UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMAN, SOCIAL AND MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES

Southampton Education School

ENGAGING WITH CHILDREN'S VOICES: ILLUMINATING PERCEIVED NOTIONS OF INCLUSION IN PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES IN THE RECEPTION CLASS.

by

Patricia Anne Shaw

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this study is to illuminate children's perceived notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities in the Reception class. It also seeks to ascertain how practitioners (teachers, nursery nurses and teaching assistants) respond to children's comments, and whether they can utilise children's perceptions to inform their pedagogical practice.

Empirical research was conducted using qualitative methodology. Reception classes in infant and primary schools in the North of England were selected. Extensive data were gathered with forty children and seven practitioners over a six week period in each of the schools. This included collecting fieldnotes; undertaking observations of children in pedagogical activities; conducting group and individual interviews with children; and individual interviews with practitioners. Participative tools, including photographs and drawings, were used to engage with children's voices, since this was central to the research aim.

All data were systematically analysed and an overall understanding was gained of children's perceived notions of inclusion. These resonate with two dimensions: belonging and relationships (with practitioner and/or child); and democratic pedagogies. Moreover, the research offers a new critique to child-centred pedagogies, which affords greater insight into younger children's perceptions of inclusion, than have been presented in the literature thus far.

Whilst acknowledging the small sample of practitioners, the study's findings are of note when analysed alongside other empirical research. The findings reveal that practitioners involved in this study retain some resistance to responding to the views of young children. Moreover, the findings identify that there is limited evidence of practitioners' serious reconsideration of planning regarding children's perceived notions of inclusion, and that they require a shift in their reasoning. Furthermore, they signify the necessity for greater emphasis on the importance of engaging with children's voices in the training of newly qualified teachers, and the ongoing professional development for all practitioners in early years.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Patricia Anne Shaw

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Engaging with children's voices: Illuminating perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities in the Reception class.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while 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: 7 July 2017

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Lastly, I give thanks to my family, friends and colleagues for their unyielding support. For picking me up when I thought I couldn't go on any more; for the meals and cups of tea to keep me going through the endless hours in front of the computer screen; and the unfailing belief in me that I could do this. I'm glad to prove you right!

Chapter 1:   Introduction

This study explores how an engagement with children's voices could illuminate their perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities in the Reception class (children aged four to five years). It is predicated on the knowledge that young children have the right to express their views on issues that matter to them, in accordance with the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). Therefore, the key rationale for this study is to engage with children who have direct experience of matters that are of importance to their perceived notions of inclusion. This resonates with Oliver and Barnes's (1998, p.102) reference to "genuine and meaningful equality of opportunity", and Allan (2007), who argues for the presence of the voices of those who have the most direct experience of inclusion. Furthermore, it utilises children's perceptions of inclusion to determine what practitioners' think about the idea of listening to children's views to inform their pedagogical practice.

The initial interest for this research project arose from my experience as a primary teacher of more than twenty years in England, and with seven years' experience of specifically working with children aged four to five years. During this time, I became aware of the dominance of sociocultural theoretical framing in the early years. In this context, much of the learning occurs in environments that tend to focus on the one-to-one relationship, usually adult to child, and where children are central to their education, which responds to their interests and curiosity in accordance with their maturational developmental level (Gestwicki, 2006).

Different theories underpin or contribute to countries' pedagogical principles. In an international survey on pedagogy (OECD, 2014), the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, for example, are frequently mentioned as having influenced curriculum and pedagogy in England. Here, the pedagogical practice of scaffolding (where the practitioner helps the child master a task or concept that the child is initially unable to grasp independently and offers assistance with only those skills that are beyond the child's capability) is partly derived

from the work of these theorists. Furthermore, a child-centred approach is implemented in England, alongside a constructivist/interactive approach.

Pedagogy is influenced by a number of factors, such as a country's Early Childhood Education and Care system or organisation, and links to primary school education (Wall *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, the country's regulatory minimum standards and the curriculum framework influence pedagogical practices. In England, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2014) is the curricular document for teaching during children's early education and care. It does not include any explicit guidance for staff on pedagogical practice, nor does it prescribe a pedagogical approach; nevertheless it sets out some parameters that frame pedagogy.

Within the practice and observable pedagogy in early years education in England, Stephen (2010, p.18) refers to two "big ideas". The first of these is concerned with provision that is child-centred and offers children opportunities to choose how to spend their time; and the second, emphasises play as the medium through which children learn. However, a subsequent exploration of the literature surrounding the quality of early years education (see Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002), reveals that these 'big ideas' are not emphasised in documents such as the EYFS (DfE, 2014). The EYFS (DfE, 2014, p.9) makes reference to the need to move towards more adult-led activities, so that children can be helped to "prepare for the more formal learning of Year 1".

The EYFS (DfE, 2014, p.5) establishes the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that,

> Children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life.

This notion of 'school readiness', implies a more formalised approach to learning and teaching, which could be at variance with sociocultural theories.

As such, the language employed within the EYFS raises questions for me about how children might perceive their inclusion within such changes in the provision of their pedagogical activities.

It is this shift in emphasis with regard to learning and teaching, alongside the absence of young children's voices in empirical research about inclusion (see Burfoot, 2003; Children and Young People's Unit, 2004), that inspired me to undertake a study that offers a new understanding of children's perceived notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities. Furthermore, this study seeks to extend the research about belonging and relationships in relation to inclusion (O'Brien and Forest, 1989), which has predominantly been conducted with older children, and/or children with special educational needs (SEN) (see Crouch *et al.*, 2014; Prince and Hadwin, 2013; Rose and Shevlin, 2017).

Since children's perceived notions of inclusion are central to my research, it is necessary to understand what is meant by inclusion in the broader literature and to define it within my specific context. Booth (1998), for example, refers to a multiplicity of inclusions, which indicates that there are differing views and perspectives within this field.

1.1   Four principles of inclusion

Following an extensive review of the literature, I have adopted four key principles of inclusion. Firstly, the study reflects the perspective of UNESCO (2009) that inclusion is about addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children through increased participation in learning. This corresponds with Booth *et al.'s* (2000, p.13) position that inclusion requires schools to examine critically what they can do to "increase the learning and participation of the diversity of students". Hence, I assume the premise that inclusion provides,

> A framework within which all children – regardless of ability, gender, language, ethnic or cultural origin – can be valued equally, treated with respect and provided with real opportunities at school (Thomas and Loxley, 2001, p.119).

With this in mind, I selected to engage with the voices of all children in the Reception classes of two schools. This concurs with the views of Hall *et al.* (2004) and Ainscow *et al.* (2006) that inclusion should be for all learners and not only those with impairments, or defined as having SEN. Consequently, the study extends the current research on inclusion in early years settings, which has largely focused on children with disabilities and SEN (see Odom *et al.,* 2012; Halfon and Friendly, 2013; Lawrence *et al.,* 2016), to concentrate on the inclusion of all young children. Moreover, it presents perceptions of inclusion that have been absent from empirical research (see Kirby and Bryson, 2002; Clark *et al.*, 2003).

The second principle refers to a shift in power. Accepting that young children's voices are absent from empirical research (see Driessnack and Furukawa, 2011; Gray and Winter, 2011), the study espouses Pascal and Bertram's (2009) view that there is still some way to go before children are acknowledged as important in making a difference to their lives. Clough and Barton (1998) articulate this position, by identifying a dilemma in which children's voice acts as a function of power or indeed powerlessness. Moreover, Moore and Sixsmith (2000) recognise that the power differential between adult and child is further emphasised, since adult accounts are invariably filtered through adult constructions of the world, which may bear little or no relevance to children.

Consequently, I assume the premise that child voice can be viewed as a radical agenda, which requires practitioners to think differently about the power they possess. By asking the practitioners to reflect on the children's comments about their perceived notions of inclusion, they are invited to consider whether the children's perceptions might have an impact of their practice. In doing so, it is conceived that the practitioners are being asked to challenge any perceptions they hold about losing power. Additionally, they are invited to consider how, through reassurance and reinforcement, they could learn to use power constructively by sharing it with children (Children as Partners Alliance (CAPA), 2002).

Blenkinsop (2005) supports the view that adults can be asked to think differently about engaging with children. She suggests that everyone has the ability to communicate their views and that it is the educator's role to find ways in which to enable this to occur.

> Each human comes equipped with an instinct for communion and that it is up to the educator to both sanction that instinct and provide opportunities for it to flourish. Buber called this 'inclusion', which, unlike empathy, 'does not mean giving up one's own side of the relationship'. The ability to see the other, understand and embrace the other without giving up the self is the true penetration of being, true dialogue, the I/Thou (Blenkinsop, 2005, p. 287).

In concurrence with CAPA (2002), Blenkinsop (2005) presents a rationale for sharing power, where no one is required to relinquish their authority or control. By responding to children's notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities, the practitioners in my study are still able to maintain their professional experience and knowledge in decision-making processes during the planning of pedagogical activities. Nonetheless, the children's comments also provide opportunities for the practitioners to consider how their decisions impact on the children's perceived notions of inclusion. Thus, Blenkinsop (2005, p.302) describes the practitioner's job as translating into a conscious participation that brings the world to the child, meets them where they are, and for practitioners to "be more thoughtful about the interaction and to be conscious about the notion of inclusion".

The third principle I adopt, denotes inclusion as an ongoing process rather than a fixed state (see Sebba and Ainscow, 1996; Booth and Ainscow, 2002). This principle considers how changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies (UNESCO, 2009), should respond to the individuality of all children. Thus, it reflects the thinking of Lenz Taguchi (2010, p.9) who maintains that a pedagogy can be developed that is "inclusive of children's and students' thinking and different strategies and ways of doing". It also concurs with Nutbrown and Clough's (2006) perspective that children can learn together in appropriate and respectful pedagogical practices.

The final principle refers to O'Brien and Forest's (1989) view of inclusion, which focuses on the need for a child to belong and the importance of the daily relationships they form with those around them. By nurturing these relationships it can become possible to recognise and respond to the diversity and difference within all people.

The reasons for adopting these principles over others, resonate with the placing of children at the centre of the study. By embracing the notions of: including all children; redistributing the position of power, so that it can be shared more equally; considering inclusion as a process that is responsive to meeting children's needs; and recognising the importance of belonging and relationships, this empirical study seeks to explore how an engagement with children's voices can illuminate their perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities.

Each of the four principles endorses the view portrayed in the UNCRC (2005) general comment (No.7), which contests the arguments used to inhibit consultation with young children. These arguments include: a lack of basic capacities for communicating and making choices; and the powerlessness young children have experienced in society. Dewey (2004) also recognises the importance of altering the adult-child power differential through the creation of shared activities, where the teacher and learner subconsciously alternate in their roles. In adopting such practices, I seek to ascertain whether practitioners are able to think in terms of transforming structures so that children could become "beings for themselves" (Freire, 1970, p.74). Furthermore, I wish to determine if these practices could enable practitioners to "make the place more inclusive and enabling for all who attend" (Nutbrown and Clough, 2009, p.202).

1.2   Including the child's voice

Whilst the study is seeking to understand children's perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities, and how they might be used to enable

practitioners to reflect on their pedagogical practice, it is essential to remember that the children's perspectives are important in their own right. Their views are not regarded simply as meeting a research aim; the children are recognised, accepted and valued for who they are (Booth and Ainscow, 2004).

Nevertheless, I am also mindful of Foucault's (1972) perspective that children may tell several, possibly competing, stories about themselves and about societies. He posits that the politics of our time and place influence which stories are told, when and by whom, which is why some stories are heard more often and are given greater status than others. This perspective reflects Freire's (1970) thinking about the oppressed, of whom young children could be considered, due to the dominant discourse of childhood evident in political rhetoric (see Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999; Prout, 2000; Moss, 2014).

Reflecting on the notion of competing stories and whose voices are afforded prominence, I intend to raise the profile of young children's voices within the discourse on inclusion. Furthermore, by accepting Foucault's (1997) assertion that truth does not exist, this study no longer necessitates the requirement for verifying the authenticity of children's voices, rather it acknowledges them as important representations of children's perspectives at the time of issue. This position concurs with that of Moss (2007), who counters the perception that young children are unable to provide accurate representations of their lives.

The notion that children are most knowledgeable about matters of importance to them, and that they are capable of communicating these perceptions to adults, results in the development of the main aim of this study - to illuminate children's perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities in the Reception class. It also establishes the first two research questions:

- In what ways do children perceive pedagogical activities as promoting inclusion in the Reception class?

- In what ways do children perceive pedagogical activities as hindering inclusion in the Reception class?

Furthermore, the study acknowledges the importance of understanding children's priorities, interests and concerns and how they feel about themselves (Pascal and Bertram, 2009), in relation to inclusion. Additionally, it aims to ascertain how practitioners respond to children's views in terms of their pedagogical practice. This leads to the final research question:

- What are practitioners' thoughts on the idea of listening to children's views to inform their pedagogical practice?

The research occurred over a three month period (six weeks in each school), in the Reception classes of an infant school and a primary school in the North East of England, with a total of forty children and seven practitioners (teachers, nursery nurses and teaching assistants). The methodology adopted within the study acknowledges that young children may have difficulty in expressing their views verbally, through data collection such as interviews and questionnaires. Therefore it employs more participative tools, such as photographs and drawings. This approach also extends the research conducted by some, for example, Thomas and O'Kane (1998) and Clark *et al*. (2009), who used photographs with older children, teaching staff, or both. My research offers new ways of understanding children's perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities, through the processes of discussion, reflection, negotiation and accommodation (Clark, 2012).

The thesis is divided into seven chapters, including this introduction.

Chapter 2 is separated into five sections. The chapter begins by examining the literature about engaging with children's voices. The second section concentrates on inclusion and analyses its contested discourse. Section three offers a rationale for the importance of belonging and relationships within

children's perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities. The fourth section concentrates on how democracy is perceived as enabling opportunities for inclusion within children's learning, and the fifth section provides an analysis of pedagogy and its affiliation to inclusion. Finally, a summary is provided at the end of the chapter, which identifies the key definitions that are adopted within this study. An explanation is presented of how the research questions were formulated, before they are finally stated.

Chapter 3 explores the methodology adopted in the study. It considers the philosophical nature of its qualitative approach, and how this impacted on the study's overall design. It outlines the method of selection of the schools, children and practitioners. The research methods of observations; semi-structured individual and group interviews; and the use of participatory tools, are also explored. A consideration of any ethical issues that arose within the research, is provided. Finally, an account of the process by which the data were analysed is presented, leading to an explanation of how the overarching themes of children's perceived notions of inclusion were generated.

Chapters 4 presents contextual information about the two schools and describes the understandings gained in relation to children's perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities. **Chapter 5** analyses the practitioners' responses to the children's comments about their perceived notions of inclusion, and reflects on their views about engaging with children's voices.

Chapter 6 addresses the main research questions of the study and debates the significance of its findings in relation to inclusion. It discusses suggested dimensions of children's perceived notions of inclusion, which include: belonging and relationships; and democratic pedagogies in relation to children's interests and autonomy. It also presents the overall understanding gained through the research.

Chapter 7 presents the contribution and originality of the research study, reflections on the research process, recommendations for future research, and implications for education and practice.

The final thoughts of the research project present a summary of its key findings, which recognise that children are very knowledgeable about matters that are of importance to them. Moreover, it places them at the forefront of their education. In so doing, the research provides opportunities for practitioners to reflect on alternative ways on listening and responding to children's voices.

Chapter 2:   Literature review

2.1   Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature relating to the research study. An exploration of the literature was conducted initially to understand the concepts that would inform the research design. These were identified as: engaging with voices; inclusion; and pedagogy. The term engaging with voices is explored first in section **2.2**, since it was central to the focus of the study, followed by section **2.3**, in which inclusion is defined. Finally, a discussion on pedagogy is presented in section **2.4,** which includes a specific focus on pedagogical paradigms that are adopted in the early years. Within the section on inclusion, further concepts are explored that emerged from the initial data analysis. These include relationships and belonging, and democracy. In each of the sections, theoretical notions of the different concepts are discussed first, followed by an analysis of empirical studies.

2.2   Engaging with children's voices

The notion of engaging with children's voices, espouses the ethos of listening that has been recognised in Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989). This convention advocates the entitlement for all children and young people to be given the right to express their views and that these will be heeded. It marks a shift away from dominant discourses of childhood, prevalent in the twentieth century, where children were perceived as vulnerable and innocent and who were ultimately the property of their parents (Devine, 2003). They were "expected to adhere to the dictum of being seen but not heard and to behave according to societal norms" (Rose and Shevlin, 2004, p.156). The adoption of this perspective of childhood, led to children being patronised and marginalised when expressing views about their education (Smith, 2007).

More recently, there has been a paradigm shift towards the acceptance that children have views and opinions separate from the adults in their lives (James

et al., 1998; Matthews, 2007). The belief that children have agency and are capable of making sense of their views and sharing their views on issues concerning them, has resulted in the acknowledgement of children's rights. With these rights comes the "power to command respect, to make claims and to have them heard" (Federle, 1994, p.343). Whereas, historically, particular groups have been excluded from decision-making concerning issues of identity and the quality of their lives, they are now beginning to express their voices and make demands about citizenship, choices and social justice (see Parker, 1998; Dean and Melrose, 1999).

In England, legislation, such as the Children Act (DoH, 1989) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (DfE, 2015), has indicated significant progress in acknowledging the importance of children and young people's voices. Furthermore, Wolfendale (2000) suggests that there is a rationale and justification for consulting children and including their views, which is imperative on three grounds: equal opportunities; educational; and psychological. Despite this rationale for engaging with the voices of young people, it does not appear to have been reflected within educational decision-making processes. Reasons for the exclusion of young people from these processes are often cited as a lack of maturity and competence (James *et al.*, 1998). Devine (2003) comments that schools operate within a predominantly adult-centred framework with little impact on the status of young people within the system. This is of particular relevance for children in the early years.

Much analysis concludes that there is a strong, observable relationship between understandings of childhood and the provision made for young children (see Edwards *et al.,* 1993; James and Prout, 1997; Dahlberg *et al.,* 1999; Prout, 2000; Moss and Petrie, 2002; Soler and Miller, 2003; Whitebread and Bingham 2011; Moss 2014). The analysis conducted by these authors, concludes that the dominant discourse of childhood evident in political rhetoric, differs significantly from alternative discourses of children and childhood that "foreground the culturally and socially constructed nature of learning" (Anning *et al.,* 2004, p.1). Therefore, I contend that it is necessary to

engage with children's voices in the early years, if it is to become possible to understand their perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities. The notion of gaining greater insight into children's views through an engagement with their voices, is supported by researchers such as Ainscow (1999); Cooper (1993); Rudduck *et al.* (1996).

Before examining the challenges presented by engaging with children's voices, it is important to consider what is meant by voice. Thomson (2011, p.21) refers to it as,

> … a political concept that brings together past and present, emotional and intellectual ways of knowing, public and private, various parts of social and cultural life, and truths and fictions. 'Voice' is inherently concerned with questions of power and knowledge, with how decisions are made, who is included and excluded and who is advantaged and disadvantaged as a result. Weak forms of 'voice' generally support the status quo or aim for modest reforms. The strongly democratic use of 'voice' equates to a call for a public sphere in which there is dialogue, reciprocity, recognition and respect. Reaching that utopian state is understood as a struggle to be heard, listened to and taken seriously.

Thomson (2011) also acknowledges that there are inherent problems around voice which include: purpose; singularity – voice and voices; authenticity; embodiment; and language. These are discussed within the remainder of this section.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2005, p.6) states that children must have "the right to express their views in all matters affecting them and to have their views given due weight". Additionally, Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) states that any child who is capable of forming his or her own views should be given the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting him or her, and that due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of that child will be given due diligence. However, the latter section of this statement may lead to ambiguous interpretation of what constitutes an appropriate age or level of maturity (Shaw, 2016). Far from ensuring that all children are engaged in decision-making about their education, this could lead to children being marginalised if it is deemed they do not have the capacity to make informed decisions. The gap between rhetoric and reality is further

emphasised by Harvey (2002) of the Children's Legal Centre, who commented on the experiences of 300 children invited to attend a Children's Forum at a UN conference. They were able to discuss their proposals to create a better world for children, but they recounted a feeling of disappointment with the process as their voices were lost among the bickering of States. One under-18 delegate from the UK commented: 'We spoke, but it feels like no-one listened'.

This statement emphasises the existence of a power differential between adults and children. Dalrymple and Burke (1995) conceptualise this by referring to the term 'adultism' as the oppression of children and young people by adults. This scenario echoes the constant theme of powerlessness and exclusion felt by children and young people (Lansdown, 1995). Furthermore, Roche (1999, p.479) maintains that the combined effect of the,

> Discourses surrounding children, especially young people, 'adultism' and the relative powerlessness of children is to marginalize their views and perspectives.

Freire (1970) refers to the oppressed, of whom young children could be construed by their marginalisation and powerlessness in society. He proffers that they are not "marginal" or people living "outside" society, but that they have always been "inside the structure which made them 'beings for others'". The solution, he argues, is not to "integrate" them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves'" (Freire, 1970, p.74). This reflects the position I adopt within my study. By enabling children to express their views about inclusion in pedagogical activities, freely and without pressure, possibilities unfold for practitioners to reflect on the comments and consider adapting the provision of pedagogical activities, in response to the diversity and individuality of the children.

Developmental theories, such as those promoted by Piaget (1936), have focused on the competency of children at different ages, however, in recent years there have been challenges to the hegemony of these theories. Perspectives of childhood (see Parton and Wattam, 1999; Turnbull *et al.*, 2008) have promoted an alternative viewpoint, which challenge the assumptions

about children's inability to make decisions in their own best interests. Such references to children having authority over their own voice are based on an assumption that they possess one homogenous voice or culture (see James *et al.*, 1998; Jenks 2009; Woodhead 2009). However, others (see Qvortrup 1994; James and James 2008; Fattore *et al.*, 2009) recognise children's agency that affords them some opportunity to shape and negotiate aspects of their own childhood.

The work of researchers, such as Levin (1994), point to the variety of 'childhoods' that children experience, which will ultimately influence how they are able or willing to express themselves. Ritala-Koskinen (1994) develops this further by arguing that children do not live as one cultural grouping and that there is no single concept of childhood. Subsequently, this implies that if there are different cultural interpretations of childhood, there will be more than one set of relationships between children and adults and, inevitably, more than one set of children's meanings or voices.

Roche (1996) posits that if children's voices are to be listened to with sensitivity and authenticity, it may be necessary to choose between the voices of different children. By recognising that there are a variety of children's cultures, it becomes possible to acknowledge that different children have contradictory wishes and expectations, all of which are equally valid and should be listened to accordingly. However, James *et al.* (1998) allude to the difficulty of responding to these diverse voices in the portrayal of their minority child, indicating that the difficulty arises when choices have to be made upon which of the voices to heed. Nutbrown and Clough (2009, p.202) acknowledge this difficulty, however, they connote that,

> Though it will not always be possible to accommodate fully all the views and suggestions made by children, it is the case that many of the views that young children offer can often be incorporated into changes in practices and settings which make the place more inclusive and enabling for all who attend.

Nevertheless, even if attention is afforded to children's voices in order to provide more inclusive environments, it is important to note that voice itself is a problematic term since it does not always retain the same meaning. Hadfield

and Haw (2001) purport that the construct 'voice' has become such a broadly used term that it is in danger of losing much of its specific meaning as it becomes disconnected from the different theoretical sources and critical praxis from which it originated. They also suggest that it privileges experience over theory or training, as the basis of an individual's understanding of an issue or activity, and the meaning to which it is afforded. Hadfield and Haw (2001, p.487) contend that it fundamentally relies on an "interior authenticity", which Britzman (1989) describes as the ways in which an individual can participate in a community, find the word, speak for oneself, and feel heard by others.

Consequently, voice could be viewed as a social construct; the way in which children are influenced by their life and cultural experiences will ultimately affect their ability to understand their own feelings and communicate with others. Komulainen (2007, p.25) supports this perspective and emphasises that there is a danger the term 'voice' could be sensationalised and it also takes for granted the view that "children have message-like thoughts that can be exchanged, and intentions that match the situations defined by adults". She identifies a moral-pragmatic tension at the heart of so-called 'child-centred' debates and states that the analysis of children's voices must include considerations of the dynamics of human communication and interaction.

Moreover, Fielding (2004) argues for the need for a critically reflexive praxis and more importantly, a more dialogic model, not of adult silence or dominance, but one in which adults work in partnership, speaking with, rather than for, young people. In doing so, it becomes less significant whether children's thoughts can be exchanged to fulfil an adult agenda, but rather that adults attempt to understand the child so that they may present a unified voice. However, this assumes the presence of one voice. Cruddas (2006) suggests it is necessary to understand and take account of the multiple and changing notions of self, and thus avoids the term 'voice', preferring the concept 'engaging with voices' operating within a socially constructed space. This concept promotes the analysis of both child and adult voices in the context and avoids an over reliance on adult ways of listening to children. It also acknowledges Thomson's (2011) concern about the emphasis on singularity of voice and recognises the importance of considering the

authenticity of whose agenda is being fulfilled when engaging with children's voices.

Komulainen's (2007) study in nurseries, where the children were all diagnosed with a disability, presented a starting point for my research. She acknowledges the complexity of understanding and interpreting voice within her work, however, where her research differs from mine is the context in which it was conducted. The main difference is that my study focuses on the voices of all children in the two Reception classes, who were both able-bodied and defined as having special educational needs. By placing children's voices at the forefront of my study, it seeks to extend research focused on inclusion of children with SEN and disability to centre on the views of all children. My study also adheres to Cruddas's (2006) notion of multiple and changing notions of self and therefore I adopt the term 'engaging with voices' within the confines of the research project.

This idea of multiple notions of self and powerlessness has particular resonance within the field of engaging with voices of young children. Young children often have short attention spans and can alter their perspectives fairly quickly (Donaldson, 1987). Therefore, it is important to be mindful of this when constructing the social situations in which to engage with their voices. Furthermore, there may be anxieties about the reliability of the child's perspective or over the ways in which they are presented. However, Foucault (1997) counters this argument by presenting a poststructuralist perspective that truth does not exist. Instead, he believes that what is held to be true, is a fiction created through 'truth games' that express the politics of knowledge of the time and place. Hunter (2007) concurs with Foucault, stating that the drive to understand children's true or 'authentic' wishes and feelings, is sometimes misplaced. Rather, she purports, it is necessary to scrutinise how children's wishes and feelings are produced and how they are subsequently interpreted.

Moss (2007) refers to the need to contest dominant discourses that seek to shape subjectivities and practices through their universal truth claims and their relationship with power. Thus, it is not important to determine whether a

child is stating a 'truth', but rather to ensure that their voice is heard at its point of utterance. Consequently, it no longer becomes essential to consider whether these perspectives can be generalised, or to cogitate conventions of reliability and validity of what constitutes an accurate interpretation of the child's insider perspective. The activity to make core assumptions and values contestable is described by Yeatman (1994, p.7) as "postmodern politics", of which he specifies a politics of difference that contests those groups, and claims a privileged position of objectivity on a contested subject. This has resonance with Thomson's (2011) concern about the authenticity of voice, if adults are in positions of power that contest the truth and accuracy of children's voices.

Moore and Sixsmith (2000) maintain that children's perspectives are of value, not only to contest the dominant discourse, but also for their own sake. Lundy (2007) concurs, conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) in an attempt to address some of the issue outlined above. Her model focuses on four elements:

- Space: Children must be given the opportunity to express a view
- Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their views
- Audience: The view must be listened to
- Influence: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate (Lundy, 2007, p.933).

Lundy (2007) argues for the space to be inclusive, in order to ensure that the views of a diverse range of children are sought and that participation is not just afforded to the articulate and the literate (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004). In this sense, it can be understood to consider the notion of embodiment (Thomson, 2011), where children are enabled to express their views in a tangible or visible form. The engagement with voice carries the caveat that it must be allowed to be expressed freely. In some cases, children will need the help of others to form a view, and thus, once more, it raises questions about the ways in which voice can be expressed. When accessing the views of children with communication difficulties, there can be a tendency to scrupulously frame questions and procedures to better enable participation (Costley, 2000). Ironically, this over prescription can actually ensure a level of control over disclosures and thus reduce the authenticity of their accounts.

Lundy's (2007) last two points, audience and influence, are linked by the notion that children have the right to have their views listened to and not merely heard, and to be actively involved in the decision-making process. Lancaster and Broadbent (2003) state that children are able to communicate long before they can talk and, therefore, it is necessary for adults to receive training in effective listening, which may involve looking. Furthermore, Pascal and Bertram (2009, p.255) purport that,

> Listening is an active process of receiving, interpreting and responding to their communications. 'Listening' includes using all the senses and emotions and accessing children's range of communication is clearly not limited to the spoken word.

The UNCRC (2005, para.11(c)) emphasises, in the case of younger children, that the achievement of participation rights "requires adults to show patience and creativity by adapting their expectations to a young child's interests, level of understanding and preferred ways of communicating". This could be construed as responding to Thomson's (2011) concern about the language used to engage with children's voices. By listening with intent to children's views, it is possible to make a difference in the understanding of their priorities, interests and concerns in relation to how they feel about themselves (Pascal and Bertram, 2009).

Indeed, within this context, listening can be viewed as an "active verb that acquires meaning at the moment at which the listener receives it and evaluates it" (Rinaldi, 2006, p.126), thus giving value to those to whom we listen. If the audience is truly listening then, ultimately, it may result in change. The extent to which this occurs is directly linked to the adults' perception of the age and maturity of the child and their capacity to express their opinions. The lack of understanding of how young children can express their views may limit their prospects for influence, despite the evidence that suggests their ability to make decisions increases in direct proportion to the opportunities offered (Alderson and Goodwin, 1993; de Winter, 1997). Moreover, Dahlberg *et al.* (2006) contend that adults have a duty to consider how children may become active participants in their lives, since they have a voice that should be taken seriously by involving them in democratic dialogue and decision-making.

However, MacNaughton *et al.* (2007, p.458) connote that there is "little empirical evidence to support the contention that consulting young children is valuable". They suggest that this may be due to the scarcity of research with young children, and also the scepticism about young children's ability to participate meaningfully in policy-making. The UNCRC (2005) released a General Comment (No. 7) that summarised some of the arguments that have been used to inhibit consultation with young children.

> They have been regarded as undeveloped, lacking even basic capacities for understanding, communicating and making choices. They have been powerless within their families, and often voiceless and invisible within society (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2005, p.7).

Most children who have been consulted in research, have been in their formal years of schooling or older (see CREATE Foundation, 2000; Driskell, 2001; Fajerman, 2001; Gordon and Marchant, 2001; Burfoot, 2003; Children and Young People's Unit, 2004). Therefore, in keeping with Allan's (2007) view that it is crucial that the voices of those who have the most direct experience of inclusion are allowed to influence any future developments of policy and practice, the voices of younger children must also be afforded the same prominence in research. Casey (2005, p.24) asserts that,

> Listening to and consulting with children, acting on their recommendations, following up on the views that children have expressed and involving them in the on-going processes are important in all children's settings.

Furthermore, Todd (2007, p.13) states that "education cannot be inclusive without collaborating with children and parents in ways that enable their perspectives to influence the development of schools and systems". Todd (2007) and Casey (2005) reflect the perspective of Messiou (2006a). She maintains that when views are collected in relation to inclusive practices, it is the children's that are of particular importance because they experience the impact of inclusionary or exclusionary practices first-hand.

> ... by directly listening to marginalized and excluded people themselves, we might gain important insights in relation to inclusive education. In this sense, marginalized people's voices should have a central role in the process of inclusion. Children could be considered as one of the marginalized groups whose voices have been neglected within inclusive education (Messiou, 2006a, p.40).

Moreover, Messiou's (2012) position that engaging with children's voices is essential if inclusion is about identifying and addressing barriers to participation and learning, reflects the tenet of this research. Just as Messiou presents ways in which such engagement can lead to better understandings of marginalisation, this study seeks to illuminate perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities for children in the early years. In so doing, it proposes to extend the research surrounding inclusion by ensuring that younger children's voices are represented in empirical research. It also responds to MacNaughton *et al.*'s (2007) view that consulting with young children is not perceived as valuable in education. Focusing on two research-based case studies that involved young children in policy-making, MacNaughton *et al.* (2007) demonstrate that even very young children can express views on matters that affect them.

Although the purpose of my research is not to inform policy, as was the case in Allan's (2007) research, it still contributes to the discourse that challenges the value placed on young children's ability to have their voices listened to about issues that matter to them. Whilst it might be easier to discern the views of older children who may have more well-developed language skills, in my experience it is far more complex to determine the opinions of children under the age of five. This is due, in part, to some children's lack of verbal language in expressing their opinions and preferences about their education. Indeed, it may seem more straightforward to elicit the views of children who are verbally skilled, since their views may be more readily validated.

However, voice is not limited to the spoken word and, as such, new ways need to be developed to provide a multitude of means by which to communicate (Clark *et al.,* 2003). The inclusion of young children's voices in research, therefore necessitates the utilisation of suitable methods and methodologies that are capable of empowering children to share their lived experiences and perspectives. Additionally, it is important to note that listening not only includes the spoken word but, as Lewis (2010) contends, it is also about the silences. These should be recognised as neither neutral nor empty; they are an integral part of the dialogue and, as such, should form part of the analysis.

In keeping with more participatory principles, my research challenges the positivist paradigm that defines children as passive objects (see Punch, 2002; Greene and Hogan, 2005; MacNaughton *et al.*, 2007; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008). It also enables participants to "define their own reality and challenge imposed knowledge" (Veale, 2005, p. 254). However, Moore *et al.* (1998) state that concern is often expressed about the reliability of children's accounts. This is an unenviable problem because any doubts about the representation of children's perspectives can easily be seized upon in order to discredit the views expressed. Nevertheless, dialogue for young children can have very different interpretations than for older children. Malaguzzi (1998) informs that children have a hundred languages such as playing, thinking or speaking, all of which enable the understanding of the endless number of children's potentials, their ability to wonder and to inquire. Therefore, young children should be enabled to express their views in any way possible, whether this is practiced through the medium of talk or through children's activities and overall behaviour.

Arguments outlined earlier that young children may be able to express their views and feelings accurately and with authenticity, are disputed by Fivush (1993). She purports that while there is evidence that even very young children can recall their experiences accurately, exploring children's perspectives can create a situation in which the division between reality and fantasy may become blurred. This is not problematic, however, if one accepts Foucault's (1997) perspective that it is not necessary to create a direct correlation between the child's perception and the adult perceived reality. There is, nevertheless, a difficult line between empowering the child, whilst concurrently maintaining an understanding on the child's perspective rooted in reality.

The following discussion narrows to look more specifically at what empirical studies have to offer about engaging with children's voices. An international review of listening to, and consulting with, young children (see Clark *et al.*, 2003), provides a wider perspective on practice, policy and research developments. The review focused on young children's views and experiences of education and childcare and concluded with this remark.

> Young children will best be served by changes to policy and practice which remain alert to their differing perspectives and interests as well as their needs (Clark *et al.*, 2003, p.48).

In order to remain alert to these differing perspectives, an alternative means of engaging with the voices of young children is necessary. Authors, such as Christensen and James (2000) and Messiou (2012), argue that research with children does not necessarily entail adapting research methods, but rather that some techniques may be more appropriate than others. This is of particular importance for children in the early years. Research conducted in this field by Clark *et al.* (2005), for example, utilised the 'Mosaic approach' which exemplified a practice that combined the traditional methodology of observation and interviewing, with the introduction of participatory tools. Children used cameras to document what was important to them, took the researcher on a tour of the setting, whilst remaining in charge of how this was recorded, and made maps using their photographs and drawings. Each of these tools formed one piece of the mosaic. These pieces of documentation were then brought together with comments from parents and practitioners to form the basis of dialogue, reflection and interpretation - a process involving both children and adults.

Another research project (Jones and Gillies, 2010) explored the process of using a picture booklet to engage young children (five to seven year olds) in discussions about their school experiences of children with labels of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) being included in a mainstream kindergarten classroom. The booklet was based upon a design previously used in the UK (Jones, 2005), however, it was altered to increase the participation of the young children by using photographs of the specific children with ASD in the setting. The photographs were followed by prompt questions that engaged the children in discussions about the photographs, which then progressed to discussions about "Having Fun, Joining In, and Learning Together" (Jones and Gillies, 2010, p.128). Ryndak *et al. (*2000) comment that these themes are relevant to successful inclusion experiences of belonging and participation. Both of these studies placed young children at the centre of the research and employed innovative ways of engaging with their voices. The way in which they differ from my research, is that while they focused on what was

important to the children and how children with disabilities may be included in mainstream classrooms, my research centres on children's perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities. It is this that makes my work distinct from other research projects in the early years. Furthermore, by enabling all children to contribute to my study, it also reflects the notion that inclusion is about all children, not only those with disabilities. In so doing, it echoes the views of Ainscow *et al.* (2006) and Hall *et al.* (2004) and moves away from research centred on those with impairments, or defined as having special educational needs.

A previous study I conducted with a research group from the University of Hull, aimed to listen to children's views about the practices of teachers in a primary school that helped and/or hindered their sense of inclusion in classrooms (Adderley *et al.,* 2014). One of the differences between this research and my study is that the children involved in Adderley *et al.'s* (2014) project were aged from six to eleven years, whilst my study involves children from four to five years of age. Therefore, my study seeks to extend the knowledge and understanding of inclusion gained from their project, by including younger children's perceptions of inclusion. Adderley *et al.'s* (2014) study reveals four interconnecting themes: unfairness; shouting; loneliness; and seating plans, all of which seemed to be connected with children's interpersonal relationships with teachers and with each other. It concludes that these relationships, or what might be construed as a sense of belonging, can be viewed as crucial in terms of understanding inclusion in schools and further developing existing practices. Therefore, the notion of viewing inclusion through the lens of belonging and relationships, is discussed in the section **2.3.1**.

2.3   Inclusion

Historically, inclusion has been conceived as a way to improve educational experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational need and disabilities, through their movement to mainstream schools (Florian, 1998). Thomas and Vaughan (2004) cite O'Brien and Forest

(1989) as the first to introduce the notion of inclusion, in their document, *How to Improve Schools by Welcoming Children with Special Needs into Regular Classrooms.* The document consolidated work surrounding integration, whilst introducing the concept of inclusion for all. Ainscow (1995) describes the international perception of integration as the additional arrangements made in educational systems, in order for exceptional pupils to be accommodated within a school system that remains largely unchanged.

In their bid to challenge integration, O'Brien and Forest (1989, p.1) adopted a philosophical position to include all children.

> Inclusion is fundamental to learning about the world as it really is. Until each child belongs, efforts to achieve educational excellence build on sand.

Whilst the statement appears more focused on inclusion in regards to educational excellence, nevertheless it places children's belonging and individual perceived abilities at the foreground of inclusion. However, it was some years before inclusion was accepted and implemented in England. This was largely brought about by ratification of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994, Article 2, p.3) which argued that: "... regular schools with an inclusive orientation are ... the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all". Prior to this, discourses on education had centred on medical and charitable models of disability. The medical (deficit) model saw children's behaviour in terms of internal biological differences, where conditions were viewed as defects within the child, with external factors such as poverty having no bearing on the disability (Oliver, 1996). The charitable model viewed disabled children as tragic figures deserving of pity (Kellett, 2004), leading to them to be discriminated against based upon what was perceived to be lacking, and many being excluded from schooling entirely (Sigmon, 1983).

The shift in thinking from a deficit model of disability towards inclusion for all, stemmed from the consideration that "problems of disability are societal rather than individual, and that these problems stem from oppression by society

rather than the limitations of individuals" (Oliver, 1996, p.31). This was described as the social model of disability, which was designed to assist in the practice of identifying and removing structural, environmental and attitudinal barriers. In doing so, Mittler (2000) contends that inclusion becomes less centred on the location of the educational setting, and focuses more on eliminating social exclusion and facilitating active involvement and participation.

As Mittler (2000) identifies, although the deficit and social models are different, the two models are not mutually exclusive or incompatible, rather, their collaboration might be in the best interest of the child. Moreover, there are some (see Frederickson and Cline, 2002) who warn of the danger that the social model may lead to the rejection of individual differences, which could make children feel less included. However, Florian (2008) suggests that such a rejection of individual differences does not mean that diversity cannot be acknowledged; she contends that it is possible to respect these differences in ways that include rather than exclude learners. In so doing, Todd (2007) indicates that it is not necessary to fall into the trap of dichotomy and instead suggests that attention should be paid to the individual, without blaming or believing that problems rest within children.

The move towards an approach that recognises individual differences, whilst not being constrained by them, reflects the notion of inclusion. This concept was intended to replace integration, which had come to be seen as too limiting because it was overly complex and was restricted to the physical placement of children with special needs in mainstream schools (Lewis, 1995; Florian, 1998). However, Allan (2007, p.3) asserts that "a strong and rigid special education paradigm, driven by a deficit or medical model, continues to dominate policies and, inevitably, classroom practice".

Whilst it has been stated that inclusion was beginning to appear within educational discourses, this is not to suggest that there was a clear articulation of its meaning. The term inclusion has come to mean different things to

different people, has meant different things at different points in time, and means different things in different locations (Clark *et al.*, 1995; Corbett, 2001; Ainscow *et al.*, 2006). Indeed, Liasidou (2012, p.5) has, for this reason, called the term a "semantic chameleon".

By attempting to define the concept of inclusion, complex and contested issues are raised (Florian, 2008). Florian (1998), for example, suggests that there are many definitions of inclusion which focus on different aspects. Some definitions, she contends, focus on human interaction, others on valuing diversity, and some on organisational arrangements. Campbell (2002) describes the key aspects of the inclusion debate as being: a balance between individual needs and those of the majority; the active participation of pupils; an ongoing process; and its relation to exclusion. However, by implying that there is a requirement for a balance between the needs of the individual and the majority, there is a danger that those in minority or vulnerable groups may be overlooked. Some (see Thomas and Loxley, 2007) also suggest that inclusion has become something of a cliché, "an international buzzword" (Benjamin, 2002, p.viii) devoid of meaning.

Despite the concerns expressed above that inclusion is a contested concept and that it has lost some of its meaning, there have been considerable moves to define the term. Within the literature, definitions vary in their focus from rights, to values and community, and school capacity to cater for difference. Bailey (1998, p.184) contends from a pragmatic perspective that inclusion should mean,

> Being in an ordinary school with other students, learning the same curriculum, at the same time, in the same classroom, with full acceptance by all in a way which makes the student feel no different from any other student.

The use of the term 'ordinary' here, raises issues regarding interpretation. The term may be construed as meaning pedestrian, everyday or even normal, which could imply that if students with disabilities are not in these 'ordinary' schools, the schools they attend are not normal and therefore places these students at

a disadvantage. Furthermore, it could indicate that schools do not need to alter their processes, policies, organisation, environments and cultures in order to respond to the needs of all students. Tomlinson (1997), however, acknowledges that inclusion is not concerned with simply being in the same location and accessing the same curriculum, but rather it is about creating an appropriate educational environment.

These contrasting views emphasise the differences in definitions, with Bailey's (1998) perspective aligning itself more with the integration of students. Although he refers to acceptance for all, he does not appear to acknowledge diversity or individuality. By treating everyone the same, there is a danger that children will perceive themselves to be less included if their individual needs are not being met. Furthermore, Hall *et al.* (2004, p.801) state that inclusion "involves all learners participating in the learning". Their view concurs with those of Ainscow *et al.* (2006, p.295), who are of the opinion that schools should develop ways of "increasing participation and broad educational achievement of all groups of learners". Mittler (2000, p.95), however, believes that the focus should not simply be on the participation of children within the classroom but on "the quality of their participation in the whole range of learning experiences provided by the school". The introduction of the word 'quality' implies that it is the way in which children participate in their learning that is of importance. This is reflected in my study, which explores how engaging with children's voices might make it possible to understand children's perceived notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities.

The Department of Education and Skills (DfES) (2004) concurs with Tomlinson's (1997) perspective that inclusion is not about being in the same place, with the same curriculum. The DFES (2004, p.28) argues that,

> Inclusion is about much more than the type of school that children attend: it is about the quality of their experience; how they are helped to learn, achieve and participate fully in the life of the school.

Both of these views demonstrate that inclusion is not a static position, since it will require a review of the processes that provide support to enable participation. Ainscow (2007, p.155) agrees, suggesting that "the identification

and removal of barriers" is what is central to inclusive practices. Schools working towards promoting more inclusive pedagogical environments, cannot progress until their organisation and pedagogical approaches are examined within the context of how they are understood by children.

Messiou (2012) describes marginalisation as similar to being outside the boundaries of a circle. Children are perceived as being included if they are within the circle, whilst those who are on the outside are considered marginalised. Within the context of my study, it is plausible that some children may perceive themselves to be marginalised (or at least less included), if they consider that an activity hinders their inclusion through the creation of a barrier. However, as Messiou explains, these boundaries are not static but interchangeable for children, and therefore they could be dependent on the context or content of the pedagogical activity, or their inability to select with whom to work. Consequently, children who perceive themselves to be outside the circle in the context of one classroom, may not consider themselves marginalised in another classroom or in the playground. Equally, it is conceivable that all children may express feeling included and that none consider themselves to be marginalised.

However, Allan (2007, p.3) maintains that there is "conceptual confusion surrounding the definition of inclusion". Slee (1998, p.131) argues that the reason behind the contested discourse is that "for many, inclusion connotes a linguistic adjustment to present a politically correct facade to a changing world". Avramidis *et al.* (2002, p.158) comment that it is "a bewildering concept which can have a variety of interpretations and applications". This leads to an inclusive rhetoric which can be found in national policies and practices and in the literature or research on inclusion. Thus, it is conceived that by applying the inclusive rhetoric to the classroom, it could result in "what can, at times, appear to be a tidal wave of inclusive intent preached with overpowering zeal by a church of inclusion" (O' Brien, 1998, p.151).

O'Brien (1998) considers there is a danger that inclusion may be forced upon those in education, by people who may not understand the intricacies and implications of the term. Allan (2007) concurs, articulating that the absence of any discussion of values for teachers is also disconcerting. She contends that whilst there is often guidance for the introduction of resources that may be intended to provide more inclusive ways of working, there is frequently little insight into how teachers may become more inclusive, since it requires significant cultural and political changes in their thinking and practice.

Additionally, it has been argued that the reality of inclusion in each national system is determined by local history, culture and politics (see Booth and Ainscow, 1998; Daniels and Garner, 1999). Hence, far from inclusion presenting a 'one size fits all' definition, it provides a unique picture across different settings, a rather 'elusive' idea as connoted by many (see Ainscow, 1999; Ballard, 1999; Slee, 2000). The danger subsequently arises that inclusion becomes more specific to institutions and circumstances and a philosophical position based on one's values and beliefs, rather than a universal one. Consequently, it is important to acknowledge that inclusion is perceived differently according to its context. Slee (2004) refers to the term 'jet lag', which concurs with Ainscow *et al.'s* (2006) view that the concept has become confused and lost its clarity, meaning different things to different people. Feiler and Gibson (1999) state that this is incongruent with the inclusive movement, since it may even end up signifying nothing at all. They indicate that "inclusion could be referred to as a multifaceted construct that is strongly influenced by the context in which it is discussed" (Feiler and Gibson, 1999, p.148).

However, in allowing for interpretations to be formed and different definitions to be created, the possibility arises that inclusion may be situated in a weakened position without clarity and transparency. Slee (2001, p.114) suggests that people place their own lens on what they justify as inclusion thereby underlining the "dilemmas of generating a vocabulary for theory of inclusive educational practice". Dyson (1999) acknowledges this concern by referring to 'inclusions' rather than merely inclusion, suggesting that there are

wide ranges of practice and organisation that need to be interrogated within this domain. He advises that this notion of multiplicity draws strength from the concepts of social justice, a view expressed by Barton (1997) who advocates that the inclusive school is a microcosm of, and a pathway towards, an inclusive society.

In referring to a structurally inclusive society that celebrates rather than tolerates difference, and one where minorities are not excluded at any point, Barton (1997) adopts a definition of inclusion that reflects the position of full participation in all parts of life and society, not one that is focused on the educational agenda. However, Booth (1998) argues that this 'multiplicity' of inclusions could indeed mystify the debate by demanding that the term needs to be contextualised by the reader, whilst interpreting the meaning intended by the author.

Acknowledging the contested discourse about inclusion, a definition from UNESCO (2009, pp.8-9) offers a useful starting point by which to define inclusion within this study.

> Inclusion is thus seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.

Looking closely at the definition, it firstly suggests that inclusion is an ongoing and continuous process rather than a state as connoted by Sebba and Ainscow (1996); Booth and Ainscow (2002); Ainscow (2005). Secondly it reflects Booth *et al.'s* (2000, p.13) position that it,

> Requires schools to engage in a critical examination of what can be done to increase the learning and participation of the diversity of students within the school.

However, despite the principle cited that inclusion is about responding to the diversity of all students, there is evidence to suggest that this is not reflected

within current research. Messiou (2016), in her analysis of published articles in the International Journal of Inclusive Education between 2005 and 2015, highlights that most of the studies in the field of inclusive education are only concerned with certain groups of learners. She argues that by concentrating of specific groups of children, rather than on all, this approach to research is at odds with the principles of inclusion. My research concurs with this position, by including all children in the Reception classes of two schools. Furthermore, in doing so, it challenges the UNESCO (2009) definition, which appears to reflect the image of young children as too immature to comment on their education, by referring to 'the appropriate age range'.

