

# **Exploring How Play-Based Pedagogies Support Mixed Ethnic Identity Formation**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores some of the ways in which children's ethnic identities have been conceptualised by sociocultural and funds of knowledge (FOK) theorisation. Situated within the context of a private day nursery in the north of England, the study problematises established conceptualisations about how realities are mediated to elicit the viewpoints of three children aged 3-4 years. Research design uses praxeological principles (Bertram and Pascal, 2012) in collection processes to generate data. Employed is a two-stage qualitative methodology; semi-structured interviews with practitioners and observation using video-cued recordings of adult directed play experiences explore how the children show awareness of similarities and differences in mixed ethnic identity.

Positioning democracy at the heart of pedagogy in participation, findings evidence children's capacities for sharing previously constructed discourse from externally encountered experiences with peers and practitioners. Contributions indicate the biracial learner will use new terminologies of *brown*, *light brown* and *whiteish*, together with established societal categorisations of *black* and *white* interchangeably. Although the children's sense of cultural understanding aligned with skin colour differentials relating to self and others, they also decoded values attributed to skin colour terminology (used in larger societal contexts) to describe individuals outside of the setting.

Concepts surrounding socialisation processes; children's ability to engage in play-based pedagogical approaches; dynamics between power and agency and its influence on dispositions for shaping learner identity; and black researcher positionality have been central for supporting understanding about the complex nature of the socio-generative dispositions that drive and perpetuate practice, as well as insider/outsider dispositions. Within the process of research 'voice' has been given to what is often experienced, internalised, and goes unsaid for 'black' women researchers.

Contribution to knowledge extend beyond academic publication, critical debate at national and local level about circumstances pertinent for inclusion in policy and early years curriculum development are indicated.



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## **Glossary**

The terminology used in this study applies to Britain and may or may not be applicable elsewhere. Lane (2008:95) suggests that the terms outlined below are "...definitions and may have different meanings when applied in real life situations." It is also relevant to mention here that terminology does change with time, what is acceptable socially today may be less acceptable or unacceptable with time.

**Culture:** Everyone has a culture as a result of their lives and experiences. It includes all those factors that have contributed to these experiences. It is not just the high days and festivals, but also the minutiae of everyday life. Elements of culture may include factors such as language, social class, religious beliefs and practices, traditions, dress and food. No culture is superior or inferior to another.

**Ethnicity:** Refers to an individual's identification with a group, sharing some or all of the same culture, lifestyle, language, religion, nationality, geographical region and history. Every person has an ethnicity. Concepts of 'ethnic food', 'ethnic dress', 'ethnic music' and 'ethnic people' are therefore nonsense.

**Identity:** Defined as "children's sense of personal identity, coming from many aspects including their name, sex, genders, skin colour, physical features, hair texture, position within the family and language" (Lane, 2008:96). **Cultural identity** includes the environment, the children interacted with, the food eaten, the clothes worn, the places lived in, the music listened to and the spiritual values of the family.

**Multi Ethnic:** Defined as referring to people from more than one 'race,' including a variety of ethnic backgrounds which might include African, European, Asian, native American, Hispanic, and others" Wardle (1991, quoted in Cole and Valentine 2000:307). It is suggested that 'multi ethnic' is the most inclusive and preferred term for individuals identifying with more than one ethnic/racial group, Wardle (1991 cited in Cole and Valentine 2000).

**Racial group:** Refers to those who are of, or belong to, the same race. They have the same racial origins.

**Other terminology used:**

**Focus Children:** Used to encompass reference to the mixed ethnicity children who participated in this research inquiry.

**Practitioner:** Used to encompass all individuals who are involved in the care and education of babies and young children between the ages of nought to seven years. This term encompasses teachers, classroom assistants, early years professionals, early years practitioners, nursery nurses, nursery assistants, child minders, social workers etc.

**Scaffolding:** Used to define one of the stages of Bruner's (1986) theory of infant skill development, whereby adults help to develop children's thinking by being like a piece of scaffolding on a building.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This thesis will argue research studies have endeavoured to problematise opinions about how children who can identify with more than one racial group should be defined. But what has been consistently overlooked in current educational research discourse are opportunities to incorporate the children's interpretations about the social construction of their ethnic identity. Opinions from Goodyer and Okitikpi (2007: 85) are used to corroborate this supposition: "*the views of the children...themselves have often been ignored*".

Similarly, this thesis will position a critical lens on English policy reform and curriculum framework development to situate rhetoric for underpinning inclusion and cultural diversity in historic education policy development and revisions to the early years foundation stage curriculum frameworks have presented significant challenges for the early years practitioner in practice. Particularly where dichotomies exist between implementing rights-based government commitments to address social inequality and providing inclusive play-based provision for diverse learners. The resultant sources of literature used to position these theoretical understanding in existing epistemologies will on occasion appear old or outdated, but the aim is to inform inclusive reform in terms of culture and ethnic origin have been overlooked.

### **1.1 How the chapter is organised**

The chapter provides an overview for this doctoral research, where I begin by setting out the intention and approach to the study. The following section introduces the research aims and questions, after which I provide insight into my personal motivations for undertaking a study of this kind. Data to highlight the rapidly growing populations of mixed descent children acts as another rationale for undertaking research with this group of children. I then move on to explain the theoretical foundations for the study. The research problem is then defined. The context for this study is also defined by introducing the early years setting in which the research is undertaken. The chapter moves on to situate myself, where I make use of the enduring influence of Bourdieu to further locate my positionality. Due regard is given to perceived sensitivities and complexities that exist when undertaking research that question 'race', ethnicity and cultural differences. Contexts that explain insider/outsider status from the lens of the black academic researcher are deliberated in terms of my interaction with the focus children and practitioners. The purpose of which is to position the researcher's 'voice', define my reality and to validate the claims being made in this thesis (Hill Collins, 1990). The chapter concludes with a summary of the content and organisation of the thesis document.

## 1.2 Thesis intentions and approaches

This thesis is based upon a single site, interpretive case study in adult directed play experiences to explore the development of mixed ethnic identity formation. Providing clarity for my choice in using case study design, praxeology is introduced as a methodological approach for problematising contexts pertaining to selfhood, as well as questioning debate about culture and identity. Yin (2012) offers case study technique assists the researcher to extensively respond to the research questions so that in-depth descriptions are provided from the adopted methodological procedures, whereas Stake (1995) advocates a single site case study is beneficial for the researcher who wants to organise their project around pertinent issues. Benefiting this study is the opportunity of using strategies and techniques for interpreting collaborative construction of meaning from the research participants' responses. Pedagogy in participation which is essentially concerned with the formation of situated contexts in which interaction is sustained in relationships via joint activities and experiences (Formosinho and Pascal, 2016), support exploration about how mixed ethnic children identify self and others; offers credibility by optimising understanding through making the 'issue' being explored specific; and provides techniques that allow the researcher to pay attention to certain culturally based play activities and resources. Finally, case study affords triangulation of experiential knowledge and interpretation of the participants' responses. In this way opportunity is provided for the researcher to '*know*' the case (Stake, 1995: 127) being explored. In other words, techniques provide what Stake (1995) defines as some form of conceptual structure to the research study and the questions being explored.

To directly orientate the reader, this case study does not make claims to change knowledge to existing epistemologies that have focused on identity; children's attitude racial development; or learning about ethnic origin. Nor does it propose to 'shift' opinion about problematic and complex contexts surrounding 'race' and 'ethnicity'. Instead, case study research and its procedures are used to orient potential audiences towards new meaning about a mixed ethnic identity from the descriptions of the children participating in this study. The intention is to signify the importance of listening to diverse learners so that their 'voices' are given equitable status in play-based pedagogic approaches.

The study therefore positions three children at the heart of the research as active research participants, and their perspectives are framed as the leading voices in the exploration of play-based pedagogies. Although the children are central to this study, the influential role that practitioners have in facilitating learning experiences with young children is recognised. Contributions from the practitioners' perceptions of learning and development is therefore an important determining factor for indicating how and in what way play pedagogy

influences the focus children's capacities for sharing their knowledge about ethnicity. Practitioners' perceptions (and actions) therefore serve to contextualise interactions in pedagogic practice, as well as acting as a mediating tool in the relationships with young children and their peers. Noteworthy in this inquiry are endeavours to explore how practitioner perspectives facilitate the interconnected nature of the children's raced and cultural understandings between the home and the early years setting.

Recognising the participatory nature of this inquiry, praxeology as a methodology for listening and participation is used because of its value for demonstrating trustworthiness in qualitative studies (Formosinho and Oliveira Formosinho, 2012; Formosinho and Pascal, 2016; and Pascal and Bertram, 2009, 2012). Praxeology also creates a situated context in which to explore rights-based participatory approaches with the focus children. Acknowledging that pedagogical research focuses on exploring praxis in early childhood education, praxis within the scope of this inquiry is concerned with grounded, coherent, situated and contextualised practice (Formosinho and Oliveira- Formosinho, 2012). Praxeological principles are suited to this study because it takes as its focus practice that will certainly be imbued with the beliefs and values of the practitioners, as well as the educational and situated actions in the setting. Praxis here then is concerned with unifying the process of knowledge development and pedagogical practice so that young children are supported to co-construct and share their perspectives about mixed ethnic identity.

By reporting on the influences that facilitate the co-construction of the children's perspectives the intention is to combine the participants' voices with academic analysis to enable meaningful engagement with the study's findings. The project's approach to data analysis makes use of techniques from Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) to convey the participants' thick narrative descriptions that are observed in the learning experiences in an early years nursery setting.

The diverse range of perspectives elicited within this study are combined with researcher interpretation, so it is recognised that the localised nature of this small-scale study, and therefore researcher interpreted iterative accounts can only facilitate naturalistic generalisations (Stake, 1995). There is an acknowledgment that generalisations from the interpreted findings in this thesis cannot be applied to children beyond this group. Consequently, the sample size of mixed ethnic children participating in this study cannot be applied to the diverse mixed grouping of children in other early childhood settings in the United Kingdom.

The study does however contribute towards understandings about the influencing factors associated with a play-based pedagogic approach, and its influence on the perspectives of

the mixed ethnic learner. It also proposes to add to existing epistemologies about how, through socialisation processes of interaction with peers and practitioners, children's contributions may serve to inform new categorisations that they ascribe to similarities and differences in mixed ethnic origin.

### **1.3 Research aims and questions**

The research questions are:

1. Using the 'voice' of the child, what are the key influences on mixed ethnic children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their ethnic identity in an early years setting?
2. What opportunities exist in the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017) policy framework that allow 'mixed ethnic' children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences in their education?
3. How does the implementation of a play-based pedagogical approach provide 'space' for mixed ethnic children to explore their ethnicity?

The research aims to contribute towards existing epistemologies by exploring the perspectives of young mixed ethnic learners in an attempt to understand insider categorisations ascribed to mixed ethnic origin in an early years setting. Research question (1) relates to participatory methods; it reflects the researcher obligation to explore the key influences that enable (or not) children to draw on their internalised cultural and raced funds of knowledge (FOK) in play-based pedagogies, so that new terminologies are understood through the lens of this group of children. Research question (2) relates to the statutory framework for Early Years Foundation Stage; and directly addresses E policy commitment for inclusion. Situating practitioner understanding about inclusion policy and provision, it explores the opportunities that exist in the principal model of the curriculum framework for facilitating children's ability to reproduce externally informed cultural and raced understanding about their own mixed ethnic identity. The area of personal social and emotional development (PSED) is the central focus here because it is in this area that practitioners are mandated to support children's understanding about similarities and difference to self and others. This question therefore offers deeper insight into the complexities for facilitating inclusive practice. The thesis considers how early years practitioners balance the complexities of ensuring an inclusive curriculum for diverse learners (in particular) whilst at the same time meeting other outcome driven goals mandated within the curriculum. Finally, research question (3) directly problematises contexts surrounding pedagogic action. This question is concerned with how pedagogic techniques, interactions, and the use of resources facilitate opportunities for engaging with

children's FOK from previous cultural and raced experiences. The aim is to investigate if a pedagogy of play provides a 'space' for the mixed ethnic child to participate in reflective perspectives about their ethnic identity. Also considered is how the influence of pedagogic action enables (or not) sharing of these thoughts.

Having explained the purpose of the research as well as defining the research questions and aims, the next section explains the researchers own personal motivations for undertaking the study.

#### **1.4 Personal motivations**

The reasons for my interest in this group of children originally stemmed from having mixed ethnic children. Conversations with my own children established how 'difficult' it was to facilitate conversations about similarities and difference. Challenge was also mirrored in conversations with practitioners and the children in my professional practice. These discussions, coupled with a professional belief that holistic development is an important factor for supporting young children to have a developing understanding about themselves and others, provided what could be considered a plausible reason for raising awareness about the complexities that mixed ethnic learners may face when determining their cultural and ethnic identities. Specific to this study therefore, the lead participants are children of mixed ethnic origin.

