have gained from us.

I: Excellent. So what would you say are the worst parts?

R: Ummm... well, you've got the really demeaning-ish, sometimes, kind of jobs like changing pants and poo and things like that, but you just, and snotty noses things like that, but it's part of the job, but that's... I would say that is probably the worst part of the job.

I: The poo (Both laugh).

R: Yeah, the poo... but, I mean, after seven years of being in the environment it, it doesn't bother me, it is just part of the job, but, sometimes... yeah.

I: Yeah.

R: I'd say that's it... and potty training (Laughs).

I: Yeah... did you... we have sort of covered this... did you always want to be an early years practitioner? Perhaps... you wanted to work with children but you just fell into nursery nursing?

R: Yeah, I think it did just sort of, I did just kind of fall into it. I wouldn't say I always wanted to do it. When I was younger, I wanted to be a solicitor but... (Laughs)... I think it was more for the money (Laughs) than anything else. When my dad told me it was going to be really hard work, then it was like, okay, ummm (Laughs) but, no, not always. I have always loved being around children, but I, I, I never thought this was where I would end up.

I: Yep... so if you can imagine where you would be in five years' time, what kind of vision do you have for yourself?

R: Well, I think of myself as being here because I have been here four years now and I just think it is very rare to find, especially in nursery nurses' worlds, a job where you

get on with absolutely everybody, you love the setting, you love everything about it.

I: Yep.

R: So I have always kind of felt I am comfortable here...

I: So you want to hold on to that for as long as you can?

R: Yeah, I do, I do 'cause I, I mean, like, I sometimes, I think I'd really like to travel around a bit more and move to a different part of the world, ummm, but I, but my job holds me a lot of the time because I think that's really important and rare to find everything you're comfortable with.

I: Yeah. Do you have any aspirations to ever go into management?

R: Ummm...

I: And progress that way?

R: I....

I: Or is it something you have not thought of?

R: I have, I've thought about it a lot. I mean, I've kind of thought that maybe I'd like to train to be a teacher one day, I mean to, I know... just... I know, my friend's doing it and she says "oh I think you'd be great at it." And I think I, I would, but it is just the thought of how hard it would be to get there that scares me off it sometimes. But I think I would love to teach like foundation stage or something like that.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: So, I've got goals in my head, that's what it is, yeah.

I: Rather than say nursery management you would think of switching to...

R: Yes, I don't think I, I just don't think I could do nursery management; I think it's a really tough job and I think (manager's name) does a fantastic job and I don't know how she does it. I think it's very... yeah... and I don't know if I have got that in me but, then, maybe (Laughs).

I: I am sure you have, I, I think it is an age thing as well, isn't it?

R: Yeah, that's the other thing: at my age, I just couldn't ever imagine taking on that load of...

I: Of paperwork?

R: Yeah... the, the... the amount of paperwork, like you say, even for what you're doing, it's just ridiculous.

I: Yeah.

R: And having the worry if anything goes wrong if you, it's up to that person, I think, maybe, yeah, maybe in ten years' time.

I: Not right now.

R: No, not right now. No, I am very happy in my position (Laughs).

I: So you have an NVQ3?

R: Yes.

I: And did you do that two years in college? Was it a two-year course?

R: No, I did one year in college to NVQ2 and then I did my NVQ3 here.

I: Right, okay, so you came here with a Level 2?

R: Yeah.

I: And then you did work-based training to get your Level 3?

R: Yeah.

I: Lovely... ummm... sorry... we have done all of these... and how do you feel the level of training you have now done, is it sufficient for the job? Do you feel that Level 3 equipped you for what you needed to do?

R: Hmm, no... I think, I think it's more your own experience.

I: So your... most of your experience came from...

R: I mean, I definitely learned more in doing my NVQ3 than I did my NVQ2 because that was more sat in a classroom.

I: Yep.

R: Being in the workplace full time and doing it, definitely. I felt that everything I did for my NVQ I already knew how to do, and it was just more getting a certificate to say it.

I: Okay.

R: I felt that just the experience, I just felt, I felt like I knew what I was doing anyway.

I: Yep.

R: And I wouldn't say that once I had passed that, that I felt I was doing any better at my job.

I: Okay, so it was a formality really?