Returning to Ainscow *et al.*'s (2006) position that inclusion is about increasing participation for all, my study also reflects the tenet of educationalists who emphasise the importance of participation in empowering children as learners, enabling them to make choices, express their ideas and opinions and develop a positive sense of self (see Roberts, 2002; Bruce, 2005). Within an early years context, the child's developing sense of self and identity is linked to belonging, which acknowledges children's interdependence with others and forms the basis of relationships in defining identities (Department of Education Employment and Workforce Relations, 2009). Marsh *et al.* (2007, p.7) connote belonging as "central to our understanding of how people give meaning to their lives". Thus, it is deemed significant to view inclusion through the lens of belonging and to contemplate how relationships are considered important in children's perceptions of inclusion (Adderley *et al.*, 2014).

2.3.1   Belonging and relationships

In keeping with the central tenet of my study, that engaging with children's voices is key to comprehending young children's perceived notions of inclusion, I concur with Stainback and Stainback's (1990) view that inclusion resonates with a sense of belonging. They suggest that a sense of belonging is in line with the position that inclusion is a subjective experience and central to its understanding are the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of children (Schwandt, 1997). Furthermore, a Canadian education study (Manitoba

Education, Training and Youth, 2001, p.34) also maintains that these two terms are interlinked, stating,

> Inclusion goes further than the idea of physical location: it is a value system based on beliefs that promote participation, belonging and interaction.

Barton (2005), in his definition of inclusion, refers to it as a continuous process that encompasses the well-being of all pupils. Kehily (2007, p.173) emphasises the connection between well-being and belonging, "Belonging is not an option for any of us - a sense of belonging is vital for our wellbeing", which in turn indicates their association with inclusion.

The tenet of participation, interaction and belonging is reflected in Baumeister and Leary's (1995, p.497) belongingness hypothesis,

> That human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships.

They posit that a sense of belonging can be defined as the extent to which individuals feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in their social environment. This concurs with an important aspect of inclusion, as defined by Warnock (2005), to engender a sense of community and belonging due to its functional importance for successful learning and general well-being. It also resonates with the concept of inclusion through valuing the diversity of children (see Barton, 1997; Booth and Ainscow, 1998; Armstrong *et al.*, 2000; Booth *et al.,* 2000). Furthermore, it concurs with O'Brien and Forest's (1989, p.1) definition of inclusion as,

> Daily relationships which disclose the myriad capacities and gifts of all people lay at the foundation of education. Inclusive schools build and nurture these essential relationships.

O'Brien and Forest (1989) emphasise the importance of relationships that reveal the diversity and individuality of children, in developing inclusive schools. Furthermore, Prince and Hadwin (2013) refer to how individual differences can exist in the strength of the need to belong and how it is met. They comment that satisfying these needs involves frequent, positive

interactions with other people, including reciprocal concerns for one another's well-being. Baumeister and Leary (1995) contend that the need to belong can be directed towards any other human, and the loss of the relationship with one person can to some extent be replaced by another. It is also important to note that mere social contact is not sufficient in itself to satisfy belongingness needs. Rather, "the need is for regular social contact with those to whom one feels connected" (Baumeister and Leary 1995, p.501). Consequently, within an early years context, a child's need to belong could be satisfied through regular social contact with another child or an adult. Empirical evidential support for the importance of social relationships, comes from research with infants suggesting that humans are driven by an awareness of, and need to, communicate with other persons from an early age (Trevarthen and Aitken, 2001).

In contemporary early childhood education models and curriculum, belonging is acknowledged through the interconnectedness of the child's being, becoming and belonging (Papatheodorou 2010). Furthermore, Stratigos *et al.* (2014) discuss belonging as shaping who children are and who they can become. Whilst these views initially appear to reflect the dominant discourses of childhood in the twentieth century (Devine, 2003; Rose and Shevlin, 2004), on closer scrutiny the difference here lies in Papatheodorou's use of the word 'interconnectedness'. Rather than the three terms being discrete and separate, they form part of a more holistic approach to education for young children.

The central importance of belonging for young children has been formalised in curriculum documents such as: *Te Wha̅riki* from New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1996); and *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) from Australia (Department of Education Employment and Workforce Relations, 2009). Within the English context, there is no specific mention of the word belonging in the early years curriculum framework (EYFS) (DfE, 2014), however, there is recognition of the importance of relationships. It states that "children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships", and that they learn and develop well when

"their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carer" (DfE, 2014, p.3).

I maintain that this 'strong partnership' implies a connection that could be construed as belonging. Mahar *et al.* (2012, p.6) define a sense of belonging as,

> A subjective feeling of value and respect derived from a reciprocal relationship to an external referent that is built on a foundation of shared experiences, beliefs or personal characteristics.

This reciprocal relationship could be conceived as being between the key person and a child in an early years context. The role of the key person is to help ensure that the needs of every individual child are met and to offer a settled relationship. This has been identified as paramount to the well-being of young children and is a statutory requirement of the EYFS (DfE, 2014). It is defined as a relationship between a member of staff and an individual child, which reflects Mahar *et al.'s.* (2012) definition of belonging.

Yuval-Davis (2006), however, explicates an important issue within the discourse on belonging. She contends that belonging can vary from person to person, and that "[p]eople can 'belong' in many different ways and to many different objects of attachments" (Yuval-Davies, 2006, p.199). Belonging, therefore, could be construed as something that is experienced in diverse and multiple ways. In this regard, it may be represented as multidimensional and complex - belongings rather than belonging - which has strong resonance with the reference to 'a multiplicity of inclusions' (Booth and Ainscow, 1998; Dyson, 1999). Just as inclusion is not a fixed state (see Sebba and Sachdev, 1997; Booth and Ainscow*,* 2002; Ainscow, 2005), belonging is not fixed, but a dynamic process (Sumsion and Wong 2011). Probyn (1996) even suggests that true belonging is an impossibility. Instead she describes it as being in constant movement, the desire to belong always placing us on the outside, in a place of longing. Belonging, as with inclusion, therefore,

> Is not something that is achieved with any kind of finality; it is constantly in process, being enacted, contested and negotiated in

> the various times, places and groups in which we live our daily lives
> (Stratigos *et al.*, 2014, p.178).

Nagel (2011, p.120) describes belonging as something that "excludes as much as it includes, and … disciplines as much as it sustains and nurtures". She explains how these boundaries and borders are constantly being reproduced and how they operate concurrently to regulate the behaviour of those on the inside, whilst preventing others from coming in. Once more this could be aligned with the concept of inclusion. To return to Messiou's (2006b) definition of marginalisation as similar to being outside a circle, the boundaries of which are determined by social constructions of normality, it is apparent that there are strong correlations with belonging. The boundaries that are being produced through the act of belonging are not fixed entities but rather, as Messiou (2006b) contends, ones that can be crossed depending on the setting. This has resonance with Allan's (2007) notion that inclusion is an unstable process, in which children switch between being included and excluded.

Nagel (2011, p.120) also writes that "belonging is, above all, a political process through which different groups continuously produce and reproduce the boundaries of membership". Yuval-Davis (2006) maintains that these boundaries designate 'us' and 'them' and the politics of belonging involve struggles around who belongs, what belonging involves, and the minimum common ground required for belonging. Again the parallels with inclusion are evident. Hall *et al.* (2004, p.801) state that inclusion "involves all learners participating in the learning" and Ainscow (2007) asserts that there should be a removal of all barriers, whilst still engaging with children as individuals rather than viewing them as being part of a particular group. Hence, it no longer becomes necessary to label children as 'us' and 'them'. It also mitigates the power struggle between adults and children if the boundaries are considered to be continuously changing (Messiou, 2006b).

Empirical studies have focused on the importance of belonging. Research conducted in Canada by Ellis *et al.* (1998) with pupils aged 13–15 years with a history of behavioural problems, recorded a significant theme of the need to

feel a sense of belonging. They conclude that pupils' feelings of belonging relate directly to incidents of problematic behaviour and ultimately affect their opportunities for experiencing inclusion. The pupils' sense of belonging, and therefore their ability to form reciprocal relationships with the teachers, also directly impacted on their perceptions of inclusion. It could be argued that it was simply the acceptance by others that led to the increased perception of inclusion, but Hagerty *et al.* (1996) contrast the sense of belonging with acceptance. They state that although these notions both involve being valued by others, a sense of belonging differs because it requires a person to have similar or corresponding characteristics to feel part of the group.

Roeser *et al.* (1996) explored 13 and 14 year old pupils' perceptions of the school environment and the role of belonging on psychological functioning in school. Their findings suggest that the quality of the teacher–pupil interactions contributed to the pupils' sense of belonging. More recently, Furrer and Skinner (2003) in their research, argue that the combination of engagement and high performance that elicits more support from teachers, parents, and peers, serves to confirm or promote children's feelings of belonging. The findings of these two studies suggest that relationships with teachers or their peers, may increase pupils' engagement in learning activities. In so doing, this could be construed as increasing inclusion, since teacher-pupil interactions or pupil-pupil relationships allow for the possibility of engaging with the pupils' voices to remove barriers to participation in the learning environment.

Research published by Goodenow (1992) marked a shift from previous research about students' views about school, since she was assessing students' attitudes to school from their own personal experiences, rather than merely asking about the atmosphere in school. Goodenow (1992, p. 3) argued that,

> … a key element in all of these social processes is students' sense of psychological membership or belonging in the school or classroom, that is, the extent to which they feel personally accepted, rejected, included and supported by others in the school social environment.

Goodenow's research was reinforced by other studies (see Wentzel, 1998; Shochet *et al.*, 2006; Pittman and Richmond, 2007; Johnson, 2009). Johnson (2009) undertook a comparative study between two urban high schools: one which was centred on meeting the developmental and belonging needs of adolescents, and the other which was a more traditional school that did not have this focus. Her research indicates that students at the non-traditional school experienced increased levels of teacher support, felt more accepted, respected and included, and perceived higher levels of belongingness.

Other empirical studies on inclusion and belonging with younger children appear to centre on children with SEN (see Macartney, 2012; Nepi, *et al.,* 2013; Favazza *et al.,* 2017; Rose and Shevlin, 2017). When searching for studies conducted in the last ten years that focused specifically on inclusion, belonging and early years, two empirical studies emerged, the second of which, *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) (Department of Education Employment and Workforce Relations, 2009) was discussed earlier in this section. The first, *Citizenship and inclusion in the early years: understanding and responding to children's perspectives on 'belonging'*, was carried out by Nutbrown and Clough in 2009 and employed an action research methodology with practitioners in early years settings and children aged three to six years. They identified key themes from the data, which included a range of factors that excited or worried the children, and the ways in which children's concerns and ideas were listened to and action for change was developed. Three of the findings were: children's views can contribute to the development of inclusive practices; children's voices are central to studies of their perspectives, and the methodological challenges of listening to children's voices in research must be addressed; identity and self-esteem are key to the successful promotion of young children's positive sense of inclusivity and belonging in their early years settings.

Two of these findings resonate with my research, namely that children should be at the centre of any research study about them, and secondly, that there must be careful consideration of the methodological approach to research. The main differences between this research and mine, is that firstly, Nutbrown and

Clough's (2009) work was based on action research and was conducted by sixteen practitioners, whilst I was not an employed member of staff at the schools in which I carried out my research. They recommended that action research proved to be a practical and effective strategy for change, developing and implementing new, more inclusive, policies and pedagogies. I argue that it is not necessary for research to be conducted in this way for change to occur, and that it is the commitment to engage with children's voices that is key to developing and implementing inclusive practices.

The second difference is that Nutbrown and Clough's (2009) research was prompted by the children and tended to centre on issues such as, healthy food, transition, toilet areas, outings, all weather clothing, and settling disputes. These subjects differ quite radically from the focus of my research, however, there was another area that signified a similarity - including children's views on their own progress and achievement in their assessment profiles. Since Nutbrown and Clough's research focused on children's views of the connection between learning and belonging, it is suggested that my research could provide an extension to their research. By establishing the link between inclusion and belonging, it is posited that the exploration of children's perceived notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities could extend the understanding of matters that are of importance to children.

The importance of belonging suggested by the studies above, is extended further by Hope (2012) in her work about democratic education. She conducted research in two primary schools, one which was explicitly democratic and the other was underpinned by democratic principles. Whilst Hope's work (2012) did not focus on the same subject as mine, the reason it is significant is that it made connections between belonging and democracy. Hope (2012, p.236) states that where,

> School decisions were made democratically, curriculum was developed by teachers and students, classrooms were collaborative learning environments and lessons were not compulsory, [T]the quality of relationships between teachers and students was deemed to be very good.

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Hope concluded that although relationships between teachers and students were significant in terms of their sense of belonging, the notions of a democratic approach to decision-making, and collaborative learning environments, were also important. These are both areas that resonate with the concept of inclusion, since they could be construed as connected with enabling the participation of all children in their learning (Hall *et al.,* 2004). Therefore, the association between inclusion and democracy is explored in the following section.

2.3.2   Democracy

Moss (2007, p.4) alludes to the connection between inclusion and democracy in early education and care, by stating that "democracy creates the possibility for diversity to flourish". Furthermore, he speculates on the possibilities for emancipation and for the development of "important values such as equality, democracy and sustainability" (Moss, 2014, p.3). Moreover, he acknowledges the potential that education offers in its broadest sense as "a holistic and inclusive concept" (Moss, 2014, p.2). However, he concedes that there is no mention of democracy in the English early years curricula, despite it being explicitly recognised as a value in the curriculum of Nordic countries. For example, the Icelandic national curriculum guide asserts that one of the principle objectives of pre-school education is "to lay the foundations to enable [children] to be independent, reflective, active and responsible citizens in a democratic society" (Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2003, p.7). The absence of the term democracy in the EYFS (DfE, 2014) appears to imply that it is not foregrounded in governmental policy, however, this is not to suggest that settings do not operate in democratic and inclusive ways, but rather it is at an institutional, as opposed to national, level.

To consider the relationship between inclusion and democracy, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) offer a definition that identifies democratic practice in terms of the respect for diversity in the early years. Democratic practice needs certain values to be shared amongst the adults and children in the settings, the

importance of which is captured in these words by three pedagogistas (educationalists who have studied theories of education) from Reggio Emilia.

> Participation is based on the idea that reality is not objective, that culture is a constantly evolving product of society, that individual knowledge is only partial; and that in order to construct a project, everyone's point of view is relevant in dialogue with those of others, within a framework of shared values. The idea of participation is founded on these concepts: and in our opinion, so, too, is democracy itself (Cagliari *et al.*, 2004, p.29).

Aligning democracy with inclusion, necessitates the acknowledgement that inclusion is associated with the increase of participation for a diversity of students (Booth *et al.,* 2000). This can be achieved by ensuring that all members of the setting (children and adults) are able to voice their views on issues that matter to them. Moss (2007, p.7) suggests that the early years institution is best placed for this to happen because,

> Children and adults can participate with others in shaping decisions affecting themselves…It is also a means of resisting power and its will to govern, and the forms of oppression and injustice that arise from the unrestrained exercise of power.

Early years settings are also conceived as,

> A forum or site for meeting and relating, where children and adults meet and commit to something, where they can dialogue, listen and discuss, in order to share meanings: it is a place of infinite cultural, linguistic, social, aesthetic, ethical, political and economic possibilities. A place of ethical and political praxis, a space for democratic learning (Associació de Mestres Rosa Sensat, 2005, p.10).

Since parents, carers, children and practitioners regularly come together in early years settings, it is possible that these institutions present conditions for genuine democracy to ensue. However, if this is to occur, it is necessary to address the issue of power. Freire (1970) desires education to be a liberating process in which teachers enter into meaningful dialogue with students, acknowledge the power differential, and seek ways to develop equal relationships where power is shared. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire (1970) depicts this notion through the development of teaching and learning as collaborative processes. He rejects the idea of 'the banking concept of

education', which presents teachers as depositors of knowledge and students as empty vessels. He prefers to view a liberating education as one in which,

> Through dialogue the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow … here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught (Freire, 1970, pp.53-61).

Yet this concept is easy to misapply or misunderstand, as one moves towards an understanding of what Freire means by dialogue and the concept of dialogical pedagogy. As Freire (1970, p.61) notes: "…[T]his dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the participants in a discussion". Rogers (1980, p. 267, italics in the original) concurs with Freire, maintaining that conventional education has too much emphasis on cognitive learning, as,

> They have focused so intently on *ideas*, have limited themselves so completely to "education from the neck up" that the resulting narrowness is having serious social consequences.

Rogers (1980) argues for an alternative approach to education in which teachers assume the role of facilitators and attempt to share power with the students, thus enabling individuals to take control of their own learning. A democratic pedagogy imbues the necessity to engage in deconstructing the traditional, transmissive, banking mode of doing pedagogy, in order to create awareness about aims, goals, objectives, and about means and ends. The objectives of a democratic pedagogy are the involvement of children in the experience and the construction of learning in continuous and interactive encounters (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.,* 2002).

However, Moriarty *et al.* (2008) posit it is important to remember that, while the teacher and student each adopts or incorporates the role of the other, the teacher has a particular form of leadership role to enact. Concurrently, both teacher and student have specific accountabilities and responsibilities, and each has agency within broader structural relations to liberate those

accountabilities and responsibilities. On this subject, Bailey (2003) points to Freire's perspective, which emphasises how the teacher and student have a mutual need and how it is necessary for both to recognise this interdependence simultaneously.

Rogers (1980) states that if teachers act as facilitators, then the classroom atmosphere is better for students. An education that focuses on the student has enhanced outcomes.

> The conclusion to be drawn from these many studies is that it pays to be personal and human in the classroom. A humane atmosphere is not only more pleasant for all concerned; it also promotes more - and more significant - learning. When attitudes of realness, respect for the individual, understanding of the student's private world are present, exciting things happen. The payoff is not only in such things as grades and reading achievement, but also in more elusive qualities such as greater self-confidence, increased creativity, and more liking for others. In short, such a classroom leads to a positive, unified learning by the whole person (Rogers, 1980, p.278).

In this approach, students are also trusted to take control of their own learning in practical ways including deciding what, how, when (and if) they wanted to learn. Thus, it is essential for certain qualities to be present if facilitators are to establish the necessary relationships to genuinely share power and control with students. Rogers (1980) refers to this as congruence, positive regard and empathy. Whilst he identifies these terms in relation to clients in psychotherapy, I believe they can be equally applied to children in schools. Congruence denotes an authentic and genuine relationship between the child and teacher, positive regard involves the basic acceptance and support of the child, regardless of what they say or do, and empathy means sensing accurately the feelings and personal meanings that the child is experiencing and communicating this understanding to the child. By adopting this approach, Rogers identifies the importance of listening.

> This kind of sensitive, active listening is exceedingly rare in our lives. We think we listen, but very rarely do we listen with real understanding, true empathy. Yet listening, of this very special kind, is one of the most potent forces for change that I know (Rogers, 1980, p.116).

This notion of listening with empathy resonates with the central tenet of my research, that by engaging with children's voices it becomes possible to understand matters that are of importance to them. Furthermore, a democratic approach to education encourages teachers to engage in critical thinking. They are no longer able to be conceived as infallible but are required to be open to challenge. In this regard, teaching and learning could be viewed as a collaborative and more inclusive endeavour.

> In such shared activity, the teacher is a learner, and the learner is, without knowing it, a teacher - and upon the whole, the less consciousness there is, on either side, of either giving or receiving instruction, the better (Dewey, 2004, p.154).

It is also important to note that the child has agency and therefore, s/he should also have autonomy over her/his learning. However, learner autonomy does not mean that the practitioner becomes redundant, abdicating her/his control over what is transpiring in the learning process. Learner autonomy, as described by Candy (1991), is a perennial dynamic process amenable to 'educational interventions', rather than a static product, and as such, could be strongly affiliated to the principles of inclusion, which is also described as an on-going process (Campbell, 2002; Ainscow, 2005).

Holec (1981, p.3) describes autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's learning". It is noteworthy that autonomy can be thought of in terms of how power can be redistributed through the construction of knowledge and the roles of the participants in the learning process. Dam (1990, cited in Gathercole, 1990) defines autonomy in relation to the learner's willingness and capacity to control or oversee her/his own learning. More specifically, she, like Holec, contends that someone qualifies as an autonomous learner when s/he independently chooses aims and purposes and sets goals; chooses materials, methods and tasks; exercises choice and purpose in organising and carrying out the chosen tasks; and chooses criteria for evaluation. For Rathbone (1971, p.100), "the autonomous learner is a self-activated maker of meaning, an active agent in his own learning process". "He is not one to whom things merely happen; he is the one who, by his own volition, causes things to

happen" (Rathbone, 1971, p.104). Subsequently, learning is seen as the result of her/his own self-initiated interaction with the world.

Rathbone's view of the learner as an active agent in their learning, appears to underestimate the influence that power can have within the learning process. Blaise and Ryan (2012) examine whose agency, power and interests are exercised or marginalised in these instances. They specifically consider the power relationships between children, and between children and adults from a critical poststructural perspective. Although agency is communicated in many ways through children's engagement in a range of activities, it may also be articulated as the freedom to make choices. However, this freedom does not always put children in control, nor are they always empowered.

Research into the dynamics of power are revealed by Wood (2014) in her research into children's individual and group choices, during periods of free choice and free play. Here, she ascertains that children's activities are often socially complex because they are solving contextual and relational problems. These involve managing the social dynamics of power, often without the help of adults. However, she reveals that children do not always have the skills and knowledge to do this successfully, which means that they cannot consistently manage their choices.

Therefore, where free choice and free play are promoted as the foremost ways in which children learn within the context of different pedagogical activities, some children may be further disadvantaged or marginalised. This may occur if children lack the necessary social tools to share their interests and desires. Wood (2014) maintains that if spontaneous, responsive and democratic pedagogies are to be sustained, then practitioners need to be aware of children's ability to choose. Particular attention needs to be paid to how the freedom to choose may advantage some, but disadvantage others. My research study reflects Wood's (2014) understanding that practitioners need to aware of the power dynamics and children's ability to choose, within early years. By sharing the children's comments about their perceived notions of

inclusion, my research provides the opportunity for the practitioners to reflect on the impact of their pedagogical practice and extends the current knowledge about practitioners' thoughts on listening to young children's views about inclusion.

Hart *et al.* (2004), however, in their *Learning without limits* project, move away from the focus on choice, whilst still considering the position of the teacher within democratic approaches to learning. Their research aim was to re-open the debate about the effects of ability labelling. They brought together a group of teachers who had rejected ideas of fixed ability and studied their practice, in order to identify what was distinctive about teaching free from ability labelling. Their findings reveal that teachers were convinced they could positively affect young people's choices because they knew that their learning was profoundly influenced by every aspect of their school experiences. The teachers' belief in their power to transform young people's learning capacity was supported and sustained by their understanding of the connections between classroom conditions and the states of mind (cognitive, affective and social) that affect young people's ability and willingness to invest in learning.

Furthermore, Hart *et al.'s* (2004) research emphasises that learning occurs as a result of pedagogical principles of co-agency, trust and everybody. Co-agency demands that the responsibility for learning is shared between the teacher and the learner; trust enables a shared responsibility where the learner knows that they can tell the teacher how they learn and that the teacher will find relevant and purposeful experiences to facilitate this; and everybody refers to where teachers have both the opportunity and responsibility to enhance the learning of all. These principles are inherently embodied in the precept that whatever the teacher does will have an effect, positive or negative, on the child (Ryan, 2013).

By forming pedagogical decisions based on children's capacities to learn, rather than fixed ability thinking, it becomes possible for teachers to enhance

all children's participation, and therefore, inclusion in their own learning. Furthermore, Hart *et al.* (2004) state that it is the range and quality of the learning opportunities, the relationships that shape and support them, and the way in which they interact with the child, which create the capacity to learn. Once more, relationships are emphasised as being of importance in pedagogical decisions, which could ultimately affect children's perceived notions of inclusion.

To return to the issue of the lack of power, Allan's (1999) research with children and young people in mainstream schools and special units reveals a clash of discourses between the children's desires (for example to be seated beside their friends) and teachers' perception of the children's needs (for support). She reports conflict between the competing discourses of desires and needs, which "usually led to the silencing of the students' desires by the more voluble professionally based needs discourse" (Allan, 2007, p.9). Furthermore, UNESCO's (2009) definition of inclusion also appears to reflect this conflict. By representing the image of the young child as too immature to comment on their education, and by referring to 'the appropriate age range', it is possible that young children could be silenced by their teachers. Therefore, my research seeks to extend Allan's (2007) work, by considering whether the clash of discourses evident in her research with young people with special needs, is also prevalent for children in the early years, regardless of any perceived labels.

Revisiting Moriarty *et al.'s* (2008) point that, while the teacher and student each adopts or incorporates the role of the other, the teacher has a particular form of leadership role to enact, raises issues of accountabilities and responsibilities. Reid and O'Donaghue (2004) refer to empirical data, which identify that teacher training programmes are focusing on the transmission of pedagogical skills, which are of immediate use to teachers, rather than a consideration of the child as an active agent in their learning. This may be due to the increasing accountability in nurseries and pre-schools, who are expected to ensure that children are adequately prepared to contribute to the new knowledge society (Field, 2010). MacNaughton (2005) states that in order

to be considered a good/appropriate early childhood educator, they must adopt developmental learning theories. However, they could discard the truths of child development in favour of other truths through which to assess and work with young children. Foucault (1980; 1988) contends that we can choose the truths we privilege and that the possibility of choice implies the opportunity for disrupting a regime of truth and its inequitable effects. The possibility to disrupt these regimes, reinforces the need to adopt democratic approaches to learning.

However, in order to discard or disrupt these truths, it becomes important to consider practitioner values, since their decisions will be predicated upon their epistemological and ontological perceptions of truth. Tirri's (2010) research on teacher values, identifies caring and respect, professionalism and commitment, and cooperation as key to informing professional ethics and relationships. For Tirri (2010, p.156), caring and respect are the most "evident emotional expressions" apparent in meeting the needs of individual students. Clement (2010, p.43) identifies student perceptions of 'caring teachers' claiming that they,

> Interact democratically and encourage reciprocity in communication, deal with students equitably and respect them as persons, account for individual differences when formulating expectations, offer constructive feedback, give appropriate support and feedback, have high expectations of students, and model motivation in regard to their own work.

These perceptions resonate with two of the four teacher qualities or values, as defined by Rogers (1969), which are desirable in establishing teacher-student relationships to optimise learning. He refers to:

- **Prizing, Accepting, Trust** - where the teacher acknowledges individual students, and cares for them in such a way that their feelings and opinions are affirmed. It includes accepting the students' 'occasional apathy' and 'erratic desires' as well as their disciplined efforts.
- **Empathic Understanding** - where the teacher demonstrates a sensitive understanding of how the student thinks and feels about learning. Rogers (1969, p.111) refers to this as listening to student voice, "At last

someone understands how it feels to be me without wanting to analyse me or judge me. Now I can grow and learn".

Both of these values resonate with my study. By engaging with children's voices and sharing their perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities with practitioners, the study proffers the opportunity for practitioners to reflect on their pedagogical practice and to consider the effect it might have on children's perceived notions of inclusion. Moreover, it emphasises that the child should be at the core of her/his learning experience and they should be recognised as important in her/his own right.

Freire's (1998) *Indispensable Qualities of Progressive Teachers* also portrays the emotionally responsive teacher, and reaffirms the need for a democratic approach to teaching and learning. Four of Freire's (1998) seven qualities are:

- **Humility** – knowing our own limitations, and embracing a democratic rather than an authoritarian classroom.
- **Lovingness** – loving both students and teaching, and practising 'armed love' (fighting for what is right).
- **Tolerance** – respecting difference but not "acquiescing to the intolerable" (Freire, 1998, p.42).
- **Decisiveness** – making often-difficult choices for the best, yet being careful not to "nullify oneself in the name of being democratic" (Freire, 1998, p.42).

Freire (1998) acknowledges the importance of the relationship between the child and practitioner through lovingness and humility, whilst also recognising the need for democratic approaches to learning. He also appreciates that making the right decision is not always straightforward and that respecting difference can also lead to difficult decisions. These qualities strongly reflect the principles of inclusion apropos recognising diversity (Booth *et al.,* 2000) and the importance of relationships (O'Brien and Forest, 1989).

Reflecting on the research studies discussed this far (see Hart *et al.,* 2004; Reid and O'Donaghue, 2004; MacNaughton, 2005), it appears that embedded within the discourse on what promotes an inclusive learning environment for children, is the notion that teachers need to be mindful of the pedagogy they employ. This is discussed within the following section.

2.4   Pedagogy

Pedagogy has been described as the "act and discourse of teaching" (Alexander 2004, p.4), the application of professional judgements or "any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another" (Watkins and Mortimer, 1999, p.17). Resnick (2000), drawing on well-established psychological approaches, identified two core features of pedagogy. The first she called 'knowledge-based constructivism', an interpretive, inferential basis for learning from which learners can construct meaning. The second core component draws on social developmental and motivational theory referred to as 'effort-based learning'.

In concurrence with Hart *et al.'s* (2004) work discussed previously, Resnick (2000) argues that it is important not to socialise learners into inhibiting views of their own learning and intelligence. Blatchford *et al.* (2003) refer to a further consideration of the contexts within which learning takes place; in the school environment, this means a systematic comprehension of social contexts within classrooms. Classroom processes have been viewed in terms of teachers' actions toward pupils and pupils' learning or attainments, rather than in terms of contextual dimensions affecting pupils and teachers together (Blatchford *et al.,* 2003). It could be argued, therefore, that the two components of pedagogy, cited by Resnick (2000) (learning and motivation), are both developed in a social context.

Within early childhood education, and more specifically the EYFS (DfE, 2014), there is a dominance of sociocultural theoretical framing. Here, the child's development occurs on two levels: firstly on the social level; and then on the

individual level (Vygotsky, 1978). Pedagogical practices observable in early years settings range from didactic interactions, to modelling, prompting exploration, questioning, scaffolding specific skill acquisition and nurturing a child's disposition to learn (Stephen, 2010). Much of the learning occurs in contexts that adopt a Vygotskian approach, which tends to focus on the one-to-one relationship, usually adult to child. As such, relations between intellectual equals (and relationships around informal, playful activities), are not deemed to be of importance. However, pupil-pupil or 'peer' relations, as developmental psychology has shown (see Pellegrini and Blatchford, 2000), can be an intrinsically motivating context for learning.

In relation to pedagogical activities within this study, these were understood to mean activities that adopted,

> The instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.,* 2002, p.28).

Blatchford *et al.* (2003) contend that in contrast to adult-child relations, pupil-pupil relations are more likely to enable the sharing of power, which is strongly affiliated with the principles of inclusion (see Freire, 1970; Clough and Barton, 1998; Roberts, 2002; Blenkinsop, 2005; Bruce, 2005; Moss, 2007). However, this does not preclude the development of adult-child relationships. Rather, it is suggested that through the adoption of more democratic pedagogical principles, as discussed in the previous section, children are still motivated to learn. By employing a more inclusive approach to learning through the sharing of power, it is suggested that practitioners could espouse a more collaborative pedagogical approach.

This collaborative pedagogical approach could be described as a social pedagogy. Social pedagogy is an amalgam of three words: Social - from the Latin 'socius' which means friend or companion; Pedagogy - from the Greek 'pais' meaning child and 'agein' - meaning to lead (Hegstrup, 2003). Petrie *et al.* (2005, p.3) define social pedagogy as "education in the broadest sense of

the word". It resonates with Alexander's (2004) definition of pedagogy that connects with culture, social structure and human agency. It reflects the belief that education is about the whole child, embracing her/his social, emotional, psychological and physiological needs, locating themselves in time, place and the social world. Eriksson (2010, p.5) concurs commenting,

> Social pedagogy has to be seen both as a practice and a philosophical approach, with its own theoretical orientation to the world, an orientation with a humanitarian and democratic basis.

Here, Eriksson (2010) reflects humanistic values, which are in accordance with Merry's (2002) view that children should be able to take responsibility for their experiences. This further reflects Rose and Shevlin's (2004) image of children as active agents and as human beings in their own right, not simply as 'adults in waiting'. As such, social pedagogy works in the 'here and now' and uses 'the moment' as the space and place of pedagogic practice. Stevens (2010) refers to social pedagogy as having a strong democratic and inclusive element that promotes children's rights and views children as complex human beings in the present.

Hämäläinen (2003), however, argues that an activity does not espouse a social pedagogy because of the use of particular methods, but rather because those methods are chosen as a consequence of 'social pedagogical thinking'. Consequently, it is as much an attitude and a way of conceptualising relationships with children, as it is a body of knowledge. In this regard, social pedagogy can be perceived as resonating with the uniqueness of children's cultural backgrounds as well as their individuality, which reflects the definition of inclusion in terms of responding to difference (Forest and Pearpoint, 1992; Ainscow, 2007). Thus, Hedges and Cullen (2011, p.935) maintain that there is a research-based argument for,

> Participative pedagogy built on sociocultural notions such as intersubjectivity and co-construction and a participation plus model for pedagogy that uses intuitive intellectual resources and children's learning identities to sustain thinking and promote outcomes in responsive pedagogy.

Furthermore, Lenz Taguchi (2010, p.18) calls for a turning away from learning as a "technical process of representation, reproduction, categorisation and normalisation" and towards new ways of thinking, which offer no predetermined outcome or certainty. In this approach, the child takes responsibility for their own learning, whilst the teacher adopts a more supportive role and enables the co-construction of knowledge, through a participative pedagogy.

Laevers (1999, cited in Goldspink *et al.*, 2007, p.3) extends the notion of a social pedagogy that focuses on the rights of children to consider that "involvement and wellbeing are intermediate process variables which reveal the quality of pedagogy through its immediate effect on the learner". Involvement and well-being have been cited as two of the most important and reliable indicators of quality for educational settings and processes essential for children's ability to learn (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.,* 2002). The level of the children's well-being indicates how effective the environment is in succeeding to help children develop trust and confidence, thus freeing them to participate in their curriculum with vitality and enjoyment.

These attributes of trust and participation align with the democratic principles of Hart *et al.* (2004). By enabling children to form relationships with practitioners that are constructed on the principle of trust that their views will be respected to facilitate their learning, children will experience increased participation in their pedagogical activities. Hence, well-being is conceived as a prerequisite for involvement, or participation, (Laevers, 2000) and for social functioning (Mayr and Ulich, 1999), which could ultimately result in all children having increased perceptions of inclusion.

Farquar and White (2014), rather than relying on a universal truth of knowing, question the discourse surrounding pedagogy. They suggest that philosophy plays a central role in defining pedagogy in the early years. Furthermore, Vandenbroeck *et al.* (2012) advise that current methodologies, which are often isolated from philosophical critique, do not give sufficient consideration to the

complexity of pedagogical encounters. Walkerdine's (1990; 1992) extensive body of work has examined relationships between truths about pedagogical practices in the early years. She posits that the child-centred pedagogies at the heart of early childhood education, constitute its 'regime of truth'. These are based on an ethics of individualism and on the "dream of democratic harmony" (Walkerdine, 1992, p.22) based on fantasies rather than facts of who the child is (Walkerdine, 1988). If this is accepted as true, then the notion of engaging with children's voices becomes paramount in understanding and responding to the diversity and individuality of each child. In so doing, matters that are of importance to children may form the basis for the child-centred education.

Farquhar's (2003) synthesis of research about effective pedagogy in the early years in New Zealand, identified seven characteristics, three of which relate to how children are actively involved in their education. These are: working with children as emergent learners; contextual knowledge of children's learning; and scaffolding, co-constructing and promoting metacognitive strategies to facilitate children's learning in the context of adult/older child activities. Jordan (2004) distinguishes between the co-construction and scaffolding of learning, in terms of the power structure of the relationships involved. Co-construction, she argues, involves,

> Adult and child as equal partners in interactions, so that each is both listening and contributing, and neither is dominating the field of shared meanings that is developing in the intersubjective space (Jordan, 2004, p.37).

Whereas, scaffolding refers to the "practice of providing guidance and support to children as they move from one level of competence to another" (Dunphy, 2008, p.5).

Commitment to the co-construction of ideas with children thus requires the practitioner to adopt an ethical position regarding her/his work.

> The teacher cannot work without a sense of meaning, without being a protagonist. She cannot be merely an implementer – albeit intelligent – of projects and programmes decided and created by others, for some 'other' child and for undefined contexts. The

highest value and the deepest significance lie in this search for sense
and meaning that are shared by adults and children (by teachers and
students) though always in full awareness of different identities and
different roles (Rinaldi, 2005, p.56).

Adopting an ethical position resonates with the need for practitioners to
examine their values, since they will need to display empathic understanding;
prize, accept and trust the children with whom they work; and embody
humility in their pedagogical approach to teaching (Rogers, 1969; Freire,
1998). In so doing, practitioners should also espouse the principles of
inclusion that focus on valuing and responding to diversity and difference
(Booth *et al.,* 2000).

In addition to considering practitioners' values, work in the philosophy of early
education (Moss *et al.,* 2000; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005), and in the attention
to some aspects of successful practice (Rinaldi 2005), moves towards the
notion of a 'listening pedagogy'. In concordance with some authors, (see
Freire, 1970; Rose and Shevlin, 2004; Dahlberg *et al.,* 2006), this pedagogy
recognises and celebrates young children as active and powerful agents in
their own learning and development. Furthermore, it endorses the notion
proffered by Pascal and Bertram (2009), that by listening to children's views it
is possible to understand their priorities, interests and concerns, and how they
feel about themselves and their lives. This could be construed as practitioners
working in participation with children, where power is shared and children are
actively involved in decision-making. Within the context of inclusion, Booth and
Ainscow (2004) refer to the importance of participation. They state,

> Participation implies learning, playing or working in collaboration
> with others. It involves making choices about, and having a say in,
> what we do. More deeply, it is about being recognised, accepted
> and valued for ourselves (Booth and Ainscow, 2004, p.3).

This definition reflects the rationale of a listening pedagogy that values
children in their own right. Furthermore, it espouses the notion that inclusion
is inextricably connected with valuing difference and diversity, and explicates
how it can be enriched by engaging with children's voices through democratic
pedagogical approaches.

Participation, in pedagogical terms, is explicated by Siraj-Blatchford *et al.* (2002) in their intensive case study analysis of 12 'effective' preschools in the *Effective Provision of Pre-School Education* (EPPE) longitudinal study in the UK. They identified adult and child involvement in high quality dialogue, and cognitive engagement or co-construction of learning in a careful juxtaposition of teacher-led and child-initiated activities, as two features of effective pedagogy. This is reflected in Brady's (2006) definition of a model of contemporary learning and teaching that is based on social constructivism. It espouses Bruner's (1996) claim that learning should be participative (students being engaged in their learning), proactive (students taking initiative for their learning), and collaborative (students working with each other and their teacher to promote their learning).

These concepts resonate with my study, which perceive the child as an active agent in their learning. With regard to the second concept, proactive, whilst this is not a specific aim of the research, it is envisaged that it could become one the outcomes. If practitioners are able to reflect on their pedagogical practice in light of the children's comments, it is possible for them to enable the children to become an integral part of their learning by engaging with their voices.

Both Siraj-Blatchford *et al.* (2002) and Farquar (2003) identify with western traditions of education inspired by Rousseau, Dewey and Piaget, where the child is viewed as naturally developing and an active learner. From this position, an array of phrases about how children learn and how best to teach them are frequently cited. These include: learning occurs through play (Moyles, 2010); children have natural inclinations to explore (Rousseau, 1965); children should be encouraged to discover knowledge (Piaget, 1936); the teacher should build on what children already know (Bruner, 1996); the teacher is the guide on the side (Vygotsky, 1978); and learning should be experiential and concrete (Dewey, 1938).

Furthermore, Gestwicki (2006) maintains that from a constructivist perspective, the child responds to their interests and curiosity in accordance with their maturational developmental level. In so doing, the child becomes a competent co-constructor of knowledge of the world, based on a socio-constructivist paradigm of learning (Dahlberg *et al.,* 2006). This aspect of learning is often described as agency, which once more aligns with the principle of inclusion that recognises the value of what children have to say. These approaches to learning could be construed as referring to a child-centred education that emerges from an engagement with their natural environment.

However, when Chung and Walsh (2000) reviewed the use of child-centredness in contemporary early childhood literature, they found over 40 meanings of the term. These include: concerns with children's interests; participation in decision-making; and identifying and meeting potential. With such variance in definitions, it becomes difficult to sustain the argument that child-centredness should remain at the centre of children's learning, if a consensus of opinion cannot be agreed upon its meaning. However, the key to the definition appears to be that the child is at the centre of their learning.

Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) provide research evidence to reflect on the use of a child-centred approach, in terms of children's ability to make free choices about their activities. They indicate that settings, which have a balance between child-initiated and practitioner-led learning activities, are most effective in terms of children's cognitive, social and dispositional outcomes. This affirms Wood's (2014) assertion that for some children, free choice, rather than enabling them to 'meet their potential', may further marginalise some children; therefore, providing a balance between the different types of learning activities may seek to redress the disparity. Like Bowman *et al.* (2000), Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) point to the importance of sensitive and responsive support from adults who can manage the cognitive challenge that children experience, and support them in sustained, shared thinking.

Dewey (2004) recognises the value of a discovery-based approach (see Montessori, 1992), which enables children to take control of their learning. He believes that all situations provide opportunities for learning.

> Hence one of the weightiest problems with which the philosophy of education has to cope is the method of keeping a proper balance between the informal and the formal, the incidental and the intentional (Dewey, 2004, p.9).

This view is supported by Formosinho and Oliveira-Formosinho (2008) in their *Pedagogy-in-Participation* model. They propose that through the immersion of children in pedagogical environments that co-construct their learning, their participatory pedagogy aims to create a climate (both material and relational) for cultivating democracy, identities, humanity and knowledge. Moreover, children will feel respected, valued, included and answered, irrespective of their individual differences and even because of them. Children are listened to, and their opinions are taken into account, in the organisation of the learning environment, which includes the pedagogical materials. Furthermore, practitioners consider their perception of children's preferences, purposes and achievement when planning the pedagogical activities. All of these concepts are strongly aligned with the principles of inclusion as discussed in the previous sections**.**

Within empirical studies that focus on pedagogy in the early years, the findings of a meta-analysis of teaching approaches conducted by Sheridan in 2001, reveal four strategies for how it may be possible for practitioners to interact with children. These are: abdication - the teacher gives up her/his professionalism; dominance - s/he overrides the children's initiatives; democratic - an engaged, sensitive, social and negotiating strategy; and democratic/learning oriented - has clearly defined learning orientation in addition to the aforementioned approach.

Each of these teaching strategies leads to different possibilities for children's participation and collaboration. The teaching strategies of abdication and dominance seem to either restrict or limit children's possibilities for learning

and experiencing, and therefore, offer little space for their own initiatives and participation. Consequently, these strategies could be considered less inclusive since the children are not included in the decision-making process about their learning, playing or working (Booth and Ainscow, 2004). It is the democratic approach that promotes interplay, participation, communication and cooperation between the teachers and children, which could be construed as providing more opportunities for inclusion. Teachers with a democratic/learning oriented strategy encourage children to ask questions, learn and participate. Sheridan (2001) reports that this strategy results in children appearing content, helping each other and solving conflict through negotiation, which again could promote inclusion.

The democratic and democratic/learning oriented strategies reflect a humanist approach, since they enable children to take responsibility for their experiences and offer the potential for individual freedom (Merry, 2002). Approaches connected to humanistic education have been labelled in various ways: child-centred; learner-centred; student-centred; person-centred; and person-to-person (see Rogers and Freiberg, 1994; Henson, 2003; Ferch *et al.*, 2006; Paris and Combs, 2006; Doddington and Hilton, 2007). Whilst these definitions may not always be clear or have the same meaning (Paris and Combs, 2006), they are in agreement that they actively need to involve students.

Lenz Taguchi (2010) concurs with this approach to education. She acknowledges the importance of the individual, referring to a pedagogy that works with, and makes use of, rather than working against, differences, diversities and increased complexities of learning and knowing.

> It is a pedagogy that is inclusive of children's and students' thinking and different strategies and ways of doing, as well as their subject positioning on the margins of social class, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p.9).

Formosinho and Oliveira-Formosinho's (2008) *Pedagogy-in-Participation* model also enables each child to co-construct her/his own learning and celebrate her/his achievements. In this pedagogical context, children are able to feel

valued and respected, irrespective of their individual differences - a perspective that strongly resonates with definitions of inclusion (see Booth and Ainscow, 2004; Carrington, 2007; Leach and Moon, 2008).

Moreover, Lenz Taguchi (2010) maintains that pedagogical practice based on a philosophy of belonging and learning, differs from one based on sociocultural theories, which dominates the field of education at large and especially in early childhood education. Wenger (1998) emphasises the connection between learning and belonging, viewing it through the lens of humans as social beings. He argues that learning is about knowledge (a matter of competence with respect to 'valid enterprises') and meaning (representing our ability to experience the world in 'meaningful engagement'). This positions learning as belonging through community or social configurations. Furthermore, Wenger suggests that by participating with others through shared historical and social resources, it engenders the possibilities for mutual understanding. This concurs with research conducted by Hedegaard and Fleer (2008) and Rogoff (2003), who demonstrate how children's learning occurs through a process of participation in activities, whilst recognising the importance of cultural communities. They perceive learning as a process of transformation of participation that has personal, interpersonal and cultural perspectives (Rogoff, 2003).

It also reflects Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, in which an important concept is emancipation and liberation from oppressive social relations. With this pedagogy, students are encouraged to consider that phenomena, such as inequality, are not obligatory, but that they have arisen within a certain historical context that is established and produced by man-made social processes. Upon becoming aware of this reality, a person no longer needs to feel like a manipulable object and thus becomes an integral part of the learning process through dialogue and decision-making. These perceptions emulate those of Oliveira-Formosinho and Araujo (2004) who emphasise the importance of the role of both teacher and learner. Here, both possess competence and agency, both own ability and liking for collaboration, and both have the right to participate and develop meaning during their learning

journeys. The learning process is thus embedded in two interrelated contexts: the authentic dialogue between the teachers and learners; and the social reality in which people exist.

However, despite the wealth of research to support democratic and participatory pedagogies within the early years, academics in the field (see Hultqvist and Dahlberg, 2001; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Farquhar and Fitzsimons, 2008), maintain that the increased focus on early years education, intensified government intervention, and the introduction of a mandatory standardised curriculum, has inadvertently influenced a greater formalisation of the early years curriculum in England (Farquhar and Fitzsimons, 2008; Ang, 2014). This has led to increasing emphasis on educational attainments, assessment, and learning goals, thereby devaluing the early years experience for young children (see Brown, 2007; Pugh, 2010; Rose and Rogers, 2012; Faulkner and Coates, 2013). The overriding aim of the EYFS (DfE, 2014) is ultimately to prepare children academically for school and life and achieve prescribed educational targets. The aim of promoting "teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness'" (DfE, 2014, p.5), and recognition that the "balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults, to help children prepare for more formal learning, ready for Year 1" (DfE, 2014, p.9), is explicitly written and reinforced in the curriculum document.

However, Pugh (2010, p.9) contends that,

> The downwards pressure of Key Stage 1 into Reception classes, together with poorer adult–child ratios in those classes, is creating a less than ideal situation for many four-year-olds'.

Ang (2014) states that within an assessment-driven education system, the danger is that the notion of children's learning and education, (as exemplified through the EYFS (DfE, 2014) and its accompanying assessment frameworks), is relegated to a checklist of requisite skills that describe children's competence, or lack of competence, at school age entry. Genishi and Dyson (2009, p.3) emphasise the apparent disconnect between the realities of early years practice and government policies where "[t]he terrain of early childhood classrooms has been notably eroded by the cumulative pressures for

accountability in education". Their research reveals the daily challenges faced by early years educators who contend with the pressures of academic assessments and who feel compelled to make compromises in their pedagogical choices to account for the demands of a mandated curriculum.

Osgood (2010) notes how early years practitioners have become self-governing professionals under the gaze of simplified, governing data arising from standardised educational goals. Moreover, Adams *et al.* (2004) found that practitioners working in Foundation Stage units were highly influenced by the demands of the curriculum and testing framework, which impacted upon their own professional knowledge about the needs of the children with whom they worked. This could imply that early years practitioners have lost confidence in their professional knowledge; they may have become reliant upon 'official' frameworks and those who enforce them to judge the 'quality' and effectiveness of their practice. Furthermore, Lingard *et al.* (2014) concur with Osgood's view of practitioners as self-governing and identify that the need for inspection and self-regulation is reducing pedagogical discussion and change to one that is focused on performance data.

A consistent thread throughout Genishi's (1992) work is the intrinsic value of supporting children's learning through the exploration of innovative practices and different ways of negotiating the agency and power of both children and practitioners in the classroom. This concurs with Freire (1970), who stresses the importance of reclaiming practitioners' autonomy in initiating and enacting effective pedagogies. He states that pedagogy, and supporting children's learning, is a social process which best takes place in a context where the ability to compare, judge and make pedagogical decisions is exercised, not when learning, teaching and practice is constrained by policy and statutory requirements. Genishi (1992) argues that early years professionals must engage children's interests and learning outside the boundaries of narrowly defined curricula and support alternative means of assessment. Practitioners can then respond to children's learning in a way that is guided by the interests of the child, which is relevant to their diverse

contexts and abilities. In so doing, practitioners will embody the principles of inclusion.