Another justification for undertaking this doctoral work is linked to statistical data for this grouping. When I commenced this study in 2014, data indicated the number of children who regard themselves as mixed ethnic is rising and was predicted to reach '1.24m by 2020' (Grimston, 2007). Current circumstances mean that it has not possible to verify the most recent data about children from the mixed Black Caribbean/White and mixed Black African/White grouping between the ages of 0-5 years in England. But if Grimston's (2007) prediction was correct it plausibly justifies the focus on this group of children, because as well as being one of the fastest growing groups in UK society, very little is known about mixed ethnic children and their family's experiences in early years education (Holmström, 2013, cited in Knowles and Holmström).

Turning to research literature that specifically focuses on the experiences of biracial children and their sense of self identity (Katz, 1996; Tizaard & Phoenix, 1993; Gaither Chen et al, 2014), still appear to objectify and deny the agency of this group of children. Proposed for consideration is a view that conversations in existing bodies of research fail to incorporate the unique contributions of both the children's circumstances and the relationships encountered in their social environment outside of the early years setting. Having gained

personal experience with this group of children, coupled with being an early years academic and scholarly researcher of mixed ethnic children provides a unique position to access and understand the contributions they share. This thesis reasons debate in research that omit children's direct contributions could be reasonably perceived as being somewhat incomplete. The incomplete nature of some of these deliberations could be because the 'voice' of these children or the descriptions from their conversations do not appear to have been made explicit within these studies. Whilst contributions in research contend children are sensitive to social group information and they are attentive towards and will adapt their learning and social preferences towards that familial shared group (Gaither et al, 2014). What appears to be lesser known in existing epistemology is how children who can identify with more than one in-group (for example biracial children) make their preferences known. I will explore this matter in more detail in Chapter 6.

Taking the perspectives above into account, it is recognised that young mixed ethnic children have not only been introduced to concepts about ethnicity, but they are also capable of evaluating their internalised perspectives and will express them whilst participating in situations such as conversations with peers and practitioners. Insights are offered here to demonstrate that "young children are able to recognise their own racial in-group and demonstrate a preference for it as early as 3 years of age" Gaither, Chen et al (2014: 2313).

By centralising the children's perspectives at the heart of the study, this thesis seeks to explore and understand how this group of children's culturally determined discourse operates in sociodramatic play experiences. The intention is to explore how mixed ethnic children choose to (as well as feasibly choose not to) participate, interpret, understand and express ideas associated with their own sense of self and others' in terms of ethnic identity. The thesis aspires to focus on how the children revisit, reconstruct and share internalised discourse from previously encountered experiences with family, community and media in educational settings.

### **1.5 Defining the theoretical foundations for the thesis**

The nature of the sources of literature that have been engaged with throughout this thesis are important for supporting reader comprehension about the challenge in ascertaining theoretical debate that engages with mixed ethnic identity formation from the perspectives of young children's educational contexts. Early exploration of research literature tended to focus on mixed ethnic identity in adolescence, where these study's' take as their focus examination about matters associated with the impact of race and racism in higher education (Parker and Song, 2001 and Rousseau Anderson, 2015). Other UK based research literature demonstrate

a tendency to focus on the institutional nature of race, racism, whiteness, and micro-aggression and invalidation of minority groupings in education (Gilborn, 2015; Modica, 2015; Andrews, 2016; and Harris, 2016).

Commencing with historic epistemology, sociocultural theorisations explain young children will in social contexts constitute, perpetuate, and negotiate normalizing discourses surrounding their own identity. Notions surrounding interaction, participation and the mediating tools of language are key tenets utilised in sociocultural theory when exploring young children's identity and racial attitude development (Katz, 1976; Milner, 1983). Research literature acknowledges all individuals have an identity, and that learning about the cultural nature of human development, as well as development about identity initially occurs in the socially situated contexts of the family, wider community and media (Rogoff, 2003).

Moving beyond generalised views that all individuals have an identity, historic contexts indicate acquisition of identity is not an automatic development proceeding in passive children, it involves the complexity of conscious and unconscious interactions, as well as children's active attempts to understand, interpret and participate in their own and others' identity (Sanders, 2004). Derived from the works of early pioneers such as Vygotsky's (1978) are thoughts that within the socialisation processes of daily interaction and routines the significance of peer relationships, as well as the influence of practitioners will impact on how children construct, deconstruct and shape meaning around the formation of identities.

The importance of mediating tools of language, that could be reasonably argued as being fundamental to Vygotskian theorisation provides a useful lens for specifically focusing on children's dialogic conversations, and terminology used to express new and emergent categorisations in this project. Vygotsky (1962: 51) idea that "speech structures mastered by the child become the basic structures of thinking", is acknowledged. Also observed in Vygotskian theorisation is the idea that differentiating what a child can do in isolation, compared to what they are able to accomplish in interaction with peers and adults, children will internalise the 'language' (speech/terminology) learnt in these interactions (Vygotsky, 1978).

Understanding that sources of literature maintain identities are dialogic, Barron (2014) also offers children find 'voice' "from the multidirectional sense of the world of self and others", (2014: 255), and voice is shaped in participation in and response to the social endeavours in such participation. Comparably Rogoff's (2003) research reveals how children take on the social roles learnt in the educational environment via participation and involvement in culturally determined experiences. Appropriate for supporting thinking about how young children develop attitudes and awareness about ethnic identity, Park's (2011: 394) contends

“the language used to talk about racial and ethnic difference is an important tool that young children use in learning to understand these differences”.

This thesis therefore selects understanding from scholarly contributions in both historic and current studies (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003; Park, 2011; Corsaro 2015 and Barron, 2014) to examine children’s developing understandings about mixed ethnic diversity, and how they make use of terminology associated with ethnic categorisations in their play interactions with peers and practitioners. Fuller exposition of the children’s inimitable ways of sharing cultural and raced knowledge is presented in Chapters 6 and 7.

The study also draws upon funds of knowledge theorisation, tenets of which recognise that culture goes beyond the material artefacts or resources seen in early years classrooms. I do not suggest that material resources are not significant for supporting ethnic identity formation. For now cultural traits defined as funds of knowledge (FOK) within the scope of this inquiry are acknowledged as language, values and beliefs, prevailing and accepted perceptions acquired in social relationships, activities, and performance of tasks (Riojas-Cortez, 2001; Moll et al, 2001; Barron 2014). Prevailing understanding about FOK theorisation contend children will be entering educational settings rich in cultural knowledge from their home and community (Brooker, 2002 and Lam and Pollard, 2006). These notions are particularly supportive for examining how children’s informal knowledge of family and wider community practices have come to inform their perceptions about their mixed ethnic identity in mediated interactions of socio-dramatic play experiences. Accepting the benefit of the philosophical debate presented so far, FOK theorisation is utilised alongside sociocultural understandings to act as a lens for making explicit the influencing factors that impact on children’s ability to express ideas about their mixed ethnic identity.

Thus, the thesis acknowledges and explores the interplay between power and agency in play-based pedagogical approaches. It identifies with contexts that contend that listening is a fundamental component of ensuring participation, and for tuning into and giving power to the status of the children (Pascal and Bertram, 2012). Carefully considered are contexts associated with: rights to participate; an individual’s choice and ability to act; the redistribution of power; as well as endeavouring to comprehend dynamics between power and agency and its influence on practitioners’ dispositions to shape learner identity (Foucault, 1991). The dichotomy between implementation of play-based approaches where children are free to make their own choices and requirements to regulate and take control of learning and development to meet structured curriculum goals in national policy frameworks are carefully deliberated. The thesis positions the significance of culturally informed pedagogy for enabling children to participate in and experience educational success should not be underestimated.

Finally, this thesis considers scholarly debate about how a play-based pedagogical approach may address challenges for ensuring an inclusive curriculum for diverse learners. With a focus on exploring the complexities in developing effective early years provision and pedagogy, bodies of work from pioneering as well as more recent researchers (Giroux, 1943; Mac Naughton, 2005; Moyles, 2005; Butler and Markman, 2016 and Pascal and Bertram, 2012) are examined to question the nature of pedagogical activity, cultural production and transformation of pedagogic practice in early years settings. A more thorough explanation will emerge in Chapter 7 and 8.

Setting its theoretical foundations, this thesis moves away from philosophies that viewed children's social development exclusively as the child's 'internalisation of adult knowledge and skills' Corsaro (2015: 18) towards doctrines more in line with interpretation, reproduction and positioning of the categorisations that children ascribe to similarities and differences in ethnic origin. Sociocultural theorisation is therefore chosen as a theoretical lens for exploring established concepts and assumptions about how realities are mediated and constructed in early childhood. The intention is to make explicit that opportunities to incorporate children's interpretations in the social construction of their mixed ethnic identity in current educational research debate has been overlooked.

### **1.5.1 Defining the problem**

I commence this section by focusing on English early years policy and curricula to define the problem. Contended are thoughts that until recent changes in statutory inclusion policies in the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017), this curriculum framework placed limited focus in guidance to address social inequities for children from diverse groupings. Instead, what can be seen is a top-down nature of policy development, in which a prescriptive and assessment-driven early years culture exists. Concurring with this standpoint Ang (2014) offers monitoring, measuring and assessing children's learning are increasingly significant factors in early years practice in the UK. Coupled with the dominance of a 'school readiness' rhetoric and government preoccupation with early education as a preparation for later schooling gives rise to problematising the role of early education and how curriculum frameworks such as EYFS (DfE, 2017) have influenced the agency of early years professionals.

Discourse in research validates successive governments have shared in the moral ideal of valuing and providing inclusive provision (Pugh, 2010). Policy guidance that underpins inclusion and cultural diversity has therefore provided a critical standpoint with which to explore how and to what extent the issue of cultural diversity is engaged with in the early years curriculum. Subsequent chapters in this thesis will argue complexity arises in

developing inclusive early years policy and its implementation within early years settings. Principally where the generic nature of policy guidance leaves interpretation in practice to the volition of the early years practitioner. This thesis therefore proposes inclusive early years programmes that follow policy rhetoric and curricula guidelines present significant challenges and can be problematic in its implementation in practice. Particularly when confronting underlying attitudes and perceptions about how to support young children's ethnic identities.

Furthermore, this thesis positions the challenge of implementing inclusive provision as well as the dominance of following prescriptive curriculum learning and development goals in the EYFS means that 'informal' socialisation processes and experiences in English educational settings do not appear to encourage children to preserve their ethnic backgrounds. I propose children's individual rights to express opinions associated with their developing ethnic identities may be limited. Understanding that practitioners may possess differing knowledge about concepts relating to "culture, ethnicity, equity and participation" (Buchori & Dobinson, 2015: 72), gives rise to exploring whether play pedagogy enables or inhibits children's ability to express perspectives surrounding their emergent identities. Buchori & Dobinson (2015: 76) maintain that inhibiting factors may be due to practitioners making "use of their own realities of the dominant culture to determine what belongs and what does not belong".

Positioned for consideration is a view that there is a need for wider exploration of practitioner relationships and interactions with the children that they work with to garner better understanding about ethnicity, culture, and the critical decisions surrounding how the formation of a mixed ethnic identity is responded to in early years' provision. Exploration of this kind provides a responsiveness towards the diverse nature of children's ethnic origin, and how it may better serve learning and development in play-based pedagogic approaches. With these thought-provoking deliberations in mind, the following section now locates the early years setting in which the research was undertaken.

## **1.6 Defining the local context for this study – the early years setting**

The study is situated within the context of a private day nursery in north England. Located in a converted Victorian building in its own private grounds, the setting has provision for sixty children aged nought to three years on the Ofsted Early Years Register and the Compulsory Childcare Register. It also receives funding to provide free early education for two, three and four-year-old children.

Falling under the remit of the curriculum for children aged birth to five, the 2017 Ofsted report shows the quality and standards of the early years provision rating is outstanding. The settings 'Fascination Planning' (Thrill, Will and Skill policy) captures the approach for providing a challenging programme of development within this setting. Review of the inspection report under 'outcomes for children' stresses the children's achievements are 'superb' and many are exceeding the levels of achievement expected for their age. It also states the children have strong skills in early mathematics and literacy, and they are extremely well prepared for school.

The nurseries catchment area includes a diverse range of inhabitants who predominantly come from the Black Caribbean community. Of significance, the organisation of the environment is based on following the children's emergent ideas and interests. In this context the setting prides itself on not having distinct areas of learning seen in many early years educational settings.

The pedagogy of the setting uses a developmental approach consistent with child led experiences, and it boasts its approaches to learning supports children across all aspects of diversity. With a background in 'play' there is a strong and highly visible approach to teaching that incorporates consultation with children and techniques of '*listening to their play experiences to establish what fascinating play is for them*' (see Appendix 1 – approach to teaching policy).