R: Yeah, kind of, because everyone now has to be at least NVQ3 qualified to work in anywhere don't they?

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: And, I, yeah, definitely more of a formality for me.

I: Yeah. Ummm... if I, if you think about paperwork, because lots of people say that paperwork is having a bigger impact on their work than it did...

R: Definitely.

I: How, what do you... how much time do you think you have to spend on paperwork of any description, planning, profiles, you know sort of learning journeys?

R: Is that in my own time?

I: Yeah... or just say in the job.

R: Oh... I mean... it could... hours. I mean, we do ours in the half term and I spend 12 hours doing my profiles. I've got 12 key children and I spend, even more actually, I

spend about an hour and a half doing each of those and then when I do my planning, that's another hour and a half, which I do that once a term. Yeah, I feel there is a huge, huge amount of paperwork compared, even when I first started here. It seems that every time something new is added that you have to do now for the children.

R: Yeah.

I: So it does take a long time, I find.

I: And do you think that increase in paperwork has increased the quality for the children?

R: Umm... in some ways... I think I... it reminds me of what I, of what I, need to check that they can learn. When I am sat doing my profiles at home, I think I must go and spend some time with (name) because, ummm... because... I don't know if he can, ummm, count to ten and it just reminds me to do those things, so in which case I think it encourages us to spend a little more one-to-one time with the children.

I: So you can see the purpose of the paperwork, but it's the time?

R: I, I can see the purpose of it but to some extent I think there is a lot, too much almost. It just, just keeping a child profile I think is enough I think without all the other added extras. In my opinion.

I: Umm, if there were changes in curriculum or policy, so for example the EYFS has just been revised, how do you hear about that? How do you access that information?

R: Through (manager's name).

I: So your manager?

R: Yeah, she umm, gave us a copy of the new revised EYFS. We take it home. I've got a folder that is just so thick, just of all the new paperwork that comes out. We're either e-mailed it or given it in a booklet to read. And I, we call it our bedtime reading (Both laugh).

R: And I sit there in the evening reading through the mounds of paperwork. So that's, yeah, through my manager is how I always hear about these things.

I: Yep. Ummm, what are your experiences of Ofsted? Inspections?

R: Well, I've only experienced one, which I don't know how I have managed to dodge them, but, ummm, which was here. And... well it was terrifying because I have never experienced it before and I didn't really know what to expect and what to do, and I just... I felt like I was walking around on egg shells all day long. But a really positive outcome at the end. And it has made me feel we are doing a really good job in the setting. So, next time I won't be quite so frightened. Yeah... so it was overall a positive experience. Positive, yeah.

I: Ahhh, that helped to confirm and highlight things.

R: Yeah, and I, every, I mean, I've been reading through Ofsted inspections and things and it's, I think that it's very useful to find out what other settings maybe didn't get that you need and then it reminds us "oh we need to be making sure that we're sitting down and talking to them at snack time." Because, and I find it very interesting, and even to read back on our reports just to pick up on the things we weren't doing to

100%, and just to remind you to do them really, so I think it was a positive experience in the end, but very scary.

I: Yeah, it's just the thought of it, and you hear that word, don't you?

R: Yeah, it's like a swear word almost.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: I just remember seeing them walk through the door and everyone just looked at each other and went all of a sudden...

I: And you just feel sick.

R: Yeah (Laughs), I did feel sick, and it was on our busiest day and it was raining outside, so ummm, but it all worked and it just, yeah, well, it felt like we had really achieved something in the end.

I: Good, ummm... if we think about nursery nursing as a whole, if someone came up to you, a friend, or a friend's daughter, and said "oh I am thinking of working in childcare, what do you think?" what would you say to them about the job?

R: I would say... from my experience, if you want to do the job, look to work in a preschool rather than a nursery because it takes, it just takes up a lot of your time and...

I: And would you recommend it as a profession?

R: Yes, yes I would. But I'd say also that there is not a great deal of money in it.

I: Yeah.

R: So, yeah, which I think is the main thing that everyone feels, that it, for this, for the kind of level, for what you are doing really, it's not a highly paid job, and it should be. But that's, that would be my first thing. But I would obviously say how much I enjoy my job and how much, if they really love children, that they'll get from it.

I: Yeah, lovely, ummm, I think... what... just a quick comment about parents, do you feel that the parents here respect you and the work you do?