2.5 Summary of key findings from the literature in relation to engaging with voices, inclusion, and pedagogy

To summarise, this chapter has explored and defined the key concepts of engaging with children's voices, inclusion, and pedagogy. The overall aim of the study is to illuminate children's perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities in the Reception class. To achieve this aim, I explored the literature surrounding engaging with children's voices. This thesis reflects the position that there has been a paradigm shift towards the acceptance that children have views and opinions separate from the adults in their lives (James *et al.*, 1998). As such, it concurs with Freire's (1970) belief that children should not be integrated into structures of oppression, but that structures should be transformed so that children can be recognised as beings for themselves. Whilst it recognises that it may not always be possible to fully accommodate all the views and suggestions made by children (Nutbrown and Clough, 2009), it remains steadfast in the opinion that due weight should be given to children's views in all matters that affect them (UNCRC, 2005).

Another key concept explored, was inclusion. It has been noted that inclusion is a complex and diverse term, to which there are afforded many definitions. Within this thesis, inclusion is acknowledged as a concept that promotes the identification and removal of barriers (Ainscow, 2007). It recognises that inclusion is an ongoing and continuous process rather than a state (see Sebba and Ainscow, 1996; Booth and Ainscow, 2002; Ainscow, 2005; UNESCO, 2009), and that it involves unstable processes, occurring in 'moments', often switching children between being included and excluded within the competing discourses of desires and needs (Allan, 1999). Finally, it refers to O'Brien and Forest's (1989) view of inclusion, which centres on the importance for children to belong and form relationships with those around them.

Within the discourse on engaging with children's voices, the notion of sharing power has been identified as a prominent feature. It is inextricably connected to democracy, which necessitates the acknowledgement that inclusion is associated with the increase of participation for a diversity of students (Booth *et al.*, 2000; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Moss, 2007; UNESCO, 2009). Lenz Taguchi (2010) refers to making use of, rather than working against, differences, diversities and increased complexities of learning and knowing. This further reinforces the notion that inclusion is about addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children.

Links were made between definitions of inclusion and how they relate to pedagogy. Critical and social pedagogy were explored and the position for this study is articulated in terms of Alexander's (2004) definition of pedagogy that connects with culture, social structure and human agency. The study reflects the belief that education is about the whole child, embracing her/his social, emotional, psychological and physiological needs, locating themselves in time, place and the social world. Furthermore, it espouses the perspective of Formosinho and Oliveira-Formosinho (2008) that the pedagogical context aims to create a climate for cultivating democracy, identities, humanity, and knowledge, where children feel respected, valued, and included, irrespective of their individual differences. This perspective reflects the importance of belonging within the discourse of inclusion. In my study, belonging is defined as the extent to which individuals feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in their social environment (Goodenow, 1992). Moreover, it acknowledges that just as there are 'a multiplicity of inclusions' (Booth and Ainscow, 1998; Dyson, 1999), belonging is also multidimensional and complex (Yuval-Davies, 2006).

These explications of the terms engaging with voices, inclusion, and pedagogy, led to the formulation of the first two research questions.

- In what ways do children perceive pedagogical activities as promoting inclusion in the Reception class?
- In what ways do children perceive pedagogical activities as hindering inclusion in the Reception class?

Inherent in their development is the acknowledgement that, through a review of the literature, young children's voices are still not prevalent in research about issues that matter to them. MacNaughton *et al.* (2007) suggest that a reason for the lack of research with young children is that it is not perceived as valuable in education. Research which has been conducted with children in the early years, seems to focus on SEN (see Jones and Gillies, 2010). Based on this gap, my study aims to provide opportunities for children in the Reception class to express their views freely and without pressure. In so doing, it seeks to extend the current thinking about research that engages with young children's voices. Consideration was given to how this could be achieved, which is discussed further in the next chapter.

Moreover, it is not simply the notion that children in the early years are not being afforded the same prominence in research studies as older children, which led to my research study. Indeed, some researchers (see Clark *et al.*, 2005; Jones and Gillies, 2010) do engage with the voices of young children, however, their research has been concentrated on children's learning environments, opportunities for play, and inclusion of children with special needs, rather than on the inclusion of all children. It is the apparent lack of empirical studies that connect the fields of learning and inclusion in the early years that led me to this research project, which endeavours to contribute to the literature about young children's perceived notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities.

A further consideration within the study, is the notion that 'due weight' should be given to young children's views. The paucity of empirical research in this field led to the final research question.

- What are practitioners' thoughts on the idea of listening to children's views to inform their pedagogical practice?

In terms of considering the pedagogical activities themselves, this study espouses the position of Mittler (2000, p.4), who maintains that in order to provide an inclusive environment, "there must be scrutiny of what is available to ensure that it is relevant and accessible to the whole range of pupils in the

school". Thus, it seems reasonable to consider whether teachers understand the need for a degree of responsiveness in order that this may be enacted. Corbett (1999) and Hegarty (2001) reinforce this notion, by asserting that issues which inhibit children's inclusion need bringing to the surface so that changes can be made in response to the concerns they raise.

Therefore, by providing examples of children's comments about pedagogical activities they perceive as promoting or hindering inclusion, my study seeks to determine how practitioners reflect on, and respond to, the children's views in relation to their pedagogical practice. In doing so, the children are situated at the foreground of my research. Furthermore, my research has impact within the field of inclusion, by providing a clearer understanding of young children's perceived notions of inclusion.

Finally, a review of the literature indicates that early years educators are contending with the pressures of academic assessments, which oblige them to make compromises in their pedagogical choices (Genishi and Dyson, 2009). Adams *et al.* (2004) concur, stating that these demands impact upon practitioners' own professional knowledge about the needs of the children with whom they work. In light of these pressures, my research offers practitioners the opportunity to reflect on the impact that their pedagogical choices may have on children's perceived notions of inclusion, with the possibility of adapting their practice.

The following chapter presents the methodology adopted in this study. It debates any methodological considerations and ethical issues arising from conducting research about young children. It explains how the research design was developed to explore the main research focus, illuminating children's perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities in the Reception class, and the study's subsequent research questions.

Chapter 3:   Methodological considerations

3.1   Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological positions that were considered before embarking on the research study. The first part deliberates the philosophical dimensions of ontology and epistemology that seek to justify the research design. The next section considers the research methods and offers a discussion about the advantages and limitations of specific participative tools. Finally, it presents the ethical issues, the research integrity of the study and the methods employed to analyse the data. It depicts also, any difficulties that were encountered during the research process.

3.2   Philosophical dimensions

When conducting research it is necessary to consider the philosophical perspective upon which it is based. Punch (2014) argues that methods of inquiry in research are based on assumptions that are formed by an understanding of the nature and what constitutes knowledge of the reality being studied. This is referred to as a paradigm and described by Denzin and Lincoln (1994, pp.107-9) as,

> A set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates, or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of 'the world', the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts.

They purport that inquiry paradigms should address three fundamental issues, namely the ontological, epistemological and methodological positions of the researcher. Clough and Nutbrown (2002) suggest that the examination of research automatically presumes that many assumptions have been made about how the world exists and how it is interpreted. Grix (2010), however, refutes this position stating that answers to questions can only be formulated if the researchers' ontological and epistemological perspectives are made transparent. He argues that this is necessary to debate theoretical positions

and social phenomena, whilst also recognising the philosophical position in both ourselves and others.

Therefore, it is important to define the meaning of these terms. Blaikie (2000) proposes that ontological positions are based on the nature of social reality, what exists, what it looks like, and how it is interpreted. This suggests that each researcher may have a different ontological perspective, since they have individual experiences and views of the world that influence their understanding of social reality. Bryman (2012) refers more specifically to a social ontology that could be viewed as either objectivism or constructivism. Guba and Lincoln (1989, p.43), define constructivism in terms of "asserting .. that realities are social constructions of the mind, and that there exist as many such constructions as there are individuals".

My ontological position within this research, necessitated the adoption of a constructivist approach, where categories and meaning are socially constructed (Bryman, 2012). Although it acknowledges the objectivist position by considering the structure and culture of the setting, it recognises that "there is no objective truth to be known" (Hugly and Sayward, 1987, p.278) and that a diversity of interpretations could be applied to the research data. The constructivist approach enabled me to form an impression of the research data (Ratner, 2008) as I saw it, whilst continually revising my meaning through social interactions with the children and practitioners. In this way, the research was perceived as a continuous process where meaning was evolving throughout, rather than one with a preconceived end result. The nature of a constructivist approach, however, did present some difficulties. I concede that my experience as a teacher may be construed as influential in my interpretation of the data. However, by acknowledging this possibility, I maintain that my views and opinions could be challenged and altered both in the process of data collection and as a result of the data analysis. In this sense, it reflects Bryman's (2012) definition that social reality is an ongoing process. Moreover, it acknowledges the importance of stating my ontological position. Mason (1996, pp.12-13) advocates that a reluctance to recognise this stems

from "vagueness, imprecision, or a failure to understand that there is more than one ontological position".

A further consideration when undertaking research is to reflect on one's epistemology. Epistemology is one of the core branches of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge, its methods, validation, and "the possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality, whatever it is understood to be" (Blaikie, 2000, p.8). These ways are not static, but reflect the assumptions on which they are based and their origin (Grix, 2010). Broadly speaking, there appear to be two distinct and contrasting epistemological positions when conducting research: positivism and interpretivism. Bryman (2001, p.12) describes the former as a position that "advocates the application of methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond" and the latter, one that,

> Is predicated upon the view that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action (Bryman, 2001, pp.12-13).

Within the confines of this research, an interpretivist approach was adopted since it was predominantly concerned with eliciting and analysing the participants' views and opinions. Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p.68) suggest that "to understand any human phenomenon we must investigate it as part of the context within which it lies". The context within this research, was the setting in which the children were taught (the Reception class), and it was investigated to determine how this particular educational construct affected each child's perception of their inclusion within their pedagogical activities. Henceforth, it became important to deliberate the possible methodological approaches.

Within the research methods of social sciences there are two broad approaches: qualitative and quantitative. This is not to suggest that there are only two approaches, but that they are umbrella terms, under which a wide and diverse range of "paradigms, approaches to data, and the methods for the

analysis of data" are categorised (Punch, 2000, p.139). Quantitative research strategies use specific language such as hypothesis and variables, and consequently, rely on the observation and measurement of repeated incidences to determine causality and comparison (Grix, 2010). Since it has been determined that this research project adopted a constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology (Bryman, 2012), a qualitative approach was considered to be a more apposite methodological approach.

Qualitative research is an inductive view of the relationship between theory and research, where the former is generated out of the latter (Bryman, 2012). It is multimethod or multiparadigmatic in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Although this mode appears to dictate inductive reasoning, there are others who favour the use of the term abductive reasoning (Blaikie, 2004; Charmaz, 2006). With abduction the researcher grounds a theoretical understanding of the contexts and people s/he is studying through the language, meanings, and perspectives forming their views. The crucial factor is that the researcher comes to their interpretation of the social world as seen from the participants' perspectives. What is distinctive about abduction is that the theoretical account is grounded in the view of the perspectives of those involved in the research.

Another interpretation of qualitative research is to view it as a bricolage, which is pragmatic, strategic and self-reflexive (Nelson *et al.*, 1992). The choice of method is therefore dependent upon both the questions asked and their context. The intimate relationship that forms between the researcher and what is being studied, and the situational constraints that occur, enables the methods to be altered according to the participants' responses. Thus, the prospect is raised that the researcher might view things differently from an outsider who has little contact or comprehension of the subject matter (Taylor, 1993; Skeggs, 1994; Foster, 1995). Furthermore, the epistemology underlying qualitative research, as expressed by Lofland and Lofland (1995, p.16), addresses the need to "participate in the mind of another human being". By seeing the world through the participants' eyes, it becomes possible to

demonstrate greater empathy and understanding than would otherwise prove possible (Fielding, 1982; Armstrong, 1992; Burman *et al.,* 2001).

Qualitative research is often accused of being overly descriptive in nature when reporting its results. Lofland and Lofland (1995, pp.164-5) warn against "descriptive excess", whereby the amount of detail overwhelms or inhibits the analysis of data. Nonetheless, it is important to include descriptive detail to emphasise the contextual understanding of social behaviour. For example, I may have initially interpreted the behaviour exhibited by a child engaged in a pedagogical activity in one way, but following a more detailed analysis of the activity itself, an alternative explication may be realised. Moreover, by conducting research in more than one setting, such as the classroom and the outdoor environment, it becomes possible to consider how these contexts, rather than the pedagogical activity, may influence a child's behaviour. In this sense, it is grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly 'interpretivist', focusing on how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced (Mason, 1996).

3.3   The research design

The study's research design concentrated on both eliciting the voices of the children and exploring how practitioners responded to their views. Therefore, it became significant to consider the methodological premises on which to both formulate the research questions and develop the methods for data collection. Furthermore, for it to reflect the tenet of inclusion, the research design needed to be compatible with the principles of inclusion. The initial impetus for the study came from my years of experience as a primary school teacher. Here, I observed and experienced the challenges of employing child-initiated activities in primary schools, where the teaching was predominantly focused on the National Curriculum and its target driven agendas. Following this initial stimulus, I examined the literature within this field and, as detailed in the previous chapter, identified that there was a gap in empirical research, which focused on young children's perceptions of inclusion. This led me to

design a study that sought the perceptions of young children about their inclusion in pedagogical activities, and also considered what practitioners thought about listening to children's views in order to inform their pedagogical practice.

I adopted a question-methods approach to the study (Punch, 2014), where my research questions preceded the methodological design. Through their identification, it became possible to consider the implications for adopting appropriate methods (Shulman, 1988) that capture or generate the data (Mason, 1996). It addresses the previously held tendency in the social sciences towards methodolatry (Punch, 2014), which Janesick (1994, p.215) refers to as "the slavish attachment and devotion to method". By employing a questions-based design, the study sought to minimise the direct influence of putting method ahead of content, however, there was still a danger of constraining what could be studied. Shulman (1988, p.15) emphasises that "we are advised to focus first on our problem and its characteristics before we rush to select the appropriate method".

Punch (2014, p.25) argues that the question-method approach is,

> An aspect of conceptual clarity which involves the precise and consistent use of terms, internal consistency within an argument and logical links between concepts.

Consequently, this study required a clear understanding of the concepts of engaging with children's voices, inclusion, and pedagogy. It was through the analysis of the discourse surrounding these concepts that the following research questions were formulated.

1. In what ways do children perceive pedagogical activities as promoting inclusion in the Reception class?
2. In what ways do children perceive pedagogical activities as hindering inclusion in the Reception class?
3. What are practitioners' thoughts on the idea of listening to children's views to inform their pedagogical practice?

To explore these questions, one must define how the participants were selected and the methods by which the data were collected.

3.4   Research Participants

The sampling strategy was an integral component of the research design because it could have affected the usefulness of the data collected, the type of analysis possible, and the extent to which wider inferences might be drawn (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014). The participants were chosen according to purposive sampling because of their particular features, which then enabled a detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and questions of the study (Bryman, 2012). It was this precision of salient characteristics by which the selection was made, that gave the study its rigour. This had two principle aims: to ensure that all the key criteria of the subject matter were covered; and, that within each of these, enough diversity was included so that the impact of each characteristic could be explored.

I selected two schools: an average-sized infant school - due to an existing working relationship between the class teacher and the university; and a slightly smaller than average-sized primary school – because of a connection with the head teacher. Furthermore, within the two schools, the individuals belonged to the same subculture (Reception class) and the children were all of the same age (four to five years). In order to respond to the diversity principle, the schools were selected due to their difference in size and structure. The primary school was renowned for adopting an entire learning experience that did not adhere to the National Curriculum. It was this difference that led me to select it as a contrasting school to the infant school, which followed the National Curriculum.

The research adopted a homogenous approach to sampling (Patton, 2002; Robson, 2002; Holloway and Wheeler, 2010) because it provided a detailed picture of a particular phenomenon, namely pedagogical activities that

promote or hinder inclusion within the Reception class. Equally, it could be deemed to adopt a typical case sampling (Patton, 2002; Bryman, 2012; Cresswell, 2013) because the schools were selected on the basis that they adopted a particular position. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) report (October 2014) of the infant school states,

> Exciting opportunities are provided for children to develop their skills effectively through explorative learning in the indoor and outdoor environments. Children are well motivated and interested to learn because of how well the exciting learning opportunities are planned by staff.

The Ofsted report (May 2009) of the primary school states,

> Teaching is outstanding with an excellent balance between activities where children discover things for themselves and those where they work with an adult. This is supported by an excellent curriculum which is matched well to pupils' needs and interests. It excites children's imaginations and encourages them to want to learn.

Both of these reports depict schools that utilise child-initiated learning through exploration, although it should be noted that in the primary school it was six years since their last inspection and that the early years staff had subsequently changed. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge that the data might have been limited by adopting this sampling method. Nevertheless, I was confident that the structures, sizes and approaches to learning were suitably different to offer possibilities for similarities and differences to be identified through the data analysis. Reference to the socio-economic and ethnic structures of the schools is presented in sections **4.1.1** and **4.1.2.**

In keeping with its inclusive nature, all children were involved in the research process, however, only the data regarding those who had returned their consent forms were included in the analysis. This resulted in 40 children and seven practitioners, across both schools, partaking in the research, which generated very rich data from multiples sources. Within the context of qualitative research, the focus is not so much on the size of the sample, but with the richness of the data collected (Patton, 2002). In my research, the data were collected about all children through fieldnotes, observations, individual and group, interviews, and with the practitioners in individual interviews.

By analysing the fieldnotes and observations, I was able to select photographs of a range of pedagogical activities that reflected the different ways in which the children were taught in the two schools (Appendix E). A representative sample of the children's quotes from each of the schools (Appendix A) was then used to determine how the practitioners regarded listening to children's views. The range of collection methods provided sufficient data that could be analysed in depth, thus presenting opportunities to reflect on what was revealed, rather than focusing on the breadth and size of the sample. Furthermore, the children were offered the prospect of explicating their perceptions of inclusion, through a drawing activity in the individual interviews. By providing different opportunities for eliciting their views, I believe the sample size was appropriate for the research criteria.

Table **3.1** presents information about the number of participants in each of the schools. Pseudonyms have been provided for each of the schools to maintain their anonymity.

Table **3.1** Participants in research study from both schools

Riverside Infants	Oak Ridge Primary
21 children in Reception class	19 children in Reception class
2 teachers	1 teacher
1 nursery nurse	1 nursery nurse
1 teaching assistant	1 teaching assistant

Observations of all the children in the study were recorded and each child was included in the group and individual interviews. The practitioners were only involved in the individual interviews. Participants were provided with the necessary information about the research before agreeing to partake in the activities. This is discussed in detail in the ethical issues in section **3.6**. Having decided upon the selection criteria for the participants, it was necessary to consider the research methods for data collection.

3.5   Selecting research methods

The first two research questions focused on how children perceived pedagogical activities to promote and hinder inclusion. Therefore, it was important for me to contemplate how I confronted social, political, and psychological perspectives that militate against taking children seriously (Darbyshire *et al.,* 2005). Institutions and professions often have an entrenched tradition of doing things 'to' children (de Winter *et al.*, 1999; Sandbaek, 1999; Runeson *et al.,* 2001), focusing exclusively on adults, whilst society often sees them as immature and not to be taken seriously (Aries, 1962; James and Prout, 1997; Mason and Fattore, 2005). However, more recently the sociology of childhood has exemplified the concept of children as agents who actively and competently participate in these constructions (James *et al.*, 1998; Mayall, 2002). More specifically in regards to very young children, Malaguzzi (1993a) argues that there is a need to change the dominant image from adults-in-the-making, and irrational and incompetent beings, to capable people in their own right. This paradigm shift around children as active subjects and expert knowers has been associated with new roles for children in research (Mason and Danby, 2011).

Research exploring the sensitive contents of children's lives is evident in studies conducted by Alcock (2007); Markstom and Hallden (2009); and Ebrahim (2011). The projects by Alcock (with children aged six months to almost five years) and Markstrom and Hallden (with children aged three to five years) conclude that children actively draw on a range of strategies to assert themselves, manage regulations and negotiate the social order. This attests to the notion that children are capable and influential beings (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2006; Prout, 2000). The central tenet of Ebrahim's (2011) research (with children aged one to six years) was to illuminate the perspective of young children as agents. Usually this type of research is based on responses by adults about young children's constructions of childhood (Ebrahim, 2007). However, Ebrahim's (2011) study drew on an empowerment approach that included young children as key informants when producing knowledge and understanding in their lives.

While there is a positive move toward listening to children's and young people's perspectives, there is still some apprehension as regards to eliciting the views of preschool children below the age of eight years (see Hill, 2005; Pound and Lee, 2011). There is a strong tradition of adults conducting research *on* younger children in this age range, mainly within the fields of developmental psychology and education (Tay-Lim and Lim, 2013). Moreover, Mayall (2001), in referring to three different positions in research - *on, with* or *about* children - asserts that research *on* children reinforces the concept of the adult in the superior and dominant position. She contends that research *with* children challenges this perspective, recognising that children have an important role to play within the process and are indeed often the most knowledgeable about issues that affect them directly. By working *with* the group, researchers aim to transform not only the power relations embedded in the research, but also those in the context in which the research is being conducted (Thiessen, 2007).

Mayall's (2001) third position, research *about* children, is where they are considered as active agents in the process, but are not consulted about the design or involved in the data collection and analysis. In my study, the children may be considered active agents because they were able to bring their perspective to the research, which was subsequently shared with practitioners so that they might reflect on their practice in terms of inclusion. In doing so, this study contributes to existing research regarding young children, but rather than adopting the position of research *on* children it focuses more specifically on research *about* children. They were given opportunities to express their views freely by employing participatory tools that were familiar within their pedagogical environment.

Foucault (1985) purports that conducting research to inform adults about the lives of young children, whilst also placing them at the centre, can empower children in decision-making about their lives. It can raise issues that might not otherwise have been considered, and suggests options that might not have been conceived. In this sense, I was mindful that the research should not become merely tokenistic (Dockett *et al.,* 2011). Whilst endorsing this view,

Lather (2007, p.136) argues that qualitative researchers have become too obsessed with voices, romanticising what research informants say, and indulging in "confessional tales, authorial self-revelation … the reinscription of some unproblematic real". She argues instead for "complexity, partial truths and multiple subjectivities" (Lather, 2007, p.136), and in doing so, reaffirms the perception of Britzman (1989) that there is not simply one voice. Multiple subjectivities suggest that it is not only a political terrain but also social context that affects voice; what you say one day may not be the same as the next.

Fielding (2001) identifies further difficulties, in particular, the issue of power and who controls the research and its data, since it depends on who is listening, what they choose to do as a result, and in whose interests they act. Unequal power relationships between adult researchers and children is an area that is widely debated, and one in which concerns are expressed about how the perspective and position of the child are considered in developing methodological approaches in research (see Morrow and Richards, 1996; Mayall, 2001). Several ways are suggested to equalise these power relations. Farquhar (1990) emphasises the need for reflexivity, responsiveness and open-ended research goals and methods, which allow children to set their own agendas and talk about their daily lives and views, whilst Malewski (2005, p.219) argues for "precocious methodologies". He refers to methods that empower children and challenge traditional practices with a tendency to ignore their lived experiences in different sociocultural contexts. This reinforces the principle of the UNCRC (2005), which refers to the need to show patience and creativity in the way that children's views are collected.

Thus far, the research design has focused on the need to engage with children's voices. This was achieved by using photographs of different pedagogical activities from each of the schools, to initiate conversations with the children in groups. Furthermore, opportunities were provided for individual conversations by asking the children to draw pictures of the pedagogical activities they perceived to be most and least inclusive. The rationale for adopting these tools is discussed in section **3.5**. However, the third research

question centres on how the practitioners responded to the children's views about inclusion. They were presented with the children's comments from the group and individual interviews, and were then asked to consider how these comments might inform their pedagogical practice with regard to inclusion. I ensured that a representative sample of quotes were used to depict all of the themes from my initial data analysis (Appendix A).

In addition, opinions were sought as to whether the practitioners considered that participatory tools, such as the use of photographs of pedagogical activities, could be included within the existing practice for engaging with children's voices (e.g. learning journeys). Research by Nutbrown and Clough (2009) examined children's perspectives on inclusion and they conclude that children can contribute their own unique viewpoints on situations in their early years settings. They present examples of practitioners responding to these perspectives, demonstrating how a positive sense of inclusivity can be promoted by including children in the identification and exploration of important issues. Though it may not always be possible to accommodate fully, children's views and suggestions, many changes can be incorporated within practice, thus increasing children's perceptions of inclusion within their pedagogical activities. Nutbrown and Clough's (2009) work supports the important pedagogic position of listening to, and consulting with, children (Clark and Moss 2001, 2005; Clark *et al.,* 2005), by emphasising children's active participation.

3.5.1 Data collection schedule

The data were collected over two six week periods in each of the schools, the details of which are presented in table **3.2**.

Table **3.2** Details of data collection schedule in Riverside Infants and Oak Ridge Primary schools

Dates of data collection	Activities undertaken as part of the research design	Methods used
Riverside Infants Initial school visits - w/c 6th April 2015 (3 days)	• Getting to know the setting and the people who worked in the setting. • I worked in the Reception class to get to know the children and their routines. • Observation and understanding of types of pedagogical activities that were utilised	• Taking fieldnotes at the beginning of the research process about structure of school and pedagogical activities
Riverside Infants 15th April 2015 – 20th May 2015 (5 weeks)	• 3 days a week was spent in the school • Collecting class lists and distributing ethical consent forms • Observing children during different pedagogical activities (indoors and outdoors) and at different times (mornings and afternoons) • Discussion about meaning of inclusion using pre-selected pictures • Selecting pedagogical activities for diamond ranking activity in group interviews (children) • Conducting group interviews (21 children) • Conducting individual interviews (21 children) • Conducting individual interviews (4 practitioners)	• Structured observations using Leuven Involvement Scale (LIS) – timed for two minutes duration (Laevers, 1994) • Unstructured observations of children in learning activities not planned by the practitioners • Group interviews (children) • Individual interviews (children) • Individual interviews (practitioners) • Informal observations of children and practitioners
Riverside Infants 25th May 2015 – 1st June 2015	• Transcribing group and individual data • Beginning to analyse data	
Oak Ridge Primary Initial school visits – w/c 1st June 2015 (3 days)	• Getting to know the setting and the people who worked in the setting. • I worked in the Reception class to get to know the children and their routines. • Observation and understanding of types of pedagogical activities that were utilised	• Taking fieldnotes at the beginning of the research process about structure of school and pedagogical activities

| Oak Ridge Primary

5th June 2015 – 8th July (5 weeks) | • 3 days a week was spent in the school
• Collecting class lists and distributing ethical consent forms
• Observing children during different pedagogical activities (indoors and outdoors) and at different times (mornings and afternoons)
• Discussion about meaning of inclusion using pre-selected pictures
• Selecting pedagogical activities for diamond ranking activity in group interviews (children)
• Conducting group interviews (19 children)
• Conducting individual interviews (19 children)
• Conducting individual interviews (3 practitioners) | • Structured observations using Leuven Involvement Scale (LIS) - timed for two minutes duration (Laevers, 1994)
• Unstructured observations of children in learning activities not planned by the practitioners
• Group interviews (children)
• Individual interviews (children)
• Individual interviews (practitioners)
• Informal observations of children and practitioners |
| Oak Ridge Primary

13th July 2015 – 20th July 2015 | • Transcribing group and individual data
• Beginning to analyse data | |

The length of time spent in each school was an important factor, because it enabled me to develop relationships with the children and practitioners, which I hoped would permit them to feel more at ease when engaging in conversations about my research. Whilst I was in each school, I became an integral part of their school community, which meant that the children viewed me as simply another adult who was present to support them in their learning. This became evident during a timed observation of a specific child, when another child approached me to ask for help in doing up his shoelaces. It presented a dilemma for me in relation to whether I should continue with my research or assist the child. I managed the difficulty by staying focused on my research, whilst also informing the child that I would help him at the end of the two minute observation. I also developed a good relationship with the practitioners by helping out on visits and in the everyday activities of the class. In this way, it was hoped that they would not view my presence as intrusive, but rather as a means to understand the children's views of inclusion, so that I could determine the practitioners' thoughts on the idea of listening to children's views to inform their pedagogical practice.

The different methods by which the research questions were explored are detailed in table **3.3,** each of which is explained fully in the following sections.

Table **3.3** Framework for data collection

Research Questions	Methods of Data Collection
In what ways do children perceive pedagogical activities as promoting inclusion in the Reception class?	· Structured observations of children using the LIS (Laevers, 1994). · Unstructured observations of all children. · Photographs of pedagogical activities were used to inform the design of the group semi-structured interviews, using a diamond ranking activity. · A drawing activity was used as a tool in the semi-structured individual interviews with children.
In what ways do children perceive pedagogical activities as hindering inclusion in the Reception class?	· Structured observations of all children using the LIS (Laevers, 1994). · Unstructured observations of all children. · Photographs of pedagogical activities were used to inform the design of the group semi-structured interviews, using a diamond ranking activity. · A drawing activity was used as a tool in the semi-structured individual interviews with children.
What are practitioners' thoughts on the idea of listening to children's views to inform their pedagogical practice?	· Semi-structured individual interviews with practitioners.

3.5.2   Observations

One of the data collection instruments used in research about young children, is observations (Rolfe *et al*., 2001), and as such there has been a move towards its utilisation in research, in more recent years (Flick, 2009; Gobo, 2011; Silverman, 2011). This was of particular relevance in my research because it enabled the study of children's interactions with their environment or physical contact with others, and social norms or pressures to conform to expected behaviours (Ritchie *et al.,* 2014).

The research occurred within a natural context, in which I was influenced by the structure of the teaching day, the context in which the pedagogical activities occurred, or where the children selected to work. Mack *et al.* (2005, p.25) allude to the immersion of the researcher in the context as a weakness since it relies on the "memory, personal discipline and diligence" of the researcher. Conversely, there are others (Plath, 1990) who view it as a strength, refuting the image of a person with a vague idea of what has occurred. Instead they are depicted as one who creates a field text consisting of notes and documents. Denzin and Lincoln (1998, pp.29-30) explain that the researcher then,

> Moves from this text to a research text: notes and interpretations based on the field notes. The text is then re-created as a working interpretive document that contains the writer's initial attempts to make sense out of what he or she has learned. Finally, the writer produces the public text that comes from the reader.

In order to understand how these meanings were formulated, participant observation was employed. This differs from the role of direct observation since I adopted a participant-in and observer-of the situation (Punch, 2014) role rather than a detached observer. However, it is important to acknowledge to what extent I intruded during the data collection, since the degree often varies and it can be referred to as being on a spectrum (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; May, 2011). Adler and Adler (1994) describe three membership roles for the researcher: complete-member-researcher; active-member-researcher; and peripheral-member-researcher. Moreover, Wolcott (1988) distinguishes between the researcher's opportunity to be an active participant; a privileged observer; and a limited observer.

I employed two of the above roles. Firstly, I adopted the peripheral-member researcher/privileged observer position by explaining to the children that I was observing how they worked and learned through different learning activities. Whilst I noted different behaviours and responses made by the children, I also became part of the activity itself when the children asked me questions. It therefore became necessary to suspend the data collection and become an active participant in the activities. However, at other times I was able to assume

the limited observer position, recording data whilst not attempting to form relationships or engage more deeply with the children (Ritchie *et al.,* 2014).

Depending on which role I assumed, there were different consequences for the data collection. In particular, the capture of the interaction or behaviour could be construed as partial and selective, and reflective of my own interpretation of the observations. Thus, once more, it emphasises the need to acknowledge my epistemological position. Henwood (1996, p.29) argues that,

> Researchers who adopt a more ... interpretative, constructionist (or deconstructionist) stance have a clear affinity for qualitative research ... plus a strong conviction that choice of method is liberated and informed by the position one takes within the epistemological debate.

A study carried out by a team of researchers (Lefstein and Snell, 2011) illustrates such a tension. They were analysing literacy lessons in primary schools, utilising observations, fieldnotes and specialist observation software, to explore instances when the teacher participated or influenced the discourse. Additionally, they focused on each lesson's pace as an important component of pedagogic practice. When the pace was analysed, the data indicated that lessons, which had been perceived as fast-paced, were in fact paced more slowly and vice-versa. This led the researchers to review their fieldnotes and recordings, examining both their own subjective experience of pace and the teachers' and pupils' behaviour. Moreover, it indicates the need for careful analysis of all available data if subjectivity is to be avoided and richer interpretation to emerge.

In addition to different types of observation, there are also variations in the way data are captured. Spradley (1980) delineates the different phases participant observation may take: descriptive; focused; and selective. My observations began as a descriptive process through the completion of fieldnotes in the first week in each school. This reflects Boeije's (2010, p.60) position, who suggests that "a researcher continually selects, is insider and outsider at the same time, and observes, participates and takes notes". Lofland *et al.* (2006) stress the importance of taking mental notes at the outset, whilst

Berg and Lune (2012, p.231) note the next stage to include "cryptic jottings", or "jotted notes" (Lofland *et al.*, 2006, p.109). Merriam (2009) and Berg and Lune (2012) both emphasise the inclusion of detailed descriptions, analytic notes/observer comments about the setting and subjective reflections as necessary elements of fieldnotes. The fieldnotes were used to identify the different types of pedagogical activities available in each of the classes, which also informed the design of the interviews.

The recording of fieldnotes was followed by focused observations of the involvement and well-being of the children using the Leuven Involvement Scale (LIS), for the duration of two minutes (Appendix B). This occurred throughout the ensuing five weeks. This framework for recording observations was one developed by a team based at the Research Centre for Experiential Education (Laevers, 1994). The tool focused on two central indicators of quality early years' provision: children's well-being; and involvement. Well-being refers to feeling at ease, being spontaneous and free of emotional tensions and is crucial to good 'mental health', whilst involvement denotes being intensely engaged in activities and is considered to be a necessary condition for deep level learning and development (Laevers, 1994). The observations enabled me to select a range of pedagogical activities that were representative of the different activities employed in each of the classes. They were then used in group diamond ranking activities, which were designed to elicit the children's perspectives of inclusion in these pedagogical activities.

Even though this framework was created predominantly to focus on the quality of early years education, it still has relevance for my research. Whalley (2007, p.58) suggests that,

> Laevers' work is well established and rigorous, and it is particularly accessible to early year's workers. Laevers has been looking at the processes of learning as well as the outcomes or products. He is interested in what is happening inside children as they learn.

Although Whalley (2007) denotes the importance of the use of the LIS (Laevers, 1994) for early years workers, I deemed it appropriate for my study since it is

focused on what was happening within the child. This could then be construed as trying to understand the children's perspectives. In so doing, I extrapolated that the terms well-being and involvement reflect the tenet of inclusion and participation (see Booth and Ainscow, 2004; UNESCO, 2009), since they suggest that high levels are evident when children are fully immersed and invested in their learning. Since children's concentration and involvement could fluctuate during the day, I repeated these observations at different times, during different activities and in alternative contexts (see table **3.2**).

A research project utilising this framework focused on the concept of deep level learning as a critical approach to educational evaluation (Laevers, 2000). Its findings identify indicators for quality, which are situated at the centre of the context-outcome framework. Laevers concludes that if interactions are secure, then the well-being of the children will enable them to become stronger and keep practitioners informed about their feelings and emotions. In relation to my study, the use of the LIS (Laevers, 1994) enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of children's perceptions of inclusion. Whilst the observations did not provide specific data about perceptions, they contributed to the rich data analysis of the children's comments during the interviews.

Further research projects using the LIS (Laevers, 1994), include one evaluating a curriculum model of a child centre in Singapore (Ebbeck *et al.*, 2012) and another utilising action-research to study how noise affected three year old children's ability to establish relations and interactions at an early childhood education centre in Brazil (Kishimoto, 2012). In Ebbeck *et al.*'s (2012, p.61) study, the focus was to "assess and make value judgements about the experiences of children". In order to assess its suitability as a research tool, a trial was initially conducted to gauge its efficacy and it was found to be culturally appropriate. Children were observed on six occasions and the rating of each child's observations was aggregated in order to gain an overall involvement score.

Kishimoto's (2012) study was a lengthy investigative process (2004 to 2011) using the LIS (Laevers, 1994) to observe children's well-being. High levels of noise were recorded in the nurseries. Over this period of time, different measures were brought in to ameliorate the environment, including children being moved into different rooms and anti-noise plaster being installed. Further analysis of the children's behaviour at the end of the time-period, identified great improvement in their well-being.

Both of these research projects adopted a quantitative methodology. Ebbeck *et al.'s* (2012) study focused specifically on statistical data, whilst Kishimoto's (2012) project explored the children's behaviour in terms of waking up frightened and upset. This could be construed as employing a qualitative approach since it focused on behaviour, however, the main focus of Kishimoto's study appeared to be more quantitative, with the correlation between the noise levels and grades at its foreground. These studies, in essence, assumed a different methodological approach from my study; my project considered the specific language of the LIS (Laevers, 1994) to analyse the children's behaviour, body language and involvement in the pedagogical activity, rather than the children's levels (see Appendix C). However, is important to note that there were some conceptual problems that arose from employing this approach.

For example, it was problematic to equate involvement and well-being directly with inclusion, since some children may have perceived themselves as included whilst their outward appearance and behaviour suggested otherwise and vice versa. Furthermore, I was conscious that this was my subjective interpretation of the data, which may have resulted in only partially analysing the children's perceptions and behaviour. Therefore, in order to ameliorate this potential issue, the triangulation of different methods, semi-structured interviews, diamond ranking and drawing activities, was introduced. This approach offered the ability to analyse the content and context of the pedagogical activity in relation to the children's body language and behaviour and suggest possible reasons for any disparity in the data. It also allowed for richer data to emerge

about how the children perceived different pedagogical activities as promoting or hindering inclusion.

3.5.3   Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were documented on a digital recorder. The use of video recording was considered as it can provide a fine-grained multimodal record of an event detailing gaze, expression, body posture, gesture (Jewitt, 2012). However, a common limitation in video data is that it can lead to the collection of large amounts of rich data, which can be overwhelming and, if not managed appropriately, can also lead to overly descriptive and weak analysis. Snell (2011) sees the 'sensory overload' of video data as a significant methodological issue in video-based research including data management, coding, and sampling. Therefore, the decision was made to use a digital recorder as it gave me more insight into the verbal contributions of the children, although this is not to suggest that body language was not deemed important.

The recordings were listened to as soon as possible after the interviews (usually within three days). This allowed for the additional recall of the interviews from my own memories, which could be used to support the children's responses, and also to decipher some of the comments that were either difficult to hear and/or comprehend. Detailed notes, including the names of the children, were made so as to aid the process of transcription. I transcribed the group interviews in full, which proved to be harder than transcribing the later individual interviews. This was mainly due to the children speaking over one another, some voices being fainter, and also some non-verbal communication which was not audible on the tape. I therefore worked from memory to include significant moments such as a child looking to another for support/approval, being distracted or disruptive, or when a child was particularly animated during the activity, which could then be used to support the data from the transcripts thus providing richer overall data.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in groups of four children, and individually with children and practitioners. These allowed me some flexibility in the way they were organised, but they were not any less stringent in their design and interpretation. Burgess (1984, p.102) refers to interviews as "conversations with a purpose", however there are others (Kahn and Cannell, 1957, cited in Kerlinger, 1970, p.16) who dispute this, stating that the interview is not simply a conversation but a "specialised pattern of verbal interaction – initiated for a specific purpose and focused on specific content areas, with consequent elimination of extraneous material". Charmaz (2006, p.27) describes semi-structured interviews as a "directed conversation". Furthermore, she emphasises the "contextual and negotiated" (Charmaz, 2006, p.27) qualities of an interview and how the interviewer is a participant in the shaping of the conversation. It differs from a structured interview in its flexibility to follow up or clarify comments made by the interviewee, explore a viewpoint, or to open up explanations to questions that were not foreseen when the research questions were determined (Newby, 2014).

Nonetheless, these forms of interview are not without their difficulties and constraints. The semi-structured interview has the potential to produce abundant, rich and deep data, but this may be difficult to analyse without sufficient time and resources (Newby, 2014). Furthermore, Christensen and James (2008, p.92) comment that "the expression of the child's personality, in terms of behaviour and attitudinal preferences, is often context dependent"; therefore it is essential to consider the context when interviewing children. Within my study, considerable thought was given as to where the children should be interviewed. If this occurred in the classroom, the process could be continually interrupted by other children and staff members, which could also inhibit their freedom of expression. Equally, the removal of children to an unfamiliar room might also constrain their responses.

Nevertheless, a separate room was used, which was not unfamiliar to the children, where I introduced the scenarios of different pedagogical activities and began to draw inferences of how the children understood the term inclusion. This is discussed further in the next section. These scenarios were

selected from a series of pictures in the 'Talking About' series (Black Sheep Press, nd.), which focus on developing situational understanding and verbal reasoning skills in children. The scenarios were selected as a tool readily used to evoke discussion about a variety of matters in the early years, in order to attempt to elucidate the complex concept of inclusion. I elected to use these pictures rather than pictures drawn, or photographs taken, by the children themselves as I had hoped that children would engage in a discussion between themselves about their perceptions of inclusion, instead of becoming fixated on their own work. However, on reflection I am mindful of how this may have influenced or limited the children's conceptual understanding of inclusion.

It was also necessary to contemplate an appropriate time and place in which to conduct the practitioners' interviews. In my experience the school day is often pressured, hurried and tiring and therefore it was important to consult with the practitioners to determine a suitable time for these interviews. By discussing the process of conducting the interviews with the practitioners, I anticipated that they might be able to reflect more deeply on the children's comments and consider how they could inform future practice.

Wherever an interview is conducted, it is important, in the opening minutes, to develop a rapport with the respondent (Tuckman, 1972; Dyer, 1995). In this research, it comprised a brief synopsis of the purpose of the interview and an opportunity to make the participants feel at ease. Selltiz *et al.* (1965, p.576) state that the "interviewer's manner should be friendly, courteous, conversational and unbiased". Regardless of whether the children or practitioners were being interviewed, I was mindful of Oakley's (1981, p.41) view that,

> In most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship.

Oakley (1981) alludes to the possibility of unequal power differentials between the two parties being altered by the attitude of the researcher.

> Participants can also make and remake these decisions as they come to know more about the situation and realise the benefits and difficulties that were not initially apparent (Graue and Walsh, 1998, p.76).

With regards to the children, the way in which I spoke and responded to them, signified that I had become part of the interview process and was able to influence how it progressed. Mitchell (1993, p.55) posits, "the informed researcher's voice no longer provides an authoritarian monologue but contributes a part to dialogue". It is essential when interviewing children to gain their trust and respect. By assuming the role of a naive adult, it can give a sense of empowerment to the child which may make the interview process more meaningful. "Insight can be gained from how children react to the researcher's role in their world" (Davis, 1998, p.330), which allows for a more equal sharing of control and power. It is also necessary to consider that a child might provide responses in order to please the adult, emanating from a culture in which they are rarely given the opportunity to express their true feelings (Oakley and Williams, 1994). Equally, Clark *et al*. (2005, p.84) state that,

> When interviewing young children, in particular, there may be an inclination to become too focused on the child's perspective and lose the focus of the interview. 'Children have a tendency to 'chain', that is to make associations to what other people have just said and 'chain' their further comments to those words.

An example of this comes from a transcript of one of the children's interviews, where they were noted repeatedly using the word 'included'.

RI Joshua: Very, very, ever so included (RI I).

It is possible that Joshua did not comprehend the term and therefore, simply repeated its use. However, as the interview progressed, it became apparent that this was not the case since he explained that he felt included when he was with his friend and even drew pictures to reinforce this notion. Nevertheless, I remained attentive to the possibility that children may simply have repeated my, or other children's, words during the interviews.

3.5.4   Group interviews

Interviews with children in groups are built on circumstances with which the children are familiar and are based on interactions, so that the children are able to discuss the questions, help each other with the answers, remind each other about details, and keep the answers truthful. Children are also more powerful when they are together, and they are also more relaxed when with a friend than when alone with an adult (Mayall, 2000; Eder and Fingerson, 2003; Einarsdóttir, 2003).

Within this methodological approach, focus groups are often used. Where they differ from the group interview is that focus groups rely on the participants to engage with each other and the researcher adopts the role of facilitator rather than leader. By engaging in discourse, the participants become an active part of the research analysis and may alter their perspectives as a consequence of talking with others (Kitzinger, 1995) and further that they have the opportunity to both query, and explain themselves to, each other (Morgan, 1996). In this research project, whilst the children did occasionally speak to one another, the majority of the conversations were led by me and therefore, it is construed that group interviews, and not focus groups, were the means by which the data was collected.

The children were interviewed in groups of four, since Einarsdottir (2005) argues that speaking with children in small groups can lessen their anxiety and promote sharing of more truthful responses. The groups were selected after consideration of the observations recorded over a four week period. Attention was given to selecting children who appeared to enjoy being together, and to try and ensure that children with more dominant voices were not placed alongside those who were quieter (Smithson, 2000). However, when children expressed a desire to be in a different group with their friends, their wishes were heeded. It is important to note that groups were not formed according to gender. In some instances, there was an even balance, but other groups comprised solely of girls or boys. This could be construed a weakness of the selection process since by failing to reflect on how the balance of gender may

have influenced the children's comments, the data collected may not have presented an accurate representation of the children's perceptions of inclusion. Prior to the interviews, consent was sought from both the parents and the children themselves, which is discussed further in section **3.6.**

The group interviews lasted approximately twenty minutes and included all children in each of the classes. Whilst some children had not returned their consent forms, I deemed it appropriate for all children to be involved, since the research was focused on inclusion. Nevertheless, only the data from the children for whom I had received consent, were analysed. At the outset of the group interviews, I explained the aims of the research to the children through the use of pictures of different scenarios of inclusive pedagogical activities (see Appendix D). These included examples of children learning in different environments, with their peers and/or with a teacher, and in differing pedagogical activities. The focus was not intended to be on the pedagogical activities *per se*, but rather it allowed for a discussion of what the children understood by inclusion or feeling included. I asked the children to consider which of the children looked included. At this point I did not explain to the children what I meant by the term included, as I wished to see how they interpreted it. However, I concede that by providing pictures that portrayed very specific ways of children working in different pedagogical environments, I did indeed suggest possible interpretations of inclusion.

During the discussion it emerged that the children connected inclusion with notions of knowing what to do (Hedges and Cullen, 2011), being able to play with your friends (Booth and Ainscow, 2004), and the teacher helping the children to learn (Jordan, 2004). After these discussions, I did not tell the children how I interpreted inclusion, although I noted that the children's perceptions resonated with some of the definitions I had identified in the literature review. Although I acknowledge that the children may have been inadvertently influenced by the scenarios presented, I did not correct or manipulate their words so that they reflected my own conceptualisation of inclusion. This was in keeping with the tenet of the research, which placed children at its forefront.

Chapter 3 Methodological considerations

Following on from this initial activity, I introduced five photographs (Appendix E) that were a representative sample of the different pedagogical activities that occurred in each of the schools. These are portrayed in table **3.4**.

Table **3.4** Pedagogical activities in Riverside Infants and Oak Ridge Primary.

Riverside Infants	Oak Ridge Primary
Whole class	Whole Class
Group work	Working with teacher
Use of outside environment	Use of outside environment
Creative resources	Creative resources
Visit to fire station	Construction equipment

It is of note that there were some differences in the types of pedagogical activities utilised in the two schools. In Riverside Infants, the children tended to work in small groups with a practitioner, whereas in Oak Ridge Primary, they were supported on an individual basis. This is not to say that the children at Oak Ridge Primary did not work in groups but when they did, it was largely without the presence of a practitioner. The visit activity refers to the children visiting either a police or fire station as part of their topic on 'People who help us', and construction denotes an activity where children were given the opportunity to create objects with a variety of equipment.

The dialogue that ensued between the children and myself ensured that we were functioning under a shared assumption (Myers, 1998). Acknowledging that this form of discussion is not naturally occurring, I heeded Silverman's (1993) warning that the method of analysis is key to the interpretation of group interviews. Therefore, I did not analyse the group interviews as if they were naturally occurring but as discussions occurring in specific, controlled settings. Furthermore, I used these interviews as a means of eliciting information from the children in the early stages of my research, which I could then refer to at a later date in their individual interviews.

However, group interviews are not without their difficulties. Whilst they may lessen the anxiety of some children, there is also a danger that dominant voices may silence others or indeed influence their responses. Voice is used here to describe an opinion or viewpoint which emerges from the group discussion that can, but does not necessarily, originate from an individual (Smithson and Diaz, 1996). A possible way of analysing these opinions is to consider a collective voice, which is a joint perspective that emerges from a collective procedure leading to a consensus, rather than an individual's view (Smithson and Diaz, 1996). Hence, this may not be perceived as the most inclusive means by which to elicit the children's perspectives; nonetheless, it could be argued that by providing an opportunity for children to discuss their views with other children, they may have felt more supported. By offering the prospect of participating in an individual interview, each child was afforded the opportunity to express their perceptions of inclusion in what might be interpreted as a more inclusive manner.