Understanding that play can potentially act as a useful '*cultural bridge*' (Broadhead and Burt, 2012) between the home and educational setting is an important contributory factor for conducting this inquiry in the catchment area. The diversity of the children attending this provision together with the pedagogic and participatory approaches seen in the settings teaching policies facilitates exploration of the aims and purpose of this study. In this way the thesis offers an opportune and relevant contribution to bodies of knowledge interested in explorations about how a play-based pedagogic approach; influences mixed ethnic identity formation; facilitates co-construction of the ascribed meanings and new ways of knowing from the perspectives of children. However, none of this can be achieved without carefully and deliberately positioning myself in the study. This next section therefore provides a contextual insight about my positionality.

### **1.7 Positionality – situating self**

*Introducing the researcher.* I identify as a British woman of colour (preferring to dismiss categorisations from census classifications that define me as 'Black British Caribbean'), who was born and schooled in Bradford, West Yorkshire. I am a mother, academic, and for the

past six years a 'black woman researcher'. I make such a bold announcement here, to situate myself and to attempt to make clear how being a woman of colour has shaped the decision-making processes in this inquiry. In sharing my contemplative thoughts, I hope to provide some insight into 'what it is like to be me'. At the time of writing this paragraph, I am fifty-six years old, yet for as long as I can remember, I have been asking the question, *where do I fit?* Anyone who cares to seek out the thoughts of my mother, would I'm sure, find in her response a narrative that has been a woman devoted to a lifetime's support with my ability to 'fit in'.

The strategies in the design and methods used in this thesis are driven by a desire to explore and centre 'voices' that go unnoticed in the process of early years pedagogy and practice. Unrealistic as it is, I would like those that are impacted by my research to stop for the briefest moment to recognise that, like me, young children are seeking meaning and an exploratory desire to find out where and how 'they fit'! Drawing on Robson (1993) I acknowledge that it would be unrealistic to view the subsequent findings surrounding identity formation in this thesis as the only input into decision making processes that determine early years practice in settings.

When considering positionality, I see myself as what Robson (1993) terms as a practitioner researcher. As an academic, this thesis is relevant to my work as a full-time principal lecturer and course director in a school of Education. Although being part of the requirement for working in higher education, this research project is solely driven by my interests, where I have had individual freedom to design and shape the study. A privilege not always afforded to academics. I see myself as a practitioner researcher because at the heart of what I do, I find that my personal philosophy in my work with young children, seems to always be driven from the perspective of the child. Although I have not owned my nursery business for nine years now. I clearly recall its mission statement, '*putting children at the centre of what we do*'. This core value drove the operational practice of my business, and still influences how I access literature, how I lead debates with students, and I am sure, how I have undertaken this research study.

Traditional attitudes tended to regard ideas from the researcher's own experiences as being 'biased' and therefore in need of removal from research studies. I am however guided by more contemporary beliefs that consider insights from the researchers' background as providing useful contributions within research. Contemporary beliefs could be seen as early as 1959 where Wright Mills (1959: 195) reasons "the most admirable scholars within the scholarly community . . . do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other.

Further exemplification about my background (*my story*) can be viewed in Appendix 2.1 which provides contextual information about myself, my family, and experiences of supporting understanding about similarity and difference in matters associated with my ethnic identity. Which I consider have been fundamental in the approaches adopted in this study.

Buoyed by theoretical and philosophical support (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Jansen & Peshkin, 1992) for locating my experiences, knowledge, and identity within this thesis. I thoughtfully propose that contributions from my own experience as an early years practitioner, observing and assessing practice within this English curriculum framework, and being a parent of mixed ethnic children offers useful contributions towards this research project. As will experiential knowledge from parental insights from supporting my children's learning experiences in their ongoing development and formation of a mixed ethnic identity. I draw on the historic perspectives of Maxwell (2013: 46) to make a case for using 'researcher identity', in reflecting on the objectives of this inquiry, and its relevance in terms of exploring assumptions and experiential knowledge in my study: "views come from some perspective, and therefore is shaped by the location (social and theoretical)) and 'lens' of the observer".

Having cautiously presented philosophical reasons for including contributions from my own experiences, the next section makes use of a seminal sociocultural theorist, Bourdieu (1993) to locate my voice and tell 'my story' throughout this thesis. I use Bourdieu's ideas about habitus, cultural capital, and multiple perspectives so that it can be applied to wider theoretical frames of sociocultural thinking and funds of knowledge theory in early childhood education for capturing the categorisations ascribed by children.

### **1.7.1 The enduring influence of Bourdieu**

This thesis uses the theoretical lens of interpretive reproduction to critically challenge related agendas of play pedagogy that have focused on contexts associated with inclusive practice. When considering a study that makes use of human activity and the reproduction of knowledge in educational practice the ways of doing so can be many. But in an endeavour to ground theory and practice into the lived experiences of mixed ethnic children, I turn to a Bourdieuan perspectives to try to situate my positionality. In the following paragraphs I present a short overview about how his ideas relating to habitus, field and capital have paved a way for comprehending the social activity of human action created in the dialectical relationships between the participants in this study. As a basis for providing rigour in the thesis, the principles from Bourdieu's (1990a) concept of habitus have been helpful for comprehending thoughts and actions that transpired between practitioners and children.

But more significantly the features of habitus support the presentation of the interrelationship of thought and activity that occurred between the practitioners and researcher (myself) throughout this study.

Bourdieu's (1993) theorising allows the researcher to not only objectify their experiences by giving them 'voice', but more importantly afforded are opportunities to '*make public*' experiences between particular members of a social group. In terms of my research, group members relate to the focus children and the practitioners. I perceive Bourdieu's intentions for the researcher as seeking to make visible the covert tensions that can and do exist in social relations in research processes. Drawing on his theorisation I offer that by articulating the experiences of mixed ethnic children and practitioners I do so from my social position. But I offer up for consideration that I juxtapose my findings with the children's centralised narratives (in particular) so that both become public statements throughout the study.

I acknowledge that the inherent foci of the explorations within this thesis seek to create a space where I endeavour to generate and position research practice which is different from that already seen in sociometric studies. In other words, I am trying to generate a field of enquiry which corresponds with my own value position, one which also problematises existing value positions in educational research. In terms of my positionality, I acknowledge that I am endeavouring to generate and position a sociology from my own ethnographic encounters.

A historic suggestion that is seminal to this study advises the researcher, that to adhere to the spirit of Bourdieu's work one needs to "deconstruct and reconstruct... concepts in relation to our own distinct experiences" (Grenfell and James, 1998: 51). To be sensitive to the experiences of mixed ethnic children I endeavour to critically integrate Bourdieu's deliberations with debates in research literature and the differing social conditions and experiences that are encountered in the methodological process of this study.

Similarly, what I take from the work of Bourdieu research is an understanding that sociological analyses are adulterated by *agendas* of reconstructed social issues that prevail within society, and by *values* which are held by the individual as a result of their own personal trajectory (Grenfell and James, 1998: 51). Whilst complexities do exist in Bourdieu's writings inasmuch as he does not offer any formulas or standardised tools of enquiry for pursuing his philosophical beliefs. What he does offer in his writings are ways of thinking about context such as one's own objectivity and subjectivity in generating new sociologies. Thus, within this thesis I actively reflect on my own dispositions, habits, and actions that are utilized in the research activities.

Complexity also exists in utilising Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus when examining conditions conferred on individuals such as culture and ethnic origin. His writings about education are perceived as relating to pedagogic action and the socio generative dispositions that drive and perpetuate practice. Comparably Bourdieu (1972/1977a) writes extensively about the importance of "*family as a site of social and cultural reproduction*" (Grenfell and James, 1998:56). Pertinent to this inquiry I utilise Bourdieu's ideas concerning 'cultural language' to question how and in what way the focus children draw on their cultural and ethnic language from the home/community to contextualise terminologies shared in participatory practice. Although Bourdieu does not write extensively about parental involvement in schooling, his ideologies in matters such as home/school relationships and cultural reproduction provide insightful ways for thinking about and analysing how omission of clear articulations surrounding the place of contexts such as 'race' renders these important issues in the social reproductive nature of educational structures as invisible (Grenfell and James, 1998; Reay, 2004). It is considered that exploration into how play-based pedagogy influences the formation of children's mixed ethnic identity is about problematising matters that need to be addressed in early childhood education rather than inequalities that need to be challenged.

Bourdieu arguments make clear practice is what is important and relevant. I also understand that reflexivity enables an individual to understand the social positions that are constructed in qualitative research processes. Having presented just a few of Bourdieu's concepts that are relatable to positioning self in this thesis, I now move on to discuss further complexities surrounding insider/outsider positionality in the process of conducting research.

### **1.7.2 Positioning the black academic researcher insider/outsider status**

This section considers how my own culture and ethnic identity will have inevitably influenced research processes in this thesis. Rather than taking up a stance of being one or the other in terms of insider/outsider positionality, I turn to the work of Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, (2009:54) who ask the researcher to guard against making decisions about whether they are an insider or outsider, and to instead consider one's ability to be "open, authentic, honest, showing a deep interest in the experience of one's participants and being committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience".

Notions surrounding Black feminist theory is key for allowing the utilisation of a counter-narrative to open to scrutiny hidden feelings. It also provides an opportunity to analyse one's research experiences from an outsider-within perspective (Hill Collins, 1990). Careful deliberation of insider, outsider perspectives is provided throughout this thesis, but at this juncture reflective thinking provides an opportunity to give voice to what is often

experienced, internalised, and goes unsaid in the process of conducting research. Discourse surrounding black feminism is critical of the invisibility of 'black' women's experiences (Mayer, 2009). However, the thesis acknowledges tenets of Black feminist theory because it allows 'white' normative ways of knowing to be challenged by moving black women's voices "from the margins to centre stage... encourages critical and reflexive thinking... in academic debate" (Reynolds, 2002: 592).

Afforded are opportunities for black women to define their reality, and for validation to be given to those claims without them being viewed as being threatening (Hill Collins, 1990). As part of "naming one's own reality", Ladson-Billings (1998: 14) strongly advocates that due attention is given to events that have affected the researcher. The events that are presented in the methodology and discussion chapters of this thesis, are squarely situated around ideas associated with Bourdieu's notions of 'cultural capital.' I consider these experiences to be salient for sharing the challenges I encountered; the impact of what I hope was the unintended consequences of engaging in participatory research relating to 'ethnicity' and 'race'; and the resultant perspective that one can never truly be an insider when participating in research. This is conceivably because of the stigma attached to membership roles, the differing experiential knowledge base of participants (Corbyn Dwyer, 2009) and the subsequent challenges that these events placed on me as a Black researcher.

Advancing explanations about positionality, Corbyn Dwyer and Buckle (2009: 60) ideas about "the space between challenges the dichotomy of insider versus outsider status" because the researcher is cautioned that viewing the concept of being either an insider or outsider in research projects would be overly simplistic and limiting. As qualitative researchers we need to have an appreciation and understanding about the fluidity and multi-layered complexity of human interactional experiences when thinking about insider/outsider positionality. Drawing on Mullings (1999) suggestion that although the researcher's knowledge is always based on his/her positionality, holding membership in a group does not mean similarity with that group. Documented in the thesis is the complex relationship between researcher/practitioner and researcher/children membership. The following sections present a brief overview of how I initially considered myself to hold insider membership with the children and practitioners.

*Membership and positionality with the focus children:* Greater complexity surrounding insider/outsider positioning exists when deliberating research with young children. Recognising that I have an innate ability to build rapport quickly with young children, outsider positionality is re-evaluated to consider the inevitable engagement that will occur in the dialogic conversations with the children. I recognise that I can establish trust quickly in the

development of relationships with children. I believe that this is because children recognise that I am genuinely interested and engaged in matters that are important to them. The impact of which is, I find that I am readily 'invited' into their play experiences. Remaining an outsider would be extremely challenging in these circumstances because I am conscious of my decision to always respond to and engage in children's 'world views'. Discussions with my research supervisors were invaluable here. I was relieved to find that not only could I remain open minded about insider/outsider perspectives, but there was a positive endorsement that I should not ignore a position of being an insider when working with practitioners, and even more so in my interactions with children. As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge that I will enter the complexity and continual challenge of considering where one's positionality lies in the process of conducting research. Welcomed is the opportunity occupy the position of both insider and outsider rather than one or the other in this context.

*Membership and positionality with practitioners:* It is hoped that this thesis demonstrates my capacity for being deeply reflective, as well as demonstrating a commitment to providing rigour and authenticity in the process of undertaking doctoral level research. Before starting out on my doctoral journey I carefully deliberated over the reasons for undertaking a study that problematises contexts associated with sensitivities surrounding 'ethnicity'. However, I do not think I fully comprehended the challenges I would encounter during the inquiry, nor did I think about the 'impact' my identity as a black female researcher would have when working with the research participants. In terms of practitioner/researcher positioning I did not fully 'weigh up' positionality of insider or outsider status. I initially perceived that the commonality of experiential knowledge of early years practice meant that I automatically held an insider status. But when tensions occurred in the dialogic conversations of problematising matters such 'race', 'ethnicity' and pedagogic practice, it quickly became apparent that any notions I had of holding insider status were quickly dispelled.