R: Yes, I do. I... I mean, most of the parents I've known for a long time who have had older siblings here and I think we do, all of us, form a really good relationship with parents.

I: Yeah.

R: I sometimes from some parents, which are very few, feel they sort of see me as a very young girl and think I am not competent in what I do. Not knowing me but just seeing me and judging me. Which I can, I can probably understand because I look even younger than I am, but I do...

I: Lucky you! (Both laugh)

R: Ummm, I do sometimes think they think I am just a young girl who has just fallen into this job for the sake of it, and, not.... Well, that's my opinion; no one has ever told me that, but I sometimes just think that, yeah.

I: Do you think, ahhh, the parents were different in the private setting? Was it the

same?

R: Ahmm, I felt I had more time to talk to them in the private setting because they all arrived at different points throughout the day.

I: Right.

R: So, and obviously their child was in my care for so many more hours of the day, and I felt that I got to talk to them all individually and let them know how their child has been all day. So I did actually form good relationships with quite a lot of parents there as well, because we spent a lot more time talking.

I: Yeah, yeah, whereas here I assume they all come...

R: Yeah, like on mass.

I: And then more or less...

R: We've all been talking about how we can get the parents to contribute more to their profiles, the children's profiles, and we all said it is so hard to catch them, because they're, it's 30 at once and then they are gone and it's the same. But, I mean, I work, I do the sort of, the after-school club, which we have sort of ten children, and those parents all arrive at different times and that is kind of like the nursery-ish bit of the day.

I: And that changes the dynamics?

R: Yeah. Unfortunately, none of my key children do that bit, so I don't get to chat to them, but the parents who do pick up at that time I feel I definitely do get to talk to a lot more.

I: Yeah, ummm, we have done the rest... we, we talked, ahhh, I talked to another member of staff a little bit about how, I mean, maybe you haven't been here long enough to say, but in the old days, pre-school was literally a couple of hours play but it has evolved now to more of a childcare provision.

R: Yeah.

I: Do you see that in pre-schools? Do you see that the role of a pre-school has changed over time?

R: Definitely, I really do. I mean, because, like, yeah, like you said, even when I started here, there were some sessions there were eight children and we never used to open on a Friday afternoon because it was purely play school and the children were here to play and socialise, and I feel it has massively changed. I mean, we are always joking saying we are a pre-school slash nursery now because we almost offer wrap-around care.

I: Yes, so the, so the whole focus of pre-schools is, I personally feel, is changing quite dramatically.

R: Yeah, because of working parents as well.

I: If I think of the future of pre-schools, in ten years' time, it is going to look different.

R: Yeah.

I: If I think of from where it did, say, when I went to pre-school, where it was literally...

R: It was open two mornings a week or something like that...

I: ... And mums stayed, and mums helped and mums had a coffee.

R: Yeah, and it was a social affair. It was... people were there to be social. You would get ten mums sometimes standing around chatting.

I: Yes. And now with busy working parents and that may impact the time they have got to give.

R: Yeah, if they have got to rush off to work.

I: All of those things, committees struggle because parents are just so busy.

R: They don't have time to be on a committee, I completely agree. Pre-school is changing and it's not... I mean, it used to be called play-group and they changed that name because it's just not play, well, I mean, obviously it is, they're playing, but it is not the only thing that is going on.

I: But the purpose is different.

R: Yeah, the purpose has, I feel, changed. But then I look at some other pre-schools and I think we, even, the pre-schools in (town name) are more moving forward. I mean, I live in (village name) and the pre-school there is in a pack-away. It's a pack-away, ummm, and I think that is still quite old-fashioned.

I: Yes.

R: They are only open, they are open all the mornings but only two afternoons, and I just, I just couldn't imagine us as a preschool being like that anymore.

I: Yes. And I would worry about how sustainable that is because people just can't access those hours any more. Can they?

R: No.

I: Because it means someone is at home. That's all right if you have a younger one, but eventually there comes a time where you can't access that training, that provision.

R: Yeah.

I: And then what's the future? So...

R: That's, yeah, that's what I think, but, I mean, yeah, it is definitely becoming not so pre-school, but I think a lot of people just have to work, and that's, that's why and people want to accommodate for working parents.