In each of these types of interview, it was vital that I declared my position within the research as a matter of ethical consideration (Clough and Corbett, 2000). I informed the children and practitioners that I had been a teacher and that I had previously taught children of the same age. I further attempted to allay the children's fears by explaining that their comments and opinions were to assist me in my understanding of how they felt most or least included in their learning activities.

It was also important to question my position and voice in relation to the perceived voices of children. By raising the possibility that the children's subjectivity is constructed out of their unfolding interpersonal reflections of their experiences (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003), it is difficult to remain truly impartial as the nature of the discourse requires an interaction between both parties. Gadd (2004) refers to how the body language and nonlexical expressions of the interviewer may indeed encourage the respondent to say more. The impartiality or bias of the interview process is further compromised by becoming part of the interview. Oakley (1993, p.58) states that it is more than dangerous bias "it is the condition under which people come to know

each other and to admit others into their lives". In doing so, richer data can be collected and analysed but there still remains the possibility that responses are constructed to place the respondent in a better light or that the interviewer may sway these replies (Newby, 2014). However, it may be feasible for researchers to "tune themselves to detecting contradictions in interviews and cultivate an alertness to accounts that seem 'canned', rehearsed or a repetition of an existing cliché" (Bourdieu, 2000, cited in Yannos and Hopper, 2008, p.235).

Notions of the lack of impartiality, possible bias and subjectivity of these methods, may suggest that they are not as reliable as quantitative methods, but there are researchers who disagree. Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2001) suggest that reliability in these situations is the degree that the researcher's theoretical analysis and conclusions correspond to the actual data obtained. Cohen *et al.* (2000, p.120) concur stating, "Reliability includes fidelity to real life, context and situation specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondent". By considering the context in which the participants were interviewed, being open and honest about the aims of the research, and responding to their comments and body language, I believe that the analysis and conclusions I deduced were true to the data collected.

Furthermore, validity was assured by contemplating the weight and authority of the findings (MacNaughton and Hughes, 2009) and comparing them to other similar research studies. In this way, my research reflects Edwards' (2001, p.124) view that, "Validity in qualitative research is a matter of being able to offer as sound a representation of the field of study as the research methods allow". By enabling the participants to express themselves through observations, group and individual interviews, the research methods adopted a multimodal design within the field of inclusion. The employment of participatory tools, perceived as, "a flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard" (Cohen *et al.,* 2007, p.349), also ensured the validity of the research. An

explanation of, and rationale for, the adopted participative tools is provided in the next section.

3.5.5   Participative tools

As articulated earlier, the research design was predicated on the principles of the UNCRC (2005) that patience and creativity should be considered in the way that children's views are collected. Veale (2005) suggests that the methods used should offer a participatory design that situate children's perspectives and agenda within a broader context and make links between the findings, policy and practice. In regards to inclusion, Mittler (2000) refers to the need for active involvement and participation, Campbell (2002) to active participation and Booth and Ainscow (2004) to learning, playing or working in collaboration with others. Each of these authors firmly espouses the relationship between involvement and participation in providing education for all children regardless of individual differences. Since participation is steadfastly rooted in the philosophy of inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2004), it is important to reflect the use of participatory tools as a means for data collection.

More recent work on children as researchers has introduced other ways of knowing and more participatory research methods (Cox, 2005; Leitch *et al.,* 2007; O'Brien and Moules, 2007). Empirical evidence from research conducted by Measelle *et al.* (1998), supports this perspective and suggests that young children from the age of three to six years can share reasonably consistent self-conceptions and accurate personal experiences (Hogan, 2005). However, it is important to ensure that the methods utilised to elicit these perspectives emanate from activities that would routinely occur in an early years context. Most adults have the ability to concentrate on a topic regardless of the setting, but for young children this in not necessarily the case. Gopnik (2009) comments that children have a broader attention focus, making them excellent learners, but resulting in some difficulties with focusing on non-contextualised topics. Thus, while children are developmentally capable of sharing information about their experiences (Harris and Barnes, 2009), it is the role of

the researcher to determine the optimum method by which this can be elucidated.

There are many researchers in the education of young children who recommend constructivist strategies as an effective means to elicit views and opinions (see Stipek, 2004; Einarsdottir *et al.*, 2009; Nie and Lau, 2010). Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) suggest that these approaches can facilitate the inclusion of young children as active participants in data collection that is both child-centred and hands-on. This allows children to construct meaning through the research process and share it with the researchers. Whilst my study is not structured to enable the children to collect the data, they were involved in participative ways of communicating. This will be explored within this section.

Nind *et al.* (2010a) illustrate the use of a multimodal approach to research, in a study which unpicked the interactions of young children with learning disabilities, and provide details of how social practices in different settings can be inclusive or exclusionary. Their methods included live and video observations, fieldnotes, documentary analysis and informal and semi-structured interviews. Nind *et al.* (2010a, p.26) comment that "observing young children with learning disabilities provides insights that cannot be gleaned in other ways". Whilst my research does not focus on children with disabilities, there are still parallels between the two approaches. Thomson (2008, p.1) purports that being young (and/or disabled) does not mean that children have "nothing to say", just that one needs creative ways of listening. By adopting different or multimodal ways, it becomes possible to listen to "the things that are unsaid" (Thomson, 2008, p.4) as well as those that are spoken.

In addition to seeking alternative means of communication, the decision to use participatory tools was also an attempt to challenge traditional adult-controlled power dynamics and to equalise power relationship between researchers and children. This suggests that conventional research methods relying heavily on verbal language, such as interviews, may not be appropriate for young children. However, it does not infer that children cannot be interviewed, simply

that an alternate way of conducting the interview might be considered. Researchers, such as Morrow (1999, p.213), argue that, "If we are going to listen to children (which is innovative in itself), then we are going to have to be innovative about doing so". The participatory discourse ensures the inclusion of children through the consideration of researchers' ontological practices. By using a range of tools that offer flexibility to elicit the views of children in a manner appropriate to their developmental level (Robert-Holmes, 2005), it allows for diversity within the group (O'Kane, 2000; Cornwall, 2011).

3.5.5.1   Photo-elicitation

One of the participative tools employed, was photo-elicitation. It involved the use of a representative sample of photographs of different pedagogical activities that were employed in each of the schools (see Appendix E). The justification for utilising photographs rather than tools which rely on more traditional modes of communication, such as asking direct questions, was to attempt to evoke a deeper response from the children. Collier (1957, p.859) refers to the use of photographs as follows,

> No matter how familiar the object or situation may be, a photograph is a restatement of reality; it presents life around us in new, objective, and arresting dimensions, and can stimulate the informant to discuss the world around him as if observing it for the first time.

He evokes thoughts of how photographs can be used to conjure up information, feelings and memories due to the specific form of representation. The difference between interviews using image and text and those using words alone, is how people respond to the two forms of symbolic representation. Harper (2002) comments that the parts of the brain processing visual information, are evolutionary older than those processing verbal information and, as such, images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than words. However, Banks (2001) indicates that it is possible to overstate this case. This is supported by Collier (2001, p.51) who challenges the over reliance on language stating that research is "a sea of words and more words, in which visual communication are not taken as serious intellectual products".

If this is accepted, then it could be argued that research favours those who are able to understand and respond to their questions, thus excluding certain members of society. Methods which make more use of visual and spatial material can widen participation to include all users (Lodge, 2007). Prosser (2007, p.16) further argues that,

> Emancipatory and participatory research such as photo voice and photo elicitation can gather valuable input from teachers, pupils and other who actually inhabit the built environment.

The insertion of images into interviews, is distinct from many traditional methods. In a seminal study to test its efficacy, Collier (1957) found that photo-based interviews were significantly longer and more focused than traditional ones. They produced 'deeper' interviews, based on the notion that photographs elicit precise and "at times even encyclopaedic" (Collier, 1957, p.856) information and can "trigger responses that might even lie submerged in verbal interviewing" (Collier, 1957, p.854). Photographs have the potential for empowering participants as the visual character of the method (in combination with the interviews) makes abstract questions more approachable and accessible (Van Auken *et al.,* 2010). Others (see Rose, 2001; Harper, 2002; Stewart and Floyd, 2004) stress the multidimensional qualities of images, which can represent experiences, social domains and physical settings. Photographs can help sharpen informants' abilities to reflect on and explain their experiences and perspectives, and provide memory anchors (Loeffler, 2005).

Van Auken *et al.* (2010) state that there are two primary variants in photo-elicitation: externally-driven, - where subjects are asked to evaluate images presented by researchers; and participant-driven - where subjects choose images that establish the basis of the interview. The second alternative embodies the ability to reduce barriers between researchers and participants, creating opportunities for people to be more meaningfully involved in data generation. Although the variant used within my research was externally-driven, I contend that it was not top-down or closed, since photographs were employed as a stimuli for conversation and as a means for children with limited vocabulary to contribute to the research conversation. Harper (2002,

p.23), referring to the participant-driven approach, states that when "two or more people discuss the meaning of photographs they try to figure out something together". In this way, the children were afforded the power to control the direction of the discussion by sorting the photographs as they wished.

Another research project utilising photo-elicitation was conducted by Woolner *et al.* (2010), who explored individuals' views from a school community to develop an understanding of the learning environment. They recognised that it worked well to mediate between researcher and participant, "bridging gaps between the world of research and the researched" (Harper, 2002, p.20) and provided a focus for all parties so that "awkward silences can be covered" (Banks, 2001, p.68). In their project, photographs were used in two different ways: in eliciting opinions and ideas through open observation and discussion; and in a sorting activity. The picture sorting activity worked well for a number of reasons, including the use of an inclusive approach whereby all stakeholders were offered an opportunity to voice their opinions, and prospects for various perspectives of differing ages to be explored. Furthermore, the photographs were useful in stimulating discussion, although some respondents focused on photographs relating specifically to areas/classrooms with which they were familiar.

Analysis of Woolner *et al.'s* (2010) work, reveals that the same photograph suggested different ideas and associations to different people. Despite being of particular identifiable places or activities, the photographs seemed successfully to have avoided being prescriptive and, instead, allowed space for individual reaction. However, this is not to suggest that the method is without complications. Banks (2001) argues that the difficulty is not with using the images, but in knowing how to use them, leading to instances of insight without methodological understanding. A related criticism made by both Banks (2001) and Harper (2002, p.20), is that visual methods can become "an end in themselves", producing observations "that beg for greater theoretical and substantive significance" (Harper, 2002, p.19). It is possible then, that the photographs could have become the focus of my attention, rather than the

conversations that occurred between the children. By analysing the transcriptions of the exchanges between the children, I was able to reflect on their significance. It is, therefore, imperative that researchers consider how the instrument is used because "a tool is also a mode of language, for it says something to those who understand it, about the operation of use and their consequences" (Dewey, 1991, p.52).

Whilst interest in the voices of children and young people has grown alongside concern for participation and rights (Nind *et al.,* 2010b), there are other groups who are not afforded the same levels of inclusion, leaving their voices often hidden or unheard in educational research. Nind *et al.* (2010b) used photo-elicitation as one way to engage with girls with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. They intended it to "unpack their thinking and scaffold their own thought processes" (Carrington, *et al.,* 2007, p.9), explaining the narrative behind the images. The girls were asked to photograph five 'best bits' of the school and five recommendations for 'improvement'. Nind *et al.* (2010b, p.15) respected the girls as valid contributors in the generation of knowledge, accepting their voices as "situated within complex dynamics". They were enabled to speak authoritatively about what had gone wrong in their education and how they were now making real connections. This research also challenges the more traditional means of data collection and analysis and presents alternatives to allowing voice to the voiceless (Visweswaren, 1994).

A further study, focusing on children of the same age as my research, was conducted by Linklater (2006). She explored children's ideas and values from the Reception year, through discourse about their experiences and actions. Rather than seeking answers, she sought to provide "rich, nuanced and contextual knowledge about social actions, meanings and processes" (Mason, 2003, p.5). In concurrence with research utilising the Mosaic Approach (Clark, *et al.,* 2005), the children were given disposable cameras to photograph objects that were important to them. However, rather than adhering to the instructions, many simply took pictures of objects that were in their vicinity. This demonstrates the difficulties arising from conducting research with young children; nevertheless, it should be noted that the cameras still fulfilled an

essential role of ensuring that the children felt in control of their role in the research. Whilst the children in Linklater's (2006) research were not actually included in the data analysis process, she could have used the photographs in conjunction with informal interviews to elicit the children's perspectives about their learning environment. One such method of achieving this is through the use of a diamond ranking activity.

3.5.5.2   Diamond ranking

Diamond ranking is a recognised thinking skills tool (Rockett and Percival, 2002), valued for eliciting constructs and facilitating discussion. Its strength lies in the premise that when people rank objects items or statements, and explain their reasons for doing so, they are required to make explicit the rationale for organising them in this way. As such, this makes their understandings open to scrutiny and comparison (Clark, 2012). It is also an activity that has been used to explore and clarify value positions, feelings and thoughts on a topic and is usually carried out with pre-written statements (Rockett and Percival, 2002). Nine statements or anecdotes are used to represent a spread of opinions or perspectives and then, usually working in pairs or threes, the task is to sort and rank the statements or anecdotes in a diamond fashion. The statement considered as being 'interesting', 'important', 'better' or significant' is placed on the top row, with the next two most 'interesting' placed in the second row. This continues until the final statement, ranked as the most unimportant or uninteresting, is placed at the bottom of the diamond (Clark, 2012) (see figure **3.1**).
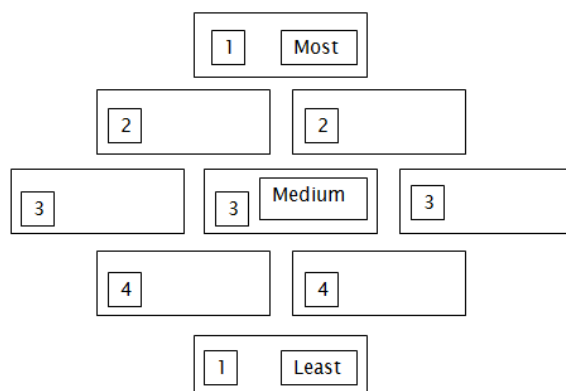
Figure **3.1** Organisation of diamond ranking (Clark, 2012)

The important aspect of diamond ranking is not the actual position of the statements themselves, as there are no correct or incorrect answers, "but the process of discussion, reflection, negotiation, accommodation to other perspectives and consensus seeking that takes place in agreeing the ranking" (Clark, 2012, p.224).

Lewis *et al.* (2005) provide an example of research using this activity. They invited pupils to name either an aspect of school they liked or about which they had plenty of choice. These were followed with the opposite comments, then 'in between' responses until an array was generated. The interviewer wrote each response on a 'post-it' note as it was given and asked the pupil to place the note on the table, slowly building up a diamond shape as detailed above. The resultant shape became the focus for further discussion with the pupil and/or among the small group. Lewis *et al.* (2005) ascertain that this is a particularly productive and versatile approach to exploring views with diverse groups and individuals. For children with speech, language or learning difficulties, and/or emotional needs, it enables comparative judgments to be shown without the need to articulate these shades of difference. Clark (2012, p.224) reports,

> That using a diamond ranking activity enables children and young people to play an active part in the research with an attempt to get at their opinions whilst not making assumptions about what they think.

Thus far, the discussion has focused on the use of statements and anecdotes in the research process, but others have adapted the tool to include photographs. Thomas and O'Kane (1998) used them in their study of participation in decision-making by looked-after children. They did not employ photographs to conduct formal interviews with participants, but to provide a visual stimulus that promoted more direct involvement in the research process. This was also intended to enable respondents to reflect upon and explain their perspectives and experiences (Van Auken, *et al.*, 2010). In essence, the photographs were not data *per se* but were used as a means to create research data (Petersen and Ostergaard, 2003). Discussing the use of diamond ranking

with children, O'Kane (2000) reports that the participants preferred methods of active, rather than passive, communication.

A second research project using photographs, was conducted by Clark *et al.* (2009) with pupils aged 11 and 13 in two different schools. It aimed to explore the impact of a positive psychology programme on the well-being of both students and teaching staff. The rankings were based on 'Good things happening in your school' and 'Rubbish things happening in your school'. Discussions centred on what the images represented to the participants and whether the aspects depicted within, promoted a positive or negative view of being in school. The students normally worked in pairs to promote discussion as suggested by Harper (2002). The use of photographs, rather than written statements, was given prominence, since Clark *et al.* (2009) perceived the process to give agency to the participants and produce different information from a traditional interview (Woolner, *et al.*, 2009).

The research team adopts active approaches of "doing or moving" rather than passive transmission of "just talking" (O'Kane, 2000, p.153). The physical aspect of looking at photographs, first cutting them out, then sorting, ranking and discussing them in pairs, meant that participants were actively involved and able to use the images as visual cues. Since the children in my research were aged between four and five years of age, I considered that they might not have the dexterity to cut out the photographs, and so I prepared them in advance. However, the children were actively involved in the sorting and ranking activities.

Conducting a pilot study in another school enabled me to modify the number of photographs utilised in the diamond ranking exercise from nine to five (see figure **3.2**). I used these photographs (Appendix E) to initiate discussions with the children about which of the pedagogical activities they perceived as more inclusive, and which ones they perceived as less inclusive. The way in which the concept of inclusion was introduced, has already been discussed in section **3.5.4**.

Figure **3.2** Photograph of diamond ranking activity at Riverside Infants

The use of diamond ranking can be adapted to seek the views of those individuals who may have been excluded or disempowered in some way, as suggested by Lewis *et al.* (2005) and Lloyd *et al.* (2006) in their work for the Disability Rights Commission. Since society has marginalised both young children and people with disabilities due to conventions of power and decision-making as detailed in **Chapter 2,** it is posited that this tool could be deemed inclusive.

3.5.5.3   Children's drawings

Children's drawings (Picard, *et al.*, 2007) can be used to understand their views on a topic and to assist adults to understand their perceptions, thoughts and experiences (Cox, 2005; Dockett and Perry, 2005; Driessnack, 2006). As Driessnack (2006, p.1415) suggests, "the child's drawing acts as a transitional space in which feelings can be externalised into a concrete form that can be manipulated, reworked or reconstructed". Additionally, the method is often very successful because drawing forms part of the everyday experiences of children and is considered "fun", "relaxing" (Fargas-Malet, *et al*, 2010, p.183); "triggering remembering", "helping the abstract become concrete" (Gabb, 2010, p.44); and "minimizing the power relationship between researcher and child" (Smart, 2009, p.301).

Children's early drawings have been likened to babble, which fails to recognise their communicative potential (Gardner, 1980; Anning, 1999). Matthews (1997, 1999) explains how the action of drawing enables children to make sense of the world around them and, therefore, the process is often more important than the end product. This is further supported by Pahl (1999), who attests to their ability in enabling children to talk either to others, or indeed themselves, about what happens in their world. Drawings cannot be read or translated in the same way as the written or spoken word, nor can they be easily understood out of context (Hall, 2009), since adults bring their own, often misleading, expectations to the interpretation (Brittain, 1979). Indeed Lowenfeld and Brittain, (1987, p.2) suggest that children use drawings to create a meaningful whole which combines,

> Diverse elements of their experience … In the process of selecting, interpreting and reforming these elements, children have given us more to think about than a picture or sculpture; they have given us a part of themselves; how they think feel and see.

Furthermore, Wall (2017) concludes that drawings are successful in eliciting the perspectives of the youngest students. She contends that they show the value in using visual approaches to provide a process and/or output that is supportive of this intent. The *Campaign for Drawing* (Adams, 2006) promotes its status and identifies four functions: perception; communication; invention; and action. Within my research, the first three functions are of particular note. They enabled the children to consider the questions that had been asked previously in the group interviews, and assisted them in reflecting and processing any emotions or thoughts that may have arisen. A comment from Zara indicates how she had time to reflect on her response in the diamond ranking exercise and reply with greater emphasis when asked why she did not find the whole class activity inclusive – '*I told you another time I didn't feel very included when we write it on the board!*' However, the means by which these drawings were interpreted was of paramount importance.

It has already been acknowledged that the interpretation of drawings is problematic and Malchiodi (1998) has been criticised in terms of the danger of projecting the adults' perspectives onto the children's drawings (Angelides and

Michaelidou, 2009). Kress (1997) posits that the interpretation of the product alone ignores utterances which facilitate a deeper understanding. Moreover, Jameson (1968) indicates how misleading a description of the drawing after completion can be, and suggests that by standing close to the children whilst drawing, one can frequently hear them talking to themselves about their work, thus offering the possibility of a different perspective. By adopting this practice in my research, it became possible to listen to the children's talk, which enabled me to understand the ideas on which the drawing was based, thus providing insights into their interests and background (Gentle, 1985; David, 1999).

Gentle (1985) believes that children's discussions and the ideas they share have a direct influence on the content of their work, and as such they should work together in small groups or pairs. Having already interviewed the children in groups of four, I elected to interview them individually, thus allowing for more detailed conversations to become part of such discussions. Moreover, I used the drawing activity as a conduit to elicit the children's views about inclusive pedagogical activities during their individual interviews. I asked the children to draw a learning activity in which they felt most included and one where they did not feel included. Whilst they were drawing, I asked them questions about why they had selected the specific activities. In this way, I was able to try and understand the children's perceptions of inclusion, whilst also providing me with the opportunity to inquire about the content of the drawings themselves. On several occasions, children were able to express other feelings through the drawings that had not been apparent in the interview process.

An example of this is provided by Matilda during the drawing activity.

Tricia: And when you're left out how are you feeling?

Matilda: Just left out.

Tricia: How does that make you feel inside?

Matilda: Left out too.

Tricia: Hmm and what sort of expression do you have on your face when you're feeling left out?

Matilda: Mad!

During the group interview, Matilda did not particularly engage in the conversation about what made her perceive herself as less included, however, during the drawing activity in the individual interview, her perceptions were much more evident.

Drawings have been used differently as research tools, in various studies. For example in Dockett and Perry's (2005) study, children were invited to draw pictures depicting what they thought their school would look like before they started, and what it was like once they had started. They were then asked about their drawings to prevent the adults forming their own interpretations of the work. In contrast, Driessnack's (2006) research used drawings of occasions where the children felt afraid, as a starting point for conversation. They proposed that the process of drawing stimulated the children's thoughts and facilitated their ability to talk, thus increasing the amount of information that was shared. I adopted the second approach within my research, which was a more apposite method to elicit information about children's views of inclusion, due to its participative and collaborative approach.

3.6 Ethical issues

Underlying any discussion of ethical issues are five main principles to which qualitative research should strictly adhere (as outlined by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (2015). It should be of high quality; all participants should be fully informed; confidentiality and anonymity must be maintained; the involvement of participants must be voluntary; harm must be avoided; and the independence of the research must be made clear (NFER, 2012). Within my research there were two distinct groups: the children and the practitioners. These principles apply to both groups but there are some more complex issues that need to be considered when working with children (Bell and Bryman, 2007).

Before commencing my research, the issues of *consent, assent* and *dissent* (Dockett *et al,* 2012) were considered. Central to any research is recognition of the role of informed consent, that is, voluntary consent provided on the basis of sufficient and appropriate information, including the right to withdraw (Dockett *et al,* 2012). The practitioners were afforded the same rights as the children, however, conducting research with children necessitated an additional element, namely, an assessment of the child's capability to make informed decisions. This concurs with the wording in the UNCRC (1989), which states that a child who is capable of forming her/his own views must be afforded the right to be heard. It reasserts the notion of a power imbalance between adult and child, since presumably it will be the researcher or the parent/carer who decides whether the child is capable of expressing her/his views.

However, Thompson (1992, p.60) presents an alternative perspective suggesting that,

> Perhaps searching for a minimum threshold age for children's consent is asking the wrong question. Depending on the content and the complexity of the judgement, children at most ages are capable of making decisions concerning what they want to do, so perhaps the child's competency to consent to research should not be regarded as an inflexible limitation deriving from the child's age, but rather as an interaction of the child, the context, and the nature of the task.

Thompson's ((1992) approach would enable one to situate *assent* within the debate on ethical conduct in research with young children, reflecting Tymchuck's (1992, p.128) perspective of,

> A parallel process in which the parent or guardian agrees to allow a minor ward to participate in a research project and the child assents or agrees to be a subject in the research.

However, this is not without its difficulties as there are many interpretations of assent across the research literature. Ford *et al.* (2007, p.20) refer to it as "agreement obtained from those who are not able to enter into a legal

contract"; Vitiello (2003) defines it in terms of not merely being about the absence of objection; and Cocks (2006, p.258) places it within an ongoing process, embedded in relationships and requiring the researcher to be "vigilant to the responses of the child". Gallagher *et al.* (2010) concur, stating that children's decisions about participation are not made in isolation, rather the interdependence of children and adults means that they are embedded within the context of relationships.

Appendix F comprises copies of all consent forms and documentation required to obtain ethical approval from the University of Southampton for my study. Within it is a child's consent form, which includes details about the research and asks the child to put a smiley face if they wish to be included. The intention was not specifically to ask the child to sign it, but it acknowledges how I conveyed the concept of assent within the research process. Furthermore, it explains that a child could withdraw at any time and that they could refrain from answering any of the questions if they so wished, which could be deemed as *dissent.*

Dissent is about "knowing children, their interests and preferences", which "provides opportunities to gauge children's comfort with participation and to respect their dissent – regardless of developmental level" (Dockett and Perry, 2011, p.242). This is not to suggest that the process is straightforward, indeed Gallagher *et al.* (2010, p.479) comment that children occupy a "messy, compromised position [as] research participants", being subject to a range of influences and expectations including relationships with peers, family and teachers. Moreover, children's verbal, behavioural and emotional signals should be noted as indicators of assent or dissent, paying attention to the "body subject, the body of personal experience" (Thomas, 2005, p.71). Dockett *et al.* (2012) exemplify this in their research with two year olds, illustrating examples of clear verbal responses, apparent acquiescence accompanied by disengagement, and general disinterest of the children. These instances affirm the importance of responding to children's body language as a means of providing considerable information about their preferences.

Equally, it is important to recognise that dissent is not something that only happens at the outset of the research; it is possible that participants may assent to some levels of participation and not to others. Indeed, this occurred within my pilot study when one child did not wish to partake in the diamond ranking activity. She had initially assented but after a short while her body language intimated that she wished to withdraw. This explication is supported by Black *et al.* (2010), who comment that dissent does not require a reason or justification and can be expressed at any time. Moreover, it suggests that consent, assent and dissent should be regarded as provisional and open to renegotiation each time data are contributed (Simons and Usher, 2000). Thus, research designs should consider ways of managing opting in and out, affording children genuine opportunities to participate without ongoing obligations (Dockett *et al.*, 2012).

Whilst the importance of gaining children's consent in the research process has been stressed in this chapter, one must also be mindful that "respect for children's status as social actors does not diminish adult responsibilities" (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008, p.35). Although it has been acknowledged that children are competent social actors (Kellett, 2010), they can also be deemed as vulnerable. Lahman (2008, p.285, italics in the original) states, "I believe both the notions of competent and vulnerable, worded as *competent yet vulnerable child* may be held simultaneously as a way of considering the unique position of children". Therefore, if children are assumed to be competent yet vulnerable, it becomes necessary to consider confidentiality in terms of what to do if a child discloses a safeguarding issue. It is essential to assure children that anything they say will not be repeated, so that a rapport of trust can be established. Nevertheless, I considered at the outset of my research, how this would be overcome if such a disclosure was made. Thomas and O'Kane (1998) suggest that the child could be encouraged to tell someone else so that the position of trust between the researcher and participant is not compromised. If the circumstances surrounding the information were so alarming and placed the child in immediate danger, however, the issue of protection would supersede that of confidentiality. Fortunately, in this research project, no such disclosures were made and so the position did not arise.

In the interviews, I afforded value to what the children said and provided opportunities for them to lead the direction of the questioning. Morrow and Richards (1996) comment that there are few attempts made to understand children's lives in their own terms which supports the need to adopt alternative methods. However, this is not without its difficulties. Allen (2005) argues that it is a risky activity since researchers need to have a protective responsibility towards children. Furthermore, Benjamin *et al.* (2003, p.549) advocate that children need to be actively negotiating their positions, moment-by-moment, within micro-cultures in which "subject positions are prescribed and proscribed" and "differentially available". They reaffirm that the submissive position of children within educational research, leads to children being taken for granted and adults resisting the requirement to confront challenges to their power (Mayall, 2002).

Therefore, researchers must ensure that participants have a positive rather than negative experience and that they do not feel anxious, upset or apprehensive (Kirby, 2001). Alderson (1995) provides a checklist of questions to consider when undertaking research with children; she suggests making an 'Impact on Children' statement for each research proposal to examine the effects of the research. This was considered within the application for ethical approval (Appendix F). In so doing, children were placed at the forefront of the research and there was less danger that they would simply become the focus of my interests.

Whilst it is important to consider the implications of research on, about or with young children, Morrow and Richards (1996) note that an over-protective stance towards children may indeed reduce their ability to participate in research. The methods by which children are engaged with the research are clearly important, but they suggest that the biggest ethical challenge is the disparity in power and status between adults and children. They argue that,

> ...using methods which are non-invasive, non-confrontational and participatory, and which encourage children to interpret their own data, might be one step forward in diminishing the ethical problems of imbalanced relationships between the researcher and researched

at the point of data collection and interpretation (Morrow and Richards, 1996, p.100).

Finally, it is important to acknowledge my position within these ethical considerations. My ontological perspective has already been discussed and considered in terms of deciding the most appropriate methodological approach in my research design. Christensen and Prout (2002) refer to a notion of ethical symmetry which is encapsulated within the relationship between the researcher and the participant. Through a guided set of principles and practices, ethical symmetry suggests that "researchers often have to rely on their own personal judgement in their everyday practice" (Christensen and Prout, 2002, p.489). These then form the basis of a set of ethical values and provide researchers with the opportunities to reflect on their assumptions, with the aim of providing the researcher with the flexibility to meet the varied circumstances of research. By considering not only what the children and practitioners revealed, but also how they behaved and the contexts in which their words and actions were located, it became possible to simultaneously explore my study interests, whilst gaining insights into what was important to the participants.

To conclude this section on selecting research methods, it is important to reflect on its multimodal approach. By adopting different methods, this research acknowledges the concept of triangulation. Observations, group and individual interviews, were utilised as major data collection strategies for my qualitative research project. According to Guba (1981) and Brewer and Hunter (1989), the use of different methods compensates for their individual limitations and exploits their respective benefits.

However, the generalisabilitiy of qualitative research presents problems as it tends to focus on small sample sizes or case studies. As such it becomes more about what can be learnt from these social contexts rather than whether they can be generalised across settings. Erlandson *et al.* (1993) note that even conventional generalisability is never possible as all observations are defined by the specific contexts in which they occur. In contrast, Stake (1994) and

Denscombe (1998) suggest that, although each case may be unique, it is also an example within a broader group and, as a result, the prospect of generalisability should not be immediately rejected. Nevertheless, such an approach can be pursued only with caution since, as Gomm *et al.* (2000) recognise, it appears to belittle the importance of the contextual factors which impinge on the case. Geertz (1973), however, identifies the value of such detailed data and rather than perceiving it as a negative factor, looks to regard it as 'thick description', that is, rich accounts of the details of a culture.

Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that the dependability of the research can be ensured by utilising overlapping methods such as group and individual interviews, which occurred in my research project. Shenton (2004) asserts that the research design may be viewed as a 'prototype model', whereby it is reported in sufficient detail to allow for a future researcher to repeat the process. Undertaking a pilot study in another school, could be conceived as a prototype. It enabled me to amend some of the questions in the children's interviews. Moreover, alterations were made to these questions following the transcription and initial analysis of the interviews from the first school, Riverside Infants. Some of the questions appeared to be leading the children towards specific answers and others were not directly relevant to the research questions. Therefore, I modified the questions to ensure that they provided sufficient space for the children to respond without coercion or influence. Reflection on the data analysis from the first school also enabled me to refine the relation between the interview questions and the research questions. Such in-depth coverage allowed me to assess the extent to which proper research practices had been followed. This process also facilitated me to overcome the issue of researcher bias, by demonstrating that I had acted in good faith and not allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations (Bryman, 2012) to influence the conduct of the research.

Finally, in response to Guba and Lincoln's (1994) unease about the reliability and validity of qualitative research, I created a book (Appendix G) using the children's drawings and quotes so that I could discuss my interpretations of their comments. This allowed the children to identify any discrepancies

between my analysis and their reality. Guba and Lincoln suggest that it is good practice to share the findings with the research participants, to check they have been correctly understood (respondent validation), and establish trustworthiness.

3.7   Data analysis

When selecting and planning research tools, it is important to have a clear overview of the methods for data analysis. Analysing qualitative data is a complex process and needs careful consideration but Coffey and Atkinson (2006, p.3) stress that,

> What links all the approaches is a central concern with transforming and interpreting qualitative data – in a rigorous and scholarly way – in order to capture the complexities of the social worlds we seek to explain.

The richness, intensity and multimodality of data collection in my study connoted the importance of analysing the data in as much detail as possible, so that notion children's perceived notions of inclusion could be understood.

Cohen *et al.* (2007, p.368) provide helpful stages in the process of analysis:

1. Generating natural units of meaning
2. Classifying, categorising and ordering these units of meaning
3. Structuring narratives to describe the interview contents
4. Interpreting the interview data.

Once all the data were collected, it was necessary to consider the process of analysis. In qualitative research, coding is often used to try and explore the concepts or themes within the raw data and is defined as,

> Most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2009, p.3).

Since the coding is often ascribed by the researcher, it seems appropriate to consider their ontological and epistemological position not only at the outset, but also at the point of data analysis. Thus, one is forced to consider how methods, such as interview questions, may influence the outcomes. Merriam

(1998, p.48) states, "Our analysis and interpretation – our study's findings – will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place". Therefore, a clear understanding of the theoretical framework must accompany the methods and interpretation of the data. This is not to suggest, however, that coding is an absolute science since data can be interpreted in many different ways. Sipe and Ghiso (2004, pp.482-3), in their narrative about coding dilemmas for a children's literacy study, note that, "All coding is a judgment call" since we bring "our subjectivities, our personalities, our predispositions, [and] our quirks to the process".

Furthermore, Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) recommend keeping to hand a copy of the theoretical framework, the central research question, and the goals of the study, so that the researcher remains focused. Emerson *et al.* (1995, p.145) advise a general list of questions to consider when coding field notes, regardless of the research purpose.

· What are people doing? What are they trying to accomplish?
· How, exactly, do they do this? What specific means and/or strategies do they use?
· How do members talk about, characterize, and understand what is going on?
· What assumptions are they making?
· What do I see going on here? What did I learn from these notes?
· Why did I include them?

These questions were considered when documenting the fieldnotes and observations. Although I used the language from the LIS (Laevers, 1999) to observe the children in different pedagogical activities, I also provided additional information about the way they responded to pedagogical activities in the indoor and outdoor environments and interacted with other children, during unstructured observations. These were then used to formulate the questions in the interviews. Once the initial interviews had been conducted and transcribed, I was able to reflect on my questions and alter them as needed, As such, I was coding throughout the data collection process and adapting my methods accordingly (Saldana, 2009). Charmaz (2006, p.45) identifies the importance of this asserting, coding "generates the bones of your analysis.… [I]ntegration will assemble those bones into a working skeleton".

3.7.1 Transcription and Coding using Nvivo

One element of analysis is the transcription of interviews. Every word is included, but this alone is not sufficient in the analysis phase. Drew (2005) proposes that inference and suggestion can be included, which makes it possible to convey the feeling and essence of the interview rather than the mere utterances. Holstein and Gubrium (1997, p.127) comment that,

> The analytic objective is not merely to describe the situated production of talk, but to show how what is being said relates to the experiences and lives being studied.

Additionally, facial expression and body language can be noted during the interview itself (Ring, 2000). Table **3.5** details the conventions adopted within the transcription process.

Table **3.5** Transcribing conventions used in data analysis (adapted from Drew, 2005)

Transcription Conventions	
…	The number of dots represents the time in seconds the participant paused between speaking
!	Demonstrates stress or emphasis
-	Used to indicate a word is broken off
WORD	Words written in capital letters indicate an increase in amplitude
(words)	Brackets are used to bind any uncertain words during the transcription; they also include the transcribers best guess

A further important aspect was the coding of responses in the group interviews, observational records, and discussions emerging from the drawing activity. Kerlinger (1970) defines coding as the translation of responses to specific categories for the purpose of analysis. Deciding on the approaches to coding is, however, problematic in itself. At the core are two different methods: grounded theory where the categories arise from the data itself; or a predetermined conceptual framework, which is based on the findings from the literature review. It could be considered that I adopted a grounded theory approach to my coding. Since I had selected an interpretivist epistemology, I was predominantly concerned with eliciting and analysing the participants' views and opinions. Therefore, it was important not to be constrained by any

preconceived ideas. Rather, it was the issues of importance emerging from the stories the participants have to tell, that were of interest. Indeed Strauss and Corbin (1994, p.274, emphasis in original) insist that, "interpretations *must* include the perspectives and voice of the people who we study [*sic*]".

The use of a qualitative data analysis software (QDA - NVivo) was used to facilitate the analysis. It can enable researchers to order, search and filter data systematically, or as Flick (2009, p.361) suggests, "at least make quality easier to demonstrate". Seale (2010) emphasises the ability to demonstrate that all negative instances have been explored and all parts of the data have been examined. However, there are others (see Weitzman, 2000, pp.807-8) who highlight the shortcomings of such programmes, since "the very ease, speed and power of the software have the potential to encourage … the researcher to take short-cuts". The caveat, therefore, is that it does not obviate the crucial role of the researcher within the analytical process nor undertake the qualitative analysis itself (Flick, 2009).

The process of analysis took place in three stages:

1. Coding using NVivo;

2. Merging and deleting codes;

3. Analysis leading to key themes.

The coding process was conducted for each interview type: Children - sixteen group, and forty individual, interviews; and practitioners - seven individual interviews. The group interviews lasted for approximately twenty minutes and were transcribed first, as they were completed in week four of the research project. The children's individual interviews lasted for approximately ten minutes and the practitioners' about fifteen minutes. These were conducted in weeks five and six in each of the schools. The transcript of each interview was read at least twice, first on a line-by-line basis, and later as a whole. The first reading of the children's interviews enabled a precise coding of words, lines, phrases and paragraphs that reflected the definitions of inclusion (Appendix

H). The second reading enabled me to 'read between the lines', for example, by asking the question 'what is happening here?' (McLeod, 2001). An illustration of this is presented in which Henry explains why he felt most included in a specific pedagogical activity.

Henry: Cos William has got it and it's a favourite game.

Tricia: Why is that you like to play it with William?

Henry: Cos he's my best friend!

Tricia: Ok so you're going to draw that here.

Henry: Yeah but I'm not going to draw the game bit, I'm just going to draw me and William but not the hammers.

In this extract, Henry perceives himself to be most included when playing an imaginary/creative game with another child. He identifies that it is his favourite game, which associates with the code of an activity being the '*favourite',* but it also links with the code of *'friends'.* A further comment made by Henry, *'but I'm not going to draw the game bit, I'm just going to draw me and William but not the hammers',* indicates by reading between the lines that his sense of inclusion could be more associated with his friend than it is with the game/activity itself.

Furthermore, the observations of children participating in different pedagogical activities were analysed in relation to how they connected with definitions of inclusion and to provide additional evidence about the children's behaviour and body language in response to these activities. For example, these observations included information about the date, location and type of pedagogical activity for each child, whilst utilising the language of the LIS (Laevers, 1994) (Appendix C).

One difficulty that arose during the analysis stage, relates to the subjective nature of conducting observations. On occasions, children were observed as displaying behaviour that could be interpreted as them being less included, yet

in their interviews they reported positive perceptions of inclusion in these same pedagogical activities. This identifies the challenge of undertaking research with young children. However, by analysing the unstructured observations of children, alongside the timed observations and the children's comments in their interviews, it became possible to suggest a more considered and reflective interpretation of the data.

3.7.2   Merging and deleting codes

Once all transcripts of the children's interviews had been coded, tables were formulated for each of the research questions (Appendix I). These tables present the codes created during the initial analysis. Initially there were 101 codes in total: 47 ascribed to RQ 1 and 54 to RQ 2. At this stage, the codes were closely aligned to the actual words the children uttered concerning the definitions of inclusion. Thorough analysis of this table and the data revealed that some codes were similar, such as '*being kind*' and '*children are friendly*'. In these cases, the specific text in the transcripts to which the code had been attributed, was checked and the codes were only merged if it did not distort the coding process.

A closer analysis of the codes enabled them to be merged into nine broad categories for pedagogical activities that promote inclusion (table **3.6**) and seven that hinder inclusion (table **3.7**). The association of each of the initial codes to the individual categories is also indicated in the tables in Appendix I. It is important to note that some of the codes appear in more than one category because they seem to identify different perspectives. For example, children emphasised positive perceptions of inclusion because they liked an activity, explaining this in terms of having fun, and because they were active (doing something like making models).

Table **3.6** Categories assigned to children's perspectives of pedagogical activities that promoted inclusion.

Number assigned to category for merging	Category	Number of initial codes assigned to category
1	Kindness/being happy	5
2	Creative/active engagement	9
3	Child's own interest	16
4	Environment	7
4	Fun	2
6	Friends	9
7	Helping/support	4
8	Being able to do the work	8
9	Pride in achievement	8

Table **3.7** Categories assigned to children's perspectives of pedagogical activities that hindered inclusion.

Number assigned to category for merging	Category	Number of initial codes assigned to category
1	Can't do something	6
2	Feelings	7
3	Doesn't know what to do	7
4	Don't like doing something	22
5	Unable to remember	5
6	Sensorial experiences	9
7	Left out/lonely	9

In table **3.6**, categories 3, 8 and 9, appear to relate to the child her/himself, whilst the remaining categories relate to others children or practitioners, or the environment. Moreover, in table **3.7,** most of the categories concern the child's perception of inclusion in the specific pedagogical activities. This could indicate that when children have negative perceptions of inclusion, they relate this to the activity itself, whereas, when they perceive a positive connotation, they associate this with themselves or other people in the class.

3.7.3   Analysis leading to key themes

Once the codes had been scrutinised there appeared to be a connection between some of the categories. For example, '*being able to do the work'* strongly related to '*pride in achievement',* because there were many comments that related to children perceiving themselves as included when they were able to complete their work independently or to the best of their ability. An illustration of this comes from Luke who stated '*You, you got to do your handwriting really neatly'* and from Sophia who responded to a question about why she felt most included when she was working on her own, '*Cos I don't need any help'.* I interpreted Sophia's comment as concerning a child taking pride in her accomplishments because of the tone in her voice and that she was able to show her mother her achievements. I assigned Luke's comment to both categories because it was given in the context of completing the work set by the teacher and because other people could see the result. Consequently, the categories were merged to form a broader theme *'independent achievement*' since I considered this to be a more appropriate term that encompassed both the child's completion of, and pride in, their work.

This final process comprised a closer analysis of the actual words and phrases that the children used in order to ensure that there was no misinterpretation or alteration of their meaning in order to reduce the number of codes. This was duly executed and the codes were abridged to five themes aligned to RQ 1 (table **3.8**) and five for RQ 2 (table **3.9**). An itemisation of the individual codes allocated to each theme can be found in Appendix J. Links between the themes in tables **3.8** and **3.9** and the literature review, are detailed in the tables in

Chapter 3 Methodological considerations

Appendix K.

Table **3.8** Themes aligned to RQ 1

Research Question 2	Number of codes
Dislike of the activity	22
Sensorial experiences	11
Feeling alone	11
Unsure of the activity	11
Difficulty of the activity	8

Table **3.9** Themes aligned to RQ 2

Research Question 1	Number of codes
Collaboration	20
Children's individuality and difference	16
Physically active engagement	9
Independent achievement	7
Environmental context	7

Ryan and Bernard (2003) assert that an emphasis on repetition is one of the most common criteria for establishing a pattern warranting a theme, but they argue that it is not sufficient. Simply because something emerges most frequently, it cannot be adopted as a theme since it must be relevant to the research questions and focus, or that other codes were unimportant. A code that was mentioned fewer times than another (*sensorial experiences*) might be of as much interest as one which was mentioned twice as often (*dislike of the activity*). Nonetheless, the quantitative analysis acted as a guide for me at the beginning of the analysis.

3.7.4   Further analysis leading to areas of importance

Once the data had been analysed within the separate research questions, a further level of analysis was undertaken to determine if there were any connections between the themes. This process was conducted through the examination of each theme in tables **3.8** and **3.9** and it became apparent that some of the themes in one table connected with those in another. An example of this is presented in table **3.10**.

Table **3.10** Connection between themes for RQ 1 and RQ 2

Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Links with the literature	Dimensions of inclusion
Collaboration – Choosing who to work with; Watching and learning from others	**Feeling Alone –** Not having the opportunity to play/work with other children; Being left out by specific children	**Co-construction of knowledge -** (Jordan, 2004; Hedges and Cullen, 2011) **Working with children as emergent learners -** (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002) **Learning and playing in collaboration with others** – (Booth and Ainscow, 2004) **Co-agency** – **(**Hart *et al.*, 2004)	**Belonging and relationships** (Goodenow, 1992; Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Hagerty *et al.*, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Johnson, 2009; Nagel, 2011; Hope, 2012)

Table **3.10** seeks to present an example of how I identified interrelated themes in the first two research questions. Collaboration is acknowledged as promoting inclusion, whilst the theme of Feeling Alone appears to indicate the reverse since children reported that they did not perceive themselves as included when they could not work or play with a friend. It is important to note that whilst each of the themes in RQ 1 and RQ 2 was examined to determine whether there were any connections between them, I did not constrain the analysis to ensure that each of the themes fitted into the overarching

categories. For example, the themes of Physically Active Engagement and Independent Achievement did not appear to connect with any of the themes in the second research question, so they were left as independent themes. This process of analysing the themes was conducted for each of the research questions and eventually two overarching categories were formed: belonging and relationships; and democratic pedagogies. A detailed explanation of each of these categories is presented in **Chapter 6**.

3.8   Coding systems

A coding system was designed to identify the location of each quotation, vignette, or observation. In the instances of observational or contextual data, information is provided about the date, time, and location of the activity the children undertook. The different schools are given the following abbreviations: Riverside Infants (RI) and Oak Ridge Primary (ORP). In the interviews, the child's and practitioner's names are used within the extract. With the group interviews using the diamond ranking activity (DR), the following system is adopted – *RI DR or ORP DR,* and for the individual interviews the following system is adopted – *RI I or ORP I.* Each child had the opportunity to be part of one group and one individual interview and the practitioners were only involved in the individual interviews. In the observations using the LIS (Laevers, 1994), the following system is adopted – *RI O*: pseudonym (date, time, location, activity) or *ORP O*: pseudonym (date, location, activity). Each reference to the child's well-being in the text utilises the language of the scale and makes a judgement of the relative position of the child's well-being (Appendix C).

Vignettes or unstructured observations are also used to provide more detailed and extended contextual information from the fieldnotes about how the children engaged with the different pedagogical activities and the following system was adopted – *RI V or ORP V*. These entries do not utilise the LIS (Laevers, 1994) and offer a much broader account of how the children engaged with, and responded to, both the pedagogical activities and each other. Since these observations were not constrained by the two minute duration and were

not focused on a specific pedagogical activity, they enabled me to follow a child if they chose to move from one activity to another and record their behaviour, attitude and interactions accordingly.

In all instances, the first two or three letters represent the school and the final letter(s) denote(s) the method of data collection. The reference code that refers to participants, different sources and specific pieces of data is placed at the end of the quotation from an individual child or practitioner, or at the end of a conversation between the children and/or researcher.

3.9   Summary

This chapter presented the rationale that underpins the methodological decisions taken for this study. It included the research approach; research design; methods for data collection; and ways of data analysis. One of the most important decisions was adopting a qualitative approach, which was derived after careful consideration of the research foci. The main challenge related to the analysis and presentation of findings, which sometimes presented differing perspectives of the children's sense of inclusion from the participant observations when compared with their comments in the interviews. The next two chapters present the findings of the study in response to all three research questions.

Chapter 4: Children's perceptions of pedagogical activities that promote or hinder inclusion in the Reception class

4.1 Contextual information about schools

4.1.1 Riverside Infants (RI)

Riverside Infants was an average-sized infant school in the North of England with approximately 247 pupils on roll. The age range of the children was four to seven years. Most pupils were of white British heritage and were drawn mainly from the town in which it was situated, with a few of the pupils coming from the surrounding villages. The proportion of the pupils on the SEN register was below the national average. The number of disadvantaged pupils was below the national average. The school was rated as 'good' by Ofsted in 2014. The school was voluntary controlled; it had close links to its local church and stressed its strong Christian ethos in its mission statement.

The structure of the school comprised nine classes: three Reception classes (Foundation Stage 2), three Year 1 and three Year 2 classes. The three Reception classes had 24, 27, and 23 children on roll: the research was conducted in the Reception class with 24 children, 21 of whom were involved in the study. These children had a class teacher, nursery nurse and teaching assistant (TA) who worked with them on a daily basis. Table **4.1** presents the structure of an average day.