Although great efforts were made to as practically possible ensure my ethnic origin and cultural knowledge did not influence the methodologies used in this thesis. It did not prevent perceptions that I had a pre-determined agenda. Where many researchers would not have to think about their identity in research design, I was forced to acknowledge that my skin colour, and therefore my identity would significantly influence the research processes. It isn't that I don't know that I am categorised as being 'Black', it is that I never had to think about myself in this way before. I simply thought I must now maintain a position of being an outsider because of my research topic, and what Roberts (2013: 338) terms as a 'troubled sense of self'.

Searching for ways of being open, authentic, as well as ways of demonstrating deep interest in the experiences of the children provided what can be viewed as a naive lens for viewing

my role in this this thesis. Thoughts of being a practitioner at heart, led to ill-conceived and ill-considered ideas of insider membership. That was until experiences within the inquiry brought to the fore the need for a reflective reorientation of my position as a 'Black' female researcher.

I make this distinction here because the disclosure of personal research experiences is salient, given the impact the encounters had on the participants, the research design, and the decisions that I was forced to make in the methodological process. I do this to give 'voice' to the narrative that might have otherwise gone untold (Roberts, 2013) in this thesis. Raised awareness of my deeply held values, any personal biases and perspectives that caused me to reconsider my researcher status are therefore made explicit. For now, thoughts in this introductory chapter are centred on making clear the early judgements surrounding my position as a woman of colour and researcher in the study.

Achieving democratic participation and maintaining positive relationships in the research process will be dependent on the positive management of the practitioners as research participants. Correspondingly maintaining detailed research schedules and journal entries support processes for clarifying researcher understanding as well as acting as an invaluable resource for member checking. Thus, the thesis recorded what provided a sense of relevancy and transparency regarding what was going on in the process of research (Ortlipp, 2008).

## **1.8 Summary**

This introductory chapter commenced by contending there is a plethora of research that has been undertaken in the field of early childhood. Where Scholars in educational research have raised questions and provided new understandings across a range of contexts to set the foundations for supporting understanding about how children and childhood is conceptualised and understood. As well as explaining the purpose of early childhood education (ECE), this chapter has presented the theoretical foundations for this thesis. It has also indicated very few studies present their findings from the perspectives of children, and that there are few studies that position mixed ethnic identity formation in UK early childhood education discourse.

It is acknowledged that cultural practices and traditions undertaken in the home environment will be reproduced in children's play repertoires. Considering the research aims and proposed research questions, this doctoral research carefully considers how mixed ethnic children choose to (or not) categorise their cultural and ethnic beliefs, by investigating play-based pedagogic approaches. It is envisaged that praxeological methods

will facilitate the emergence of ethnographic narratives that move beyond generalised conversations in educational research. This thesis proposes to move beyond Vygotskian (1978) ideologies that consider the adult 'expert' in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) interacts and shares knowledge with the 'novice' child, towards doctrines that demonstrate how children's contributions may serve to inform new categorisations from their own perspectives about similarities and differences in mixed ethnic origin. The thesis therefore offers new contributions to knowledge by positioning democracy at the heart of a pedagogy in participation (Formosinho and Pascal, 2016). Focus on the influence of play-based pedagogic approaches, and the contexts in which children are supported to engage in learning experiences that facilitate co-construction of mixed ethnic identity hope to add to current educational debates by giving 'voice' to children from these groupings.

Finally, innovative approaches have been adopted within this thesis, where I have used Bourdieu's (1990a; 1993) principled themes to explain matters associated with my positionality within this thesis. Comparably studies undertaken by Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) have been evaluated to position the 'voice' of the black academic researcher. The primary purpose of which is to: explain insider/outsider perspectives from the lens of the black academic researcher; and to evidence researcher judgements that will have inexorably considered my culture and identity.

### **1.9 Organisation of the thesis**

This concluding section offers an overview of the thesis, relating to the content of each chapter. Chapter 2 examines prevailing theoretical debates in existing research literature about how pre-school aged children respond to and identify with constructs of mixed ethnic identity in early childhood education. It provides an explanation about the enduring influence of perspectives about young children's dispositions for engaging in matters that impact upon them. Discussion introduces both sociocultural and funds of knowledge theory as framework for exploring established epistemologies that have examined the key influences on mixed ethnic identity formation. Chapter 3 examines how English early years policy reform and approaches have influenced the construction and adaptation of professional and learner agency. It locates the interrelationship between practitioner agency; its influence on structural factors linked to social inequality in the curriculum framework of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017); as well as contexts surrounding young children's 'agency' and 'power'. Chapter 4 presents the methods adopted in the research. It introduces the rationale for the choice of methodology used to explore contexts associated with the formation of ethnic identity and includes reflection on the complexities and sensitivities in methodological techniques that occur when questioning pedagogic practice. Chapter 5 explains the study's approach to data analysis and presents the thematic framework, whilst

Chapter 6 foregrounds the children's perspectives about their mixed ethnic identity. This chapter also incorporates and acknowledges the significant contributions of peers in the co-construction of ethnic identity. Chapter 7 draws upon the perceptions of two practitioners to discuss how resources and play-based pedagogic approaches influenced the co-construction of the children's emergent perspectives. Next Chapter 8 brings together the perspectives from both the children and practitioners to re-examine the research questions by considering the findings from their contributions. The chapter culminates with a presentation of the thesis' theoretic model where my contributions to originality from the findings in this study are presented. The final chapter (nine) summarises the key findings; presents an account of the contributions to new knowledge and originality; as well as considering implications for research, dissemination, and practice. I bring the thesis to a close with a personal reflection of my learning and growth from undertaking this inquiry. The chapter concludes with a key message from the researcher.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical perspectives surrounding young children's mixed ethnic identity formation**

### **2.1 Introduction**

When constructing a theoretical lens for any research inquiry philosophers, such as Maxwell, (2013) suggest that research design should draw on known theories, concepts, and assumptions in existing research literature. This chapter therefore offers theoretical perspectives of what is already understood about how pre-school aged children respond to and show awareness of similarities and differences in ethnic identity. Discourse that makes use of developmental psychology theory and postmodernist schools of thought are explored to focus on and garner understanding about factors that influence and shape mixed ethnic children's awareness about their ethnic identity. Of particular interest are the cultural processes in which the co-construction of learning is occurring.

Providing a rationale for the choice of theoretical lens, sociocultural theorisation is introduced as a framework for exploring established concepts and assumptions about how realities are mediated and constructed in early childhood. The intention is to make explicit that opportunities to incorporate children's interpretations in the social construction of their ethnic identity in current educational research debate has been overlooked. Presented is a movement away from sociological ideas that favour children's social development exclusively as the child's "internalisation of adult knowledge and skills" Corsaro, (2015: 18), towards doctrines that explore the categorisations that children ascribe to similarities and differences in ethnic origin.

It is important to acknowledge the salience of contexts associated with 'race ethnicity' in current educational research discourse, particularly where research literature conflates ideas associated with race, ethnicity, and culture. Similarly, it goes without saying that being a black woman researcher, a mother to biracial children, and early years practitioner, will undoubtedly influence how I engage with and interpret existing literature to frame discussions about conceptions of ethnicity and identity formation in the forthcoming sections.

### **2.2 How this chapter is organised**

The chapter commences by introducing existing epistemologies in educational research that have built on Vygotskian ideologies to offer the rationale for and choice of theoretical lens used within this study. Funds of knowledge (FOK) is introduced, where I explain its use as a theoretical frame to explore and give 'voice' to the categorisations that young children

ascribe to their mixed ethnic origin. FOK theorisation is utilised to demonstrate how children's perspectives are pivotal in the process of meaningful learning and a pedagogy of play in the early years.

Exemplification surrounding young children's racial awareness, attitude development and concepts associated with ethnicity and having a positive sense of self and others in early years educational settings is evidenced in Appendix 3. Incorporated within this account are research standpoints that offer explanations about identity formation and young children's understanding of mixed ethnic identity in educational settings.

Moving forward, recognising that play can be a central way in which young children develop, learn and explore socially constructed ideas from wider society, research that has shaped understanding about the purpose of play and how young children share, build upon and interpret ethnicity through play is explored. Considered are perspectives about how children may respond to external influences, such as the influence of peer relationships, as well as the influence of the interactional nature of play pedagogy. Ideas about how practitioners may address the challenges of ensuring an inclusive curriculum for diverse learners is considered. With a focus on exploring the difficulties in developing effective early years provision and pedagogy, Butler and Markman, (2016) and Karabon (2016) research is examined to question the nature of pedagogical activity, cultural production and transformation in early years settings.

Associated with play, the chapter concludes with a review of research that supports comprehension about how cultural artefacts, and their usefulness as a mediation tool for facilitating young children's understanding about their sense of self in terms of ethnicity is examined.

### **2.3 Introducing the theoretical framework for this inquiry**

A range of ideologies in educational research have set the foundations for supporting understanding about socialisation processes of young children's identity formation. Theorisation within this inquiry selects ideas from studies that have built on Vygotskian (1978) theorisation, where scholars (Rogoff, 1990; Corsaro, 2015; Gaither Chen et al. 2014 and Barron, 2014) have examined young children's developing understandings about cultural and ethnic diversity. Explored in these studies is the importance of mediating tools of language, that could be reasonably argued as being fundamental to Vygotskian theorisation. This study has a particular interest in and is focused on the terminology used to express new and emergent categorisations as ascribed by the children within their dialogic conversations in an early years setting. Ideas that "speech structures mastered by

the child become the basic structures of thinking”, Vygotsky (1962: 51) is acknowledged. Also acknowledged in theoretical debate are views that contend by differentiating what a child can do in isolation, compared to what they are able to accomplish in interaction with peers and adults, children will internalise the ‘language’ (speech/terminology) learnt in these interactions, Vygotsky (1978). When it comes to children’s developing attitudes and awareness about ethnic identity Park’s (2011: 394) argues “the language used to talk about racial and ethnic difference is an important tool that young children use in learning to understand these differences” is particularly pertinent for supporting thinking”.

Although conversations in educational research regard the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as the adult expert interacting with the novice child (Vygotsky, 1978), I offer children will also construct their ethnic identities through social interaction with their peers without the involvement of the ‘expert’. This study argues externally acquired conversations that are shared in the early years setting are particularly relevant for supporting practitioners’ developing understanding about how children make use of and share their FOK whilst interacting with peers. Key ideologies from sociocultural perspectives place value on building upon what children already know to co-construct new understandings (Karabon, 2017). FOK theorisation is therefore utilised within this inquiry as a sociocultural lens for examining how mixed ethnic children mediate perceptions about their ethnicity between the structures of home and the early years setting.

### **2.3.1 Funds of Knowledge (FOK) theorisation**

Conceptualisation about FOK approaches have been fundamental in supporting my understanding. Moll et al. (1992) and Riojas-Cortez, (2001) used this term to describe contexts of children’s participation in their home and communities, where bodies of knowledge and skills are developed. When identifying cultural traits in children’s socio-dramatic play, Riojas-Cortez (2001: 35) defined these *cultural traits* (identified as FOK) as the “language, values and beliefs, and ways of discipline”. In the context of this inquiry principles of FOK theorisation are utilised to explore and give ‘voice’ to the categorisations that young children ascribe to their mixed ethnic origin. It takes as its focus the culturally informed knowledge that is shared across contexts of participation between the home and community and play-based pedagogical experiences. The purpose of using this theoretical frame is to support practitioners developing thoughts about how diverse children’s knowledge and participation in sociocultural activities can inform implementation of a culturally reflective and inclusive curriculum.

Key theories explain observations of young children showed that upon starting ‘school’ children cross what they term as a “*cultural boundary*” Lam and Pollard (2006: 133) between

home and early years setting. Yet determinants of cultural knowledge in early childhood education settings appear to emerge from “the social practice of what is done to children” (Barron, 2014: 255), instead of utilising the cultural and ethnic information that children share in their play repertoires.

Interpretation of historic and current literature indicate there appears to be little sense of the ways in which children respond to or take up positions in relation to the sociocultural and ethnic practices that they experience. I also get a sense from my reading that young children may find what they learned at home in terms of their cultural and ethnic knowledge is inconsistent with the expectations of early years provision. (Lam and Pollard, 2006).

Perceived as still being relevant to educational debate and contributing to development of the theoretical framework for this inquiry, I am guided by notions that affirm in the validation of children’s culture, as well as ideas that settings should link “what kids already know and value to that which they do not yet know” (Lee, 2006: 275), to help them in the educational process of identifying with themselves and others. Also embraced is Moll’s (2010: 456) thinking that “when children see themselves in their schooling, they combine their home or community identities within an academic identity”.

Understanding that children will be entering educational settings rich in cultural knowledge from their home and community (Lam and Pollard, 2006), studies also evidence early childhood educators tend to determine what knowledge harmonises best with existing pre-planned learning experiences, often ignoring the rich cultural knowledge that children bring into the setting (Karabon, 2017). Hence perceptions that there is inconsistency with what is learned at home and what is learnt in the early years setting seem comprehensible.