I: Yes. Well, I have, we have done all of my questions.

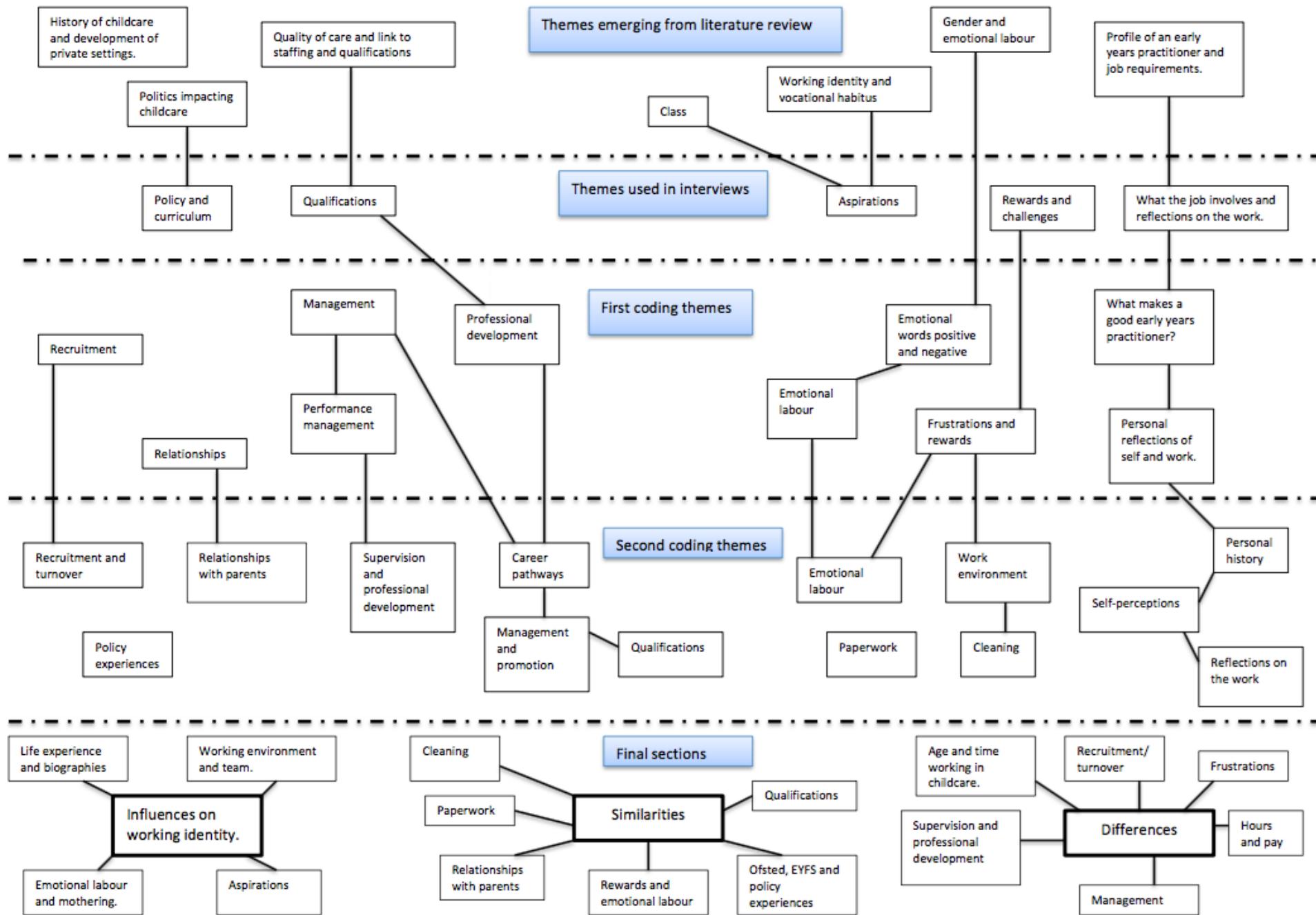
R: Oh, thank you very much.

I: Is there anything else you wanted to add about the provision, or the government, or anything else about nursery nursing in general?

R: No, I think we have covered everything, only that I think we should all be paid huge wages (Laughs).

I: I agree. Well, thank you.

## Appendix J: Analysis process



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