Table **4.1** Structure of the school day at Riverside Infants

AM 9.30 – 12.00	PM 13.00 – 15.10
Whole class activity (30 minutes)	Whole class activity (30 minutes)
Group work (30 minutes)	Group work (25 minutes)
'Busy time' (90 minutes) Any activity that was child-directed (either from a range of teacher provided pedagogical activities or other resources in the class)	'Busy time' (70 minutes)

The focus of the whole class activity and the group work was either literacy or numeracy based. In the whole class activity, the children sat on the carpet, listened to the teacher and participated in some interactive pedagogical activities. The nursery nurse and TA were also present to assist the children, with the TA also supporting a child with autism. In the group work, the teacher organised the children into groups according to perceived ability. They were assigned to a practitioner who selected a context for the activity, either in the classroom or the outdoor environment. During this time, the aim was to help the children consolidate their understanding of the concepts that had been taught during the whole class activity.

Once the whole class and group work had been completed, the children were able to undertake 'busy time', during which they were able to engage in free-flow play, which is coordinated, and moves fluidly from one phase or scenario to the next (Bruce, 2001). This occurred between the three classrooms, the workshop and the outdoor environment. The three classrooms each had a different focus: literacy; exploring the world; and cookery/home/role-play area. In addition, there was a separate room, the workshop, where the children engaged in model-making. The outdoor environment comprised: a climbing frame; covered area; shed; tables; kitchen area; garden; sand; tyres; and crates.

There were no designated breaks during the morning or afternoon teaching sessions and the children were able to select activities according to their own interests. The staff and children had a one hour lunch break, after which the afternoon's structure was broadly the same as the morning with a slightly shorter 'busy time'. During the research data collection, the children were observed participating in visits to different settings in their local environment, including police and fire stations.

4.1.2 Oak Ridge Primary (ORP)

Oak Ridge Primary was a slightly smaller than average primary school in the North of England with approximately 208 pupils on roll. The age range of the children was four to eleven years. The vast majority of children were from white British backgrounds and all spoke English as their first language. Pupils came from a fairly even mix of advantaged and disadvantaged background and it drew its pupils from a wide geographical area. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was average and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, was below average.

Oak Ridge Primary was a semi-open plan building surrounded by playing fields and school grounds. The school was rated as 'outstanding' by Ofsted in 2009. Although the school recognised that it was quite some time since their last inspection and that the criteria for awarding the grade had changed, they had recently invited the local authority to inspect the school and they were still viewed as outstanding. The school was voluntary controlled, it had close links to its local church and stressed its strong Christian ethos in its mission statement.

The structure of the school comprised one class for each year group from Reception to Year 6. The research was conducted in the Reception class which comprised 31 children, 19 of whom were involved in the study. These children had a class teacher, nursery nurse, and two TAs, one of whom supported a child with autism and did not work with the other children. Since there was

only one Reception class, all the pedagogical activities occurred in either the
classroom or the outdoor environment. Table **4.2** presents the structure of an
average day.

Table **4.2** Structure of the school day at Oak Ridge Primary

AM 9.15 – 11.15	PM 13.15 – 14.30
Whole class (with the teacher) (45 minutes)	Whole class (with the teacher) (30 minutes)
Group work (without teacher)/working individually/group with teacher (75 minutes)	Group work (without teacher)/working individually/group with teacher (45 minutes)
BREAK 11.15 – 11.35	BREAK 14.30 – 14.50
AM 11.35 – 12.15	PM 14.50 -15.30
Group work (without teacher)/working individually/group with teacher (40 minutes)	Group work (without teacher)/working individually/group with teacher (30 minutes)

The focus of the whole class activity and the group work was either literacy or
numeracy based. In the whole class activity, the children sat on the carpet,
listened to the teacher and participated in some interactive activities. The TA
and nursery nurse were also present to support the children. Once this was
completed, the teacher directed the children to each of the pedagogical
activities she had planned for the day. These were based upon where the
children said they wished to go first. They could then move freely between the
activities once they had completed the initial one. Although all the
practitioners were present in the classroom, they did not sit at the same table
as the children to support them in their work, but they were available if their
assistance was sought. During this time the practitioners also worked with
children on an individual basis. The children then went into the large
playground for their break; once they returned to the classroom they resumed
their activities. The afternoon was a repeat of the morning's activities - a whole
class activity and usually a repeat of the group activities to ensure that the
children had sufficient time in which to complete them.

In addition to the classroom there was a small outdoor environment which was for the sole use of the children in the Reception class. The children were able to use this area during the day but it was not used as free-flow play. Only when the teacher decided, could the children move between the outdoor and indoor environments. The outdoor environment comprised: climbing frame; covered area; sand; crates; tyres; planks of wood; tables; and a shed with science resources.

Whilst the schools were similar in many ways, it is important to note that there were some key differences. These are presented in the table **4.3**.

Table 4.3 Structure of access to pedagogical activities in both schools.

Riverside Infants	Oak Ridge Primary
Free flow play in the indoor and outdoor environment.	Teacher decided when children had access to indoor and outdoor environment.
No break in access to pedagogical activities except for lunchtime.	Morning and afternoon break in pedagogical activities, in addition to lunchtime.
Practitioners present at all pedagogical activities to support children in their learning when they were asked or saw opportunities to extend their learning.	Practitioners were sometimes present at group pedagogical activities to support children by extending their learning, but often they worked on an individual basis with child. At this time the other children undertook pedagogical activities largely without support from practitioners unless it was requested by children.
Pedagogical activities during 'busy time' were planned by all practitioners in the Reception class to provide children with a range of learning opportunities. Children were able to choose what to do, when to do it and also select other activities that may not have been presented by asking a member of staff if they could have access to the necessary resources (e.g. paints if they have not been set out).	Pedagogical activities were planned by the teacher alone and children were required to complete certain activities before they were able to choose from a range of teacher-directed activities. They were not able to select other activities that were not already presented.
Children were able to move freely between four different rooms and the outdoor environment, each of which had a specific focus for pedagogical activities (literacy, mathematics, science and creative).	Children were able to move between activities in the classroom and had access to the outdoor environment when the teacher decided. All pedagogical activities were contained within these two areas.

4.2 Children's perceptions of how pedagogical activities promote inclusion.

This section presents the themes that emerged from the data analysis relating to how the children considered that pedagogical activities promoted inclusion in their classes (figure **4.1**).
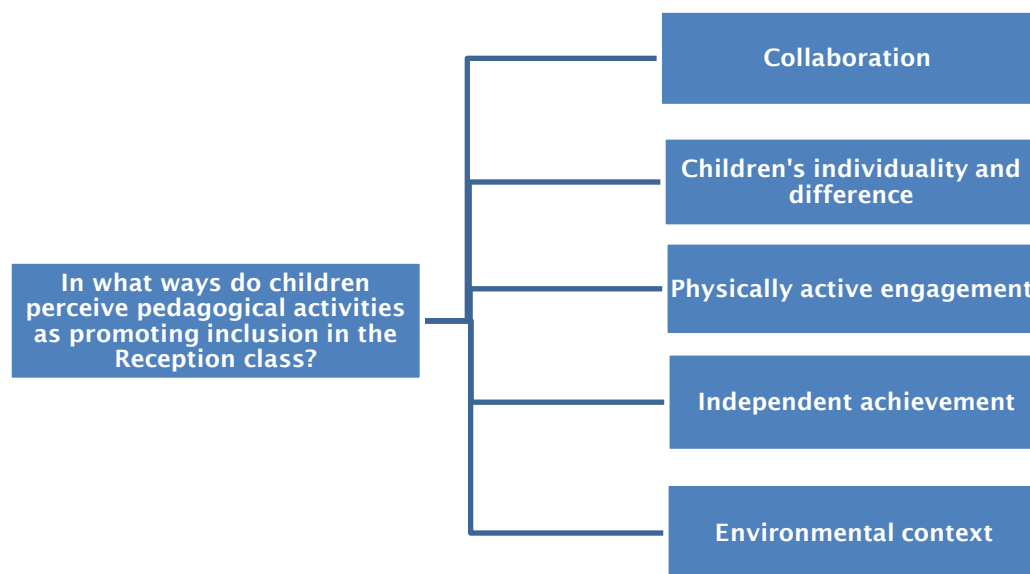
Figure **4.1** Themes emerging from analysis of the data in relation to RQ 1

4.2.1 Collaboration

Collaboration received the greatest number of comments from the children in relation to why they perceived the pedagogical activities to be most inclusive, and whilst this does not necessarily indicate that it is the most important, it offered a starting point for analysis. During the detailed data analysis, it became apparent that there were two subthemes: working or playing with others and learning from others.

4.2.1.1   Working or playing with others

Some children expressed their perceptions of how specific activities promote inclusion, in terms of their desire to be working or playing with a friend or another child. An excerpt of an individual interview conducted with Jacob seeks to illustrate this point.

Tricia: What type of activity makes you feel like these children (in the different scenarios), *really included?*

Jacob: Err football.

Tricia: Why is that?

Jacob: Cos I like playing football with George.

Tricia: And do you like working on your own or would you rather like to work with somebody else?

Jacob: Working with somebody else.

Tricia: Why is that? Why would you like someone to work with you?

Jacob: Cos I don't like doing stuff on my own (RI I).
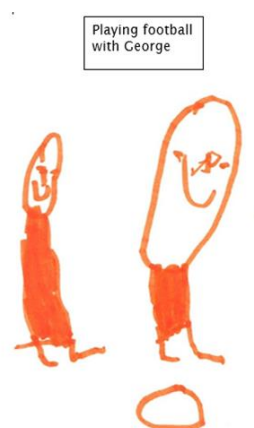
Figure **4.2** Jacob's drawing of a pedagogical activity in which he perceives himself to be included.

The excerpt and figure **4.2** both appear to support the notion that the presence of another child is intrinsic to Jacob's perception of inclusion. In observations undertaken using the LIS (Laevers, 1994), Jacob demonstrated differing levels

of well-being and involvement. In the whole class and small group phonics activities, when Jacob was not working with his friend Archie, he was often distracted and showed little emotion, thus portraying lower levels *(RI O: Jacob (16/4/15, classroom, phonics))*. However, when he was either playing outside or drawing with Archie, he demonstrated much higher levels of well-being and involvement by crying out with pleasure, and also displayed high levels of energy and spontaneous actions *(RI O: Jacob (17/4/15, classroom, drawing)); (RI O: Jacob (22/4/15, outside, crates/tyres)).*

Whilst it is possible that these differences could be attributed to Jacob participating in various pedagogical activities in different contexts, it is not to repudiate Jacob's belief that it is the presence of the friend which contributes to his perceived notion of inclusion. An excerpt from another child, Olivia, explores this viewpoint further.

Tricia: What type of activity makes you feel like these children, really included?

Olivia: Colouring.

Tricia: Why does that make you feel really included?

Olivia: Err because I like drawing my favourite things on my television.

*Tricia: And when you're drawing and colouring, are you working on your own or with
          other people?*

Olivia: Working with other people.

Tricia: And why does that make you feel included?

Olivia: Because I don't want to be on my own (RI I).

Olivia suggests that it is not the presence of a specific friend that contributes to her perception of inclusion, but rather it is simply the company of another person. Further evidence comes from an observation where Olivia was working independently in a small group mathematics activity. She portrayed lower levels of well-being and involvement when she became unsure of what to do and sought reassurance from another child *(RI O: Olivia (16/4/15, classroom, number-days of the week)).* Without the support from the child, Olivia may have

felt unable to complete the task and therefore did not perceive herself as included in the activity.

In other whole class activities or when she was playing with her friends, Olivia was observed being more focused and confident. When she was engaged in a creative activity with other children, she was seen chatting to her friends about what she was doing and also suggesting ways they could improve their work *(RI O: Olivia (30/4/15, classroom, drawing))*. In doing so, she was demonstrating high levels of well-being and involvement. Whilst it is not conclusive, the analysis of the data indicates that Olivia perceived herself as more included through learning and playing in collaboration with others, which concurs with Booth and Ainscow's (2004) view of inclusion.

Similarly, a child from Oak Ridge Primary, not only expressed that she did not perceive herself as included when she was on her own, but she commented on how it made her feel.

Tricia: When you're inside doing your work you don't feel quite so included (child's own words) *then, why is that?*

Evelyn: … Because no-one's with me.

Tricia: And how does that make you feel when you've got to do it on your own?

Evelyn: Sad.

Tricia: Why does it make you feel sad Evelyn? What is it about doing it on your own that makes you feel sad?

Evelyn: When I'm doing my work and I don't have no-one.

Tricia: What would be different if you had someone there with you?

Evelyn: I'd be happy (ORP I).

Evelyn states that she feels sad when she is on her own and that she would feel happy if someone was with her. However, it should be noted that it is not clear why she feels this way and that it could be contributed to her feeling safer or

less isolated. However, the following observations may support the interpretation that she is more included. In the first example, Evelyn was noted showing lower levels of well-being when writing sentences independently (even though other children were present at the table) *(ORP O: Evelyn (19/6/15, classroom, writing sentences)).* However, in the second observation, she was much more relaxed and confident when she was working with the teacher on a similar activity *(ORP O: Evelyn (23/6/15, classroom, writing with teacher)).*

The difference between these two observations seems to suggest an additional or alternative interpretation of *'Because no-one's with me'.* Some examples from the interviews or drawings appear to make a more explicit link between a positive perception of inclusion and working or playing with friends or other children. However, in Evelyn's observations she displayed higher levels of well-being and involvement, not when she was working at a table with other children, but when she was working with the teacher. Therefore, it is conceivable that for some children it is not sufficient merely to have someone else present at the activity, but that they need to be engaged in the activity with the other child, if they are to perceive themselves as included. However, it is also prudent to mention that these observations took place on different days and therefore Evelyn could simply have been feeling less confident in the first observation.

Thus far, the examples provided have deemed to present data from a range of sources to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis in understanding the children's views of inclusion. In these cases the data appear to validate the analysis, however, there were instances when the different data sources seemed to provide conflicting interpretations. Below are extracts of two interviews with Harry about the types of activities in which he perceives himself as included, and his reasons; the first is from the group interview and the second from his individual one.

Tricia: Why, what is it about working in a group that makes you feel really, really included, not left out?

Harry: Because other children are doing it and I am doing it too (RI DR1).

Tricia: What type of activity makes you feel like these children, really included?

Harry: Playing outside.

Tricia: And are you playing on your own or are you playing with other children?

Harry: Sometimes I play with other children. Sometimes I play with um lots of people and sometimes I play with one person (RI I).

In the first example, Harry perceives himself as included when he is with other children, but an observation recorded whilst he was playing in the outdoor environment does not appear to reflect this perspective *(RI O: Harry (16/4/15, outside, crates/tyres))*. During this observation, Harry was building with the tyres and crates on his own. There were other children playing near him but he did not engage with them or seek their involvement in his game. Indeed, when another child took one of the crates he began to cry and he was not confident to confront the child about this. On another occasion, Harry was observed in the classroom undertaking a science exploration activity and again he was seen playing on his own. Although he did make contact and talked briefly to another child, he displayed high levels of well-being and involvement throughout the observation *(RI O: Harry (5/5/15, classroom, science))*.

These two examples seek to present a possible alternative perspective to the one expressed by Harry. He seems to articulate that he perceives himself as most included when he is playing with at least one child, but this was not supported by these observations. Indeed in nearly all the observations undertaken during the research, Harry was observed talking to himself, working predominantly on his own, and only interacting with other children for short periods of time *(RI O: Harry (20/4/15, outside, imaginary game); (22/4/15, inside, visit-police); (5/5/15, workshop, creative))*. Once more, this is not to negate Harry's expression that he perceives himself as most included when he is with other children, it merely suggests that there could be other explanations. It might be that Harry wishes to interact more with other children and that he would perceive himself to be more included if he was playing with other children and therefore states that this is the situation; or it may be that the observations only recorded a glimpse of what was happening and that at other

times he was indeed playing with other children. Equally, although some children had referred to the perception of inclusion in terms of not being left out, it is conceivable that Harry interpreted the term quite differently.

4.2.1.2   Learning from others

Some children reported positive perceptions of inclusion when they were either learning from children or learning from a teacher, both of which connect with the definition of learning and playing in collaboration with others (Booth and Ainscow, 2004). An excerpt of an individual interview with Joseph illustrates how he perceives himself to be included when he is working with others.

Tricia: Which learning activity are you going to choose where you feel most included?

Joseph: That one (points to the painting picture).

Tricia: The creative. So painting and playdoh? Why have you chosen that one?

Tricia: Why is doing drawing your most included?

Joseph: …um …

Tricia: Why do you feel most included when you're doing something creative?

Joseph: When Zara does some for me I Just .. I put the body on and then I colour it in.

Tricia: So you work together to do it do you?

Joseph: Yeah cos if I colour it in it will get out of lines a little bit, cos I can go in lines but sometimes I get out of lines a little bit (ORP DR3).

Joseph comments that he perceives himself as more included when he is working with his sister (Zara) because she can help him. Although the following observation, utilising the LIS (Laevers, 1994), is not of a painting activity and does not specifically illustrate the need to be working with Zara, it does suggest that Joseph perceives himself to be less included when he is on his own.

Clear signs of discomfort, looks dejected, does not respond to environment. Absent, no energy, passive, looks around at others (ORP O: Joseph (8/6/15, classroom, mathematics)).

Joseph was observed working at a table on his own and appeared to display lower levels of well-being by seeking reassurance or support from someone else. However, Joseph showed higher levels of well-being when he was working in the outdoor environment

Smiles, happy, relaxed, cheerful, self-assured, confident, spontaneous and expressive, no signs of stress, lively, not so intense. Continuous activity with some intense moments, creative, not distracted, concentrated, persists for most of the time through observed period, energetic (ORP O: Joseph (8/6/15, outside, imaginative play)).

It could be construed that Joseph displayed these higher levels because he was playing with other children, but it is also plausible to suggest that it was because he was in the outdoor environment.

Another boy from Oak Ridge Primary also reinforced the concept of learning in collaboration with others, and how he considered that the support of his friends could alter his perception of inclusion.

Tricia: Which one would make you feel really, really included?

Aiden: Building stuff.

Tricia: And why does that make you feel really included?

Aiden: Cos loads of people get to play.

Tricia: And when you're playing with those people how does it make you feel?

Aiden: Happy.

Tricia: Why are you feeling happy when you're playing with your friends outside?

Aiden: Cos your friends are learning and I need them (ORP I).

The excerpt initially demonstrates the link between perceptions of inclusion and playing with other children but it also raises a potential difficulty in its analysis. Aiden comments that he feels happy when he is playing outside because his friends are learning alongside him and support him when necessary. However, it is important to note that feeling happy is not the same as perceiving himself as included; nonetheless, additional observations of Aiden revealed him displaying high levels of well-being and involvement whenever he was playing with other children. An observation of Aiden using the construction equipment *(ORP O: Aiden (16/6/15, classroom, construction))* showed him being relaxed and engaged. This could indicate notions of inclusion, since he was able to negotiate with other children when they attempted to use the same equipment, and continue learning and playing, which supports his comments about learning with his friends.

The examples given here underline the importance some children placed on working with other children, but there were others who expressed the need for an adult or teacher to be present in order to assist their learning. This relates to the definition of co-agency where the responsibility for learning is shared between the teacher and the learner (Hart *et al.*, 2004).

In the diamond ranking exercise, Hannah selected the whole class as the pedagogical activity in which she felt most included.

Tricia: Why does that one make you feel most included Hannah?

Hannah: Because I was listening to the teacher and what she says.

Tricia: And when you have listened and hear what the teacher says how does that make you feel included?

Hannah: Cos those questions to her and we listen (ORP DR9).

These comments appear to support the notion of co-agency but additionally they introduce the concept of trust (Hart *et al.*, 2004; Kangas *et al.,* 2016), since Hannah states that she can ask questions, the teacher explains things

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and she listens. Observations undertaken during the research seem to endorse this perspective, since Hannah was observed on one occasion sitting on the carpet in a whole class activity *(ORP O: Hannah (12/6/15, classroom, whole class-phonics))*, in which she raised her hand both to ask and answer questions. On another occasion when she was writing individually with the teacher *(ORP O: Hannah (12/6/15, classroom, writing with teacher))*, Hannah was observed talking to the teacher and asking questions to ensure that she was completing her work correctly. In both instances, Hannah showed high levels of well-being and involvement which could suggest that she felt included in both of the pedagogical activities.

Another child at Oak Ridge Primary also expressed a positive perception of inclusion when the teacher was helping him.

Tricia: Luke's chosen working with the whole class listening to the teacher. Why have you chosen this one as feeling most included?

Luke: Cos I like working with the teacher to, to do my handwriting cos, if, if the teacher shows (ORP DR2).

Luke's comments indicate that his perception of inclusion is connected with undertaking his handwriting with the teacher because she can support him to do it neatly; an observation of this activity appears to support his perspective *(ORP O: Luke (12/6/15, classroom, words))*. However, a different observation of Luke listening to the teacher during a number activity *(ORP O: Luke (19/6/15, classroom, whole class-number))*, presents an alternative viewpoint. Luke was much less engaged and did not exhibit high levels of well-being which suggests two possible inferences: that the content of the activity contributed to Luke perceiving himself as less included, or alternatively, it might be that he was not feeling well or he was tired that day. Either of these interpretations could be valid but it is important not to allow them to detract from Luke's actual words and opinions.

Most of the comments, which related to positive perceptions of inclusion in relation to learning from the teacher, came from the children at Oak Ridge Primary. This could be significant since the structure of the school day was different in the two schools. At Oak Ridge Primary, the children largely participated independently in their pedagogical activities and tended to work with the teacher on an individual basis at specific points during the week; whereas, at Riverside Infants, the children were supported through group work rather than on an individual basis. This may have contributed to the children perceiving that they were more included if they received the individual attention of the teacher to support them in their learning.

4.2.2   Children's individuality and difference

Some children perceived the pedagogical activities to be inclusive when they were enabled to pursue areas that reflected their individual interests. A conversation in a group interview at Riverside Infants, emphasises that two children can perceive the same pedagogical activity either to be inclusive or not, based on their own interests.

Tricia: Leo, you want to put the whole class, where everybody works together with the teacher at the top. Why? Why does that one make you feel included?

Leo: Because I want to learn about four strokes and two strokes and one strokes. All the numbered strokes means how noisy your engine is (RI DR5).

Leo reports that he perceives himself to be most included when he is working as a whole class, but it could be argued that it is not the activity *per se* that contributes to this positive perception of inclusion, but rather that its content relates to his individual interests. This explanation is supported as the interview continues and Leo enters into a conversation with another child. This extract details a discussion about a group activity when the children were learning about mathematical concepts.

Tricia: Why don't you like it when we work in a group, why don't you feel included in that?

Henry: Cos I don't like doing that work (points at mathematics activity).

Tricia: Why? What is it about group work that you don't like?

Henry: Cos it's really boring.

Tricia: Ok, so you find it boring.

Leo: I find it good (RI DR5).

During the discussion Henry points to the specific activity in the photograph when he states he does not like doing that work, which may indicate that it is the content that contributes to Leo's perception that he is less included. Observations of Henry appear to support this interpretation. Whilst they are of whole class, rather than group, pedagogical activities, I believe they are of importance because Henry reported *'And it's so long to choose me' (RI I)* about whole class activities, which may be a reason he finds them boring. In the first observation *(RI O: Henry (16/4/15, classroom, whole class-mathematics)),* Henry displays facial expressions and actions that indicate he is ill at ease, he does not join in with the activity and he shows no interest at all. These recordings appear to suggest that he has low levels of well-being and involvement and thus does not perceive himself to be included.

Another observation *(RI O: Henry (16/4/15, classroom, whole class – visit/vet),* however, presents a different perspective. Although the pedagogical activity is still a whole class one, Henry alters his body language, behaviour and involvement as it progresses. At the outset, he displays negative facial expressions and his arms are crossed, which later changes to a smile when the vet brings his dog into the classroom. From this point onwards, Henry listens intently, talks to the adult next to him, raises his hand to ask/answer questions, and is not distracted by the children talking around him. He appears to be displaying much higher levels of involvement, which reflects Booth and Ainscow's (2004) tenet that inclusion is about engagement, since the content of the activity appears to respond to his individuality and difference.

To return to Leo's comments, it is possible to perceive an alternative perspective when he disagrees with Henry and speaks in more general terms about finding group work *'good'* because he can learn things. Whilst it is important to note that finding something good does not necessarily equate to being included, it may add strength to the argument that it is the content of the activity that contributes to the perception of being inclusion, since Leo remarks on this twice during the group interview. Furthermore, Leo speaks firstly about wanting to learn things in general, but then more specifically about engines, which could indicate he views the group work as an opportunity to learn about things in which he is interested.

The comments from Leo and Henry appear to strengthen the assertion that the content of the pedagogical activity is of most importance. Whilst this is not specifically identified as one of the themes, it is present within the theme that relates to responding to the individuality and difference of the child (see Sheridan, 2001; Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Nutbrown, 2012).

Another way in which children perceived themselves as included, was when they were able to select to do/make what they wished. A child from Oak Ridge Primary reported this during her individual interview.

Tricia: Why did you choose this one as when you felt most included?

Holly: Because my favourite thing is painting.

Tricia: And who decides what you are going to paint?

Holly: Me.

R: Ok. And how are you feeling when you're doing the painting?

Holly: Good

R: Why? What is it about painting that makes you feel like that?

Holly: Because it makes me feel happy (ORP I).

Holly appears to perceive herself as included because she can choose what she wants to make and expresses that it is her favourite activity, which could indicate that she has been given the opportunity to participate in pedagogical activities that respond to her individual interests. An observation undertaken of Holly painting also seems to support this opinion. She is witnessed smiling, talking about her painting, being self-assured with some intense involvement and creativity in the task *(RI O: Holly (16/6/15, classroom, painting).*

Another child from Oak Ridge Primary also commented on the content of the activity that contributed to his perception of inclusion.

Tricia: So it's still working with the teacher, but it's working on your own with the teacher. Why does that one make you feel most included?

Riley: Because I like doing my diary.

Tricia: What is it about doing your diary that you like?

Riley: I writed I went to my grandmas and granddads for a barbeque and my cousin came (ORP G7).

Riley's comments could indicate that he perceives himself as included because he can write about matters that are important to him or because he is working with the teacher. This was alluded to in an earlier part of the interview when another child selected working as a whole class as the pedagogical activity in which they were most included. Riley interrupted the question addressed to that child.

Tricia: How does that help you learn? (to Edward)

Riley: Because it makes you learn more.

Tricia: Why? Why does it make you learn more?

Riley: From listening to the teacher and, and then you do, then you get to be a grown-up (ORP G7).

This excerpt underlies the complexity of interpreting children's comments. Riley states that the presence of a teacher can make you learn more, which could be why he perceives himself as included, yet he also explains that writing about his weekend was why he selected the diary as his most inclusive pedagogical activity. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude which of these factors actually leads to the child perceiving themselves as included, or if it is indeed both.

Another example from a child at Riverside Infants presents a slightly different perspective.

Tricia: Ava, you've chosen the creative one, the making things. Why is that the one that makes you feel most included?

Ava: Because I like being there.

Tricia: Why? What is it about being in there that makes you like?

Ava: Making things.

Tricia: Do you work by yourself or do you work with other people.

Ava: I work by myself and with other people.

Tricia: And are you able to make what you like or does somebody tell you what to make?

Ava: I make what I like (RI G7)

Ava comments that she likes working on her own and with other people, however, during the individual interview, Ava drew only herself playing in the workshop (figure **4.3)**. This could possibly suggest that she places more importance on, and perceives herself to be more included, when she decides what to make on her own rather than working or playing with another child.

Playing in the workshop

Figure **4.3** Ava's drawing of a pedagogical activity in which she perceives herself to be included.

Furthermore, an observation of Ava in the workshop appears to suggest that whilst she was showing high levels of well-being because she was laughing, smiling and crying out with pleasure, she did not show high levels of involvement, since she was not entirely focused on the activity and became distracted by others *(RI O: Ava (20/4/15, workshop, model-making))*. This could indicate that Ava interpreted being included to mean being happy and enjoying an activity and not necessarily being engaged in it.

4.2.3 Physically active engagement

Some children made comments about being included when they were physically active and furthermore these were supported by the observations of their behaviour and body language. In these pedagogical activities, children had free choice over what they could do or make in both settings. In Riverside Infants they were able to select the context for their learning (indoor/outdoor environment), whereas at Oak Ridge Primary, the teacher decided upon the place of the activity.

The first example arises from an individual interview with a child at Riverside Infants, who expresses perceptions of inclusion during 'busy time'.

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Tricia: Which of the learning activities make you feel really, really included in school? The most included in school?

Freya: Workshop.

Tricia: The workshop and why is that Freya?

Freya: Err ..

Tricia: Why do you feel most included in the workshop?

Freya: Cos I love making stuff (RI I).

Freya's comments imply a strong connection to the creative element of the work *'love making stuff'* but it is also aligned to the physical process of making. The notion of this being associated with inclusion was enriched when Freya was observed in the workshop *(RI O: Freya (20/4/15, workshop, creative))*. Freya's body language and behaviour appear to support her comments about loving making things since she is seen talking to herself, dancing, and smiling when describing her model. All of these actions show the child moving about whilst undertaking the activity. She does not sit down or remain static, as with some of the children in the workshop, rather she is observed hopping from foot to foot throughout the activity *(RI V)*. Whilst neither of these data entries can be interpreted as a positive correlation with inclusion, by analysing them together it is possible to form a stronger assertion.

In another example, a child from Oak Ridge Primary selects learning outside as the most inclusive pedagogical activity during the diamond ranking exercise.

Tricia: Which one have you chosen Ivy?

Ivy: Learning outside.

Tricia: Why do you feel most included Ivy when you're learning outside?

Ivy: You get to play with other children and climb outside and have fun (ORP DR4).

Ivy appears to associate being outside with climbing, having fun and playing with other children. This is expanded upon during the individual interview in which she states that she likes playing on the climbing frame and in the shed. When asked why this makes her feel included she replies *'because I get to play with more friends outside than inside' (ORP I).* This further comment implies that it is being with her friends and not the physically active element that enables Ivy to perceive herself as included. However, I consider that because she mentioned the outdoor environment in both of the interviews, where she has more opportunity to move around, it is possible that it is this aspect of the activity that makes her perceive herself as included, or at least is a contributory factor.

This interpretation is further supported by some observations. On two occasions in the outdoor environment, Ivy was seen being lively, relaxed and energetic *(ORP O: Ivy (12/6/15, outside, imaginative play); (16/6/15, outside, climbing)).* These instances showed Ivy displaying the highest levels of well-being and involvement. The observations conducted in the classroom exhibited much lower levels *(ORP O: Ivy (12/6/15, classroom, whole class-phonics); (8/6/15, classroom, number-pizza shapes)),* which could indicate that these more stationary activities do not enable Ivy to perceive herself as most included. Alternatively, it may be that it is the outdoor environment itself that contributes to her perception of inclusion. If indeed this is the case, it is possible that the outdoor environment actually enables children to be more physically active by its ever changing atmosphere and spatial capacity (see Rivkin, 2000; Bilton, 2002; Ouvry, 2003).

The observations of Ivy and Freya appear to endorse the children's comments, however, this was not always the situation. An example from a group interview with another child from Oak Ridge Primary revealed that he perceived himself to be most included in creative activities.

Tricia: Why does the creative activity make you feel most included?

Isaac: Because, because that's my favourite thing.

Tricia: Why is it your favourite that makes it more inclusive than the others?

Isaac: Because, because I just like doing creative things (ORP DR2).

Isaac comments that he likes doing creative things, however, in an observation *(ORP O: Isaac (12/6/15, classroom, creative-playdoh))* there is some evidence that conflicts with this notion. Isaac is engaged throughout the observed period, but his well-being is compromised by another child's behaviour towards him when he changes from being lively, happy and full of energy to being upset, distressed and shouting out in anger.

The disparity in evidence might be explained by considering the content of the creative activity. In this instance it was making things with play-doh, but Isaac may have been recalling a time when he felt included during a painting or drawing activity. Equally, it is possible that on this day Isaac was feeling tired or unwell, which affected his sense of well-being. Whether either of these interpretations are correct does not detract from Isaac's statement that he perceives himself to be most included when he is doing creative things. Indeed during his individual interview when asked what it was about colouring that made him feel most included, Isaac responded that he *'like[d] drawing skull and crossbones. Cos they're of pirates and I like pirates' (ORP I).* This comment seems to strengthen the interpretation that it is also the content of the activity that has an impact on whether Isaac perceives the activity as being inclusive or not, which connects to the previous theme.

4.2.4 Independent achievement

Some of the children perceived themselves to be included when they were able to achieve something, whilst working or playing on their own. A child from Riverside Infants indicated this during his individual interview.

Tricia: And so which of the learning activities makes you feel most included?

Matthew: I like building.

Tricia: And are you doing it on your own or are you doing it with other people?

Matthew: Doing it on my own.

Tricia: And do you like to learn on your own?

Matthew: (nods)

Tricia: Why is that? Why do you feel most included when you're building on your own?

Matthew: Hmmm … that means you can build ever you want.

Tricia: So when you're building this car how are you feeling?

Matthew: Happy and I can even build a proper motorbike.

Tricia: Wow and can you do that all by yourself or do you sometimes need someone else is to help you?

Matthew: I can do it all by myself and no one to help me (long pause). *But sometimes I do need help building cars (ORP I).*

Matthew indicates that he perceives himself to be more included when he is working on his own because he is able to achieve the end result independently. This could be interpreted that it is the actual process of deciphering the problem, completing the work, and selecting the resources, which makes Matthew perceive himself as included. Indeed, he was observed several times working on his own and often chose to move away from the other children in order to concentrate *(ORP O: Matthew (12/6/15, outside, construction); (16/4/15, classroom, construction))*. In these instances he was noted as having high levels of well-being and involvement, which could support the viewpoint that Matthew perceives himself to be most included when is able to complete the pedagogical activity independently.

Another child from Riverside Infants also expressed a sense of independent achievement when she was most included.

Tricia: Why is that you think the workshop makes you feel most included?

Sophia: Cos you get to make stuff.

Tricia: And when you're in the workshop are you making stuff on your own or with other people?

Sophia: On my own.

Tricia: And do you feel included when you work on your own?

Sophia: Yes.

Tricia: Why is that?

Sophia: Cos I don't need any help (RI I).

Sophia initially states that she feels included because she can make things but when questioned further she explains that this is when she is working on her own because she does not need any help. Once more, this could imply that it is the ability to achieve something without any support that makes Sophia perceive herself as most included. An observation in support of this interpretation came when she was ordering numbers, which she had practised previously with the teacher *(RI O: Sophia (20/4/15, classroom, numeracy).* She smiled and talked to herself throughout and once Sophia had completed the activity, she was very animated and appeared pleased with herself as she showed the teacher. This implies that the independent achievement is connected to the need for someone else to appreciate it.

Similarly, another child at Oak Ridge Primary expressed a desire to show her work to another person.

Tricia: Which one would you say makes you feel the most included?

Emma: Um .. making stuff in the workshop.

Tricia: Why does that one make you feel the most included?

Emma: Colouring pictures for my mummy.

Tricia: Why, why is that activity the one that makes you feel most included?

Emma: Cos I love my mummy and I can show it to her (RI I).

Figure **4.4** Emma's drawing of a pedagogical activity in which she perceives herself to be included.

Emma comments that she feels most included when she is drawing pictures for her mother because she can show them to her. Figure **4.4** alludes to a further reason for perceiving herself as included because she has drawn other children in the picture.

Tricia: When you're doing pictures for mummy, are you doing them on your own or are you working with other children?

Emma: With other children!

Tricia: So why do you like to work with other children?

Emma: Because they're my friends!

It is possible that Emma also needs the connection to other children whilst she is undertaking an activity in order to perceive herself as included, which connects to the first theme of Collaboration.

However, another child commented specifically that she felt included when she was working on her own.

Tricia: When you're doing your colouring are you doing it on your own or with your friends or with the teacher?

Phoebe: I'm doing it on my own.

Tricia: And do you feel included when you're working on your own?

Phoebe: (nods).

Tricia: Why do you like to work on your own Phoebe?

Phoebe: Because I want to be on my own, I want to be alone.

Tricia: When you're doing your colouring or making ladybirds, does anybody ever help you?

Phoebe: No.

Tricia: No. Would you like them to help you?

Phoebe: (shakes head) *(RI I).*

Phoebe expresses that she does not receive help from anyone but she does not consider that she requires it or indeed that it is a barrier to her inclusion. Observations to support this perspective were recorded, including one where she was painting *(RI O: Phoebe (20/4/15, classroom, painting))* and in another where she was participating in role-play with phonics *(RI O: Phoebe (30/4/15, classroom, role-play-phonics)).* In both of these observations, Phoebe displayed high levels of well-being and involvement. In particular, the second observation and other unstructured observations, revealed that Phoebe often adopted the role of leader and appeared to enjoy being in command of the activity *(RI V).* Therefore, it is important to note that some children perceived themselves to be more included when they were working independently rather than with another child or teacher.

4.2.5   Environmental context

Some comments related to how the children indicated that the environment was an important consideration in perceiving themselves as included. These included reference to the indoor and outdoor environments and how the children's behaviour could be altered depending on the context. An example comes from a child at Riverside Infants during his individual interview.

Tricia: So what is it that makes you feel most included, being outside?

Jack: Because, because I can shout outside.

Tricia: Uhuh, anything else?

Jack: Because you can fight more outside. Pretend fight more outside

Tricia: And can you do that inside?

Jack: No (RI I).

Jack explains that he perceives himself as more included when he is outside because he can play in a different way to that which is allowed in the classroom. Another child from Oak Ridge Primary also indicates that he can behave differently in the outdoor environment.

Tricia: So Jasmine has chosen working with Miss Wylie. Why does that learning activity make you feel most included?

Jasmine: Cos she's .. Cos she's so nice and lets you do anything and lets you go outside to do it.

Jasmine: .. Playing means that you're like running around in the playground and it makes you jump in the puddles if it's been raining.

Tricia: And do you like to do that?

Jasmine: (nods) And if the slides you can go on anything (ORP DR8).

Jasmine implies that it is the space and environmental conditions that make her feel included. She states that she can run around, which denotes that the amount of space has an impact on her notion of inclusion. This connects with Jack's perceptions that he can shout and fight outside, which could also be related to the sense of space since Jack refers to being able to fight more outside. Furthermore, Jasmine alludes to the lack of movement when she is working inside as a whole class.

Tricia: Why does that one (whole class) make you feel quite not quite so included?

Jasmine: … it's boring when you sit down and you're bored (ORP DR8).

Jasmine seems to indicate that she does not perceive herself to be included when she has to sit still for long periods of time because it is boring, which once more appears to support the notion that the environmental context has an impact on whether a child perceives themselves to be included or not. The physical constraints of a classroom with furniture and large numbers of children, could mean that children consider themselves to be constricted in their behaviour and movement and therefore not as included as when they are in the outdoor environment.

A further child from Oak Ridge Primary, also referred to the environmental factor.

Tricia: So why are you feeling most included in the outdoor environment?

Nathan: Cos I am happy and I can play with err my …

Tricia: You can play what outside?

Nathan: I can breathe the air out of my mouth (ORP DR6).

Nathan explains that he is able to breathe more easily in the outdoor environment, which could indicate that he is responding to the change in atmosphere and feeling of the air. This also relates to some of the children's comments about being physically active and how this can contribute to their perceptions of inclusion.

It is important to note that many of the children who perceived themselves to be more included in the outdoor environment attend Oak Ridge Primary, in which the children spend a large part of their day indoors. They are only able to play outside when the teacher decides it is appropriate and they do not have free-flow play as in Riverside infants. Therefore, they may consider that the sense of space, and not being confined by the walls of the classroom, gives them more freedom and autonomy and thus a sense of inclusion.

4.3 Children's perceptions of how pedagogical activities hinder inclusion.

This section presents themes that emerged from an analysis of the data in relation to the children perceiving that they were not included in their pedagogical activities. Six different themes were identified and they are explored in figure **4.5**.
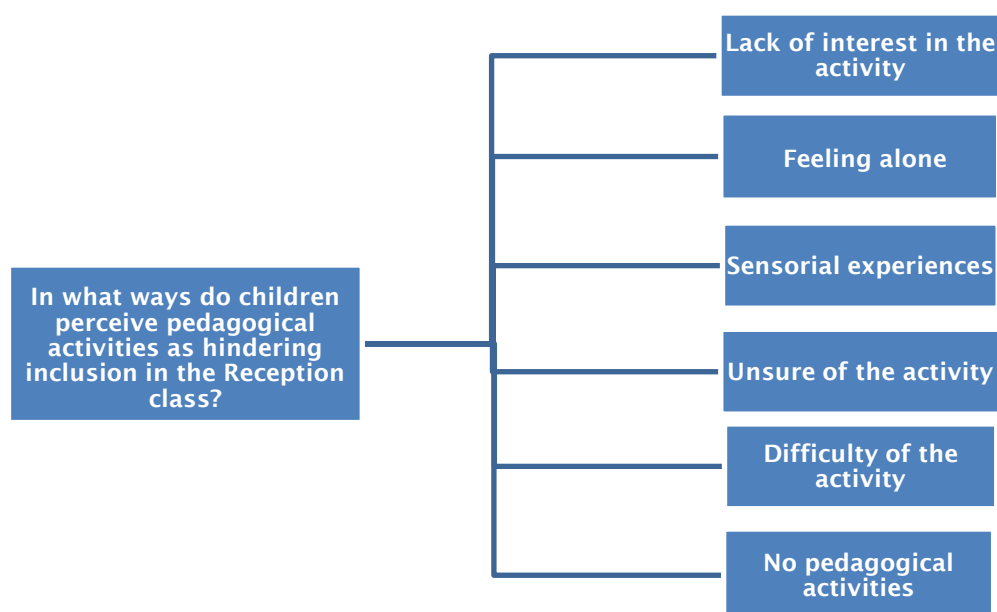
Figure **4.5** Themes emerging from analysis of the data in relation to RQ 2

4.3.1 Lack of interest in the activity

Many different expressions were offered by the children to indicate they did not perceive themselves as included when an activity did not appeal to their interests. The reasons they specified included: boring; length of activity; not fun; and not liking the activity. An example comes from a child at Riverside Infants.

Tricia: What kind of learning activities make you feel like you're not so included?

Freya: Um… er… the groups

Tricia: The groups. Why is that Freya?

Freya: Because … I don't know. I don't have fun in it (whispers).

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Tricia: You don't have fun in it? Ok. Can you do the work when it's in the group work? Do you know how to do the group work?

Freya: Yes because Mrs Smith tells us.

Tricia: Who chooses what work, how to do the work and what work when we're doing group work?

Freya: Mrs Smith.

Tricia: And so can you choose what to do when you're doing group work?

Freya: No.

Tricia: And how does that make you feel?

Freya: Quite .. sad (RI I).

Freya suggests that she does not perceive herself to be included when she is not enjoying the work. She indicates that it is not because the work is too difficult or that she does not know what to do, but it is the actual content which does not invite her sense of enjoyment and inclusion. Since she whispered the comment, it could infer that she considered she should not feel this way. This resonates with the theme of children's individuality and difference in RQ 1, where children perceived themselves to be included when their interests were noted and pedagogical activities were provided to respond to those pursuits. An observation of Freya *(RI O: Freya (16/4/15, classroom, group work-days of the week))* may support this perception, since she was noted displaying a neutral expression, not being very engaged, daydreaming and exhibiting times of inactivity. However, in another observation *(RI O: Freya (17/4/15, classroom, group work-phonics)),* Freya displayed much higher levels of well-being and involvement, being creative, energetic and smiling throughout. Whilst this could be attributed to the activity occurring on a different day, it is also possible that the difference could be due to the content of the activity itself, since one was mathematics and the other was literacy based.

Another child from Riverside Infants expressed the notion that the pedagogical activity's content was a contributory factor to not perceiving himself as included.

Tricia: Jacob, you've chosen the workshop, the creative things. Why don't you feel very included when you're doing creative things?

Jacob: Cos I don't like doing them.

Tricia: Why don't you feel very included when you're doing something in the workshop?

Jacob: Cos I don't like doing creative things (RI DR2).

Jacob implies he does not perceive himself to be included when he has to undertake a creative activity. Whilst the children in Riverside Infants were given free choice of the activities they undertook during 'busy time', it may be that Jacob felt an obligation to visit all of the different activities at some point during the week. Sometimes he was observed following his friends around and joining in with their play, and at other times he was simply standing alongside them (*RI V*). An observation of a creative activity *(RI O: Jacob (17/4/15, classroom, drawing)),* revealed a different perspective from the one Jacob presented in his group interview. Jacob was observed humming, smiling at an adult, looking at what others were doing, but he maintained concentration throughout. This implies that he was included, which seems incongruent with his earlier comments. However, an individual interview with Jacob, may provide further elucidation.

Tricia: Anything at all that makes you feel like you're not included?

Jacob: In the workshop.

Tricia: In the workshop. Why is that Jacob?

Jacob: Cos I don't like going in the workshop (RI I).

Rather than it being creative activities *per se* that made Jacob perceive himself not to be included, it is possible that it was the actual context. Jacob was observed model-making in the workshop, during which he was engaged albeit

at a largely routine level; he showed little enthusiasm or energy, lost interest
very quickly and soon left the workshop area *(RI V).* This could support the
notion that it was the environment in which he was working that contributed to
Jacob's perception that he was not included.

Another child from Riverside Infants appears to reinforce this notion.

Tricia: Can you draw me an activity where you don't feel so included?

Lucas: Sitting on the carpet.

*Tricia: Ok. So are you going to draw a picture of you there sitting on the carpet? And
why is it that you said you didn't really feel included in that?*

Lucas: Cos it's boring.

*Tricia: Is there anything that you would do sitting on the carpet that would be not
boring?*

Lucas: No, cos you have to sit on the carpet for really long (RI I).

Lucas states that it is boring because he has to sit on the carpet for a
considerable length of time. The types of activities that occurred on the carpet
were ones where the teacher taught the pedagogical activity to the entire class.
During these activities, I observed the teacher ensuring that the children
partook in an active manner, sometimes asking them to use the interactive
whiteboard, sometimes singing songs, making actions or answering questions.
However, Lucas did not perceive himself as included in these types of activities.

In observations, Lucas appeared to be engaged in some of the activities *(RI O:
Lucas (16/4/15, classroom, whole class-phonics))*, but less so in others *(RI O: Lucas
(20/4/15, classroom, whole class-counting)).* In the counting activity, Lucas was
observed frowning a little, but then nodding and smiling when he answered a
question correctly. As the activity progressed, Lucas became less focused and
his initial energy to answer questions began to wane when he was not selected,
and subsequently, he began to distract children around him. This may have

been the point at which he perceived himself to be less included as he was not involved in the activity, and thus began to withdraw.

Another child from Riverside Infants alluded to perceiving himself as less included when he was not selected to be part of the activity.

Tricia: So what sort of learning activity at school makes you feel like you're not included, Henry?

Henry: I just don't like playing groups.

Tricia: And why is it that you don't like working in groups?

Henry: Because .. it makes me .. um.. don't like it.

Tricia: Why?

Henry: Cos it takes so long.

Tricia: What do you do when you're doing the group work?

Henry: It's very, very hard.

Tricia: Very hard is it?

Henry: And it's so long to choose me.

Tricia: Oh I see. Oh so you have to wait a long time to be chosen?

Henry: Yeah so long! (RI I).

Henry cites two reasons for not feeling included: the difficulty of the activity; and the length of time it took to be selected to partake. The latter of the two reasons appears to support the notion raised by Lucas. In these extracts, both boys seem to perceive themselves as less included when they are not able to contribute directly to the activity. They appear to interpret the passive experience of listening to others as a means of hindering their inclusion. An example to support Henry's perspective comes from an observation of a whole class numeracy activity *(RI O: Henry (16/4/15, classroom, whole class-counting))*. At the beginning of the session, Henry is noted being engaged in the session, raising his hand and calling out to answer questions. However, as time

progresses and he is not selected to participate, he loses interest and looks for opportunities to move away from the activity. By the end, he shows no interest in the activity and begins to distract those around him. This, therefore, appears to support the notion that the perception of inclusion, is connected to how involved the child is in the activity.

A further child from Riverside Infants expressed strong feelings about an activity he found boring.

Tricia: Are you going to tell me about what's happening in the picture, Leo?

Leo: I'm getting cross.

Tricia: Why are you getting cross?

Leo: Because I hate it.

Tricia: Why?

Leo: Because it's boring.

Tricia: What are those children doing? (Pointing at children in the drawing)

Leo: Smiling.

Tricia: They're smiling but you're not. Why are they smiling?

Leo: Because they like it outside.

Tricia: Why do you think they do?

Leo: I like playing outside, but I don't like the groups out there.

Tricia: So why do you think they like the group work outside?

Leo: Because .. Because they thought it was fun (RI I).