Moving beyond determinants of social practices emerging from “what is done to children” (Barron, 2014: 255) is relevant to the design of this inquiry, because ideas from research provide compelling opinions that young children do have the capacity to act as agents in integrating knowledge into their play. Understandings about how children shape their sense of self in early years provision may provide valuable contributions towards developing awareness in what could be considered as an ongoing concern about the degree of that knowledge that is valued or shared within the pedagogy of the setting. Theoretical frames of reference are therefore informed by research using FOK theory to explore how children’s informal knowledge of family and wider community practices has informed the children’s perceptions about their mixed ethnic identity in the mediated interactions of socio-dramatic play experiences. Explored are the social constructs that impact upon and facilitate judgements and preferences that children make about their own ethnic identity, as well the judgements they make about differing identities to their own.

Advancing ideas taken from existing epistemologies, sociocultural studies have reasoned that from an early age, children will in social contexts constitute, perpetuate and negotiate normalizing discourses surrounding their own identity. In these social context's human diversity and difference impact significantly on children's understandings of and ways of being in the world. Orienting the reader, further exemplification from contributions relating to epistemologies about children's racial awareness and attitude development, identity formation in early childhood, and mixed ethnic identity formation can be viewed in Appendix 3.

I do not present these findings here to ensure that a sharp focus is maintained on existing studies that relate to and focus on responses to the research questions. Notions from these literary sources have informed my developing understanding and the direction my study would take. Particularly, scholars that inform mixed ethnic children have an enhanced cognitive ability in racial identification, where these children not only recognise skin colour, they are able to decode the value attributed to skin colour differentials in larger society (Gaither, Chen et al, 2014). Which in turn allows them to identify more flexibly in racial categorisation and identification tasks (Mac Naughton, 2005).

Contributions that developed my awareness about children's identity formation in early childhood include theorisations that children will make use of cultural tools of thought and then will go on to independently use them for their own purposes (Rogoff, 2003). Ideas that children can absorb and to some degree construct for themselves descriptions of self and others in cultural and ethnic terms provides new ways of knowing that are highly supportive of this research.

Reflection on studies in Appendix 3 that have supported my developing thinking about mixed ethnic identity formation have been guided towards notions that suggest children have an enhanced ability in racial categorisation, where they are able to identify with their two racial in-groups flexibly (Gaither, Chen et al, 2014). In developing the theoretical framework for this study are views that identity may fluctuate dependent on circumstances (Hud-Aleem and Countryman, 2008).

Focusing on the formation of an ethnic identity in the early years, there is evidence that children can only learn tolerance, inclusiveness and how to challenge generalised negative narratives, if they observe adults doing the same (Siraj-Blatchford, 2000). In the context of this inquiry, reflection on these studies steers me to move beyond generalised ideas about the dependency of circumstances and adults' role modelling behaviours such as tolerance in their studies, towards exploring the potential influences pedagogical practice may have on children. My thinking has also been guided towards focusing on constructs that support

children to engage with learning experiences that facilitate developing constructions about their ethnic identity.

Understanding the processes by which children share knowledge about their sense of self and others identity may go some way towards enhancing pedagogical learning experiences and activities that are planned for mixed ethnic children in early years settings. Moving beyond pluralistic beliefs of provision that is inclusive to all, to provision where listening to children's wider experiences are valued by giving them 'voice' in educational knowledge is a compelling ideal, but I also believe is of paramount importance in shaping pedagogical practice for the diverse learner.

Whilst ideas about social practices that shape and determine cultural knowledge and sense of identity are useful for developing understanding, findings of the ways in which children's experiences of ethnic identities still appear somewhat incomplete. There appears to be little explanation in research literature, English educational policy or curriculum frameworks that plainly describe how young biracial children engage in and maintain categorisations associated with their ethnic identity. Similarly, there appears to be incomplete accounts for describing the influences and approaches used in play pedagogies in the processes associated with ethnic identity formation. Apart from conversations in early childhood research that describe it as being "anchored in a web of relationships, group solidarity and communal culture" (Flum and Kaplan, 2012: 240). This definition serves to demonstrate the problematic nature with which issues are engaged with in early years educational contexts.

In summary what does appear to be accepted as a consensus in research is formation of identities are fluid and multifaceted, where nineteenth century sociological conceptions witnessed the emergence in thinking surrounding development in individual identity. This thinking is signified by concepts in which identities are largely linked to children's external lived experiences within their home and community. I recognise that children are able to exert their agency and preferences through expression and negotiation about their ideas surrounding identity (Waller et al, 2011). However, there is ongoing debate about power in relation to the role of adults in the social construction of childhood learning and development, and the agency and choice children have in their own learning. Reflection on these notions have guided my thinking to frame my study differently, so that it incorporates the unique contributions of children, which appear to have been overlooked. If space is given to the agentic ability of children, my belief is they can interact and negotiate contexts surrounding their ethnicity.

Whilst reproduction of these cultural practices is observed in children's play repertoires, explorations that incorporates and extends understanding about how children choose to

categorise their cultural and ethnic beliefs add further challenge but provide a platform for thinking about and adding to current educational debates surrounding ethnic identity formation. These contexts are particularly supportive in exploring opportunities to facilitate transformation within pedagogical practice. The next section therefore considers varying interpretations surrounding the purpose of play; how children explore their cultural and ethnic identities through play; as well as making a case for its inclusion as a tool in the theoretical framing of this study.

## **2.4 Play**

Theories focused on promoting the socio emotional and cognitive benefits of play in education and child development can be found in historic bodies of work such as Erikson (1963) who considered the theoretical meaning of pretend play rituals and its potential for giving children power and control of emotions from early childhood and throughout life. Piagetian (1964) theorisations relating to stages of play development differentiated it from processes of imitation to processes of assimilation, where children use play to construct knowledge of the 'world' by trying to connect new experiences to their existing cognitive schema.

Of further interest relating Vygotsky's (1986) pioneering studies are thoughts about internalisation processes and how they constitute the law of transformation of the external into the internal. Although two levels of internalisation are recognised in Vygotsky (1978) works, interest here is focused on processes that involve internal representation that is specific to cultural and individual (ethnic) contexts. Described as a period in which children learn the language of their culture, Vygotskian theorisation suggests that between the ages of two to eight years this learning can be seen in children's play. Broadhead and Burt (2012) also offer Vygotsky's works provides a lens for understanding that play is a process in which children mediate and develop new forms of thinking, where they combine internal ideas with external realities.

Reflection on these pioneering ideas has guided me to review other early childhood researchers who have gone to great lengths to articulate the importance of play. Pertinent to this inquiry are studies that have linked the relationship between play and learning and its usefulness in informing pedagogical practice. Seen as being an invaluable tool for learning, justifications foregrounding the purpose of play can be found in the national and international studies from scholars such as Hennig and Kirova (2012) and Karabon (2017) to name just a few. In these disciplines' debates suggest the problematic nature of defining play can be attributed to ideas that play can cover a range of behaviours that relate to varying types of activities (Wood and Attfield, 2005). Brooker, Blaise and Edwards (2014:

32) maintain beliefs surrounding children's play is a "cross-disciplinary area of research", found in psychological, sociological, historic and anthropological studies. The authors also contend these disciplines in terms of theory and methodology have a lack of cross-disciplinary engagement and agreement surrounding the purpose and benefits of play.

Though I cautiously agree with thoughts about there being differences between rhetoric and reality, from my observations in 'play-based settings', there appears to be agreement that there is no universal definition for play. What is apparent is a consensus in understanding that play is an important vehicle in which young children develop, learn and explore socially constructed ideas from wider society. There is also a shared opinion that children will draw from and re-engage with experiences as a means of understanding their cultural worlds, where the use of play is seen as an accommodating tool for mediation in interactions between peers and practitioners.

Highly relevant to this study, Broadhead and Burt (2012) explain play has the potential to act as a powerful 'bridge' between children's home and 'school' communities. Using play as a mediation tool for connecting ideas about how mixed ethnic children choose to share and co-construct knowledge about their ethnic identity with peers and practitioners therefore seems pertinent in my inquiry.

#### **2.4.1 Play Types**

When it comes to defining the type of play that will be explored, Hughes (2002) provides a number of different yet interchangeable play types to support the use of a common language for describing play. This research however draws on socio-dramatic play to garner deeper understanding about how the mixed ethnic child reconstructs and make meaning of their pre-existing diverse repertoires of sociocultural activity experienced in the environment of an early years setting. Hughes (2002) explains socio-dramatic play as children's enactment of 'real' and potential experiences, stemming from personal, social or interpersonal nature.

#### **2.4.2 Characteristics of play that facilitate engagement in perspectives surrounding ethnic identity**

In building a case for play in the design of this study, grappling with the concept of play has been very challenging, because for the most part the diversity of play seen in literature makes defining it and justifying its purpose very difficult. Deciding what characteristics of play could provide particular learning outcomes to emerge associated with a child's developing ideas about their ethnic identity is all the more challenging.

It is important to explain that in the negotiation of access phase of this study conversations with adult participants yielded a shared consensus that the ethos and culture of the setting would shape the type of socio-dramatic play contexts undertaken with the selected children. Central to play pedagogy in this setting is an ethos for following the fascinations of the children, therefore practitioner insistence that the children would decide when, where and how they played was respected without contention from the outset.

Characterised as a child centred or child-initiated approach, observations of play started out by giving 'voice' to a small group of mixed ethnicity children in activities freely chosen by the children and the practitioners. The process of play involved following the children's ideas in their freely chosen and intrinsically motivated ways of being in the setting. Supporting reader understanding, it is also important to note that play processes use approaches in which the environment offers all kinds of loose materials sourced by the children from their own encounters in the home and wider community environments.

Also relevant for supporting reader understanding are the practitioner responses in the interview phase of the study that espoused, "*through their play all children share knowledge about their ethnic and cultural self and others*". Practitioner responses contend the children's knowledge is observed most often in the dialectal nature of conversations when the children make use of the materials brought in from the home. Offered in the interviews were beliefs that development and learning is encouraged through co-construction of these shared ideas in mediated interactions with the practitioners.

Like Sutton-Smith (1997) the explanations offered above characterising play and definitions of learning through play in the setting seem somewhat incongruent with ideas in research literature because cautiously contended here is a view that child-initiated play and child centred pedagogy in practice comes with particular biases and cultured ways of operating, defined in the most part by the values of those who lead the setting.

I present these thoughts because achieving an appropriate and sensitive balance between child initiated and adult directed play-based experiences is dependent on practitioner confidence, training and experience, particularly when also operating with the external influences from outcome driven inspection frameworks; constraints of adult: child ratios; pressures from parental expectations of early childhood education, and meeting expectations from more senior practitioners. Similarly, the practitioner's own ideology about the interests and needs of the children within their learning community also influences the adopted types of play and pedagogy.

With thoughts about complexity in providing culturally appropriate socio-dramatic play experiences in mind, research confirms there is the potential for tensions to exist where there is a mismatch between cultural play contexts and dialogical conversations in which individuals participate. Here Bhabha (1998) speaks of the existence of 'liminal spaces' between cultural groupings, which may serve to limit the emergence of new meaningful identities amongst children, peers and practitioners.

I therefore suggest such spaces in play are vital for children coming from diverse multicultural societies and relationships. Instead in my experience what is often seen is external pressures negate opportunities for giving voice to shared understanding in culturally appropriated play activities because of the subtle tailoring of practitioner assumptions about the children who they work with. This study will consider the incorporation of intentional play experiences, where the rationale for doing so is to provide 'space' for more prominent inclusion of children's perspectives towards expanding upon dialogue seen in existing sociological contexts surrounding ethnic identity formation and play pedagogy.

Debates appear to have in common the aim of understanding how young children's experiences in different social contexts contribute towards and shape beliefs of self, behaviours and the community. Waller et al (2011: 103) reason "to know an individual we must also understand the social relations in which any particular individual exists by going outside the individual".

It is important to consider external social experiences and their impact in shaping children's identity. I believe better understanding is required about the meanings' children give to their own lives whilst mediating their competence and capacity for understanding and acting upon definitions pertaining to ethnic categorisation.

Comprehension of how experiences in educational settings impact on young mixed ethnic children when they cross the cultural divide (Lam and Pollard, 2006) between the home/community environment and that of the early years setting have the potential to provide a valuable contribution towards exploring the complexities surrounding how children are empowered (or not) to share cultural knowledge acquired prior to entering educational environments through their play.

Explored next are social constructs that impact upon and facilitate judgements and preferences that children make about their own and differing ethnic identities. I start with the influences of peer relationships in racial socialising processes and how these inform the judgements made by mixed ethnic children.

## **2.5 Children's construction of identity with peers and the power of friendships**

There appears to be a small number of studies (Aboud, 1988; Haskins, 1983; Barron, 2011; Corsaro, 2015) that have considered the development of ethnicity in terms of interaction with peers and development of ethnicity in friendships. Reflection has enhanced my thinking from concepts focused on traditional views of identity consisting of internalised shared values and norms that guide behaviours, towards thinking that is more in line with ideas of interpretation and reproduction, Corsaro (2015) provides noteworthy inferences about the interrelationship between children, pedagogy and practice. In line with an interpretive approach Corsaro (2015) proposes children's place in cultural production in early years settings is concerned with their active attempts to participate in and reproduce information provided by adults as well as peers.