Leo indicates, firstly, that he finds the activity boring and, secondly, that it makes him cross when he is working outside in a group. This could indicate three things that makes Leo feel this way: working in a group; the content of the activity; or because it occurs outside. However, as they interview continues he clarifies that it is not the context of the outdoor environment that

contributes to his perception that he is less included, since he states that he likes playing outside. This suggests that it is the content which is the determining factor. Moreover, when he drew figure **4.6**, he pointed to the children who were smiling because they thought it was fun and then he indicated that the child at the end was himself and that he had a cross face. Appearing at the end of the line of children could further denote Leo's perceived notion of being less included.

Figure **4.6** Leo's drawing of a pedagogical activity in which he does not perceive himself to be included.

4.3.2   Feeling alone

Some of the children offered several reasons for feeling alone in certain pedagogical activities. An analysis of these comments revealed that the children placed importance on their relationships with other children, which led to the development of three subthemes: friends; excluded by specific children; and having no-one with whom to play.

4.3.2.1   Opportunity or desire to work and/or play with a friend

James's comments, cited during his individual interview, present his views on the importance of working or playing with friends.

Tricia: What sort of activity at school doesn't make you feel very included?

James: (quietly) *When I'm on my own.*

Tricia: Are you ever on your own and feel not included at school?

James: I don't want to tell you.

Tricia: You don't want to tell me.

James: It's a secret (RI I).

James was reluctant to discuss the pedagogical activity in which he perceived himself as less included. He was keen to draw the pictures in figures **4.7** and **4.8** and explain that he perceives himself as included when he is making books because he is with his friend. However, when I questioned him about why he did not perceive himself as included he was more reticent, stating *'I don't want to tell you'*. Whilst James did not want to, or was not able to, articulate why he did not perceive himself as included, the words he spoke in relation to inclusion, *'Very, very, ever so included …. Making them with Jack',* and the pictures he subsequently drew, indicate that he placed some considerable emphasis on the opportunity to learn with his friends. Indeed in his drawings, James depicts himself working with two friends in the one where he perceived himself to be included (figure **4.7**), and alone in the one where he did not (figure **4.8**).

Making books with my friend
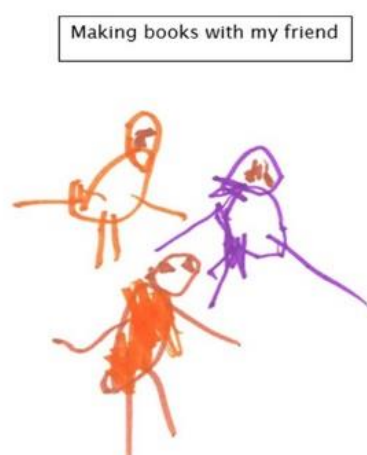
Figure **4.7** James's drawing of a pedagogical activity in which he perceives himself to be included.

When I'm on my own

Figure **4.8** James's drawing of a pedagogical in which he does not perceive himself to be included.

In the group interview, James again expressed his perceptions of not being included in terms of the separation from his friend, *'I was left alone without Jack (RI DR6).* The concept of being alone is supported by an observation of James in a group literacy activity where Jack was not present. James was constantly looking around and asking for Jack and was distracted by what was occurring in the room *(RI O: James (5/6/2015, classroom, group-days of the week)).* A different observation of James engaged in a literacy activity that he had

initiated with Jack, further supports the notion that being separated from one's friends can lead to a child perceiving that they are not included *(RI V)*. In this instance, James was engaged in the activity for a long period of time and was observed smiling and laughing with his friend.

The next two subthemes offer connected, yet distinct, perspectives, where children did not feel included because they were left out by specific children; and when they felt alone because no-one wanted to play with them.

4.3.2.2   Being left out by specific children

In a group interview, Scarlet explained why she did not perceive herself as included.

Tricia: Scarlet, why did you have the outside picture as the one you didn't feel very included in?

Scarlet: Because I was dressing up as Aurora and Charlotte was dressing up as Belle.

Tricia: And what happened to you?

Scarlet: I feel alone (RI DR6).

Scarlet states that she feels alone even though she is playing with her friends in the outdoor environment. Moreover, in the individual interview, when asked if she ever perceived herself as not included, Scarlet replied *'But sometimes I really don't' (RI I)*. She then provided a possible reason for this even though she was with her friends, by stating that they were '*mean to me'*. Furthermore, in figure **4.9**, she depicts her two friends smiling, however, the picture she sketched of herself, initially had a smiling mouth, but she later drew over it to alter it to a sad one. When asked why she had changed the picture, she replied '*Cos I'm not happy'*. Again it could be argued that not being happy does not necessarily equate to not being included, however, when it is coalesced with the comments about feeling alone and identifying with a child who is excluded from an activity by their friends, there appears to be a stronger argument.

When sometimes my
friends are mean to me

Figure **4.9** Scarlet's drawing of a pedagogical activity in which she does not perceive herself to be included.

During an unstructured observation, Scarlet was noted playing in the outdoor environment in a role-play scenario with two other girls. Initially she was happy and smiling but as the game progressed she was unable to wear the clothes she desired because the other children would not allow her, and as a result she removed herself from the activity. She folded her arms and looked dejected. She tried to negotiate her own way but when this was met with resistance, she ceased playing with the children; they then moved away and she was left alone *(RI V)*. This observation further supports Scarlet's notion of feeling alone and that it occurred when her friends would not acquiesce to her wishes.

4.3.2.3   Having no-one with whom to work or play

An interview with Matilda seeks to explain how some children perceived that they were not included when they had no-one with whom to play.

Tricia: Could you think of a learning activity where you're not feeling very included?

Matilda: When, when the kids leave me alone.

Tricia: OK where does that happen?

Matilda: Outside sometimes and inside sometimes (ORP I).

Figure **4.10** Matilda's drawing of a pedagogical activity in which she does not perceive herself to be included.

In the individual interview, Matilda drew a picture of herself being left out by one of her friends (figure **4.10)** and she explained that this could occur anywhere in the learning environment. Whilst this would initially seem to align itself with the second subtheme, as the interview continues she expands the notion of feeling left out to embrace all children. Furthermore, unlike the interview with Scarlet, Matilda does not state a particular child as having made her feel left out but that it is the '*kids'* that make her feel like this.

Tricia: And why do you think the children leave you out?

Matilda: Cos .. cos. They say there's not enough kids to play with and .. and um ......

Tricia: And when you're at school and you're feeling left out who is making you feel left out?

Matilda: Everybody (ORP I).

This extract seems to support the notion that Matilda does not just feel left out by one friend but that there is a greater sense of rejection and that there is no space for her in the learning activity. This leads her to believe that she is being left out by everybody.

4.3.3   Sensorial experiences

Some children commented that the reasons for perceiving themselves to be less included, related to sensorial experiences. In the theme Environmental Context within RQ 1, the outdoor environment was cited as the context where some children perceived themselves to be most included, but others commented that they did not feel this way. This appears to resonate with the definition of inclusion being connected with responding to children's difference and individuality (Nutbrown, 2012). An individual interview with a child from Riverside Infants explains why she did not perceive herself as included in the outdoor environment.

Tricia: Which activity makes you feel not so included?

Emma: Playing outside.

Tricia: Playing outside in the group activities with the teacher or playing outside on your own with your friends? Which one makes .. (interrupts)

Emma: Group activities.

Tricia: Group activities. So why is that? Why don't you feel included when you do that?

Emma: Cos it's boring.

Tricia: Why?

Emma: Cos I hate going outside, cos it's so .. I thought it was going to rain (whispers). *And it's freezing outside!*

Tricia: And why did you not feel very included?

Emma: Cos I hate outside! (RI I).

Emma expresses quite forcefully that she does not feel included when she has to participate in group activities in the outdoor environment. At first she indicates that she finds it boring, which implies that it is the content she perceives as less inclusive, but as the interview progresses she appears to place greater emphasis on the outdoor environment itself. She states that she does not like the rain and that it is very cold, which then leads her to perceive that she is not included.

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Figure **4.11** Emma's drawing of a pedagogical activity in which she does not perceive herself to be included.

Figure **4.11** appears to reinforce the notion that she does not perceive herself as included. In the individual interview, Emma indicated that she was the girl with the sad face and combined with her comments about hating to be outside, it appears that the sensorial experience of the outdoor environment is contributing to her perception of not being included. During the six week observation period, Emma was rarely noted engaging with learning in the outdoor environment. Her preference was to undertake activities inside the classrooms and she only went outdoors when she were guided to do so by one of the practitioners *(RI V)*. This, too, appears to support the perspective that the environmental conditions of the outdoor setting were significant in determining whether Emma perceived herself to be included.

Another child from Riverside Infants also indicated that the sensorial experience was a contributory factor to perceiving himself as less included.

Tricia: Is there anything in school that makes you feel like you're not very included.

Max: Err PE.

Tricia: Why PE?

Max: Because .. because it's all hot with your shorts on (RI I).

Max selected a pedagogical activity that had not previously been mentioned in the diamond ranking activity, which could indicate that he felt more strongly about it since it had come from his own recollections. He perceived that he was less included in PE and attributed this to feeling too hot. Once more this appears to signify that temperature is pivotal to the discussion. Emma expressed that she considered the outside environment to be too cold and Max identifed that his raised body temperature made him feel uncomfortable. In RQ 1, children cited that they perceived themselves to be included when they were actively engaged in an activity, but in this instance, it appears that some engagement can be too active, which can lead to some children perceiving themsleves to be less included.

Another way some children perceived themselves as less included, was in relation to the feel or the texture of the environment. An example comes from a child at Oak Ridge Primary during her individual interview.

Tricia: So you said you don't feel included when you're playing tractors on the carpet.

Jasmine: Yeah but it hurts my knees when I crawl.

Tricia: How are you feeling when you're doing that activity then?

Jasmine: It just makes me feel like …… it makes my hand .. it makes it like it hurts my legs. And cos when it hurts my legs it just gets my legs all … Like it hurts my knees when I crawl so fast (ORP I).

Jasmine identifies the texture of the carpet as contributing to her perceived notion of not being included. She had already expressed this during her group interview, when she selected the whole class activity as being least inclusive stating '*Cos the carpet's so, so boring when you sit on it it's just makes you move cos it's spiky and it's um its uncomfortable a little bit' (ORP DR8)*. These two comments imply that it is not the content of the activity, whether that be learning from the teacher or playing with the tractors, which contribute to Jasmine's perception of not being included; rather, it is the actual texture of the carpet on which the activity takes place that is the primary factor.

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Jasmine also referred to the noise level as a reason for not perceiving herself as included in pedagogical activities during her individual interview.

Tricia: What do you like to do while drawing?

Jasmine: I like to sit quietly.

Tricia: Why do you like to sit quietly while you're drawing?

Jasmine: Cos it don't make my ears hurt (ORP I).

Jasmine states that the noise is too loud for her sometimes and therefore she prefers to work somewhere quieter, such as the conservatory (which was slightly separate from the classroom). During the six week period, Jasmine was often observed working in the conservatory with just a few children *(ORP V)*. She tended to select the pedagogical activities in this area when she was given the choice, rather than ones that were in the classroom. Moreover, in the group interview, Jasmine perceived the whole class activity as least inclusive explaining, *'It's because .. er .. It's too noisy in there (ORP DR8).* These two comments appear to suggest that noise was also an important factor for determining whether Jasmine perceived herself to be included.

4.3.4   Unsure of the activity

Some of the children perceived themselves as less included when they did not know what to do in a pedagogical activity. In this example, a child from Oak Ridge Primary explains that he feels this way in a writing activity.

Tricia: When you're doing your writing on your own and not with the teacher do you feel as included then?

Ryan: Umm no.

Tricia: No. And why is that?

Ryan: .. Umm I don't know quite what to (ORP I).

Ryan appears to perceive himself as less included when he is writing alone, since he states he is unsure of how to progress. This perspective is supported by a comment made earlier in the interview when Ryan was asked about the pedagogical activity in which he perceived himself as most included. He stated that it was when he was writing his diary with his teacher '*umm .. because it makes me learn how to write and it makes me better um how to write as well'.* Although Ryan appeared hesitant when replying to my questions, which may imply that he was unsure of his answers, it could be argued that both of his remarks support the inference that he perceives himself to be less included when he is on his own, rather than as a consequence of the writing activity itself. When the teacher is present he feels more reassured and therefore perceives himself as more included. This seems to reinforce the findings in the theme of Collaboration from RQ 1, where the children perceived themselves to be more included when they could learn from others.

Observations appear to corroborate Ryan's perceptions. When he was observed writing with the teacher, *(ORP O: Ryan (23/6/15, classroom, writing with teacher)),* Ryan smiled, looked at the teacher for reassurance, cried out with pleasure and maintained concentration throughout the entire period. However, when he was observed writing on his own *(ORP O: Ryan (24/6/15, classroom, writing on own)),* he displayed lower levels of well-being and involvement appearing far more serious, and although there was continuous activity with some intense moments, he was observed looking around for others to support him.

Similarly, another child from Oak Ridge Primary also reported that he perceived himself to be less included in the writing activity when he was on his own, both in the group and individual interviews.

Tricia: Is there anything in the school which make you feel not very included?

Jayden: I'm not very I'm not very sure about what, I'm, what letters or my numbers after 13, 14, 15, 16, 17.

Jayden: And I'm also worried what letters and doing in my diary (ORP DR6).

*Tricia: If you thinking about the learning activity which one makes you feel not very
included? Any of the learning things you do in class?*

*Jayden: Well I was just doing some lists cos we're going to have the teddy bears' picnic
on Wednesday and … um .. and I felt a bit … worried cos I want quite sure how to
write custard and that on the list (ORP I).*

Jayden states in both of the interviews that he feels worried by having to write
the letters in his diary. The second example identifies that Jayden was anxious
when he had to write a list for the teddy bears' picnic. This was an activity that
was conducted individually, without teacher support. Therefore, it appears
plausible that Jayden, like Ryan, also perceived himself to be less included
when he had to complete the work on his own, due to his insecurity about
knowing what to do.

However, unlike Ryan, the observations of Jayden do not appear to support his
perception of being less included when he is writing on his own. Two
observations of Jayden conducted on the same day *(ORP O: Jayden (23/6/15,
classroom, writing on own); (23/6/15, classroom, writing with teacher)),* show him
smiling, self-assured, crying out with pleasure, energetic and creative. These
observations suggest that Jayden was equally included in both of the activities.
Nonetheless, it does not repudiate his perception that the anxiety he
experienced made him feel less included.

Despite the differences in observational data analysis, these two examples still
suggest that it is not necessarily the pedagogical activity itself that makes the
children perceive themselves as less included, but rather it is the mode of
delivery. If the children are writing with support they feel more included, which
resonates with the definition of inclusion by Hedges and Cullen (2011) - a need
for the co-construction of knowledge.

Both of these examples were from children at Oak Ridge Primary where they either worked alongside the teacher with their writing, or they were encouraged to write independently. However, it is important to note that some children from Riverside Infants also perceived themselves as less included when they had to write on their own.

Tricia: So Jack, can you tell me about you picture where you don't feel very included? Who have you drawn?

Jack: It's James.

Tricia: It's James and what's James doing in the picture?

Jack: Errr writing.

Tricia: He's writing and what are you doing?

Jack: Just not doing anything (sadly).

Tricia: And why aren't you doing anything?

Jack: Cos I don't know what to do (RI I).

In this extract, Jack does not perceive himself to be feel included in the group activity even though the teacher is present. He does not appear to construe the teacher's support as a way to be more included, but instead he makes reference to his friend, James. It could be interpreted, therefore, that Jack did not consider that the adult could help him in his learning. Indeed, in the picture he drew of the pedagogical activity he did not perceive as inclusive, Jack drew James (on the right) sitting at the table even though he had stated that he was not present (figure **4.12**). Again, this seems to indicate the importance placed on having a friend to support the child in their learning (Booth and Ainscow, 2004).

Figure **4.12** Jack's drawing of a pedagogical activity in which he does not perceive himself to be included.

4.3.5   Difficulty of the activity

Some of the children voiced that they perceived themselves to be less included in a particular pedagogical activity because they found it too difficult or they were unable to complete the task. The examples from both Zara's group and individual interviews, seek to provide reasons for this.

Tricia: You've chosen the whole class all sitting learning together. Why does that make you feel not very included?

Zara: Cos we have to do writing and I don't really, really like to do it.

Tricia: Why?

Zara: Cos it's really hard.

Tricia: And what do you do when you find something hard at school and you can't do it?

Zara: Try to practise.

Tricia: And how does it make you feel?

Zara: Sad. It's kind of hard and then Miss Wylie says to just write one word that I can do that I know (ORP DR1).

Zara: I told you another time I didn't feel very included when we write it on the board!

Tricia: And why is it you don't feel very included when you're writing on that board?

Zara: Because … it's hard to do this. I need to concentrate.

Tricia: OK. So why is it you're not feeling very included when you're writing on the board?

Zara: Because I don't… I can't write words properly. And I don't really like doing it. It feels a bit hard and tricky. That's how (ORP I).

Zara explains that she did not perceive herself as included, by reinforcing that she feels unable to write very well and that she finds it too difficult. In the individual interview, she comments that she had told me this the previous week in the group interview, which is important as it suggests that the notion of not being included has remained with her. Zara asserts that she does not like writing, and whilst this does not necessarily equate with not being included, it could be argued that feeling sad because she cannot do it properly, could be interpreted as not being able to fully access the activity and therefore she could perceive herself as being less included. If a child is unable to complete their work, or finds it too difficult, an argument could be made to suggest that the pedagogy is not reflecting Farquhar's (2003) definition of inclusion as working with children as emergent learners or Hart *et al*.'s (2004) pedagogical principles of trust.

However, Zara was observed writing on two occasions, once with the teacher and once on her own and in both she exhibited high levels of well-being and involvement *(ORP O: Zara (8/6/15, classroom, whole class-phonics); (19/6/15, classroom, writing on own))*. She was noted smiling, talking to herself, being energetic, and having continuous activity with intense moments. This is not to repudiate the feelings she expressed of perceiving herself as less included, but it does suggest that either the external manifestation of a child's behaviour does not always represent their actual feelings, or that on these instances the child was feeling confident in the task.

The other issue raised by the interview with Zara was that she was not very good at something, which led to her perceiving that she was not included. Another child from Oak Ridge Primary also expressed this sentiment.

Tricia: I'd like to think you to think of a learning activity where you don't feel so included.

Nathan: Painting.

Tricia: Painting, why is that?

Nathan: Cos .. cos ... Cos I'm not artist for everyone.

Tricia: You're not an artist. What does that mean if you're not an artist?

Nathan: um ...... (long pause) I like to do painting but .. but I'm not an artist.

Tricia: OK so you're not an artist. Do you mean you're not very good at the painting?

Nathan: I'm good but I'm not a very good artist (ORP I).

Nathan appears to articulate that he does not perceive himself to be very good at painting. This resonates with Zara's thoughts that she cannot write properly. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the child's awareness that they are not very good at something resonates with the perception that they are not included if an activity is too difficult for them.

4.3.6   No pedagogical activities hindering inclusion

It is important to note that some children from both schools expressed that they did not perceive themselves to be less included by any of the pedagogical activities. These perceptions were communicated in both the group interviews, where they were asked about the specific pedagogical activities that had been selected from each class, and again in the individual interviews, when they were asked to draw a picture of a learning activity where they did not perceive themselves to be included. In the individual interviews, these children left one side of the paper blank.

The following examples from two children at Oak Ridge Primary present this perception.

Tricia: Which of the activities makes you feel like this little boy or this little boy (not included)? Do any of the activities I've taken picture of make you feel like that?

Riley: (shakes head)

Tricia: No? What about you Daisy?

Daisy: None of them (ORP DR7).

Both of these children were in the same group interview and once Riley had stated that there were not any pedagogical activities where he perceived himself less included, Daisy concurred. This may suggest that she was influenced by Riley, however, both children still maintained that they felt this way in their individual interviews *(ORP Riley I; ORP Daisy I).*

The following example is taken from an individual interview at Riverside Infants.

Tricia: Is there any time when you feel like that (not included) *at school?*

Ava: No (RI I).

All of these comments suggest that some children did not perceive themselves as being less included in any of the pedagogical activities. This could be interpreted in a number of ways. Firstly, it is possible that the children were unable to comprehend what I meant by feeling less included, even though they had responded to the questions about the pedagogical activities in which they perceived themselves to be included. Secondly, it may be that the children were unable to recall something at that particular instant, or thirdly, they may simply not have considered that there was an activity they perceived as less inclusive. Lastly, the children may not have felt confident to express their feelings and were slightly intimidated by myself or the interview context. An alternative perspective comes from Daisy, who stated that she did not perceive that any of the pedagogical activities were less inclusive, during both the group

and individual interviews. This could be construed as providing a stronger argument that the children were capable of expressing their views, since the comments were representative of Daisy's perceptions on more than one occasion.

4.4   Summary

The children's perceptions of inclusion were presented in this chapter. In terms of perceiving themselves as being included in pedagogical activities, the ability to undertake the following themes were identified as being important for the children: collaborating with other children or teachers; utilising their own interests, actively engaging in their learning; appreciating their independent achievement; and responding to the environmental context.

Data analysis of the children's comments regarding pedagogical activities that hindered their inclusion, exemplified themes relating to: the activity being unengaging; feeling alone; a sensorial experience; the difficulty of the activity and not knowing what to do. It is important to note that some children in both of the schools did not perceive that they were less included in any of the pedagogical activities.

Comments made by the children in response to RQ 1 and RQ 2 were often supported by additional evidence from observations and fieldnotes, but this was not always the case. In some instances, children's observations appeared to controvert the analysis of the interviews. However, this does not negate any of the data sources, it merely allows for different possibilities to be discussed. Nonetheless, the voices of the children were paramount to the inquiry and remained at the forefront of the data analysis.

The following chapter explores the practitioners' responses to the children's comments and considers the impact on their pedagogical practice

Chapter 5: Practitioners' perceptions on listening to children's views

This chapter focuses on the third research question:

What are practitioners' thoughts on the idea of listening to children's views to inform their pedagogical practice?

Practitioners from both settings were interviewed using some of the direct quotes from the children (Appendix A) and they were asked questions about how these quotes could potentially inform their pedagogical practice. Before presenting the findings, it is important to consider the background and role of the practitioners in each of the schools. This information is provided in Appendix L. The themes that emerged from analysis of the data are presented in figure **5.1.**
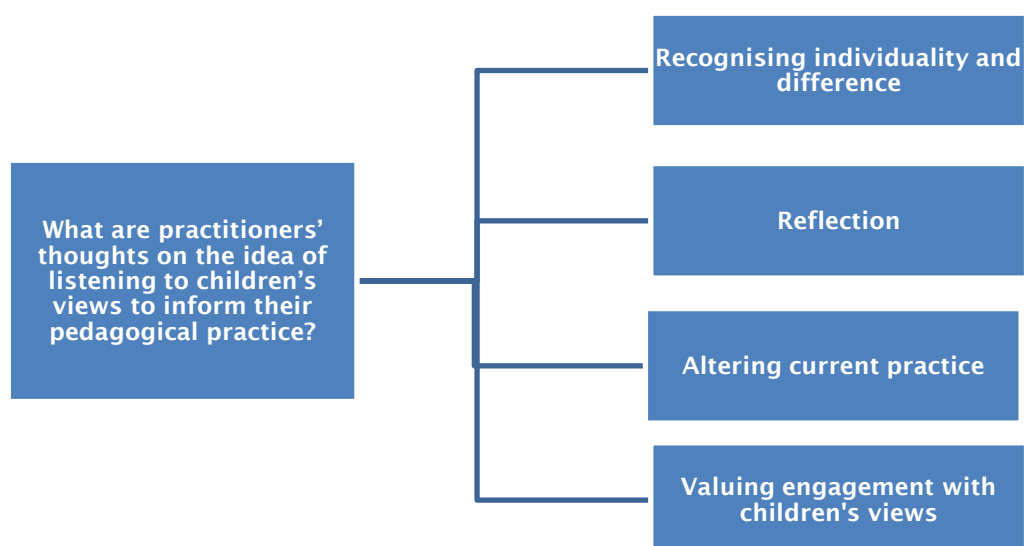
Figure **5.1** Themes emerging from analysis of the data in relation to RQ 3

5.1 Recognising individuality and difference

Some of the practitioners expressed how they responded to the children's individual needs in the way they structured their pedagogical activities. The first example comes from the nursery nurse at Riverside Infants in response to the following statement from a child.

I just don't like playing groups. Cos it takes so long. And it's so long to choose me (Henry: RI I).

RI Lydia: We've said that with some individual children, the learning on the carpet, the more structured learning is more suitable to, you know, a small group of children ….

Lydia (NN) articulates that she is conscious that for some children the whole class structured pedagogy is not suitable and alludes to the need to respond to children's individuality and difference. This appears to connect with Henry's comments that he did not perceive himself as included during whole class activities, when he had to wait a prolonged period of time before he was involved in a given activity. However, a different perspective is provided by Nina (T), in response to the comments about the pedagogical activities where the children perceived themselves to be most included.

Because I get help (Ava: RI I); Cos it makes us all learn together (Lucy: RI DR4).

Tricia: So how do the comments make you reflect on your decisions, when you read those comments? What do you think?

RI Nina: Um so when you're doing your planning you've got to try and make sure that you can get something from them. I mean two in particular would sit there and not say anything, so I would tend to give them something so they've got to speak, otherwise they would sit there for the whole session and not say a word, and others would speak for them. But if you actually give them something, if we're doing shape, if you give them a shape and say what do you think that is, or how many sides, because you've give it them, they will do it, but if you just held it up they wouldn't. But the ones who are a bit more timid, if you give it them, then they will cos they've got hold of it.

This extract suggests that Nina (T) equates verbal communication and interaction as a sign of engagement and being included. She does not appear to consider the child's perception that they are more included when they are supported by the teacher or their peers. Rather she seems more focussed on the need to encourage the children to communicate verbally so that she knows

they are 'getting something' from the activity. However, Megan, the TA at Riverside Infants, presents an alternative viewpoint.

RI Megan: Some get embarrassed in a big group, but they like to sit and watch somebody else so they know that they were right in their own mind, rather than having to put themselves on display.

She implies that the children can still be included even if they are not verbally communicating, since they can be listening and reflecting on what is said in terms of what they may think or know about the subject. The difficulty arising from this approach is that it requires the practitioner to have a detailed knowledge of the child and advocates engaging with her/his voice in order to understand if, and when, they feel included in their learning.

Another range of comments relate to the practitioners' understanding of the impact the length of time of an activity can have on a child's notion of inclusion.

Cos I don't like doing it. Cos it's too um .. cos it's too boring cos it takes a long time (Daniel: RI I).

Anastasia (T) explains how she recognises these differences.

RI Anastasia: I know that some children feel absolutely secure and brilliant, and there's other ones who will be absolutely itching and twitching and looking around to be off as they need to do that in very active and different and shorter way.

Anastasia indicates that she is conscious that children learn in diverse ways and that they have differing attention spans, which corresponds to the need for practitioners to respond to children's individuality and difference. Whilst she is cognisant of this, she also considers that she has a duty to extend the children's learning.

RI Anastasia: And I think sometimes ... the children who are on that cusp there reaches a point where they're going to have to do a little bit of conforming. 'Cos another

learning thing for life is that there are going to be things you don't want to do all the time and they've got to learn that as well. So they can't keep going off and doing what they want.

Anastasia implies that children cannot always be at the forefront of decisions about their learning. She indicates that children need to be encouraged to encounter pedagogical activities that may not appeal to their interests or the way in which they like to learn, since this is part of life and the learning process. This seems to be at variance with the EYFS (DfE, 2014). However, when she was questioned about how the children's comments could inform her practice (*Because they're my friends! (Emma: RI I); Because other children are doing it and I am too (Harry: RI DR1))*, she modified her response.

Tricia: Is there anything that you could possibly, um, do differently, that might harness those positive comments they're making about when they feel most included?

RI Anastasia: Yeah, instead of looking at a er, er, er flat screen or me, they need to be looking at each other. They need to have a little more interaction, sort of turn to the person next to you or get yourselves into groups, do more activities in that way. And then it's just making sure that they're supported, make sure they don't just go off at a tangent.

This extract suggests that Anastasia is mindful of the need to provide different opportunities when planning pedagogical activities, and subsequently reflects on how her current practice may not be contributing to the children's perceptions of inclusion. She suggests ameliorating her approach to meet the children's individual needs, which emphasises the importance of engaging with children's voices.

Most of these comments indicate that the practitioners recognised the need to differentiate learning opportunities, provide different learning environments, and respond to children's individual interests and perceived needs. However, there are a few comments which denote that practitioners consider it is necessary to conduct the pedagogical activity in a given manner. An example is provided from a teacher at Riverside Infants.

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Tricia: So can I just ask you finally, whether you could tell me, this kind of information feeding back to you things children have said in response to questions that I've asked, do you find any of it useful and would it assist you in your planning in the future?

RI Nina: Well I think it would because like, and I know that I keep going back to this one, it's boring cos it takes a long time, that's going to stick in your mind, int it?

Tricia: Yeah.

RI Nina: Well we don't want them to find it boring, but it's got to take that length of time cos that's what length of time it is.

Nina (T) implies that the activity has been planned to deliver the session in the most effective time and that this cannot be abridged to meet the perceived needs of the children. It appears to suggest that the teacher considers herself to be the most informed person in determining how a pedagogical activity should be taught. In adopting this approach to planning, it is possible that the teacher is unwittingly contributing to the children's perception of being less included even when they demonstrated a lack of interest in the activity (section **4.3.1**). However, she keeps going back to the notion of boredom, so it appears that she may be considering the need to consult with the children about their views on the matter.

A final note on this first theme, is that all the examples cited here have come from practitioners at Riverside Infants. This not to suggest that staff at Oak Ridge Primary did not recognise individuality and difference, but rather that they did not make specific reference to this in their interviews. The difference in their responses, may lie in the fact that Riverside Infants had three Reception classes with approximately 60 children, as compared to 25 at Oak Ridge Primary. As a consequence of working with much larger numbers of children, it may be possible that the practitioners at Riverside Infants felt the need to respond more overtly in terms of recognising difference.

5.2   Reflection

Some of the practitioners commented on how the children's quotes *(Learning things off her* (the teacher) *(Liam: ORP DR5); From listening to the teacher and, and then you do, then you get to be a grown-up (Riley: ORP DR7))* made them reflect on their own practice and consider its impact. The first examples present a positive response about the process of reflection.

Tricia: Is there any way that these comments could inform your practice?

ORP Tiffany: I think I would do it in a more discreet way, so set up all of the activities .. So that they are doing the things I want them to do but without me so that it's more of a child-led activity than me initiating it.. err . So I'll definitely look at doing that more. Emm and making sure that they know they can do it on their own rather than having an adult reassure them cos a lot of them do need that reassurance.

Tiffany (T) appears to reflect on her practice and consider how it could be altered to encompass a more child-initiated approach. Her response seems to encompass the perception expressed by some of the children about being included when they were able to achieve something independently (section **4.2.4**). Furthermore, she comments that she had not considered asking the children what they thought about their pedagogical activities.

ORP Tiffany: Really I just, because I've never thought to have this sort of conversation with a child it's so interesting to see what they think because I would never have thought that some of the responses would be like that.

This perspective may have been because she was a newly qualified teacher (NQT), as she stated that she had not received any training about engaging with children's voices, despite the attention given to this in recent years. However, when asked whether it was something she could embed in her practice, she responded favourably.

ORP Tiffany: Yes definitely. I do know by the school I've been in before they do learning journeys together and you write down what they've thought about the work and I think that would be nice because then you pick up on what they are

happy with what they are not happy with and that then usually reflects in their
play doesn't it?

Tiffany appears to reflect on her experience of visiting a school during her training in which they placed a value on listening to children. This reflects the findings of Kraska and Boyle (2014) that pre-service teachers had more positive attitudes to inclusion if they had studied one module on this field, during their training. Although Tiffany does not specifically refer to inclusion, she states that engaging with voices would assist her in understanding how happy the children feel about their learning.

An example from the nursery nurse at Riverside Infants may reinforce the notion of the importance of professional experience. She had over twenty years' experience in early years and, as such, it could be argued that it was this level of pedagogical understanding that led her to reflect on the necessity to respond to children's specific interests.

RI Lydia: And maybe as the year progresses and they're maturing and they're learning more and the length of time does, the length of time that they are sat on the carpet or doing group work, does lengthen, um .. maybe we ought to get it a bit more …

If we can identify those children, how we can get learning interesting as opposed to boring, so they are getting something out of it and they do feel included.

Lydia (NN) reflects that perhaps the practitioners should be more aware of how the children respond to the length of different pedagogical activities. She then implies that engaging with children's voices enables her to respond to children's individuality, by identifying which children perceive themselves to be included through learning in specific ways and thus altering her practice accordingly. This connects with the next theme about how practitioners could alter their current practice to make it more inclusive.

Both of these practitioners recognised that reflection afforded them the time to consider the impact of their pedagogical practice, identify the children who did not perceive themselves as included, and alter their practice to increase inclusion. However, some of the practitioners presented a different perspective. An example is provided from the nursery nurse at Oak Ridge Primary in response to some of the quotes from the children.

I felt a bit worried when I didn't know how to write custard on the list and because I'm not sure what to do (Jayden: ORP I).

Cos we have to do writing and I don't really, really like to do it (Zara: ORP I).

Tricia: Do you consider any of this information that's come from the children, do you find it in anyway helpful working with children?

ORP Selina: .. Umm …. It hasn't, that sounds really awful. It hasn't changed my opinion. 'Cos it's pretty much what I would expect.

You could make it comfortable, you could question it all out for them, so everything's there if they want it to be. That's my opinion is they're not going to learn, you're not giving them anything to work on, you've got to push them to .. to encourage learning.

This extract suggests that the practitioner does not consider the children's comments to be of importance in her pedagogical practice. She seems to advocate that by making the activities simple and providing support to decipher how to complete their work, the activities will not assist the children in extending their learning. She implies that the decisions about the pedagogical activities have been designed to extend the children's learning by encouraging them to work beyond their immediate capability.

A possible rationale for these comments could stem from the nursery nurse not being included in the planning process. Tiffany (T) was responsible for this task, and her comments demonstrate her willingness to reflect on how she could alter her pedagogical practice. However, the other practitioners at Oak Ridge Primary only supported the teacher in the delivery of the learning opportunities. The absence of their involvement in the planning may have

contributed to Selina's belief that the children need to be challenged in their pedagogical activities if learning is to occur. Indeed she commented,

ORP Selina: Well I don't do the planning. I just do whatever is being planned and I go along with that. So if the plan is to have individual groups whether that be outside, group on the carpet, group on you know the free flow whatever, um .. then that's what we would do.

Whilst Selina (NN) states that she executes what the teacher has planned, she also remarks that she has the flexibility to alter her practice: *Nothing's set in concrete.* This implies that Selina acknowledges that there are opportunities to alter her pedagogical practice if she deemed it appropriate: *We do go off a little bit, if we don't think it's working or we try it and it's not right we adjust.*

Another possible reason for not reflecting on the importance of engaging with children's voices, could be that although the nursery nurse qualified more than twenty years ago, she may not have received any recent training. This is in direct contrast to the nursery nurse in Riverside Infants, who was involved both in the planning of pedagogical activities and also undertook regular professional development opportunities. This notion appears to reflect Kraska and Boyle's (2014) findings about the consequence of receiving appropriate training on recent research in inclusion and its impact on pedagogical practice.

Although this is the perception of only one practitioner at Oak Ridge Primary, it could be significant that the practitioners at Riverside Infants, who were all involved in the planning process, were more open to reflection on how they could make the pedagogical activities more inclusive. However, it is important to note that only seven practitioners were interviewed in this research project and therefore any conclusions must reflect the small sample size and cannot be generalised. Nevertheless, in Riverside Infants it is possible that the practitioners were more able to express their thoughts on the structure of different pedagogical activities and through their observations of the children, they may have been able to reflect on whether the children perceived themselves to be included. However, this does not detract from the importance

of engaging with the children's voices to try and understand their perspectives on inclusion.

5.3   Altering current practice

Despite the reservations of some practitioners to alter their pedagogical practice, there were others who suggested ways to make learning more inclusive for all children. The first example comes from the teacher at Oak Ridge Primary.

ORP Tiffany: I think I would do it in a more discreet way, so set up all of the activities .. So that they are doing the things I want them to do but without me so that it's more of a child-led activity than me initiating it.. err . So I'll definitely look at doing that more.

Tiffany (T) reflects both on the children's comments and her own pedagogical practice. As previously stated she was an NQT, so she may not have had the experience to consider the implications and impact of her practice. By contemplating how she could alter her practice, Tiffany states that she would plan the activities to ensure that they were more child-led, but with the addendum that the children would not know they were doing what she wanted. This could imply she had misinterpreted the term 'child-led', which is defined as freely chosen play activities that provide opportunities for adults to extend children's thinking (Siraj-Blatchford *et al*., 2002), since Tiffany appears to interpret it as the children being unaware that they are being directed by the teacher. Even if the children were not aware of this, there is still a possibility that they would perceive themselves to be less included because they did not have overall choice of their pedagogical activities.

Another example from a nursery nurse at Riverside Infants, reveals the possibility of altering her practice in response to some of the children's comments about the activity being too long/boring.

Tricia: So what do you think you could possibly do to harness that if you've identified that (friendships) *as something that's really key to the children? Is there anything that you could maybe promote or change or do something differently within practice that could utilise that?*

RI Lydia: If it's something that they perhaps are finding it boring or finding it hard to grasp, um, maybe I could take them aside afterwards and make, just to recap over it, but to do it as a fun activity.

Lydia (NN) does not suggest that the whole class activities should be discarded, but she attempts to mitigate the children's perceptions of not being included by focusing on the individual children and attempting to engage them in a fun and less formal manner afterwards. Again, this could be seen as responding to the child's individuality and difference but it could also be argued that rather than waiting until after the whole class activity, these children could be working in a more creative and responsive mode from the outset. By allowing the children the freedom to select their approach to learning, it is possible that they might feel more included.

A further example from a teacher at Riverside Infants also advocates a change in her practice.

Tricia: So can I just ask you finally, whether you could tell me, this kind of information feeding back to you things children have said in response to questions that I've asked, do you find any of it useful and would it assist you in your planning in the future?

RI Nina: But I do think that putting them with buddies, rather than leaving them as they are sometimes, would be beneficial. The ones that's more confident you would be able to do that. Maybe it would work.

In contrast to Lydia, Nina (T) advocates changing her pedagogical practice during the activity. She too, does not propose removing the whole class activity, but she reflects on how the children could be utilised as a learning tool to help each other feel more included. This concurs with some of the children's comments about how they perceived themselves as more included

when they were working or playing in collaboration with others (section **4.2.1.1**). Therefore, it is possible that the delivery of the activity may remain the same, but that the practitioners' pedagogical practice is altered to respond to the children's individuality and difference.

A further example from Lydia (NN) presents a different perspective about how the pedagogical activities are planned.

Tricia: Do you think there's anything that possibly something you could do to change that perception for that child, so that it wasn't boring, so that it wasn't taking a long time?

RI Lydia: And it's just one of those logging to make sure, that the more interactive learning, they're up, they're down, they're moving, they haven't got time to be bored, then they're not sat for long and we do try to do that. It may be that we're more conscious of that at the start of the year, when we're trying to grasp them and get them interested in learning and they don't know that they're doing formal learning as such, and maybe as the year progresses and they're maturing and they're learning more and the length of time does, the length of time that they are sat on the carpet or doing group work, does lengthen, um .. maybe we ought to get it a bit more.

Lydia implies that at the beginning of the year, the staff are more focused on making the activities interactive and active, but as the year progresses it becomes less of an emphasis. This may be because as they get older, some of the children are able to concentrate for longer periods and the practitioners are preparing them for the next stage of their schooling. However, Lydia appears to recognise that not all children will develop in this way and that possibly she needs to be more aware of their needs, either for individual attention, or a more lively engagement with the activity.

Conversely, there were also comments that did not reflect the need for practitioners to change their pedagogical practice, since they perceived it was already inclusive, despite the children's comments. One example comes from a TA at Oak Ridge Primary.

Tricia: So is there anything that you could do differently to make it seem more inclusive for those children who don't feel it is?

ORP Yvette: Umm. Not with the carpet no because obviously it's not just in foundation they have to do it all the way through school. It's carpet time and once you're on the carpet, further up the school it's sit on the carpet at 3.00 and have a story as we do here.. But it's register time on the carpet, everybody's together as a whole class. Err but then it's brought into a fun thing as well because they get to do activities on there when they are brought off the carpet so it's not just for.. sitting .. and listening, and listening to grown-ups and they can sit and play with the Lego on there and do umm yeah.

This example suggests that there are times when Yvette (TA) believes children have to learn to conform to certain procedures, as they will form part of the structured schooling when they are older. However, as the interview progresses Yvette modifies her opinions to contemplate how different learning environments could be offered to children.

ORP Yvette: No I think and we do work umm I'm quite happy about the way we work and in the classroom but I just think there probably we .., we could and probably look at the ones, the quieter ones and I think I probably say to them would you like to go and do this on your own in a quiet area.

Reflecting on the children's comments about why they perceived themselves to be most included in their pedagogical activities (*I like sitting quietly cos it don't make my ears hurt (Jasmine: ORP I); Umm .. It so no one can see I'm painting and I can concentrate and it's not noisy (Zara: ORP I)*), Yvette acknowledges that there are potential ways in which the environment could be altered to make them feel more included. She responds by suggesting that children who prefer a quieter learning environment could be encouraged to work outside the classroom, which alludes to the possibility that she may find it helpful to engage with children's views. This resonates with the following theme.

5.4 Valuing engagement with children's views

Many of the practitioners considered that engaging with children's voices was an important aspect of their role. An example comes from the NQT at Oak Ridge Primary.

Tricia: So would you do anything differently based on those comments and why?

ORP Tiffany: Give them more verbal praise and to make sure they know that they can do it and to make sure that I check, for example in PE, find a way that they would like to be included but that they would feel comfortable. So listening to them rather than just assuming.

Tricia: Are there any reasons why you might not have done that before?

ORP Tiffany: Cos I didn't know that's how they felt, do you know that's said a lot and I didn't know that's how they were seeing things. So listening to them rather than just assuming.

It is interesting to note that Tiffany (T) states she did not know that the children were perceiving things in this way. She comments that it will inspire her to revise her practice so that she does not make assumptions about what the children think, but actually listens to what they say. It is possible she previously imagined that the children's behaviour and body language portrayed their feelings, but by participating in this research project she appears to suggest that it has informed her understanding of the importance of engaging with children's voices.

Another practitioner at Riverside Infants alludes to the age of the children as being important when engaging with their views.

Tricia: I wonder if you could tell me if you find any of this information that I've given you today, useful when you're planning your learning activities and your practice.

RI Lydia: I think so, definitely. Um and that they're at an age when they are just … coming into foundation there are a whole mixture of children that they've never met before, they are building friends, they are learning how to build friendships and

they're moving on in the next level of their development and I think that's really,.. to um... what's the word I'm looking for, just to recognise that it's important to them.

Lydia (NN) explains that she understands that friendship is important to the children at a time when they are undergoing a significant transition in their schooling. The notion that this is significant is further endorsed by a teacher at the same school.

RI Anastasia: So I think yeah definitely it's good to have their points of view in that way. It makes it very clear what, what is a good way, and even though this way gets a few not quite right, even that makes me think yeah.

Um, we do have children's voice wheels so we're tuning in, but I think that what you've done is something we should do. To talk to them, cos they will talk. Yeah I go there and I do that, they're very honest little people. It's very raw, cutting sometimes but you need that.

Anastasia (T) comments that they already have some processes in place to engage with the children's voices through the voice wheels, which enable children to comment on different aspects of the learning from time to time. Nevertheless, she acknowledges that they may not be capturing fully, their thoughts and feelings. This is interesting since the EYFS states "All children have an equal right to be listened to and valued in the setting" (DCSF, 2008: Principle into Practice 1:2), which implies it should be one of the pivotal values of early years practice, but that it is not always being enacted. This is reflected in Anastasia's comments that there might only be a limited number of children's voices being heard and that this process could enable more to be considered, 'S*o yeah, more children's voices coming through and I think that would be an excellent way to address it' (RI Anastasia).*

The notion that more could be done to enable children to express their perceptions more freely, was articulated by several practitioners. A TA at Oak Ridge Primary reflected on what was already occurring.

Tricia: That leads onto my last question which is whether you find any of this sort of information about children's voices and listening to their views, whether you would find it useful in working with children?

ORP Yvette: I think it yeah, I do. We did have. . up in the entrance, it's the suggestion box for the children to put suggestions in if there was something they didn't like and it was anonymous but I don't think they do it anymore.

Yvette (TA) indicates that the children's views have been a priority of the school in the past but that possibly this has not been maintained. Additionally, she cites a suggestion box where children can write their comments. However, this is not necessarily an appropriate means for engaging with young children's views, since many of them will not have the necessary physical or cognitive level of development to write, and therefore it reaffirms the need for ongoing professional development. Consequently, it is important to seek more accessible and participative means of engaging with young children's voices.

A teacher from Riverside Infants also commented on how they had engaged with children voices, but she also indicated how it could be adapted to make it more participative.

RI Anastasia: So I think it's a brilliant idea to get them in, do a little bit of six weeks and then maybe have a review. I mean just have it on the smart board, put it up and say this is to do with you. We do put up on there our weekly news website all the pictures of what they've been up to, but I don't know who accesses that at home really. They say they do but we're never quite sure, but that would make an excellent idea, we can do it in school. They do see that and they can say I've been in that, so we did that. Or I didn't like that or could I do this, so yeah, more children's voice is coming through and I think that would be an excellent way to address it.

Anastasia (T) acknowledges that the current process for listening to children has its limitations. She comments that it has been used to inform parents about what their children are doing at school and to enable them to discuss with their children how they respond to these different activities. However, on reflection, she appreciates the weaknesses of the practice since it does not

necessarily inform the practitioners about the children's perceptions of inclusion. She considers that it could be adapted to use photographs to engage in conversations with the children at school, about what they did or did not like. Whilst liking an activity is not necessarily the same as feeling included, these conversations instigate a culture of willingness to listen, and respond, to children's voices.

5.5   Summary

This chapter presented the practitioners' views about responding to children's perceptions of inclusion. The themes to emerge were: recognising individuality and difference; reflection; altering current practice; and valuing engagement with children's views. Within each theme, some differences appeared in the responses from the practitioners at the two schools. In the first theme, some practitioners recognised the importance of responding to children's individuality within their planning and delivery of pedagogical practice, whilst others indicated that they were more informed about how they should structure the pedagogical activity. The reflection theme again highlighted some differences. Most of the teachers reflected on their practice and considered the impact on the children's perception of inclusion. However, the nursery nurse from Oak Ridge Primary did not portray this perspective, stating that she considered that her practice was inclusive already. Her view was further reinforced by the TA at the same school, who also did not believe she needed to alter her pedagogical practice. A possible reason for this thinking could arise from their lack of involvement in the planning process. In the final theme, all the practitioners appeared to recognise the importance of engaging with children's voices, and some reflected on how they could alter their practice to allow for better ways of enabling children to express their views.

Chapters 4 and **5** presented the findings for each of the three research questions regarding children's perceptions of pedagogical activities that promote and hinder inclusion, and practitioners' thoughts on engaging with children's views. The next chapter brings together the understanding gained

through the research and presents a discussion for how engaging with children's voices can explicate more inclusive pedagogical activities in the Reception class.

Chapter 6:   Discussion

6.1   Introduction

This research aimed to gain an understanding of aspects of children's perceived notions of inclusion within their pedagogical activities. It also explored the idea of how engaging with children's views about inclusion can inform practitioners' pedagogical practice. Furthermore, through the exploration of these aims, possible implications were explored for developing more inclusive pedagogical practice within the Reception class. In order to comprehend the children's perceptions of inclusion within their pedagogical activities, it was imperative for their voices to be at the forefront of the research. Messiou (2012, p.1311) maintains that "children can facilitate the process of identifying aspects within a given context that could hinder or promote inclusion". Consequently, the children's perceptions remained central to the research study.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first one relates specifically to how the children perceived their pedagogical activities to promote or hinder inclusion (RQs 1 and 2), and the second section discusses the practitioners' responses to engaging with children's voices. Returning to the themes that emerged from the findings of the first two research questions, I considered whether there were any connections between these themes. Focusing specifically on what the children expressed, I identified two dimensions that appeared to be important in understanding children's perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities: belonging and relationships; and democratic pedagogies. These are presented in table **6.1**. It is important to note that not all themes from the findings appear in the discussion. This is because I was looking specifically, for connections between the two research questions and did not wish to manipulate the themes to sit within a dimension. I am not suggesting that the other themes were not of equal importance simply that they stood alone and were analysed as such in the findings section.