### **2.5.1 Construction of ethnic identity with peers**

Appreciating that children like to learn in peer relationships, Corsaro's (2015) defines peer culture as children sharing in interaction experiences, resources, values and concerns. This body of work argues that children evolve beyond the strong emotional bonds established in interaction with parents where they will through a process of interaction begin to participate in cultural routines outside of their family.

My thinking is directed by a view that children will share childhood knowledge and skills necessary for participation in the adult world, where they "creatively appropriate or take information from the adult world to produce their own unique peer cultures" (Corsaro 2015: 41). Information appropriated from adults is then used to creatively extend and transform concerns children may have in their peer worlds.

How mixed ethnic children use their autonomy for sharing information about their ethnic identity in peer cultures will provide an affordance for documenting these thoughts that are invaluable for practitioners working with this group of children. Suggestions that children through the process of creating peer cultures simultaneously contribute to the reproduction of the adult culture (Corsaro, 2015) is an idea worthy of reflection when exploring contexts for transforming practice.

Pertinent to discussion and worthy of further thought are theories that reflect on children's ability to develop a sense of self with children who differ to themselves. When reviewing assertions made in literature there appears to be very little agreement (that I could find in undertaking the review) about how ethnicity affects children's relationships with each other.

Baldock (2010) suggests that greater emphasis on physical activities, gestures and facial expression can be observed from children who come from differing cultural backgrounds or do not share the same language, and that usually this is driven by children's strong innate impulse or desire to make friends. Providing a supportive ethos in provision in the period where children are developing an ability to understand other perspectives of the world, or when children are likely to notice differences for themselves has the potential to foster a ready acceptance of cultural differences.

Gaither, Chen et al (2014) deepen this understanding further in their explanation that children's identification with and their perceptions of both their racial in-group and out-group is learned through observations of the social statuses associated with those particular racial groups. Emergent ideas generally show that children will show a preference for friendships in play with children considered to be from a higher status i.e., 'white' (Leman and Lam, 2008). Highlighted here are notions that race and perceived status impact on children's social behaviours and can directly guide social preferences for majority race children.

Identified here is a need for practitioners to recognise these potential influences in their observations of child-initiated participatory play. In identifying the influences that serve to impact on children's preferences practitioners also need to plan and develop activities that serve to re-address and re-balance these preferences if observed. If pedagogy is adapted to support the malleable nature of identification by mixed ethnic children and their ability to 'shift' between in-grouping to others depending on the context in which they find themselves, opportunities will be created for transformation of truly inclusive practice. Techniques such as discussions with the use of culturally appropriate resources to explain ethnic and cultural differences provide opportunities for children to explore explanations surrounding their own differing or similar backgrounds, as well as being an important route for other children to gain deeper understanding of their wider world experiences.

### **2.5.2 The power of friendships in the construction of ethnic identity**

Like studies surrounding the development of ethnic identity with peers a small body of research has considered the development of ethnicity in relation to children's friendships. Barron's (2011: 659) studies acknowledge "identification with a racial group emerges early in childhood, whilst rejection of friendships with different skin colour requires rejection of the other".

Evidence within historic studies (Haskins, 1983; Aboud, 2003) indicate that children choose friends with the same skin colour rather than what is the 'other'. Barron (2011) helpfully suggests that a Piagetian/constructivist lens has been used in studies that offer views

regarding the choice of same skin colour in friendships. Although there was little evidence of children being negative towards other groups, it is suggested same skin colour choice is due to egocentrism in early childhood (Aboud, 2003). Mainly because children have difficulty in understanding other perspectives, and so they will show a preference for what is the same. Additional studies continue to uphold preconceptions that young children may display within their social groupings, awareness and positioning of status and hierarchies within peer group relationships (Nesdale and Flessner, 2001).

Critique of the arguments positioned in Aboud's (2003) research raises concerns about children's movement away from egocentrism towards an increasing ability to decentre and to be aware of difference, because positioned is an opinion that as children are more able to decentre, they will demonstrate a developmental tendency not to engage with difference. So, it is suggested children will withdraw from engagement with difference. Although small-scale in design, afforded in my study is an opportunity to test out this suggestion when exploring the influence of peer interaction on development of ethnic identity formation in friendship groups and peer interaction.

Reviewing constructs associated with ethnicity presents significant challenge for the researcher, particularly when studies tend to use the term ethnic identity interchangeably with racial and cultural identity. Whilst some studies equate ethnicity with skin colour, other studies have discussed ethnicity in terms of power, politics, and social and cultural practices (Barron, 2011). Appreciating that children like to learn in peer relationships, explanations contend that children demonstrate an innate ability to freely share perceptions about their differing and similar backgrounds in their play repertoires, even when there are differences in language. Furthermore, studies explain children can show a preference for friendships in play with children considered to be from a higher status (Leman and Lam, 2008). Highlighted here is evidence how 'race' and perceived status impacts on children's social behaviours, and how it can directly guide social preferences for majority race children.

I pause momentarily to consider philosophical approaches surrounding the concept of 'the other', the aim being to provide the reader with an explanation about how this approach has the potential for providing a meaningful contribution when questioning how young children co-construct a sense of 'self'. This is particularly relevant because the research methods used in this inquiry explore the formation of children's ethnic identities in interactions with others (peers and practitioners). Also significant are thoughts that in attempting to make sense of 'other', it is human nature to fall back on what one has read in texts when difficulties arise in reconciling interpretations that may be difficult to understand or may be dissimilar to one's own previous experiences. The concept of 'other' is therefore significant for shaping

understanding about my positionality as the researcher and the interpretations that are made by myself about data.

Taken together many studies when deliberating on contexts associated with ethnic identity formation use ethnicity in essentialist terms. This study endeavours to move away from essentialist readings about internal developmental processes towards investigating how children's experience of a mixed ethnic identity and the relationships with peers (as well as practitioners) is constructed through culturally and socially determined discourses operating through play experiences. Hence moving away from internal accounts offered by developmental psychology. The next section moves on to deliberate how pedagogic action enables (or not) the co-construction of ethnic identity.

## **2.6 Pedagogical action: children's' construction of identity with practitioners**

Contributing to the existing knowledge base surrounding children's ability for learning from pedagogic interactions, Butler and Markman (2016) argue the effects of pedagogic cues on learning may be driven by quite an automatic, cue driven process, where social learning allows complex cultural knowledge to be learned. They also contend that although social learning takes place via the medium of language, children also learn via the actions of others. Actions and the underlying intentions behind them may potentially offer rich sources of information for understanding how pedagogic influences shape ethnic identity formation within this study. Recognising the intentions behind pedagogical actions in play experiences may allow for further contextual inferences about not only how an adult is choosing to communicate information, but also how children make use of pedagogical cues to inform their inductive learning.

Although it is indicated that children learn from the influence of pedagogic actions and cues, children do assess the intent behind the information being offered to guide their perception of the importance of what is being imparted. It is therefore important to acknowledge that pedagogic actions do not occur in isolation, rather they occur amongst ongoing dynamic adult-child interactions. Recognising that adult-child interactions could be viewed as being implicit in nature, it is vital to acknowledge that children need to not only recognise cues and navigate the intentions meant behind a pedagogic interaction, they also need to be supported to sort out which are moments for teaching and hence learning. Guided by these insights I cautiously suggest if children have difficulty in understanding pedagogical intentions there is potential for misinterpretation of intentional actions as 'acts of teaching' which could weaken the influence of learning for the child.

Postmodernists such as Mac Naughton (2005) suggest that normative judgements in relation to culture, race and identity are not viewed as 'absolute norms', but are constantly in a state of fluidity, negotiated under conditions of power. When using the term 'power', I am referring to the dominant discourses that may prevail in the daily narratives associated with racial identities. Questioning whether conversations emanating in practice, are subject to the sole narratives of the practitioner, and what is then considered as worthwhile educational experiences (Barron, 2014) are pertinent to this inquiry. Also pertinent is questioning whether conversations stem from negotiated interactions, where the practitioner acts as a mediator by drawing on the children's existing knowledge from the home and wider community (Moyles, 2005).

Where the former prevails, Barron (2014) contends that these judgements are seen to affect the curriculum. Principally practitioner judgements may influence what educational experiences are considered as being worthwhile, as well as determining (via assessment) which children are perceived as being successful.

Caveats do exist here; I am not suggesting that children from minority ethnic groupings in England are unable to negotiate the curriculum and forms of assessment. Nor do I process data to evidence that practitioner judgments do influence which children are perceived as being successful or not. I do however concur with Gaither and Chen et al (2014) arguments that the malleable nature of identification by mixed ethnic children and their ability to 'shift' between in-groups to others is dependent on the contexts in which they find themselves, which may in turn render them as 'susceptible' to situational and psychological factors. Emphasised therefore is the potentially important role that pedagogical contexts play in shaping the biracial child's learning outcomes. Reflection on notions have guided my thinking to frame my study differently, because I recognise more work is needed to better understand pedagogy and environmental resources that may be needed to facilitate experiences to achieve positive learning outcomes for mixed ethnic children, particularly children who identify with socially disadvantaged minority racial groups.

When reviewing sources of literature, the dynamics between agency and power relations were a cause for concern because they are not always made explicit within studies. Endeavouring to make clear how agency (in terms of practitioner positioning) connects with power (pedagogical actions) to shape and influence the co-construction of ethnic identity with mixed ethnic children has been key in developing the sociocultural frame for this inquiry.

Alternative perspectives surrounding the construction of identity within play pedagogy can be seen in studies concerned with children's 'figured worlds'. Holland et al (1998) espoused

four key concepts for conceptualising identity. The authors contend identity is constructed in 'figured worlds' where meaning is negotiated; is dependent on social divisions in the world for example race, gender and class; emerges from the space of authoring as individuals encounter and respond to the discourses and practices to which they are exposed; and is constructed through making worlds in serious play.

It would appear however that what individuals do and how they interact is based upon differing 'figured worlds' in which inherited beliefs, evaluation of self, interactions and use of existing artefacts shape and influence identity (Gee, 2011). Barron's (2014: 254) ethnographic study of ethnic identities with 3 and 4-year-old White British and British Pakistani children made use of 'figured worlds' theorisation and indicates that individuals "might espouse the beliefs of a particular figured world while acting according to the beliefs of another".

Taken together, these findings can be related to the world of early years education, where constructed environments of adult directed experiences, routines and resources may influence children's conscious and unconscious beliefs. Overall, these sociocultural contributions have informed this inquiry by signifying the importance of the practitioner's role in supporting the development of children's cultural and ethnic identity. All the deliberated studies have in common compelling arguments to indicate acquisition of identity is not an automatic development proceeding in passive children, but it involves the complexity of conscious and unconscious interactions and children's active attempts to understand, interpret and participate in their own and others' identity. My thinking has been informed by a suggestion that young children's identities are dialogic, where there are suggestions that children find 'voice' "from the multidirectional sense of the world of self and others" that is shaped in participation in and responds to the social endeavours in such participation. In doing so children will "improvise and author the world" (Barron, 2014: 255). These interpretations are important for positioning understandings in this inquiry that pedagogic action has an instrumental role to play in the co-construction of ethnic identity in the early years setting.

Recognising that practitioners must make use of wide-ranging pedagogic techniques when working with young children, guiding this study is an exploration of the pedagogic techniques, interactions, resources, and communicative approaches, as well as improvisations that are drawn on to facilitate opportunities for drawing on FOK from children's previous cultural and raced experiences. The idea is to see if playful pedagogy enables mixed ethnic children participating in this study to engage in reflective thoughts about their identity, and how the influence of pedagogic action facilitates sharing of these thoughts through their play. Interest is in the level of self-efficacy that is afforded to this

group of children, in terms of giving them space to mediate their own FOK and 'voice' for sharing their ideas.

In summary, previous sections have presented what could be reasonably considered as noteworthy contributions from research about the significant role that individuals (peers and practitioners) have in facilitating mixed ethnic children's understanding, judgements and preferences about their own racial identification and that of others. Literature that has shaped understanding about how play can act as a mediation tool for connecting ideas about how mixed ethnic children choose to share and co-construct knowledge about their ethnic identity have been extensively explored. As have interpretations that consider play has the potential to act as a powerful 'bridge' between children's home and 'school' communities (Broadhead and Burt, 2012).

Moving forward the power of environmental resources and their ability to determine what children learn about themselves and people differing to them cannot be underestimated. This final section explores deliberations in research literature surrounding the influence of resources in the co-construction of an ethnic identity.