Table **6.1** Connections between the data from RQ 1 and RQ 2 and children's perceived dimensions of inclusion

Children's perceived dimensions of inclusion	Research Question 1	Research Question 2
Belonging and relationships	**Collaboration** – • Watching and learning from others (practitioner/ child); • Choosing who to work with	**Feeling Alone** – • Not having the opportunity to play/work with other children; • Being left out by specific children
Democratic pedagogies	**Children's individuality and difference** – • Choosing what they want to do; • Choosing how they want to learn (group, individual); • Choosing the subject matter **Environmental context** – • Being able to behave/speak differently in the outdoor environment **Independent achievement** – • Being able to complete work independently	**Lack of interest in the activity** – • Finding the work boring; • Learning taking too long; • Not liking the subject matter **Sensorial experiences** – • Not liking to go outside because it is cold and wet; • The noise level is too loud in the classroom **Unsure of the activity** - • Not knowing what to do and who to ask **Difficulty of the activity** - • Feeling worried if they do not know how to do the work

The dimension of belonging and relationships arose from a reflection on the themes of Collaboration and Feeling Alone. The children's comments in Collaboration suggested that they perceived themselves to be included in their pedagogical activities when they were able to choose with whom to work, or by watching others, whilst those in Feeling Alone demonstrated how their perceptions of inclusion were hindered when they had to work on their own or were left out by other children. The findings led me to conclude that children perceived and expressed the notion of being included, in terms of belonging and relationships.

The second dimension emerged from a reflection on the themes of: Children's Individuality and Difference and Lack of Interest in the Activity; Environmental Context and Sensorial Experiences; Independent Achievement, Unsure of the Activity and Difficulty of the Activity. Focusing on what the children expressed, they perceived notions of inclusion as resonating with being able to select the content and context (location and mode of teaching) of the pedagogical activity, perceiving themselves to be less included when these were removed from their control. Furthermore, some children perceived notions of inclusion when they were able to complete their work independently, whilst others perceived themselves as less included when they did not what to do, who to ask for support or were worried when they were unsure of how to complete the work.

These findings indicate that there were differences in children's perceived notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities, which were dependent on their individual interests and preferred ways of working. Therefore, this study posits that inclusion could also be considered through the dimension of democratic pedagogies. By considering this approach, practitioners are able to alter their pedagogic practice in response to children's individuality and difference, which is understood through engaging with the children's voices.

In these two dimensions it is important to note that the children did not specifically refer to the terms belonging and relationships, and democratic pedagogies, but rather, the terms were constructed in order to understand matters that were of significance to the children. In so doing, the discussion remains true to the philosophy that children should have their voices heard and considered in discussions to bring about change (see Cooper, 1993; Rudduck *et al.*, 1996; Ainscow, 1999). Furthermore, it attends to Hunter's (2007) call for careful scrutiny of the conditions of production of children's wishes and feelings and the framework of interpretation in any context. Each of these dimensions is discussed in detail in the next two sections. The final section of this chapter discusses the notion of how engaging with children's voices about inclusion can inform practitioners' pedagogical practice.

6.2 Dimensions of children's perceived notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities.

6.2.1 Belonging and relationships

Children in both schools were, at times, able to select with whom they worked in different pedagogical activities. In Riverside Infants, this manifested itself during 'busy time' when the children could select to either work independently or with another person – child or practitioner. In Oak Ridge Primary, the children were given this opportunity throughout the day when they were not working in whole class activities or outside at break time. As discussed in **Chapters 4** and **5**, children from both schools identified reasons for why they perceived themselves to be included when they were working with, or learning from, another (pp.132-42), and also why they perceived themselves as less included when they were on their own (pp.163-98). These explanations indicate a connection with another person, or a sense of belonging. I propose that when the children expressed their desire to be with others they were also reflecting the tenet of Booth and Ainscow's (2004, p.3) definition of inclusion, namely that "participation implies learning, playing or working in collaboration with others".

The responses of some children from both of the schools, revealed perceptions of inclusion when they could work with another child or practitioner (Jacob p.133; Olivia p.134). Additionally, some commented that they perceived themselves as less included when they had to work on their own (Evelyn p.135) and when they felt alone (James p.164; Scarlet p.166). These comments provide a rationale that perceived notions of inclusion strongly relate to a sense of belonging, since they present alternate sides of the same position. A remark made by Scarlet (*RI DR6* p.166) provides a thought-provoking starting position. She commented that she *"feeled alone"* when she was not able to play with other children, which resulted in her not feeling included. This perspective resonates strongly with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) definition of sense of belonging. They describe it as the extent to which individuals feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in their social environment. I contend that their definition also reflects the principles of inclusion within this study; if a child is accepted by others within their

pedagogical activities, then based on my findings (Evelyn, p.135; Scarlet, pp.166-7; Matilda, pp.167-8), they might perceive themselves to be more included.

Children who expressed notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities in terms of being with someone else, reflect the connection between learning and belonging. Wenger's (1998) positioning of learning as belonging through social communities, has strong resonance with the principles of inclusion in terms of participation (see Booth and Ainscow, 2004). Furthermore, some children also perceived themselves to be more included when they had shared interests (James pp.164-5), thus correlating with Wenger's (1998) notion of shared social resources. Furthermore, Rose (2007), in referring to the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools, calls for an approach where children are provided with opportunities for socialisation with other children, and engagement with activities, in order for inclusion to be enacted.

Children observed as displaying high levels of well-being and involvement when they were learning with other children (Jacob p.133; Olivia pp.134-5; Aiden pp.139-40), reinforced the significance they placed on their relationships with others, in their interviews. Moreover, their reference to working with specific children or friends implies that their perceptions of inclusion were not simply associated with working with another child. Rather, it appears it was the formation of a relationship with a specific person that determined their perceptions of inclusion. Furthermore, examples of children who perceived themselves to be less included when they were not playing or working with their friends (Scarlet p.166), reaffirms this explication. This notion of relationships, resonates strongly with Malaguzzi's (1993a, 1993b) description of an education based on relationships that emphasise socially embedded processes, and Joerdens's (2014) definition of relationships as the emotional connections occurring through both verbal and non-verbal social interactions among children, and between children and practitioners.

By selecting specific children with whom to work, children in both schools demonstrated the importance they placed on these relationships. An example from James (*RI DR6,* p.165) revealed that he did not perceive himself to be included when he could not play or work with his friend. This was further reinforced through the pictures he drew of pedagogical activities where he perceived himself either to be included (figure **4.6**) or not included (figure **4.7**). A further example from a child at Oak Ridge Primary also revealed the importance placed on working with another child (Joseph*, ORP DR3*, p.138*).*

Dockett and Perry (2001, p.4), in their research about transition into school, reported the nature of relationships between and among children as having a "significant impact on children's sense of belonging and acceptance within a school community". My findings reflect this concept of belonging, since some children expressed the need to form relationships with others if they were to perceive themselves as being included in their pedagogical activities. Furthermore, Bennett (2011) maintains that children's relationships support their sense of belonging, which in turn endorses the development of social identity - a sense of self in relation to others. The need for the development of social identity, may account for the reason that some children placed greater importance on working with others, in order to perceive themselves as included. Children who had not sufficiently developed their sense of self, may have sought the reassurance from others to support their sense of belonging and therefore inclusion.

Research by Joerdens (2014) into young children's experiences and perspectives during their first year of school in an Australian kindergarten, signified findings that have resonance with my own research. Joerdens reported that relationships impacted on children, both positively and negatively, throughout the year. When asked what made best friends, a child responded that it was playing and working with each other. Furthermore, some of the concerns they had centred on not having a friend any more, and not being picked by others. Whilst this research was not specifically focused on inclusion, its findings appear to have important associations with, and implications for, my own study. Children in both of these studies commented

positively when they were able to work or play with another child and more negatively when they were excluded or felt alone. Hence, this reinforces the notion that relationships are of great importance to young children.

The discussion thus far refers to children perceiving themselves to be more included when they were working or playing with another child, but other children commented that this occurred when they were with a practitioner. It is important to note that the majority of comments in this category emanated from the children at Oak Ridge Primary. Since the format of the pedagogical activities presented itself differently in the two schools, it is possible that the distinction in the children's responses may have resulted from this difference. By working closely with the practitioner on an individual basis, it is plausible that children at Oak Ridge Primary were able to establish a closer relationship with the practitioner since they did not have to compete for her support and attention, with other children. In Riverside Infants, the children usually worked with the practitioner in groups, and therefore they may not have placed such significance on their relationship with the practitioner, due to the presence of other children at all times. This may have led children to place equal importance on their relationships with both the practitioner and other children.

An example of the desire to form a relationship with a practitioner, is evident through Luke's comment that he likes working with the teacher (p.141). Whilst this could be construed as learning from a more informed other, I believe it presents an alternative position. By stating that he perceived himself as more included when he was working with the teacher, I posit that it is the closeness and connection afforded by this intimate activity that resonates with Luke's perception of inclusion (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Observations of Luke learning in whole class activities did not record such high levels of well-being and involvement (p.141), which may be due to his physical distance from the practitioner. When he was seated on the carpet with thirty other children, Luke may have lost the physical connection with the practitioner and therefore he considered that the relationship he had previously formed with her, was also absent. This explication reflects the importance of the physical space afforded

between the practitioner and the child, and the child's subsequent perception of inclusion.

However, there are others (see Niland, 2015) who imply that the relationship is more than simply the closeness of the physical space. Niland (2015) suggests that it is more about the feelings that urge a child to come together with an adult through shared motivations and interests, a view which is supported by van Oers and Hannikainen (2000). I contend that these two positions are not mutually exclusive. It is possible that children can have both a shared interest in the pedagogical activity undertaken with the practitioner, and a desire to work in close proximity with the adult.

In my research, some children (for example, Riley p.145) stated that they perceived themselves to be more included when they were working individually with the teacher on a specific pedagogical activity. Moreover, observations of children working with practitioners in larger groups recorded lower levels of well-being and involvement (Appendix C; *RI O: Henry (7/5/2015, classroom, whole class-counting money)*). These observations are not sufficient to categorically conclude why the children perceived themselves to be less included, but it plausible to suggest that one of the reasons was that they did not consider the relationship with the teacher to be as strong when they were working in a large group context.

Other children who commented that they were less included when they were working in a large group, appeared to do so because of the lack of individual attention. Henry's comment "*it's so long to choose me*", and the resulting negative behaviour (p.161), reveal this desire. Research by Ellis *et al.* (1998) concluded that for children with a history of behavioural difficulties, their feelings of belonging related directly to incidents of problematic behaviour and ultimately their opportunities for experiencing inclusion. Although the intent of my research was not to explore behaviour, nor to suggest that any of the children had a history of behavioural difficulties, there were examples of

negative behaviour from children who expressed perceptions of being less included (James pp.165-6).

Further evidence in support of the importance of relationships, comes from observations of Henry when he was closely supported by an adult during a whole class activity (p.143). In this instance, rather than displaying a lack of interest, Henry was detected being able to tolerate the frustration and uncertainty of not having his questions answered or his opinions sought, since he was able to speak to the adult nearby. This may have resulted in an increase in his perceived notion of inclusion in the pedagogical activity. This indicates that the proximity, or ability to speak, to a practitioner is an important dimension in determining a child's perception of inclusion.

Some children explicated their perceived notions of inclusion in relation to the help that they received from others. Aiden (pp.139-40), for example, commented that he needed his friends to help him, while Luke commented that the teacher could show him what to do (p.139). Drawing on their longitudinal study of 357 children, Howes *et al.* (2000, p.114) highlight that "if children feel emotionally secure with the teacher they can use her as a secure base for exploring the learning opportunities of the classroom". Whilst this does not specifically refer to inclusion, I suggest that the emotional security with a practitioner could also be perceived as increasing the well-being of the child, since the practitioner-child relationship serves as a regulatory function with regard to children's social and emotional development (see Greenberg *et al.*, 1993; Pianta, 1999). I have already argued for the connection between well-being and inclusion (Barton, 2005), therefore, it is possible that children who are able to seek support from, and form positive relationships with, practitioners, may perceive themselves as more included in pedagogical activities where practitioners are present. This is of particular importance for children in the early years since they need to communicate and engage in interactions with other people from an early age (Trevarthen and Aitken, 2001).

Furthermore, my findings, as previously mentioned, suggest that for many children, there is a need for them to feel a sense of belonging through relationships with other children and/or practitioners. Research undertaken by Johnson (2009) with secondary aged children, reinforces this explication. Her findings indicate that students at the non-traditional school, who experienced increased levels of teacher support, felt more accepted, respected and included and also experienced higher levels of belongingness. I contend that the notion of belonging, which arose from the students' relationships with the teachers in Johnson's research, support the importance of relationships and belonging in my study. Although it was undertaken in secondary schools, Johnson's findings appear to strengthen my argument that for children to perceive themselves as included in their pedagogical activities, their relationships with practitioners are of paramount importance.

To conclude this section, I maintain that based on my findings, belonging is considered to be a dimension of children's perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities. This can manifest itself through a relationship with another child and/or practitioner. However, this was not the only dimension to arise from the findings. The next section discusses democratic pedagogies.

6.2.2 Democratic pedagogies

The dimension of democratic pedagogies emerged from the analysis of the children's comments in relation to practitioner-directed activities. Notions of inclusion appeared to centre on the children's own interests, or having autonomy over the content, context or mode of delivery of the pedagogical activity.

6.2.2.1 Children's interests

Referring to the notion of children's interests, most of the comments emanated from the children at Riverside Infants. Leo (p.142) referred to perceived notions of inclusion when he was able to learn about matters that

were of interest to him. Furthermore, he commented that he did not perceive himself to be included when the content was boring (p.162). An observation of Henry (p.143) recorded him being more engaged in a whole class activity that involved a visit from a vet, rather than in other observations of whole class activities that focused on mathematics and literacy (pp.161-2). Whilst it cannot be concluded with certainty that Henry's perceptions of inclusion were specifically related to the idea that the content reflected his interests, the unstructured observations of Henry within the six week duration, led me to elicit this inference. When the pedagogical activity was based on an area in which he had some interest, such as the visit from the vet, Henry's attention was much greater and he displayed higher levels of well-being and involvement, and his incidents of negative behaviour were far fewer. Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) refer to the need for children to be in a state of emotional well-being and for the curriculum to be experiential, social/interactional and instructive if they are to learn. The evidence from my findings extends this notion further, to suggest that high levels of emotional well-being and involvement also need to be present if a child is to perceive a pedagogical activity as promoting inclusion.

Further evidence of children not perceiving themselves to be included when there was a lack of interest in the pedagogical activity, came from Freya (pp.157-58) and Jacob (p.159). Freya explained that she did not perceive herself to be included, not because she was unable to complete the work in the group activity, but rather because she did not have fun. I have inferred this to mean that her perception of inclusion was influenced by either the content of the activity or with whom she was working. An observation of Freya in a group activity focusing on phonics (p.158), seems to imply that it was the content, rather than group activity *per se,* that influenced her perception of inclusion. In this instance she was observed displaying higher levels of well-being and involvement in contrast to observations of other group activities focusing on mathematics.

Jacob also commented that he did not perceive himself to be included when he was unable to select the content of an activity. At first, it appeared that his

perceived notion of inclusion was associated with his lack of choice of all creative activities, however, on further questioning this perception seemed to be connected more specifically to the content of the activity in the workshop area, where resources were provided by the practitioners. Observations of Jacob undertaking different creative activities of his own choosing (*classroom, drawing,* p.159), where he could select the materials and purpose of the activity, revealed higher levels of well-being and involvement.

A possible reason for why most of these comments came from children at Riverside Infants, could be associated with their organisation into groups according to perceived ability, and for which the practitioner had planned the content. This may have led to the children sensing that the pedagogical activity did not reflect their individual interests, since they had little choice about its content. In Oak Ridge Primary, some of the children commented that they did not perceive themselves as included in practitioner-directed pedagogical activities, however, this was more concerned with the difficulty of the activity, rather than an individual child's interests. Whilst considering the importance placed on pedagogical activities that reflect the children's interests, I became aware that some children appeared to perceive themselves as more included if they were afforded autonomy in decision-making regarding their pedagogical activities. This is explored in the following section.

6.2.2.2   Autonomy

To consider the significance of autonomy in learning, it is important to reflect on the evidence that arose from the observations of, and interviews with, children responding in diverse ways to the same pedagogical activity. Some children perceived themselves to be included in a class activity because they were able to listen and learn from the teacher (Hannah, p.140), where others commented that they were bored or that they had to wait a long time for their voice to be heard (Henry p.161). In reference to outdoor pedagogical activities, again there were differing responses in terms of perceived notions of inclusion. Nathan (p.156) professed himself to be more included outside because he could breathe; and Jack (p.155) because he could shout; whereas Emma

(p.169) commented that she did not perceive herself as included when she had to work outside in the cold and the wet. These comments indicate that children can respond differently to the same pedagogical activity.

It may be that these differences are due in part to the content or the context of the pedagogical activity, or there may be other reasons. However, I postulate that it is not important necessarily to understand why a child perceives themselves to be less included in these instances, but rather that it is about providing children with opportunities for autonomy to take charge of their learning (Holec, 1981). This concurs with Dam (cited in Gatherole, 1990) who refers to autonomy in terms of being able to select materials, methods and tasks. In so doing, it is possible that the children in my study may have perceived themselves to be more included, if they were able to select the content, mode of delivery, or environment in which they worked, as evidenced by Jacob (pp.159-60).

Moreover, Rose and Meyer (2002) state that giving children access to meaningful choice, by providing options that are culturally relevant, age-relevant, and personalised and contextualised to children's lives, will promote intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation involves an inherent gratification prompted by the feeling that learning is interesting and enjoyable (Glynn *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, if children are more motivated to learn, it is plausible that they would display higher levels of well-being and involvement, since they would be more likely to concentrate for longer periods of time and exhibit more outward signs of enjoyment. In terms of my research, this could indicate that children who were motivated to learn by being given meaningful choice, may perceive themselves as being more included in their pedagogical activities.

This concurs with Harris's (2015) evaluation of Developmentally Universal Practice (DUP), which focuses on high-quality activities that endorse equal access for young children. She reports on the necessity for early childhood education to make learning meaningful and powerful to the child's voice, and

thus be more inclusive. By giving children opportunities to learn according to their preferences and learning styles, it has the potential to promote inclusion for all young children. Moreover, the findings of my research concur with Dahl's (1982) perspective that by treating everyone the same there is a danger that children may feel less included. He states that by providing pedagogical activities that are sufficiently varied in content and delivery, the child could be assumed to have autonomy in their learning. This then leads to agency where children have the authority to make rational choices (Walkerdine, 1990), rather than being marginalised by the decisions made by practitioners.

A further example supporting the need for autonomy in children's pedagogical activities, comes from James (*DR6*, pp.165-6) who reported the perception that he was less included when he was separated from Jack during a group activity. James's comment resonates with the previous section about belonging and relationships. When the children were divided into perceived ability groups to undertake a literacy pedagogical activity, James was separated from Jack. During the activity, I observed James swinging on his chair and looking for Jack throughout (p.165), which meant he was distracted from the pedagogical activity. Based on this evidence, it is plausible that James may have perceived himself to be more included, and therefore would have concentrated on the pedagogical activity, if he had been able to select with whom he worked. Furthermore, both children could have supported each other in their learning, which may also have increased Jack's perception of inclusion.

However, not all children expressed the desire to work with others in order to perceive themselves as included, with some children specifically stating that they felt more included when they could work independently. Most of these comments emanated from the children at Riverside Infants (Sophia, pp.151-2; Phoebe, pp.153-4). Although one child from Oak Ridge Primary also perceived himself to be more included when he was able to work independently, he modified his response to state that sometimes he needed help (Matthew pp.150-1).

The differences in how children were able to access their free-choice pedagogical activities, may present a possible explication for their differing perceptions. The children at Riverside Infants were usually supported by practitioners when they were accessing free-choice activities, which could explain why they felt a greater sense of achievement when they were able to complete something entirely independently. Equally, children at Oak Ridge Primary, who were able to work independently without the support of a practitioner for longer periods of the day, may not have attributed such importance to being able to accomplish something on their own.

Despite some children expressing perceived notions of inclusion that resonated with working independently, there were others who expressed the opposite view. In instances where children were left to work without adult support, children from both schools perceived themselves to be less included when they were either unsure of what was expected of them (Ryan p.173; Jayden pp.173-4), or if they considered the work to be too difficult (Zara pp.176-7; Nathan p.178). This could present an argument for practitioners to provide work that meets the developmental needs of each child. However, there are some who warn of the dangers of such approaches. MacNaughton (2000), for example, challenges the practice of early childhood practitioners who separate children according to perceived developmental needs. She states that this has become the dominant practice grounded on a regime of truth that regulates and governs what is the appropriate, or correct way, to understand and organise young children. Moreover, Hart *et al.* (2004) consider how it is possible to create inclusive learning environments without relying on ability or attainment as organising principles for teaching.

Consequently, I believe the crucial notion is that children are given more autonomy in their learning. This could be achieved through the opportunity to select from a range of pedagogical activities, which are taught in multiple ways that are challenging, motivating and creative; by providing a range of resources from which the children can choose; and/or enabling children to select with whom they work. By providing opportunities for children to select the ways in which they work, it is possible that their perceptions of inclusion

could be increased. This concurs with Florian and Black-Hawkins's research (2010), in which they suggest an inclusive pedagogical approach can be achieved when attention is paid to everyone. They contend this occurs when individual differences between learners are accommodated by making diverse tasks and activities available to all, and without the stigmatising effects of marking some students as different. This stigmatising effect (or perceptions of being less included) could be produced as a result of grouping children into perceived ability groups. Therefore, based on the evidence suggested here, if children were able to select with whom they worked regardless of perceived ability, it is plausible that they may not perceive themselves as less included.

Thus far, I have presented an argument for considering children's interests and their autonomy, if they are to perceive themselves as included in pedagogical activities. However, this is not to negate the significance of the practitioner's role. I contend that affording children autonomy does not necessarily preclude a practitioner-directed approach. What it does, is merely offer opportunities for children to select from a range of pedagogical activities planned by the practitioner, which reflect the children's interests and learning preferences. Thus, children can have the freedom to explore and construct knowledge by participation in their own learning through their autonomous decisions, whilst concurrently, the practitioner may identify the expectations and goals for learning and give guidance and support to the children. Furthermore, this approach espouses the notion presented by Kame'enui and Carnine (1998), that teachers must present learning materials (and therefore pedagogical activities) in stimulating ways that recognise children's individuality, whilst addressing the needs of the whole class.

This perspective present a rationale for adopting democratic practices of communicative shared experience (Dewey, 1939), where the teacher and child work together in the learning experience. Observations of children in my study who displayed differing levels of concentration, interest and enjoyment in the same pedagogical activity (Appendix M), indicate the need for practitioners to be mindful of children's individuality and difference when planning pedagogical activities. This concurs with Formosinho and Oliveira-

Formosinho's (2008) model of *Pedagogy-in-Participation*, where children become engaged in interactions and relationships with adults and children that sustain joint activities and projects. These activities enable the child to co-construct her/his own learning and celebrate her/his achievements. This concurs with the findings of my research, where some children perceived the notion of inclusion in terms of being able to complete her/his work with the support of a practitioner.

A further consideration within a democratic pedagogy is the position of trust adopted by the practitioner. Hart *et al.* (2004) infer that children need to know that they are the ones who can tell the teacher about how they learn. The findings of my study, as presented in the sections about children's interests and autonomy, allude to this notion. If children are able to express their perceived notions of inclusion to practitioners, with the assurance that they will be listened to, then democratic pedagogies may be adopted that enable learning through an interactive development between the child and practitioner, and the educational spaces. The relationships between the children and practitioners, as suggested in section **6.2.1,** are the central means by which a democratic pedagogy may be achieved.

Therefore, I contend that based on my findings, engaging with children's voices offers the possibility for promoting inclusion through the design of democratic pedagogies. In so doing, children are actively involved in the process of learning, thus reflecting Prout's (2000) postmodern perspective that children are capable and influential beings and that their voices are given due weight (UNCRC, 1989). By listening and responding to children's views about their perceived notions of inclusion, I present a rationale for practitioners to respond to children's perceptions and seek ways in which to work collaboratively. Thus, my study reflects Jordan's (2004) view, which refers to a co-construction involving the child and adult as equal partners in interactions, where neither is dominating the field of shared meanings. Rinaldi (2005, p.56) concurs, stating that the practitioner "cannot merely be an implementer … of projects and programmes decided by and created by others, for some 'other' child and for undefined contexts". By developing interactions, reflecting on

them, thinking about and reconstructing them, a democratic pedagogy may be constructed.

Consequently, it is evident that practitioners have a pivotal role to play within the development of a democratic pedagogy. Therefore, the final section of this chapter considers the notion of how engaging with children's voices can inform practitioners' pedagogical practice.

6.3 Exploring practitioners' thoughts on engaging with children's views about inclusion and the impact on their pedagogical practice

The findings of my study revealed that some children (Jacob pp.159-60; Lucas p.160) did not perceive themselves to be included when they were unable to select the content or context of the pedagogical activity. When presented with these comments, some practitioners (Nina p.185; Selina p.188) resisted the opportunity to reflect on how they could make their pedagogical practice more inclusive. Moreover, they suggested that their practice provided the most appropriate way for the children to be taught. This elucidation reveals a lack of understanding of the importance of engaging with children's views, which has resonance with the concept of the powerlessness experienced by children, as stated by Clough and Barton (1998). It also reflects a resistance in the requirement to listen to children's views, which necessitates a shift in the balance of power since, as Bennett (2007) maintains, it is rarely in favour of the child. The challenge, contend MacNaughton *et al.* (2007), is to move the understandings of teachers from being experts and knowing what is best for children in a general sense, to being expert in ways to collaborate with children.

Furthermore, the nursery nurse and TA at Oak Ridge Primary (Selina, p.188; Yvette p.193) were more reluctant to consider the significance of the children's comments than the practitioners at Riverside Infants. This may have resulted from their lack of involvement in the planning of pedagogical activities, which

was undertaken by the teacher. Thus, these practitioners may have considered that the teacher had a more informed comprehension of the most suitable pedagogical approach, and therefore did not consider the significance of the children's comments.

Research by Kangas *et al.* (2016) appears to concur with my findings. They emphasise the need for practitioners to engage in conversations with children about how they felt included in their learning, in order to be able to respond to their individual interests. Their research, based on a large survey conducted in Finnish early childhood education, revealed practitioners' unawareness of the impact of their practice. It exposed that too often educators miss children's initiatives to make contact, and that the educators place too much value on the daily schedule and pre-planned learning activities than the opportunities to stop what they are doing and listen to the children. Moreover, they found that the efforts of the youngest children to make contact, often escaped their notice.

The apparent lack of awareness of the importance of engaging with children's voices by some of the practitioners in my study, is in contrast to the philosophy of early education, which advocates that the child should be engaged in a cooperative and collaborative activity (see Moss *et al.*, 2000; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). This philosophy both recognises and celebrates young children as active and powerful agents in their own learning and identifies how pedagogical approaches can lead to effective practice. It also reflects the work of Freire (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and its importance in reclaiming practitioners' autonomy in initiating and enacting effective pedagogies. Freire's work suggests that the act of teaching, learning and interacting is not a mechanical process but one that involves human relationships and interactions, as discussed in section **6.2.1.** Therefore, it is important for practitioners to recognise the significance of responding to children's voices.

However, as previously stated, the findings suggest there is little evidence of serious reconsideration of planning to enable young children to feel more included (Nina, p.185; Yvette, p.193). Furthermore, Selina (p.188) responded by saying that the children's comments were unsurprising and that she knew the most effective pedagogical activities to encourage children's learning. However, Farquar and White (2014) maintain that part of the significance of being a Reception class learner is to become self-effective and manage learning and participation for school life. Hence, it would seem appropriate for children to be more involved in decision-making about their pedagogical activities, if they are to develop these important skills.

Moreover, there is evidence to support the notion that if practitioners collaborate with children, then the children's self-esteem and motivation is increased (see Furrer and Skinner, 2003; Cornelius-White, 2007). If the pedagogical activities presented by the practitioners are too challenging, frustration and disappointment might be experienced, which often manifests as low self-concept and a lack of self-confidence. Observations of Zara (p.176-7), when she found the work too difficult; Nathan (p.178), when he considered that he was not very good at something; and Henry (p.161), when he withdrew and lacked the willingness and persistence to complete a task successfully, reveal examples of children displaying low levels of well-being and involvement. These instances appear to support the need for practitioners to collaborate and engage with the children's voices if they are to perceive themselves as more included.

Additionally, some practitioners perceived the child as too young to be able to offer insight into their perspectives of inclusion (Tiffany pp.186-7). Kangas *et al.'s* (2016) research concurs, revealing that some practitioners believe that three-to-five year olds cannot make independent initiatives. Their view appears to represent the image of the becoming child as an apprenticeship for adulthood (see James and Prout, 1997). Even where practices in Riverside Infants were in place to encourage the voicing of children's views, they were not necessarily deemed effective ('*It makes it very clear what, what is a good way, and even though this way gets a few not quite right, even that makes me*

think yeah', Anastasia, p.195). This has resonance with research by Hill *et al.* (2004), who maintain that a number of policy-makers accept the importance of giving children a voice when decisions are being made, but indicate that the influence from their accounts remains minimal. Kelley (2006) also contends that many child participation processes, while attempting to hear the voices of children, often fail to respond to their views.

Nevertheless, Anastasia reflected on the children's comments and suggested that there could be changes next year *'We'll really have more of that, um evidence everywhere and just include them a bit more in that learning about how they want to do it more'.* By suggesting an adaption to current practice in response to the children's perceptions of inclusion, Anastasia reflects Mayall's (2006) view that there has been a shift towards greater respect for children's own views, experiences, and rights, during the last twenty years. However, in my study, Anastasia's views were in the minority.

The majority of practitioners demonstrated that responding to children's views was not always evident in the Reception class (Nina p.185; Selina p.188), despite the recognition of a 'listening pedagogy' (Rinaldi, 2005) in early years education. The practitioners stated that it was necessary for children to learn to conform to certain pedagogical approaches in activities, as they would be required to work in these ways as they progressed through school. Whilst this perception appears to indicate that the practitioners did not understood the importance of affording audience and influence to the child (Lundy, 2007), it also raises questions about the appropriateness of pedagogical activities that imply structure and uniformity. Nutbrown (2012) makes reference to practitioners' pedagogical understanding of an effective education for all children, which affords equity and participation. Some authors suggest that the structure and organisation of schools, and the pedagogical practices of teachers, are paramount to the success of inclusion (see Corbett, 2001; Nutbrown and Clough, 2006).

Therefore, it appears that the ways in which the practitioners in my study think about young children, may require a shift in reasoning to explore children's perspectives and to listen to their views about their perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities. Moreover, it necessitates practitioners to reflect on their ethical and moral dimensions, since attitudes and beliefs are embedded in the way practitioners engage with children (see Woods *et al.*, 1997; Day, 2004). This view is supported by the findings of Florian and Black-Hawkins (2010) who conclude that it is how teachers address the issue of inclusion in their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about learners and learning, which ultimately determines their pedagogical approach to learning. Furthermore, they purport that an inclusive pedagogical approach offers a subtle, but important, shift in how teachers might respond to individual differences.

The views of Selina (p.188) and Yvette (p.193), which indicate that they considered they knew the most suitable way to enable children to learn, reflect a practitioner-led pedagogical approach that is in contrast to the philosophy of early years education. This philosophy is largely predicated on principles of sociocultural and interactionist models of learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Roberts-Holmes, 2012). An example of a pedagogical approach in Scotland known as 'active learning' (Scottish Executive 2007), offers opportunities to explore the scope for mutual bridging of meaning and mutual structuring of opportunities (Stephen *et al.*, 2009). Here, practitioners argue that active learning is a more inclusive approach, since all children are able to participate in the curriculum to some degree. However, the practitioners tended to talk about change in terms of how they were expected to structure or organise learning activities differently in their classrooms, rather than in terms of changing their ways of interacting with children. Whilst this change in pedagogical practice is to be commended if it responds to the children's voices, it may also be important to consider whether all children's voices are heard or whether some are more dominant than others.

Moreover, Hattie (2003) maintains that it is not the strategies or pedagogical approach themselves that make learning inclusive, rather it is the ways in

which teachers use the strategies that make a difference. This notion could be extended to consider how the adoption of a democratic pedagogical approach, which allows for children's autonomy in their learning, may enable practitioners to demonstrate that they have valued, and are responding to, the individuality and diversity of each child.

Further explications for why the practitioners did not engage with children's voices, may emerge from constraints with the English education system. An observation of James (p.165) working in a group activity, emphasises how the rudimentary way of grouping children according to perceived ability can be less than inclusive. The practitioners stated that they employed this form of grouping in order to teach the children according to their perceived ability (fieldnotes), however, some (Lydia p.191) recognised that they could possibly alter their practice to acknowledge the importance the children placed on friendships. This corresponds with Nind's (2005, p.4) perspective that differentiation becomes a valuable strategy for supporting the learning of everyone when it is used in an "elastic and creative" way, rather than as a "simplistic linear" means of sorting children as more or less able.

However, Hart *et al.* (2007) illuminate the tension between adopting pedagogical practices that belie determinist beliefs and responding to the external judgements of bodies such as Ofsted. They identify that in England, school inspectors are trained to judge the extent to which teaching is differentiated by ability level (Ofsted, 2000), despite the large body of research that documents its negative effects on students self-perception (see Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Ireson and Hallam, 2001). This may explain why many practitioners still adopt the teaching of children in groups according to perceived ability.

Further evidence of external pressures came from a practitioner (Nina p.185) who stated that an activity took the necessary length of time for a concept or skill to be taught. An explication of this comment could reveal a growing concern among practitioners that they are required to keep teaching concepts

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until they have been acquired by the children. A Reception class teacher, in research by Robert-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p.610), commented that he attempted to find the balance between the discourse of institutional performance and the needs of a three-year old, referring to "pushing the information in … rather than developing meaningful relationships". Whilst the majority of practitioners in my study did not explicitly refer to the tension between school-based performativity and young children's appropriate learning needs, it is possible that decisions made around the planning of whole class and small group activities were predicated on perceived ability, emerging from the need to demonstrate pupil progress.

Since my study was conducted during the final term before the children moved into Year 1, it is conceivable that I observed more formalised pedagogical approaches within the activities. Indeed Lydia (p.187) commented that as the year progressed the children spent longer sitting on the carpet listening to the teacher, which, based on my findings, does not appear to be the most inclusive way for all children to learn. Some authors (see Pugh, 2010; Rose and Rogers, 2012; Faulkner and Coates, 2013) refer to a greater formalisation of the early years curriculum in England, with increasing emphasis on educational attainments, assessment and learning goals. Explicitly written and reinforced in the EYFS curriculum document (DfE, 2014, p.5), is the aim of promoting "teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness'" and "that the balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults, to help children prepare for more formal learning, ready for Year 1"(DfE, 2014, p.9). Indeed, there is research to show that the pressure for schools to ensure that children meet nationally prescribed educational targets is so great that the pedagogy of supporting their learning during the early years is increasingly formalised and academic, relegating early years education to a type of 'prep'-school (see Aubrey, 2004; Pugh, 2010; Bradbury, 2012; Smith, 2012; Faulkner and Coates, 2013). The overall concern, therefore, is that the focus on children's well-being and holistic educational experience, and feasibly their perceptions of inclusion, becomes lost in the drive towards targets and attainment.

Whilst Anastasia (pp.183-4) appeared to reflect the mandate that children are required to conform to certain diktats if they are to be able to make good progress in life, she also acknowledged the need to engage children more in their learning. This appears to reflect the view of Genishi and Dyson (2009), who highlight the apparent disconnect between the realities of early years practice and government policies. Their research reveals the challenges faced by practitioners in early years who struggle to balance the pressures of impending academic assessments with their pedagogical choices, in order to respond to the demands of an authorised curriculum. Researchers have argued that within the context of a prescribed curriculum and standardised educational goals, the learning environment needs to take adequate account of individual differences and children's diverse learning dispositions (see Genishi and Goodwin, 2008; Goodwin *et al.*, 2008; Stires and Genishi, 2008; Ang, 2010; Petriwskyj, 2010).

6.4   Summary

This chapter addressed the main research questions and presented a discussion on the overall understanding of children's perceived notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities. It postulated that the dimensions, which appeared to be of most importance for children to perceive themselves as included, were: belonging and relationships; and democratic pedagogies. Finally, it presented a discourse regarding the differing views of the practitioners. It considered their responses in light of other research conducted into practitioners' thoughts on engaging with children's views, and how they were positioned within the current educational drive towards attainment, assessment and learning goals. The next chapter considers the implications of the discussion and makes a reflection on the overall study.

Chapter 7:   Conclusion, reflections and recommendations

This study explored children's perceived notions of inclusion within their pedagogical activities. Furthermore, it reflected on how practitioners considered that children's perceptions could inform their pedagogical practice. The research was conducted in the Reception classes of an infant school and a primary school, using fieldnotes; observations; group interviews; and individual interviews with both children and practitioners. It enabled me to gain insight into the study's three research questions:

- In what ways do children perceive pedagogical activities as promoting inclusion in the Reception class?
- In what ways do children perceive pedagogical activities as hindering inclusion in the Reception class?
- What are practitioners' thoughts on the idea of listening to children's views to inform their pedagogical practice?

The final chapter of this thesis reflects on the contribution and originality of the research and 'fuzzy generalizations' (Bassey, 1999) are offered as ways to consider how this study might be applicable in wider contexts. A reflection of the research process is undertaken and recommendations for possible future research are suggested. The chapter concludes with implications for education and practice.

7.1   Contribution and originality of the research

This research could be considered distinctive both its findings and its design. The contribution and originality of the findings are considered first, concluding with the 'fuzzy generalizations' of the study. The originality of the design is also contemplated.

The findings of this research study are distinctive because they offer a new understanding of children's perceived notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities. The first of the study's findings relates to the significance children

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placed on belonging and relationships. Discussions of the importance of these concepts have been presented in the literature review (see Bowlby, 1979; Hagerty *et al.,* 1996; Yuval-Davies, 2006). What is original within my research, is the association it makes between children's senses of belonging and their perceived notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities through the relationships they make with others (practitioner or child). In so doing, this study connects Nagel's (2011) description of belonging as a constant reproduction of boundaries and borders, with Messiou's (2006b) notion of marginalisation as being outside the circle. Both give attention to the confines within which children are expected to work, and both recognise that they are mutable.

Furthermore, this study's findings extend the research about belonging and relationships, which has predominantly been conducted with older children, or focused on behaviour, performance and/or achievement. It not only contemplates another dimension in regard to belonging and relationships by considering children's perceived notions of inclusion, it also centres on the voices of much younger children.

A further distinctive finding is the connection between democratic pedagogies and inclusion. The previous chapter presented an argument for a democratic pedagogy that responds to children's interests and affords them autonomy. This offers a new critique of child-centred pedagogies, which have traditionally argued for children to have free choices about their activities (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2004). Building on Wood's (2014) notion that child-centred pedagogies do not always empower children, especially those who do not have the necessary skills to solve social and relational problems, my research offers an insight into how a child-centred pedagogical approach could actually marginalise these children. If children are provided with pedagogical activities that required them to make decisions based on their interests and preferred ways of working, it is possible, based on Wood's research, that they could perceive themselves to be less included if they do not have the necessary skills to make these decisions.

Therefore, by adopting democratic pedagogies, it is conceived that children would be able to move between structured and supportive practitioner-directed activities, and more spontaneous child-initiated ones. The key is that the child is able to select which of these s/he requires in that particular moment. By engaging with their voices, the findings of this study offer insight into ways of providing pedagogical activities that respond to children's perceived notions of inclusion. Furthermore, these findings extend the awareness of much younger children's perceptions of inclusion and democratic pedagogies, than have been presented in the literature thus far.

Finally in regards to the contribution and originality of the study's findings, some 'fuzzy generalisations' are presented. Bassey (1999, p.52) states,

> A fuzzy generalization carries an element of uncertainty. It reports that something has happened in one place and that it may also happen elsewhere. There is a possibility but no surety. There is an invitation to 'try it and see if the same happens for you'.

Such a definition allows for some tentative suggestions to be made about how the findings may be generalised, but it is accepted that these are merely possibilities and should not be regarded with certainty. However, that is not to negate the importance of considering the perspectives of the participants in this study, whilst reflecting on what they could mean for further research.

Therefore, I propose four fuzzy generalisations:

1. If children are given more autonomy in their choice of content, context or mode of delivery in pedagogical activities, it seems that they will feel more included.
2. It is likely that the adoption of democratic pedagogies could lead to children perceiving themselves as more included in their pedagogical activities.
3. Engaging with children's voices in the Reception class, appears to offer new ways of thinking about how they can be included in their pedagogical activities.
4. It seems that legislation and regulatory bodies have an impact on the pedagogical practices adopted by practitioners in the Reception class.

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The second notion to consider in this study, relates to its methodological contribution and originality. This is apparent in its adaptation of the LIS (Laevers, 1994), which provided the opportunity to analyse children's well-being and involvement from a different perspective. Much of the research cited in **Chapter 3, (**see Ebbeck *et al.*, 2012; Kishimoto, 2012) adopted a quantitative approach in the application of the LIS. Where my research differs is that it employed a qualitative stance that centred on the language within the scale, rather than the numerical figures that could be assigned. This is perceived as a positive extension to the use of the LIS, since it enables the children to express their perceived notions of inclusion in the different pedagogical activities. This change in approach could signify a shift in the purpose of using such tools, in the assessment of children in the early years.

Children in the early years are subject to assessment of their learning, and evidence of their progress must be demonstrated in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) (Standards and Testing Agency, 2016). The main purpose of the EYFSP is to provide a reliable, valid and accurate assessment of children at the end of the EYFS. Furthermore, it provides an accurate set of national data relating to levels of child development. Whilst the EYFSP relies predominantly on data collected from observations of, and interaction in, a range of activities (Appendix N), I assert that the reference to levels within national data sets, implies a reliance on quantitative data. This has strong resonance with the research studies cited previously that adopted a quantitative approach to using the LIS, despite its obvious potential to utilise the qualitative statements to record children's verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Therefore, I maintain that my research offers new ways of thinking about how data can be collected. It also emphasises the importance that can be ascribed to qualitative data, in understanding what matters to children.

Another methodological contribution and originality of this research was the use of photographs in the diamond ranking activities. Research by Thomas and O'Kane (1998) and Clark *et al*. (2009) both employed photographs in their research, but they were conducting research with older children, Furthermore, the way in which my research makes connections between the different tools

for data collection (fieldnotes; observations; group; and individual interviews), creates a unique and distinct picture of children's perceptions of inclusion.

7.2   Reflections on the research process

This section reflects on some of the limitations of the research and how they have been addressed. Although I have acknowledged the notion of researcher bias in the methodology chapter, it is important to recognise its possible influence at the conclusion of my study. As a primary teacher with more than twenty years' experience, it is possible that I had preconceived ideas and expectations of what I might observe in the schools, which could then be applied to my interpretations of the data. However, I maintain that the constructivist approach I applied to this study, ameliorated the possibility. The study's aim was to consider practitioners' thoughts on engaging with children's views and whether there were any factors that influenced their decisions, rather than to prove whether the practitioners' experiences were similar to, or different from, my own.

Reflecting on the research process, I became aware of some limitations and possible weaknesses in regards to the methods themselves. Firstly, utilising the LIS (Laevers, 1994) offered a convenient starting position for collecting data that related to the body language and facial expressions of the children. However, as the data collection progressed, I was cognisant of its limiting factors. The language of the scale prescribed the data itself, which in turn constrained the analysis. If similar research was conducted in the future, I would record the data arising from unstructured observations, which would offer richer data in terms of how the children engaged with both their learning environment and their peers.

Furthermore, the use of the scenarios also presented some methodological difficulties. By selecting pictures that portrayed children in different pedagogical activities where they were observed as being left out by other children or not knowing what to do, I acknowledge that I was leading the

children towards my own conceptualisation of inclusion, and thus the research became more adult-led than child-led. If I was conducting similar research in the future, I would use pictures or photographs again as a means to engage children in discussions about complex concepts; however, I would be more mindful to select examples that offered the prospect to discuss how children perceived themselves to be included in different pedagogical activities without the presence of children in specific scenarios where they appeared not be included. Thus, the research would offer the possibility to be directed by the children.

My reflections also led me to consider the impact of the relationship I developed with the children. Whilst visiting each of the schools for three days a week over a six week period, I was accepted as a member of the class, regularly being called upon to conduct everyday tasks that would be expected of one of the practitioners. This facilitated the development of a comfortable relationship with the children, which enabled them to feel at their ease during their interviews. Furthermore, the relationships I fostered allowed me to alter my methods and questions according to the children's responses. I perceive this to be a strength of the study, nevertheless, I acknowledge it could also be interpreted as a limitation. Whilst I was undertaking timed observations, the children would often ask me to assist them with their work, which presented me with a dilemma. If I was a member of the class, as the children perceived, then one of the values of the school was that I would help the child. However, at the same time, I was also mindful of the need to collect my data. There were no easy answers in these instances, and decisions had to be made on an individual case basis. Very occasionally I had to disregard my data collection to support a child, even if it meant overlooking significant data.

Another possible limitation of the study could be the length of time allocated to the data collection. It could be construed that six weeks was an inadequate period in which to collect sufficient data for analysis. However, I contend that spending three days a week in each of the schools for the duration of the data collection period, enabled me to collect rich data from a range of sources. Related to this limitation, is the point that the research took place in only two

schools. Once more, this does not detract from the significance of the conclusions that have been drawn, however, it is important to note that the research may have been stronger in terms of transferability, if it had been carried out in a larger number of schools and over a longer period of time.

7.3   Recommendations for future research

Reflecting on the findings of this study, further research could be carried out in order to explore more deeply, the reasons behind the children's perceived notions of inclusion with regards to belonging and relationships. Such research could explore why children placed such importance of this dimension, focusing more specifically on the connections between belonging, relationships and inclusion. This study has suggested some ways in which the two concepts are related, however, it is envisaged that future research could focus more closely on how children's senses of belonging influence their notions of inclusion. Furthermore, it could investigate whether pedagogical activities that emphasise the relationships between children and children, and children and adults, enhance children's perceived notions of inclusion.

Additionally, future research could also seek to identify if there are any differences in perceived notions of inclusion, as a consequence of factors such as: gender; experiences of pre-school education; age on starting school; and length of time at school. My research identifies some tentative differences between boys and girls in terms of their perceptions of inclusion in whole class activities, however, this was not explored as it was not within the scope of my research to focus on gender differences.

The second dimension to emerge from the findings, offers opportunities to explore whether democratic pedagogies are prevalent in the early years of other countries. Examples have been presented in this study that suggest there is evidence of its occurrence in the curricula and frameworks in some countries (Australia; New Zealand; Iceland), however there is scope for further

exploration. In so doing, further research could emphasise the importance of engaging with young children's voices about matters that are of importance to them and situate them at the foreground of their educational experiences in relation to perceived notions of inclusion.

The final foci of this study was to explore practitioners' thoughts about listening to children's voices in order to inform their practice. Its findings appear to suggest that there is a conflict between what the practitioners consider to be inclusive practice in terms of listening to children, and the need to teach specific curricular content. Further research could explore whether these views are more widely held, whilst at the same time raising the profile of the importance of engaging with children's voices about matters that are of significance to them.

This also has resonance with one of the findings of my study, which notes that the NQT at Oak Ridge Primary was unaware that young children could express themselves so clearly, despite the notion that more attention has been given to engaging with children's voices in recent years. Therefore, it would be of interest to determine whether this view is expressed by a larger sample of NQTs, with a view to raising its profile within Initial Teacher Training programmes. I have already discussed including a session on engaging with children's voices in these programmes, with the Subject Head of Teacher Education at the university in which I am employed. She has agreed to include this within the provision, commencing in September 2017.

Finally, further research could be conducted in a wider range of schools, for example, ones which may not be identified as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted. This research could explore whether the dimensions identified as important to children's perceived notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities in my study, are also present in schools deemed not to be as 'good' in Ofsted terms. Whilst I recognise that the terms 'good' and 'outstanding' are simply a measure of the judgement of the external body (Ofsted) at a given time, they are a starting point for identifying schools that are deemed to be of differing standards. Furthermore, schools could also be selected from different

catchment areas or local authorities, this provide differing demographic intakes and school policies.

7.4 Implications for education and practice

The findings from this research study highlight the importance of engaging with children in a meaningful way in order to understand their perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities. Many children were very clear about perceiving themselves to be included when they were either working or playing with another child or adult. This is of significance for practitioners when they are undertaking their planning. Rather than organising groups according to perceived ability, it would be more inclusive to allow for children to select with whom they worked. Thus, it is entirely possible that children would have higher levels of well-being and involvement, which could increase their perceived notions of inclusion.

Enabling children to select with whom they work resonates with the second implication for education and practice. My findings indicate that children perceive inclusion in relation to their individual interests. If practitioners consider this when planning pedagogical activities, children could have more autonomy in the choices they make about their learning. With specific reference to the early years, Gestwicki (2006) states that children should be given opportunities to learn through activities that respond to their interests and curiosity in accordance with their maturational developmental level. Both of these implications for education and practice indicate the need for practitioners to engage with the voices of young children. This could then have benefits for all children in terms of perceived notions of inclusion and opportunities for learning.

However, comments from the practitioners appear to indicate that there is a need for ongoing professional development if they are to understand how their actions impact on children's perceived notions of inclusion. Some of the

practitioners made reference to the need to teach a specific skill and it taking as long as it required for the concept to be understood (Nina; Anastasia), despite reading children's comments that they did not perceive this approach to be inclusive. The resistance of another practitioner to consider that there might be alternative ways of teaching concepts (Selina), further supports this suggestion. By engaging in professional development that emphasises the importance of engaging with children's voices, it may become possible for practitioners to respond to children's comments and thus increase their perceived notions of inclusion.

A further implication from this research concerns the engagement with children's voices. Whilst my study centred on children's perceived notions of inclusion in pedagogical activities, a teacher from Riverside Infants (Anastasia) alluded to how the approach I adopted could be applied to her practice. She commented that they already had '*children's voice wheels',* but she acknowledged that she was not sure if they were really accessing the children's voices. She remarked that they could create more systematic opportunities for accessing children's perceptions in reviews, every six weeks. The teacher from Oak Ridge Primary (Tiffany) concurred, stating that they already used 'learning journey' books and that my approach would provide an excellent opportunity to use photographs of the children's work to discuss their perceptions of inclusion.

7.5   Concluding remarks

This study sought to understand children's perceived notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities in the Reception class. It explicated the importance of engaging with children's voices and reflected on what the observations and interviews revealed, in relation to previously published work. The findings of the research have been presented in terms of fuzzy generalisations, and implications for future education and practice have been suggested as a result of the practitioner's reflections on the children's comments.

More importantly, my study contributes to, and extends, the current understanding in two key areas. Firstly, it raises the profile of engaging with the voices of young children in general, and secondly, it illuminates children's perceived notions of inclusion in their pedagogical activities, in the two schools where the study was conducted. Despite the acknowledgement by practitioners in each of the schools, that children's views were already being considered, they were cognisant that more work could be done to ensure that the children's voices formed part of their decision-making in the planning process. This is of significance at a time when there is a growing emphasis on children's preparation for formal schooling in the EYFS (DfE, 2014). Such an initiative could potentially lead to practitioners developing pedagogical activities that respond to a specified curriculum and identified learning outcomes, rather than the needs of the children they teach.

Finally, by placing children at the forefront of their education, this research enables practitioners to reflect on alternative ways on listening and responding to children's voices. It also emphasises the notion that children are very knowledgeable about matters that are of importance to them, and that opportunities should be provided for them to express their views in as many ways as possible.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Appendix A Children's quotes shown to practitioners

Practitioners' questions using children's quotes at Riverside Infants

When I interviewed the children about their perceptions of the types of pedagogical (learning) experiences they felt most/least included in, there were some themes that emerged that I'd like to share with you and get your views.

1. When I asked the children why they felt most included in their learning activities, these were some of the responses I received.

I like working with other people.

Because I don't want to be on my own.

Because they're my friends!

Making them with A. Because of .. he's my friend.

Cos he's my best friend.

Because other children are doing it and I am too.

I work on my own. So no other children can't spoil the model.

Cos I don't like doing stuff on my own.

When I'm on my own

What are your views on the above?

Can such statements/children's views, such as the above, inform your thinking with regards to developing your pedagogical practice?

In what ways? Can you give examples?

2. Another theme to emerge was one in response to my question about why some of the children selected whole class or group work as when they felt most included.

Because I get help.

I know what to do.

Cos you put your hand up.

Cos it makes us all learn together.

Working with Mrs Percival.

Cos you get to learn about four strokes, two strokes.

How do these comments make you reflect on the decisions about your pedagogical practice?

3. Other responses that emerged from the question about which types of learning made the children feel less included were:

Cos I don't like doing it. Cos it's too um .. cos it's too boring cos it takes a long time.

I just don't like playing groups. Cos it takes so long. And it's so long to choose me.

Cos it's boring. Cos I hate going outside, cos it's so .. I thought it was going to rain (whispers). And it's freezing outside.

Reflecting on these quotes, do they tell you anything about inclusive activities in general in the reception class?

Would you do anything differently based on these comments and why?

Are there any barriers or constraints to inclusion in your planning of activities?

4. Finally, I wonder if you could tell me if you find any of this information useful in regards to your pedagogical practice. In what way?

Do you think these views could be included in the way you develop your pedagogical practice? In what ways? Can you give examples?

Teachers' questions using children's quotes at Oak Ridge Primary School

When I interviewed the children about their perceptions of the types of pedagogical (learning) experiences they felt most/least included in, there were some themes that emerged that I'd like to share with you and get your views.

1. When I asked the children why they felt most included in their learning activities, these were some of the responses I received.

Playing with my friends helps me work and I don't forget anything

Cos it's really fun and you get to do things

Cos I can breathe and have fresh air

I just want to have a go and see if I can do it

Because I get to play with more friends outside than inside. It makes me feel more happy

I like to play with friends cos they're friendly and kind and they share

Cos my friends are there when I need them

Learning with other children

Learning by myself. Cos it makes me feel happy

Cos she's .. cos she's so nice and lets you do anything and lets you go outside to do it

I like sitting quietly cos it don't make my ears hurt

Umm .. It so no one can see I'm painting and I can concentrate and it's not noisy

I like learning with other people … cos sometimes I get stuck on work … they help you and they tell you things

2. Another theme to emerge was one in response to my question about why some of the children selected whole class or group work as when they felt most included.

Teachers help us do our diaries

Because it makes me learn how to write and it makes me better how to write as well

It's because I can learn new things to do

Cos I like the things what's on the board that Mrs Wylie draws

Learning things off her (the teacher)

Because it's more important to do the jobs that Miss Wylie tells you to do

From listening to the teacher and, and then you do, then you get to be a grown-up

When we do all these things it just makes me happy cos .. co I love doing them things.

We learn sounds and do Teddy bears and letters

If you see the whiteboard you handwriting because you, you got to do your handwriting really neatly

She helps me do writing when I get stuck

Because I was listening to the teacher and what she says

Because she helps me emm ….. the words that we try to write

Sometimes I learn with my teacher when I'm doing my diary

How do these comments make you reflect on the decisions about your pedagogical practice?

3. Other responses that emerged from the question about which types of learning made the children feel less included were:

And I'm also worried what letters I'm doing in my diary

Because I don't get to talk too much people …. bit lonely

Because when I go in there nobody wants to play with me so I just play on my own with the animals

Because it's a bit boring. Because you just have to do writing on it and it makes you feel a bit tired.

You can't play with your friends when you're painting. You can talk but you can't play with your friends

Cos the carpet's so, so boring when you sit on it it's just makes you move cos it's spiky and it's um its uncomfortable a little bit

Because sometimes if you're sitting on the carpet and you're talking you might get to name moved or you might sit on the red mat or any mat.

And I like to do painting but I'm not an artist. I'm good but I'm not a very good artist

Cos sometimes we run around in PE and I don't like to run around cos I can't run fast

Because sometimes when we are playing Lego on the carpet people just want the blocks. When people don't share

I felt a bit worried when I didn't know how to write custard on the list and because I'm not sure what to do

Cos we have to do writing and I don't really, really like to do it

I told you another time I didn't feel very included when we write it on the board........ And I don't really like doing it. It feels a bit hard and tricky. That's how

Because I like learning when I'm not on the carpet and I'm drawing in the conservatory

Reflecting on these quotes, do they tell you anything about inclusive activities in general in the reception class?

Would you do anything differently based on these comments and why?

Are there any barriers or constraints to inclusion in your planning of activities?

4. Finally, I wonder if you could tell me if you find any of this information useful in regards to your pedagogical practice. In what way?

Do you think these views could be included in the way you develop your pedagogical practice? In what ways? Can you give examples?

Appendix A

Appendix B Leuven Involvement Scale (LIS)

The Leuven Scale for Well-being

Level	Well-being	Signals
1	Extremely Low	The child clearly shows signs of discomfort such as crying or screaming. They may look dejected, sad, frightened or angry. The child does not respond to the environment, avoids contact and is withdrawn. The child may behave aggressively, hurting him/herself or others.
2	Low	The posture, facial expression and actions indicate that the child does not feel at ease. However, the signals are less explicit than under level 1 or the sense of discomfort is not expressed the whole time.
3	Moderate	The child has a neutral posture. Facial expression and posture show little or no emotion. There are no signs indicating sadness or pleasure, comfort or discomfort.
4	High	The child shows obvious signs of satisfaction (as listed under level 5). However, these signals are not constantly present with the same intensity.
5	Extremely High	The child looks happy and cheerful, smiles, cries out with pleasure. They may be lively and full of energy. Actions can be spontaneous and expressive. The child may talk to him/herself, play with sounds, hum, sing. The child appears relaxed and does not show any signs of stress or tension. He /she is open and accessible to the environment. The child expresses self-confidence and self-assurance.

The Leuven Scale for Involvement

Level	Well-being	Signals
1	**Extremely Low**	Activity is simple, repetitive and passive. The child seems absent and displays no energy. They may stare into space or look around to see what others are doing.
2	**Low**	Frequently interrupted activity. The child will be engaged in the activity for some of the time they are observed, but there will be moments of non-activity when they will stare into space, or be distracted by what is going on around.
3	**Moderate**	Mainly continuous activity. The child is busy with the activity but at a fairly routine level and there are few signs of real involvement. They make some progress with what they are doing but don't show much energy and concentration and can be easily distracted.
4	**High**	Continuous activity with intense moments. The child' activity has intense moments and at all times they seem involved. They are not easily distracted.
5	**Extremely High**	The child shows continuous and intense activity revealing the greatest involvement. They are concentrated, creative, energetic and persistent throughout nearly all the observed period.

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Appendix C Examples of observations of different pedagogical activities using the language of the LIS

Name of School: Riverside Infants   **Child:** Henry

Date: 7ᵗʰ May

Activity	Well-being/ Involvement	Observation of child
Fantasy – castles (outside)	5 5	Smiles, happy, relaxed, lively, cries out in pleasure, self-assured, confident. Concentrated, persists with activity, continuous and intense activity, energetic, creative.
Making snack - toast (with TA) (classroom)	3 3	Sustained concentration. Serious, persistent, talks to other children. Not easily distracted. Talks to himself and others. Self-confident.
Counting/Money (whole class) (classroom)	2 1	The posture, facial expression and actions indicate the child is ill at ease. Doesn't join in with the activity. Looks for opportunities to move away from the activity. Shows no interest at all.
Days of week (small group with TA) (classroom)	5 2	Relaxed, happy, cheerful, lively, full of energy, self-confident. Very short attention span, looks into space, very easily distracted.
Visit from vet (whole class) (classroom)	3 4	Initially negative facial expression, arms crossed, changed to a smile during observed period. Shows some signs of enjoyment. Fairly focused, makes comments to adult. Listening intently. Maintains concentration when other children are talking.

Outdoors - role play (outside)	5 4		Talks to himself and others, confident and self-assured. Creative, energetic, persistent, not easily distracted.
Workshop (classroom)	4	5	Makes noises to himself, looks for reassurance and approval, sings, dances, relaxed. Persists to complete task, not easily distracted.
Outdoors - playing with tyres (outside)	5	5	Smiling, lively, full of energy, cries out with pleasure. Persists with activity, intense moments of involvement, energetic, creative, persists throughout the entire observed period.
PE - balancing bean bags (classroom)	3 4		Neutral expression, no signs of distress or pleasure, no emotion. Concentrated, focused on task, not easily distracted by others, persists with task, not much energy.
Visit - fire station (outside)	5 5		Smiles, waves, calls out in pleasure, hopping from one foot to another, lively. Concentrated throughout observed period, not easily distracted by others, persists with task, energetic.
Book corner (classroom)	5 5		Relaxed, neutral expression, lively, self-assured, no signs of stress or tension. Concentrated throughout observed period, not easily distracted by others, persists with task, some intense activity, creative, energetic.
Outdoors - train track (outside)	5 5		Relaxed, neutral expression, lively, self-assured, no signs of stress or tension. Concentrated throughout observed period, not easily distracted by others, persists with task, some intense activity, creative, energetic.

Name of School: Riverside Infants   **Child:** Phoebe

Date: 7th May

Activity	Well-being/ Involvement	Observation of child
Literacy (small group) (classroom)	5 5	Smiles, relaxed, lively, self-assured, confident. Concentrated, persists with activity throughout observed period, not easily distracted, continuous and intense activity.
Kitchen area - cooking, home activities (classroom)	5 5	Sustained concentration, intense involvement. Smiles obvious signs of enjoyment. Interacts with adults and child. Relaxed, self-confident. Creative use of equipment.
Counting (whole class) (classroom)	3 3	Neutral facial expression. No signs of discomfort. Some initial concentration, but then easily distracted by surroundings. Drifts in and out of concentration.
Painting (classroom)	5 5	Talks to herself, energetic, creative, smiles, relaxed, self-assured and confident. Persists with activity despite interruptions for other children and distractions around her,
PE - balancing bean bags (classroom)	4 4	Smiling, relaxed, happy, no signs of stress or tension, open to the environment, no such intensity. Focused, concentrated, persists with the task throughout the activity, some energy, not easily distracted.
Outside - small world animals (outside)	5 5	Smiles, relaxed, self-confident, assured lively. Concentrated, persists with task throughout the observed period, energetic, creative.
Visit - fire station (outside)	3/4 4	Neutral expression, some signs of stress or tension, then smiles, laughs. Mainly continuous activity at a

		routine level, persists with the task throughout the activity, some intense moments, not easily distracted.
Small world (classroom)	5 5	Smiles, laughs, relaxed, talks to herself, lively, self-assured. Focused, concentrated, persists with the task throughout the activity, continuous and intense moments, not easily distracted, creative.
Phonics - role play (classroom)	5 5	Smiles, laughs, relaxed, talks to herself, lively, self-assured, actions are spontaneous and expressive. Focused, concentrated, persists with the task throughout the activity, continuous and intense moments, not easily distracted, creative.
Numbers (small group) (classroom)	5 5	Smiles, relaxed, happy, self-assured, confident, lively. Very focused, concentrated, persists with activity, continuous and intense moments, not distracted.

Appendix D Scenarios to introduce concept of inclusion
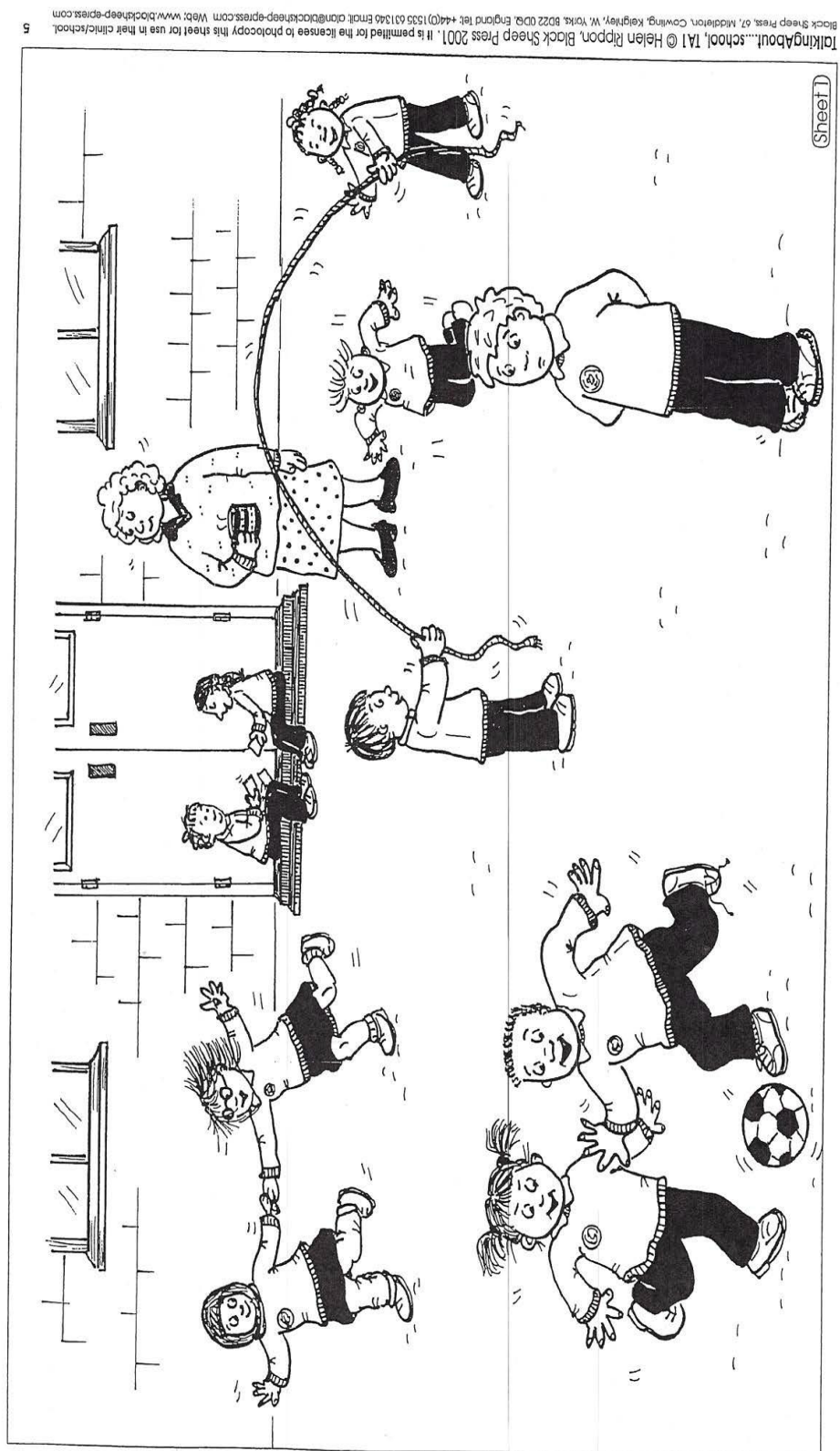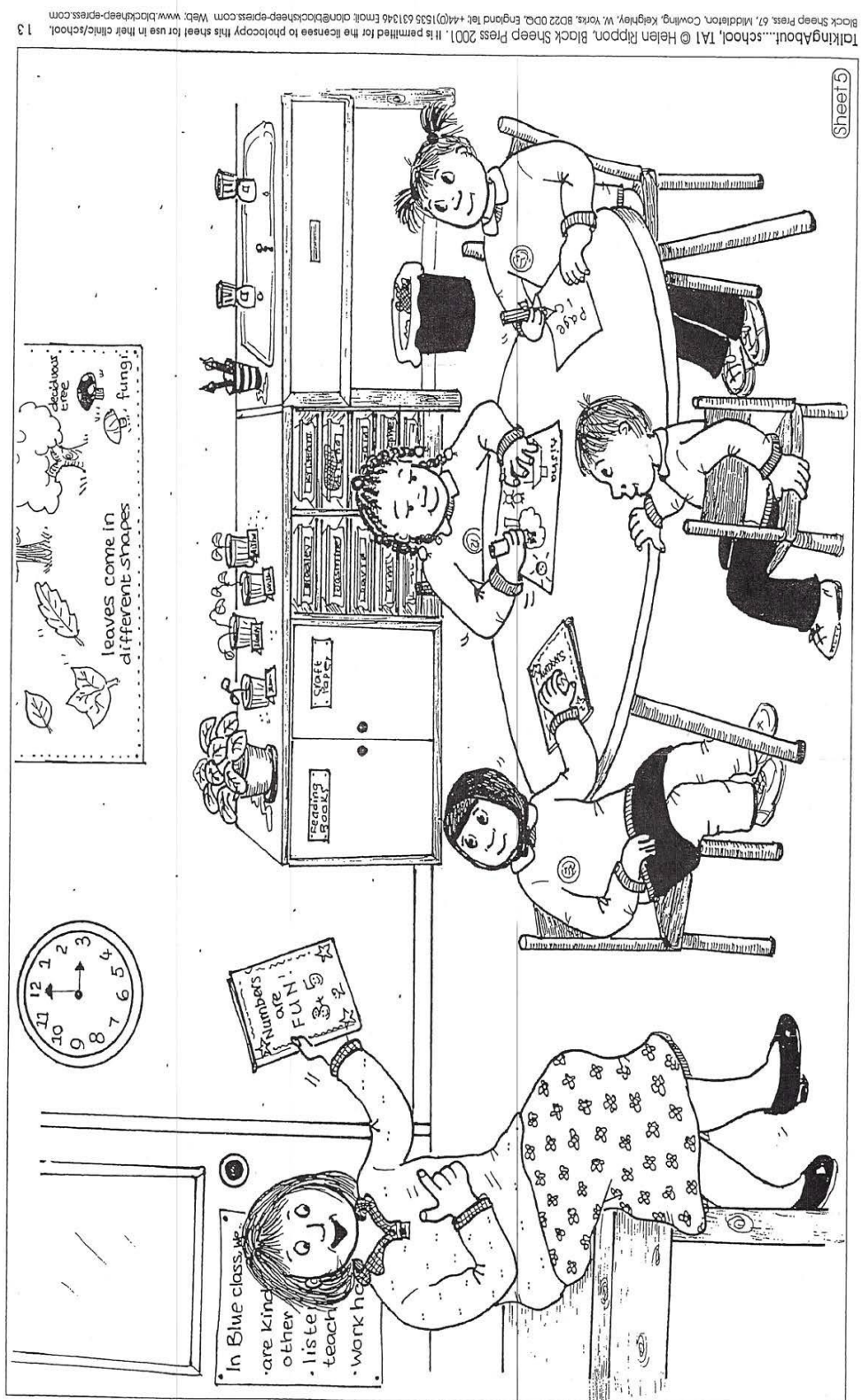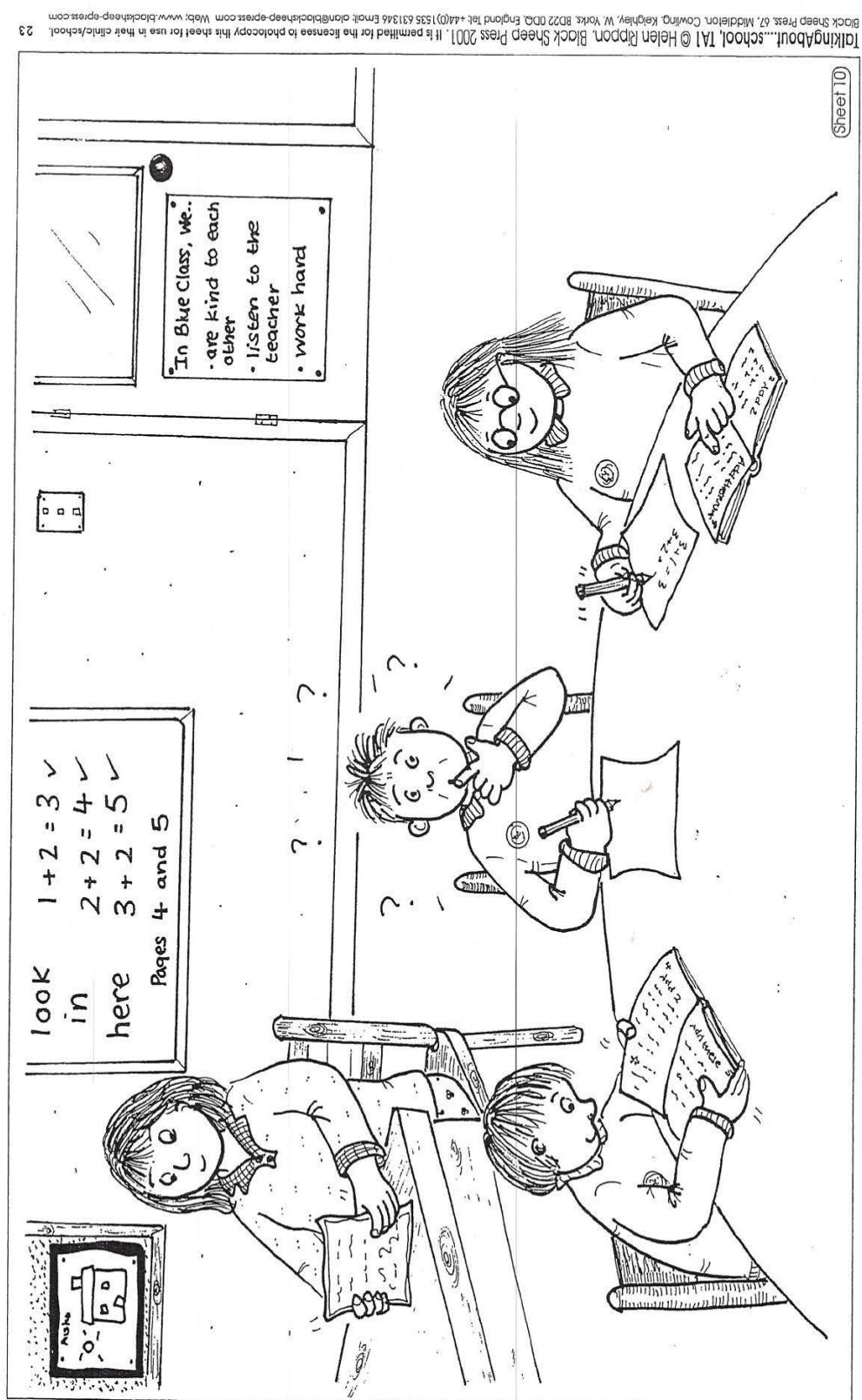
Appendix D

Appendix E Photographs of pedagogical activities

Riverside Infants

Creative resources

Group Work – teacher working with a group to teach mathematics
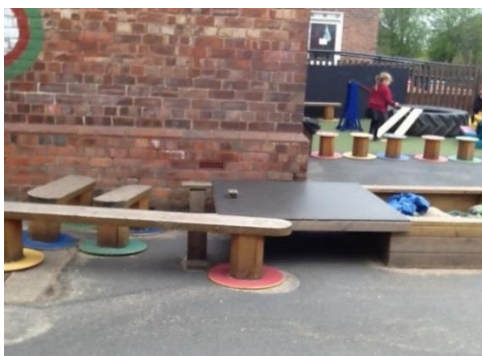
Use of outside environment

Visit to fire station
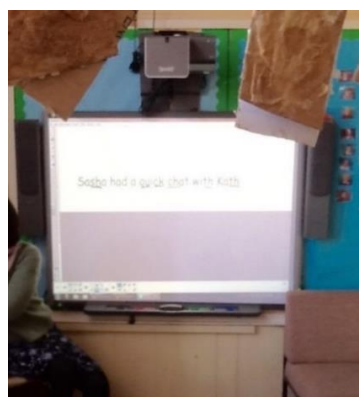
Whole Class - teacher using interactive whiteboard to teach phonics

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Oak Ridge Primary

Construction equipment

Creative resources

Working with teacher

Use of outside environment

Whole Class - teacher using white board to teach literacy lesson

Appendix F Ethics forms

Parent Information Sheet

Study Title: Engaging with children's voices: Illuminating inclusive pedagogical activities in the Reception Class?

Researcher: Patricia Shaw   **Ethics number**: 13672

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?

I am currently studying for a PhD at the University of Southampton. As part of this doctorate I would like to carry out some observations and interviews with your child.

The purpose of these observations is to gain an understanding of the ways in which s/he likes to learn and how the teachers, teaching assistants and nursery nurses can help her/him with this process. In the interviews, your child will be asked to give details about the types of activities in which s/he feels included and those in which s/he feels less so. This data will then be analysed to determine the ways in which your child considers the different activities can make her/him feel more included. These views will be made anonymous when discussing the findings with their teacher, teaching assistants and nursery nurse.

Why has my child been chosen?

Your child has been chosen because I am focusing on all of the children aged four to five years in the reception class (Foundation Stage 2).

What will happen to my child if I agree to let them take part?

After an initial visit in which to familiarise myself with the school and classroom, I will be present in the school for two days (mornings and afternoons), for a period of five weeks. During this time, I will observe your child in the course of their everyday learning activities.

During the following 2 weeks I will be carrying out interviews with your child, in a group of 4, to try and gain a deeper understanding of the types of activities in which s/he feels included. These interviews will last for 15-20 minutes, and will be carried out at a time and place that is suitable for your child.

Appendix F

Furthermore, I will be asking your child to draw a picture of an activity in which s/he feels included and one in which s/he does not. This will be carried out in pairs. Once again, if your child does not wish to take part in this activity they may stop at any time.

Are there any benefits in my child taking part?

The benefits to your child are that I will be in a position to report any general findings back to the teacher, teaching assistants and nursery nurse, which may change some of their practice. At no time will your child be identified.

Are there any risks involved?

There will be no risks to your child during the observations since these will be carried out in the course of their everyday routine. In the interviews, if your child should become upset then I will stop the interview and return her/him to their teacher and ensure that s/he is comfortable.

Will my child's participation be confidential?

The information recorded during this research project will be stored in line with the Data Protection Act/University Policy and will remain confidential at all times. All data will be kept in password protected computer which will only be accessible to me. It will be coded confidentially, which will make sure your child remains anonymous, and it will be analysed with integrity to ensure your child's views are represented fairly and accurately. Furthermore, you and/or your child are free to withdraw at any point.

What happens if I or my child changes their mind?

You have the right to withdraw at any time during the research process. If your child wishes to withdraw from the research, indicating either verbally or by their posture or body language, then I will ensure that they are withdrawn from the process.

What happens if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, please contact the Head of Research Governance (02380 595058, rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk).

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact Patricia Shaw on:

Patricia.shaw@hull.ac.uk   Tel: 01482 462084

CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS/CARERS

Study title: Engaging with children's voices: Illuminating inclusive pedagogical activities in the Reception Class

Researcher name: Patricia Shaw

Ethics reference: 13672

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (16/02/2015) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I agree for my child to take part in this research project and agree for this data to be recorded and used for the purpose of this study

I understand that my child's responses will be made anonymous in any reports of the research

I understand my child's participation is voluntary and I may withdraw her/his participation at any time without my legal rights being affected

Data Protection

I understand that information collected about my child 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.

Name of participant (child) (print child's name)..

Signature of participant (parent/carer)
....

Practitioner Information Sheet

Study Title: Engaging with children's voices: Illuminating inclusive pedagogical activities in the Reception Class

Researcher: Patricia Shaw   **Ethics number**: 13672

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?

I am currently studying for a PhD at the University of Southampton. As part of this doctorate I would like to carry out some observations and interviews with children, teachers, teaching assistants and nursery nurses in the reception class of your school.

The purpose of these observations is to gain an understanding of the ways in which the children like to learn and how the teachers, teaching assistants and nursery nurses can help them with this process. In the interviews, children will be asked to give details about the types of activities in which they feel included and those in which they feel less so. This data will then be analysed to determine the ways in which the children consider how the different activities can make them feel more included. When discussing these views with you, the findings will be anonymised. I am also interested to discover how you feel about engaging with children's voices in relation to your practice.

Why have I been chosen?

The reason you have been asked to take part in this research is because I wish to gather the views of teachers, teaching assistants and nursery nurses working with children in Foundation Stage 2 in the reception class. I wish to explore how you feel about engaging with children's voices and learn more about the ways in which you design your activities and if there are any particular reasons or constraints which influence these choices.

What will happen to me if I take part?

After an initial visit in which to familiarise myself with the school and classroom, I will be present in the school for two days (mornings and afternoons), for a period of five weeks. During this time, I will observe the children in the course of their everyday learning activities.

In addition, I will conduct an individual interview with you; this should last no more than 30 minutes and will be arranged at your convenience.

I will then provide a summary of my findings to all interested parties at the end of the research process.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

The benefit to you will be in the form of gaining a deeper understanding of how children feel about their learning and the ways in which they consider the activities make them feel included.

Are there any risks involved?

There are no risks to you in this research since the observations will be conducted during your normal working pattern and the interviews conducted in a place in which you feel comfortable.

Will my participation be confidential?

The information recorded during this research project will be stored in line with the Data Protection Act/University Policy and will remain confidential at all times. All data will be kept in password protected computer which will only be accessible to me. It will be coded confidentially, which will protect your anonymity, and it will be analysed with integrity to ensure your views are represented fairly and accurately. Furthermore, you are free to withdraw at any point.

What happens if I change my mind?

You have the right to withdraw at any time during the research process.

What happens if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, please contact the Head of Research Governance (02380 595058, rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk).

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact Patricia Shaw on:

Patricia.shaw@hull.ac.uk Tel: 01482 462084

CONSENT FORM FOR PRACTITIONERS

Study title: Engaging with children's voices: Illuminating inclusive pedagogical activities in the Reception Class

Researcher name: Patricia Shaw

Ethics reference: 13672

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (16/02/2015) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

☐

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be recorded and used for the purpose of this study

☐

I understand that my responses will be made anonymous in any reports of the research

☐

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected

☐

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.

Name of participant (print name)..

Signature of participant..

Date..

Child Information Sheet

Study Title: Engaging with children's voices: Illuminating inclusive pedagogical activities in the Reception Class

Researcher: Patricia Shaw   **Ethics number**: 13672

I would like to look at the way you work with your teachers and then ask you some questions about the kinds of activities that you feel included in or ones you may feel left out of at school. I would also like to show you some pictures about the different activities you do at school and ask you some questions about how the teachers make you feel included in these activities.

If you would like to take part in this please can you put a smiley face at the bottom of this sheet? If you do not want to be part of it you can put a sad face. When I am asking you questions, if you don't want to answer you don't have to, and if you want to stop at any time, that will be alright too.

Name: ⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯

Stamp of face:

Appendix F

Appendix G Book created with children's drawings

What I think about my learning activities

In the workshop making models

Bus
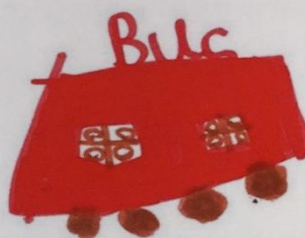
Learning activities where I feel included.

Drawing Pictures with my friends

Drawing and colouring

"Because other children are doing it and I am too.

Because we're all working together in that picture.

Because I don't want to be on my own.

I do it with grown-ups and other children."

"Because I just want to do painting for my mummy.

Cos I love making stuff.

Because they're my friends!"

Painting pictures for my mummy, daddy and little brother

Drawing pictures for mummy with my friends

When sometimes my
friends are mean to me

**Learning activities where
I don't feel so included.**

When I'm on my own

I feeled alone.

I was left alone
without my friend.

When my friend isn't
playing with me

"Because people wear dress,
won't do the dressing and I
don't get a chance to wear one.

Anybody doesn't let me
have the ribbon.

From my friends who
ignore me.

Cos I don't like doing
creative things."

Because ... I don't know. I don't have fun in it.

It's very, very hard.

Cos I don't know what to do.

Cos it's boring.

Doing group work with the teacher

Doing group activities outside

Doing work with the teacher on my own

Appendix H Initial coding process using Nvivo

Tricia: So Leo, can you remember that this week, we were talking about learning activities that we do at school that we feel included in and some where we don't feel very included. So, I wanted to know in your picture on this piece of paper on this side, could you draw me a learning activity where you feel really, really included. So anything that you do in learning at school, what type of activity makes you feel like these children, really included? So what would you like to draw?

Leo: <mark style="background:yellow">*In the workshop*</mark>*.*

Tricia: In the workshop. So you're going to draw that. So what would you be drawing in the workshop, what would you be building?

Leo: (pause) <mark style="background:lime">*I don't know*</mark>*.*

Tricia: What do you like to build in the workshop?

Leo: <mark style="background:cyan">*Star wars things.*</mark>

Tricia: Ok so could you draw me something like that? And why is it that you feel most included in the workshop, Leo?

Leo: Cos you can <mark style="background:yellow">*make things*</mark>*.*

Tricia: Who decides what you're going to make?

Leo: <mark style="background:cyan">*The people what they're going to make.*</mark>

Tricia: So do you decide, or does the teacher decide or another child decide what you're going to build?

Leo: Um <mark style="background:magenta">*because the person who's going to make it decides.*</mark>

Tricia: ok. And do you like to work in the workshop on your own, or with a teacher or with other children?

Leo: <mark style="background:silver">*I like to work on my own.*</mark>

Tricia And why is that?

Leo: Cos no-one they can <mark style="background:red">*spoil it*</mark>*.*

<mark style="background:yellow">Creative</mark>　　　　　<mark style="background:magenta">own choice</mark>　　　　　<mark style="background:lime">Uncertain</mark>

<mark style="background:cyan">own interest</mark>　　　　　<mark style="background:silver">working on own/independent</mark>　　<mark style="background:red">interference</mark>

Appendix H

Appendix I Codes for promoting and hindering inclusion and their allocation to different categories in preparation for merging

RQ 1

Codes for promoting inclusion	Category number
active involvement	2
all working together	6
being clever	9
being creative	2
being kind	1
breathe outside	4
children are friendly	1
child's individual interest	3
creative/imaginative play	2
different behaviour inside and outside	4
do whatever you want	3
doing activity for someone else	3
emphasis of liking	1/2/3/4/5
environment	4
exciting	3
favourite	3
friends	6
fun	2/5
good	3/8
happy	1/2/3/6
help	7/8
helping	7/8
inclusive visit	2/3
inclusive construction	2/3/6
inclusive creative activity	3
inclusive group work	6
inclusive literacy	3
outdoor	3/4/6
whole class	8/9
working with teacher	7/8
independent	9
influence on peers	9
kind	1
learn	3/8

learning from teacher	8
like	3
listening to teacher	8
love	3
nice teacher	6
sharing	9
on own	9
on own or with friend	9
playing	2
sense of achievement	9
shout outside	4
talking to friends	6
with other children	4/6/7

Category codes

1 – Kindness/being happy

2 – Creative/active engagement

3 – Child's own interest

4 – Environment

5 – Fun

6 – Friends

7 – Helping/support

8 – Being able to do the work

9 - Pride in achievement

RQ 2

Codes for hindering inclusion	Category number
activity too hard	4
angry	2/4
anxiety	2/3
avoiding activity	4
boring	4
can't choose	1
can't play with friends	1
don't know	5
don't know what to do	3
don't like	4
don't want to do the activity	4
emphasis doesn't like the activity	6
feeling left out	7
feeling sad	2/3/4
feeling sweaty	6
feeling tired	4
forgotten	5
getting wet	6
hesitation	5
insufficient time to complete	4
lack of ability to complete	4
length of time of activity	4
limitation of activity	4
lonely	7
meeting teacher expectations	1
messy	6
misunderstanding the question	5
moody	2
no answer	5
no non-inclusive activity	
noise	6
non-inclusive creative	3/4/6
non-inclusive construction	3/4/7
non-inclusive fire station	1
non-inclusive group work	2/4
non-inclusive literacy	3/4
outside	4/6
PE	4
whole class	4
working indoors	4

working with the teacher	3/7
non-participation	1
not being kind	7
not being on own	7
not sharing	7
not very good at something	4
on own	7
punishment	1
teacher-directed	4
time to select child	4
unable to do something	4
uncomfortable environment	6
weather	2/6
worried	2

1 – Can't do something

2 – Feelings

3 – Doesn't know what to do

4 – Don't like doing something

5 – Unable to remember

6 – Sensorial experiences

7 – Left out/lonely

Appendix J Codes merging into research themes

RQ 1 Themes promoting inclusion

	Themes				
	Collaboration	**Children's individuality and difference**	**Physically active engagement**	**Sense of achievement**	**Environmental context**
Codes	all working together	child's individual interest	active involvement	being clever	breathe outside
	being kind	do whatever you want	being creative	whole class	different behaviour inside and out
	children are friendly	doing activity for someone else	creative/ imaginative play	independent	emphasis of liking
	emphasis of liking	emphasis of liking	emphasis of liking	influence on peers	environment
	friends	exciting	fun	sharing	outdoor
	happy	favourite	happy	on own	on own
	help	good	inclusive visit	sense of achievement	shout outside
	helping	happy	inclusive construction		
	inclusive construction	inclusive visit	playing		
	inclusive group work	incluisve construction			
	inclusive outdoor	inclusive creative activity			
	inclusive whole class	inclusive literacy			
	inclusive working with teacher	outdoor			
	kind	learn			
	learn	like			
	learning from teacher	love			
	listening to teacher				
	nice teacher				
	talking to friends				
	with other children				

RQ 2 Themes hindering inclusion

		Themes			
		Dislike of the activity	**Difficulty of the activity**	**Sensorial experiences**	**Feeling alone**	**Unsure of the activity**
Codes	activity too hard	activity too hard	don't like	can't play with friends	anxiety
	angry	angry	feeling sweaty	feeling left out	don't know what to do
	avoiding activity	don't like	getting wet	lonely	feeling sad
	boring	feeling sad	messy	non-inclusive construction	non-inclusive creative
	can't choose	lack of ability to complete	noise	non-inclusive outside	non-inclusive construction
	can't play with friends	moody	non-inclusive construction	working with teacher	non-inclusive literacy
	don't want to do activity	non-inclusive group work	non-inclusive outside	not being kind	non-inclusive outside
	feeling sad	non-inclusive literacy	non-inclusive PE	not being on own	working with teacher
	feeling tired	not very good at something	working indoors	non-participation	
	insufficient time to complete	unable to do something	uncomfortable equipment	not sharing	
	length of time of activity	worried	weather	on own	
	limitation of activity				
	meeting teacher expectations				
	non-inclusive creative				
	non-inclusive construction				
	non-inclusive group work				
	non-inclusive literacy				
	non-inclusive outside				
	non-inclusive PE				
	not very good at				
	teacher-directed				
	time to select child				

Appendix K Connections between themes emerging from data analysis of RQ 1 and the literature

Connections between themes emerging from data analysis of RQ 1 and the literature

Research Question 1	Theme	Key definitions from the literature
In what ways do children perceive pedagogical activities as promoting inclusion in the Reception class?	**Collaboration**	**Co-construction of knowledge** - (Jordan, 2004; Hedges and Cullen, 2011) **Working with children as emergent learners** - (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002) **Learning and playing in collaboration with others** – Booth and Ainscow, 2004) **Co-agency** - (Hart *et al.,* 2004)
	Children's individuality and difference	**Recognising diversity** - (Barton, 1997; Florian, 1998; Booth *et al.,* 2000; UNESCO, 2009) **Participation for all** - (Booth *et al.,* 2000; Cagliari *et al.,* 2004; Blenkinsop, 2005) **Trust, value, respect** - (Federle, 1994; Griffiths and Davies,1995; Hart *et al.*, 2004; Maher *et al.,* 2012) **Careful juxtaposition of teacher and child-initiated activities** - (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002)
	Physically active engagement	**Active involvement** - (Rivkin, 2000; Sheridan, 2001; Bilton, 2002; Ouvry, 2003**;** Stephen *et al.,* 2009; Lenz Taguchi, 2010)
	Independent achievement	**Careful juxtaposition of teacher- and child-initiated activities** - (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002)
	Environmental context	**Co-construction of knowledge** - (Jordan, 2004; Hedges and Cullen, 2011) **Working with children as emergent learners** - (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002)

Connections between themes emerging from data analysis of RQ 2 and the literature

Research Question 2	Theme	Key definitions from the literature
In what ways do children perceive pedagogical activities as hindering inclusion in the Reception class	**Unengaging activity**	**Recognising diversity** - (Barton, 1997; Florian, 1998; Booth *et al.,* 2000; UNESCO, 2009) **Trust, value, respect** - (Federle, 1994; Griffiths and Davies,1995; Hart *et al.*, 2004; Maher *et al.,* 2012) **Active involvement** - (Rivkin, 2000; Sheridan, 2001; Bilton, 2002; Ouvry, 2003; Stephen *et al.,* 2009; Lenz Taguchi, 2010) **Engagement** - (Laevers, 1994) **Participation for all** - (Booth *et al.,* 2000; Cagliari *et al.*, 2004; Blenkinsop, 2005)
	Feeling alone	**Participation for all** – (Booth *et al.,* 2000; Cagliari *et al.*, 2004; Blenkinsop, 2005) **Co-construction of knowledge** - (Jordan, 2004; Hedges and Cullen, 2011)
	Sensorial experiences	**Recognising diversity** - (Barton, 1997; Florian, 1998; Booth *et al.,* 2000; UNESCO, 2009) **Trust, value, respect** - (Federle, 1994; Griffiths and Davies,1995; Hart *et al.*, 2004; Maher *et al.,* 2012)
	Unsure of the activity	**Recognising diversity** - (Barton, 1997; Florian, 1998; Booth *et al.,* 2000; UNESCO, 2009) **Trust, value, respect** - (Federle, 1994; Griffiths and Davies,1995; Hart *et al.*, 2004; Maher *et al.,* 2012) **Co-agency** - (Hart *et al.,* 2004)
	Difficulty of the activity	**Co-construction of knowledge** - (Hedges and Cullen, 2011; Jordan, 2004) **Careful juxtaposition of teacher- and child-initiated activities** - (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002) **Working with children as emergent learners** - (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002)

Connections between themes emerging from data analysis of RQ 3 and the literature

Research Question 3	Theme	Key definitions from the literature
In what ways does engaging with children's views inform practitioners' pedagogical practice?	Recognising difference	**Recognising diversity** - (Barton, 1997; Florian, 1998; Booth *et al.,* 2000; UNESCO, 2009) **Trust, value, respect** (Federle, 1994; Griffiths and Davies,1995; Hart *et al.*, 2004; Maher *et al.,* 2012) **Co-agency** - (Hart *et al.,* 2004) **Careful juxtaposition of teacher and child-initiated activities** - (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002) **Active involvement** - Rivkin, 2000; Sheridan, 2001; Bilton, 2002; Ouvry, 2003; Stephen *et al.,* 2009; Lenz Taguchi, 2010)
	Reflection	**Careful juxtaposition of teacher- and child-initiated activities** - (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002) **Co-construction of knowledge** - (Jordan, 2004; Hedges and Cullen, 2011) **Co-agency** - (Hart *et al.,* 2004) **Active involvement** - Rivkin, 2000; Sheridan, 2001; Bilton, 2002; Ouvry, 2003; Stephen *et al.,* 2009; Lenz Taguchi, 2010)
	Altering current practice	**Recognising diversity** - (Barton, 1997; Florian, 1998; Booth *et al.,* 2000; UNESCO, 2009) **Trust, value, respect** - (Federle, 1994; Griffiths and Davies,1995; Hart *et al.*, 2004; Maher *et al.,* 2012) **Co-construction of knowledge** - (Jordan, 2004; Hedges and Cullen, 2011) **Working with children as emergent learners** - (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002)
	Valuing engagement with children's views	**Recognising diversity** - (Barton, 1997; Florian, 1998; Booth *et al.,* 2000; UNESCO, 2009) **Trust, value, respect** - (Federle, 1994; Griffiths and Davies,1995; Hart *et al.*, 2004; Maher *et al.,* 2012) **Co-agency** - (Hart *et al.,* 2004) **Engagement** - (Laevers, 1994)

Appendix K

Appendix L Contextual information on practitioners

Riverside Infants

The teachers worked in separate classes, with Anastasia (T) having responsibility for the children in the research study. The other teacher, Nina (T), worked with the children when they were engaged in their 'busy time' activities. The teachers and the nursery nurse were all involved in the planning of the pedagogical activities for these children. Anastasia and Lydia (NN) shared the responsibility for teaching in the whole class and group activities. Megan (TA) was employed mainly as a support for a child with autism, although she also guided and supported other children in the class.

Oak Ridge Primary

Tiffany (T) had sole responsibility for the planning of the pedagogical activities, although there was consultation with the other two practitioners. There was also flexibility to adapt them as necessary. The teacher taught all the whole class activities with support from Selina (NN) and Yvette (TA). In the individual work, all three practitioners supported the children's learning.

Contextual information about the role and years of experience of the practitioners in both schools

	Riverside Infants				Oak Ridge Primary		
Name	Anastasia	Nina	Lydia	Megan	Tiffany	Selina	Yvette
Role	Teacher	Teacher	Nursery Nurse	Teaching Assistant (TA)	Teacher	Nursery Nurse	Teaching Assistant (TA)
Years of experience	More than 20 years	More than 20 years	10 years	1 year in Reception class	Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) Less than 1 year	More than 20 years	4 years in Reception class

Appendix L

Appendix M Examples of different observations of the same pedagogical activity

Child: Jack

Whole class - number	4 4	Smiles, relaxed, happy, self-assured. Continuous activity with some intense moments, can be distracted, concentrates for some of the time.

Child: Holly

Whole class - number	5 5	Smiles, happy, relaxed, self-assured, confident, talks to self, no signs of stress. Continuous activity and intense moments, creative, not distracted, concentrated, persists throughout the entire observed period, energetic.

Child: James

Whole class - number	4 1	Smiling, relaxed, pulls odd facial expressions, shakes head to and fro. Looks to others to copy. Frequently distracted and is in his own world. Activity is simple, repetitive and passive.

Child: Evelyn

Whole class - number	3 3/4	Neutral posture, facial expression and posture show few signs of emotion, no signs of stress. Mainly continuous activity but at routine level, not easily distracted but can gaze into space, makes some progress, not much energy.

Appendix M

Appendix N Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

Example of how data can be gathered.

Communication and language

Early learning goal	Description of 'exceeding'
1. Listening and attention	Children listen to instructions and follow them accurately, asking for clarification if necessary. They listen attentively with sustained concentration to follow a story without pictures or props. They can listen in a larger group, for example, at assembly.
2. Understanding	After listening to stories children can express views about events or characters in the story and answer questions about why things happened. They can carry out instructions which contain several parts in a sequence.
3. Speaking	Children show some awareness of the listener by making changes to language and non-verbal features. They recount experiences and imagine possibilities, often connecting ideas. They use a range of vocabulary in imaginative ways to add information, express ideas or to explain or justify actions or events.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile 2017 handbook (Standards and Testing Agency, 2016, p.42)