## **2.7 Children's construction of identity using cultural resources**

Research (Milner, 1983; Hennig and Kirova, 2012) indicate that while children are learning cultural attitudes and values from practitioners as well as their peers, they are also learning from the resources that are provided both in the home and educational environment. Comparably Rogoff (2003) reveals children take on the social roles learnt in the educational environment via participation and involvement in culturally determined experiences, where messages are conveyed using resources.

Observations of practice generally indicate that artefacts rather than knowledge appear to be valued, where practitioners in many English based early years settings still locate perceived cultural artefacts such as different skin-coloured dolls, clothes and books into the settings learning environment. This is not saying that culturally appropriate resources do not provide important stimuli for facilitating experiences about race and culture for young children, they do. I suggest what is of equal if not more significant importance is the knowledge that children already possess from their shared experiences outside of the setting because children's cultural ideas about identity are part of how young they make sense of and interpret the 'world' around them through their play. Being aware of how young children perceive their cultural and raced identity is fundamental for supporting the diverse ways in which children learn and play with resources. Taken from earlier Vygotskian (1978) deliberations, play not only allows children to connect with objects (resources) but it also

affords children opportunities to ascribe meanings to these objects and therefore higher order mental processing.

The significance of cultural resources used by practitioners cannot be underestimated because it is understood that different social contexts and opportunities for social interaction determine the kinds of knowledge and meanings (Vygotsky, 1978) that young children will develop. Moll (2011) considered educational settings are significant sources of cultural knowledge, where representations in both the resources and the majoritarian conversations from practitioners reinforce institutional structural hierarchies of 'whiteness', which could potentially damage how some children view their differing racial identity.

Pertinent to this study, Göncü et al (1999) ideas are useful for deliberating on the role resources play in the dialectal processes of research with young children. Particularly their use of observational techniques and use of resources to encourage engagement in play activities. Thinking about the appropriate cultural resources situated in the play environment has prompted me to question what artefacts or indeed play activities would be appropriate for stimulating mixed ethnic children's need for or desire to engage in activities associated with understanding about their own ethnicity.

Persuasive arguments that view artefacts as "socialising agents" suggest there is a need to move beyond making use of resources designed to be educational, child sized and safe, which renders them as being representative of only one culture – "the school culture" (Hennig and Kirova, 2012: 229). Within this inquiry I propose consideration needs to be given to the cultural groups in the early years classroom and how resources help these groups of children to connect with their lived experiences outside of the classroom.

With thoughts about artefacts being viewed as a mediating tool between mixed ethnic children their peers and practitioners, as well as recognising that no resource is 'culturally neutral', the purpose of this inquiry is to create a space using culturally appropriate resources (car) for interaction from an equitable standpoint in matters associated with the co-construction of ethnic identity. The intention is by challenging dominant ways of working with resources and thinking about how children develop their ethnic and cultural identities transformation is created in multicultural education practice.

### **2.7.1 Materials used as part of research in early years settings**

It is recognised that planned resources used in settings could plausibly be viewed as being "loaded with values" (Bang, 2009: 164), when introduced by the practitioner. For this inquiry, it is acknowledged that the introduction of appropriated artefacts (such as children's

literature, skin-coloured paints) could be regarded as being 'value loaded'. It is hoped that by choosing a more ethnically diverse setting the children will be exposed to not only dialogue about similarities and differences in ethnicity, but also the diversity of resources for facilitating these dialogic conversations will be present.

Recognising that practitioners can act as "cultural brokers" in facilitating experiences where children can consolidate learning from the home and setting environments in a manner consistent with their cultural backgrounds, the purpose of this inquiry is to adopt sociocultural theorisations (using cultural artefacts) that enable children to express and exhibit certain values, beliefs and practices categorised by themselves. Where cultural worlds are viewed as fluid and changing, the study suggests resources have the potential to help young children to reconnect with their cultural identity through play (Henning and Kirova, 2012).

## **2.8 Chapter Summary**

This review of literature commenced by introducing sociocultural theorisation that selects ideas from studies that have built on Vygotskian (1978) theorisation to examine young children's developing understandings about cultural and ethnic diversity. In the context of this study FOK theorisation is introduced as a theoretical framework, where its principles are utilised to explore and give 'voice' to the categorisations that young children ascribe to their mixed ethnic origin. It takes as its focus the culturally informed knowledge that is shared across contexts of participation between the home and community and play-based pedagogical experiences.

Appendix 3 has provided summarised contexts about children's racial awareness and ethnic identity formation. Here, explanations by Gaither and Chen et al (2014) offer views about the malleable nature of identification by mixed ethnic children, as well as informing thinking about the ability of this group to 'shift' between in-groups to others, which is dependent on the contexts in which they find themselves. Educational research also documents how children are active participants in social learning contexts (Clarke, 2001), where they can exhibit both positive and negative predispositions in their understandings of ethnic difference (Park, 2011). Children's ability to engage in complex ideas surrounding identity and difference indicates that not only have they been introduced to concepts of ethnicity, but they have learned in these experiences to evaluate their perspectives of other individuals based upon these ideas.

Deliberations in many sections of this review of literature have referred to children's learning and development about culture and identity occurring in the socially situated contexts of the

family and wider community, where internalised ideas surrounding cultural ways of being are then expressed in children's play repertoires with peers and practitioners.

Vygotskian notions that the child operates at a higher level when engaged in play; where the zone of proximal development requires a certain type of play provided a rationale for exploring insights that have shaped current understanding about the nature and role of play and its links to matters associated with race, ethnicity and culture in child development. Recognising playful activities hold educational meaning, this study uses socio dramatic play to characterise the type of play being used in the research design. In making a case for this type of play, I draw on research theorisation surrounding socio-dramatic play to garner deeper understanding about how the mixed ethnic child reconstructs and make meaning of their pre-existing diverse repertoires of sociocultural activity, experienced in the environment of an early years setting.

Explanations are provided surrounding the purpose of play; how children explore their cultural and ethnic identities through play; as well as making a case for its inclusion as a tool in the theoretical framing of this research. Foregrounding ideas about the purpose of play scholars such as Hennig and Kirova (2012) and Karabon (2017) have informed thoughts that play can act as a mediation tool for connecting ideas about how mixed ethnic children choose to share and co-construct knowledge about their ethnic identity. Similarly, there is rigour in opinions that argue play has the potential to act as a powerful 'bridge' between children's home and 'school' communities (Broadhead and Burt, 2012).

Subsequent sections in this chapter have facilitated understanding about the influence of the construction of ethnic identity with peers; the power of friendships in the construction of ethnic identity; and pedagogical action and children's' construction of identity with practitioners serve to influence mixed ethnic children's viewpoints. Taken together examples present noteworthy contributions from literature about the significance of peers in facilitating mixed ethnic children's understanding, judgements and preferences about their own racial identification and that of others.

Findings in these sociocultural contributions also inform the importance of the practitioner's role in supporting the development of children's cultural and ethnic identity in early childhood educational settings. All the bodies of work have in common compelling arguments to indicate acquisition of identity is not an automatic development proceeding in passive children, but it involves the complexity of conscious and unconscious interactions and children's active attempts to understand, interpret and participate in their own and others' identity (Sanders, 2004).

The final section explored research studies surrounding the influence of resources in the co-construction of an ethnic identity. Persuasive arguments that view artefacts as 'socialising agents' (Hennig and Kirova, 2012) and guide ideas about artefacts being viewed as a mediating tool between mixed ethnic children their peers and practitioners are particularly helpful for positioning perspectives that cultural resources allow the home culture to emerge in children's play experiences. Recognised in theorisations about cultural artefacts are notions that they have the potential to enable children to express and exhibit certain values, beliefs and practices categorised by themselves. Used in relation to its application in education, this context offers an alternative critical position for exploring ways of eliciting meanings about how young 'mixed ethnic' children develop a sense of their own cultural and 'raced' identity in interaction with peers and practitioners.

In conclusion, drawing on perspectives in educational research demonstrates the growing attention given to studies that have focused on the presence of racial and cultural dynamics in early childhood settings. This chapter builds on what could be reasonably described as the presumed relationship between the purpose of early years education and constructs appertaining to young children's learning and development about ethnic identity. More importantly viewpoints debated throughout the chapter help with framing the context of my research enquiry, as well as supporting the development of more complex understandings for integrating new information.



## **Chapter 3: The Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum Framework: Whose Agency?**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Debates in current literature are explored in this chapter to examine how early years policy reform and approaches have influenced the construction and adaptation of professional and learner agency. The chapter contends that increased formalisation of preschool education, not least the top-down nature of educational policies has had a significant impact in terms of its role and influence on young children's learning. Pertinent to conversations in this chapter are explorations associated with practitioner agency and its influence on structural factors linked to social inequality (such as inequalities in ethnic identity) in the curriculum framework of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017). Of comparable relevance are debates in literature that examine contexts surrounding young children's 'agency' and 'power'.

This study problematise practitioners' professional ability to implement experiences that give young children opportunities to 'voice' in their 'words' their understanding of cultural 'similarities' and 'difference' pertaining to ethnic identity. Also explored is the degree of practitioner cultural knowledge and their ability to facilitate learning experiences that utilise this knowledge. Reference is made here to the early years practitioners' capability to extend young children's understanding about identity without confusing them by using political terms such as 'black' and 'white'. Political categorisations known and used by adults in the early years environment is significant when analysing the language or terminology that may be used and then replicated by young learners. Considered in this chapter therefore are research contexts associated with practitioner agency and its influence on structural factors linked to possible social inequalities in ethnic identity in the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017). I note here that care must be taken not to conflate findings in literature due to my own ethnic background, and my academic/practitioner role when criticising policy framework and early years provision in my endeavours to seek causes for inequalities in inclusive practice. I acknowledge that causal factors are much more difficult to establish, and that it is easy to be seduced by presenting convincing arguments that lay the blame at the door of policy or practice.

Discussion in this chapter signifies an importance for recognising diverse contexts that shape children's learning; their ability to participate; and how these circumstances can be at odds with professional agency and expected curriculum outcomes. Appreciating the role of early years education, focus in the chapter centres on contexts associated with assessment against educational goals. The purpose is to explore emerging debates

surrounding how implementation of the curriculum framework in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector influences and shapes the early years practitioner's professional agency, which in turn may influence and shape learner/teacher identity in the formal and informal relationships with mixed ethnic young children.

### **3.2 How this chapter is organised**

To orientate the reader, I introduce the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2017) framework and Early Years Foundation Stage Profile: 2020 handbook in Appendix 4. Exemplified there are the main themes of the EYFS that underpin what is deemed as effective policy guidance for inclusive practice. The curriculum framework and the new profile handbook are critically examined to reveal challenges in their implementation exist in terms of the relationship between learner and practitioner agency and identity in practice. Observed in the principles of the framework are dilemmas for the practitioner where dichotomies exist between a pedagogy that considers the direct views of children and parents and implementing outcome driven programmes to provide effective services.

Drawing on discussion in Appendix 4 the chapter reviews Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus to consider ideas surrounding processes of socialisation and the individual's ability to engage in educational structures that influence values and expectations of particular social groups concepts linked to habitus. Pioneering work associated with Foucault (1991) writings is reflected upon to support comprehension of the potential of the dynamics between power and knowledge and its influence on individuals (practitioners) dispositions to shape learner identity.

Discourse associated with the complex relationship between professional and learner identity is explained next. The purpose of doing so is to demonstrate how successive neoliberal ideologies and revisions in the implementation of the EYFS have influenced the complex nature of dispositions for practitioners and young children. Included are conversations from literature that illuminate how policies on assessment have potentially come to influence practitioner agency. Suggested here are views that consider teachers may feel pressured to assess children in ways to meet curricula outcomes, rather than basing their judgements on knowledge of children's learning and development from their interests and engagement (or not) in learning experiences Bradbury (2014).

The chapter culminates with a debate from research literature about who should influence the decisions in the content being taught in early childhood settings. Presented arguments question whether decision making should lie with the practitioner to ensure achievement of curriculum outcomes, or whether decision making should lie in the agency and rights of

children so that they are able to influence their own learning trajectory. The aim being to again demonstrate how successive government neo-liberal ideologies in the many revisions of EYFS have influenced dispositions and agency for practitioners and young children.

The next section explores theories from the work of Bourdieu to review theories associated with socialisation processes and its influence on how the construction of knowledge is enacted between the early years professional and children in educational structures. Theories that reflect on the nature of power relationships between practitioners and learner identity are also explored, where the work of Foucault is reflected upon to support comprehension of the potential of an adult's disposition in symbolic interaction of sharing knowledge with children. Offered is a perspective that there is potential for a power dynamic where the adult (in this case the practitioner) can exercise, influence and potentially shape learner identity.

### **3.3 Theories surrounding the process of socialisation**

To explore ideas surrounding an individual's ability to engage or act in educational structures, I turn to the influential work of Bourdieu (1984) who developed his own distinct explanation for achievement, in which he viewed the major role of education as being a system of cultural reproduction. Not the transmission of the culture of society but involving the transmission of the reproduction of cultural capital. In other words, the cultural tools or means used to acquire other sorts of capital such as social class and not withstanding knowledge. Embodied in these ideas are notions "that higher class parents pass on to their children the cultural knowledge to succeed in capitalist societies" (Halambross and Holborn, 2008: 688).

In later work Bourdieu (1990) uses the concept of habitus to describe the reproduction of social stratification, where individuals are considered to develop ways of being learnt by internalising experiences. The work of Saatcioglo and Ozanne (2013: 693) support understanding of values and expectations of particular social groups in their clear definition of habitus, which they describe as "a set of unconscious and enduring dispositions, patterns of thinking, and ways of acting that are acquired in childhood and that provide a tacit sense of how the world works and one's place in the world".

However, notions of higher-class cultures being superior to, for example, working classes, where individuals are seen to be constrained by the social group they are born into for educational achievement and the role of education appear somewhat incomplete. This neo-Marxist view, whilst presenting a credible explanation of socialisation processes, is taken further in postmodernists' ideas that explain individuals are not necessarily restricted by

their backgrounds but are free to construct their own identities. Also emphasised is the idea that choice is also an important factor in the socialisation process. This impression is not dissimilar to views defined by Bourdieu (1993) who contended construction of identity is embodied in an individual's capacity to make choices and to act independently. His ideas also considered dispositions to learn, the process of constructing identities and the ability to act can constrain or similarly enable agency.

It is important to move beyond assumptions that 'class' is the main basis for socialisation and the acquisition of knowledge. Alternative perspectives (Barron, 2009; Karabon, 2017) add value by offering plausible ideas that see children as other than passive recipients of learning from adults who want them to follow agreed norms and values. Instead contended are notions that the concept of symbolic interaction is where adults (generally parents) are perceived as 'socialisation agents'. Here, agency can be seen to play a significant role in children's developing identities. Where the experiences "*learned*" and "*shared*" (Sanders, 2004: 56) in the communities in which they are active participants enable them to become "*encultured*" (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 48). Historic studies support this position about shared experiences supporting children to become encultured, insomuch as they learn to recognise and reproduce symbolic representations of a community (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Other 'agents' considered to share knowledge with children and relevant to debate are practitioners. Considered are views that these agents have responsibility for preparing children for membership in society. Handel (2006: 17) suggests that no child is simply born into society, instead it is considered: "the socialisation agents in different social segments present different expectations to children, who will accordingly, have different socialisations experiences".

Expectations that practitioners have responsibility within pedagogy for sharing and developing learner knowledge for later membership in society appears to be very difficult. Particularly evidencing how and in what ways this would be exercised in everyday practice. With thoughts about practitioner responsibility for developing children's knowledge in mind, presented are significant implications for understanding the interrelationship between children, pedagogy and practice and how children negotiate and enact their agency and choice.

Also worthy of further consideration are theories that reflect on the nature of power relationships between practitioners and learner identity. Literature contends that Foucault's (1980) studies on power relate to the production of knowledge and truth (Cohen, 2008). Therefore, exploration of studies that follow Foucauldian principles may go some way

towards supporting comprehension of professional identity and notions of power relationships, particularly when it is considered that identity is “constructed through an exchange between self and other” (Thomas, 2012: 93).

Although complex, much of Foucault’s writings are concerned with the ways in which the ‘state’ exercised power and control over society. Compelling insights are however provided in Foucault (1991) work *Discipline and Punish*, which suggests power is also found in social relationships, where knowledge and power is almost inseparable. Foucault (1991 cited in Haralambos & Holborn (2008: 561) contends “we should admit that power produces knowledge... that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations”.

In supporting comprehension of the relationship between power and knowledge, acknowledged is an interpretation from literature that limitations exist in this view. Suggested in his later work, Foucault makes clear that there a few circumstances where individuals do not exercise choice and therefore fluidity exists in one’s ability to truly exercise power. The concept of choice in participation between practitioners, children and pedagogy will be explored later in the chapter. For now, interpretations of Foucault’s (1991) work for defining ideas about power and control do lay the foundation for understanding discourses that suggest the possibilities of an individual’s choice and the ability to act and exercise one’s power. It is recognised that caveats do exist in the studies of Foucault because his pluralistic theories did not look at power in the everyday activities of people and the commonly used discourses involved in interaction.

Nevertheless, taken together the findings in both Bourdieu and Foucault’s work are important for laying the foundations in supporting comprehension of the potential of an individual’s disposition in symbolic interactions of sharing knowledge with children. There is the potential for a power dynamic to exist where the adult (in this case the practitioner) can exercise, influence and potentially shape learner identity.

Relating to this study, the presented ideas provide plausible evidence of the significant influences in historical research for thinking about the relationship between ‘self’ (early years practitioner) and ‘other’ (children, parents, researcher) and its contributions towards notions of a sense of professional self-identity (Butler, 2005).

Explanations of socialisation processes suggest practitioner identity is facilitated in early education where knowledge and power are perceived as being interlinked. Discourse that power is found in social relationships where practitioners are ‘agents’ in the sharing of

knowledge with children, I posit expectations of early years professionals as expert puts them in a position of dominance and thus allows the professional to deem themselves as the expert in the reproduction of knowledge. I also suggest that this position of dominance may be restrained to a greater or lesser degree because of the structure of the English curriculum framework. Experiences may be perceived as being engineered towards meeting curriculum goals. An essential element of what it is to be professional can be seen in research undertaken by Thomas (2012: 91) who states, “privileging of professional expertise enables early years teachers to experience certainty in their relationships...”.

The concept of ‘privileging of expertise’ can and does extend to relationships with children too, where a historic interpretation and taken for granted assumption viewed practitioner identity as one of having a level of expertise (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Within professional relationships there appears to be an expectation of a level of ‘expertise’ associated with what it means to be seen as an early years professional. By questioning the hidden assumptions associated with professional identity and the relationships between the practitioner as expert and the child as being perceived as needing to be taught, I hope to provide other ways of thinking beyond the taken-for granted ideas of learner-practitioner agency.

The next section now deliberates the challenges in the implementation of the EYFS in terms of the relationship between learner identity formation and practitioner identity in practice. Discussed is the complex nature of professional identity and the interrelationship of agency between the pedagogue and the child.

### **3.4 Construction of agency and professional identity**

#### **3.4.1 Construction of agency**

Monitoring, measuring and assessing children’s learning are increasingly significant factors in English early years practice (Ang, 2014). The top-down nature of policy development has influenced what could be reasonably viewed as a highly prescriptive and assessment-driven early years culture. Coupled with the dominance of a ‘school readiness’ rhetoric and government preoccupation with early education as a preparation for later schooling give rise to problematising the role of early education and how curriculum frameworks (DfE, 2017) have influenced the agency of early years professionals. Commonly agreed in research are notions that the introduction of the EYFS provided a landmark for early education. Certainly, educational researchers such as Moyles (2009: 23) at the time showed agreement with the principles and ideology of the EYFS citing “to have the uniqueness of

each child validated, so to speak, through the Early Years Foundation Stage and Every Child Matters is an important step forward, particularly for policy makers”.

Literature displays emergent views that there are different philosophies about how agency and structure are related to each other. Plausible explanations view agency as an individuals’ ability or freedom to act in accordance with their own wishes, regardless of social context and other extremes. Other descriptions view agency as being limited or in some way reduced when subjugated by social structures. I argue that these views are pertinent when exploring professional identity formation within the context of revisions in early years curricula development EYFS (DCSF, 2008a to DfE, 2017). Contemporary theorising about conceptualisations of ‘teacher’ professional agency is seen to emerge at various individual and social levels. A position offering value within the context of this inquiry is taken from Vähäsantanen (2014: 10) studies who argue “professional agency (involving decisions and actions relating to reform) seemed to emerge within specific temporal moments and situations, the manifestations of agency could either remain stable or change over time and situations”.

Although this research was conducted within specific change situations occurring within Finnish vocational education, the findings can be theoretically and practically applied to the English context of educational reform and its impacts on professional agency and pedagogy. Taken from this research are assertions that manifestations of professional agency are closely related or intertwined with social settings and with other people (Vähäsantanen, 2014). At an individual level, agency is likened to the teacher’s professional identity, competencies and work experiences. Whereas notions at a social level suggest agency relates to the management culture of the organisation and teachers’ professional relationships.

### **3.4.2 Construction of professional identity**

Debates in literature suggest professional identities can be impacted upon from the moment an individual joins the education sector. McGillivray (2008 cited in Miller, Drury & Cable 2012: 246) maintains “the early experiences as one enters a profession can be critical in the co-construction of professional identities as we shape ourselves through the interaction with others”.

McGillivray’s (2008) argument is reinforced by Preston (2013), where it is suggested that although many individuals tend to enter the sector with the primary aim of working with young children, government agendas through curriculum frameworks; the need to monitor standards of care and educational outcomes; and the influence of increasing demands for

childcare, individuals can find that they enter managerial roles very early on in their careers. Once there, it would appear that there is less contact with children and their families and a distinct movement towards a managerial role.

Highlighted are beliefs that the early years professional initial experiences are typified by roles linked to maintaining the standards of the setting, managing budgets, developing staff teams and developing policies and procedures, rather than time and space dedicated to the development of expertise in relational roles for supporting children's learning and development. I certainly concur with these findings, as a registered early years provider the demands placed on my setting to meet the welfare requirements of children in terms of the curriculum learning outcomes meant that individuals were promoted into positions of management with allocated roles, responsibilities and accountabilities very early on in their careers. These were not responsibilities necessarily linked to curriculum development with the children, but to understanding tasks linked to observation, assessment and evaluation reporting in readiness for Ofsted inspection processes.

The dichotomy of dual professional identity presents concern when considering the construction of a professional identity and the social construction of self as an early years practitioner. Taking on demanding and complex roles requiring skills not always provided for through formalised training programmes, coupled with less contact with children or curriculum design and developmentally appropriate activities, one can understand the emphasis and need for professional training and development in government reporting (Preston, 2013). Undermining views of professional identity and exacerbating issues of agency (power to act) are insights in literature (McGillvray, 2008) that recognise the attachment of stereotypes to the identity of practitioners. Where terminology such as 'kind' and 'loving' is attached to individuals working with young children. Similarly, Baldock et al, (2009) cites the influence of government ideology as perpetuating the stereotype of the nursery practitioner as being of low in skills and knowledge' and therefore in need of up-skilling.

Perpetuation of opinions that viewed the early years practitioner as being low in skill can also be seen in the development of policy reform of the workforce Nutbrown (2012). Against a background of ambiguity in the quality of provision, professionalisation of the early years workforce and demand for good quality and affordable childcare, subsequent Government reform began to look closely at the systems for early education. Reforms of qualifications in the early years sector endeavoured to address views surrounding professional identity. Addressed in the Nutbrown (2012) review are recommendations for a more streamlined qualifications framework with all childcare qualifications working to the same set of common

occupational standards. Recommendation that has subsequently been addressed in the Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017).

Issues surrounding professionalising the early years workforce are important in supporting comprehension about the problems relating to inconsistencies in pedagogy and inclusive practice. Attempts to create common occupational standards are addressed in the Teacher Standards (2013). Observed in the Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017) are policy endeavours to redress inequalities that existed between recognition of the then newly formed Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) and Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Attempts are made to 'shift' attitudes towards developing professional practice based on incorporating knowledge of child development and learning, rather than a dominance towards care routines. What has been emphasised in literature is the introduction of professional qualifications such as PGCE Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS), (formally the Early Years Professional Status, EYPS) has impacted on and influenced professional agency and identity by readdressing long established processes for developing the early years professional (EYP). Against a backdrop of workforce reform this study maintains inequalities still perpetuate in terms of parity in teaching practice, which arguably contributes towards the continued undermining of professional status, qualifications, as well as the skills and knowledge of those professionals.

Advancing discussion Vähäsantanen (2014) research proffers that whilst 'teachers' do not have extensive opportunities to influence the contents or direction of reforms, such as Teacher Standards (2013) or the curriculum framework of the EYFS (2017), their agency in terms of being able to exert influence is seen to become significantly stronger concerning educational reform practices. These discoveries in literature suggest at an organisational level and within their working practices individuals appear to have more opportunity to make decisions about pedagogical issues. Their agency is aligned to relationships with 'others' in the workplace and views of 'self' in relation to the tasks they are expected to perform within the provision. Vähäsantanen (2014: 7) states the exercise of agency is seen to be "intertwined with their professional interests, professional competencies, and previous work experiences".

In summary, although neoliberal ideologies for improving the skills and effectiveness; and raising the quality of provision by enhancing practice in the early years workforce is found in Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017). It is proposed that complexity and challenge exist in the implementation of such reforms in practice. Particularly where conflicts appear to be prevalent in early years professionals' perceptions of their professional identities and agency at an organisational level. Emergent views suggest there appears to be a fluidity in

conceptualisations of professional identities linked to “interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences derived from practices” (Vähäsantanen, 2014: 7).

### **3.5 Early Years Professional and Pedagogy**

Focus now centres on discourses that explore pedagogy and the development of children’s cultural identity formation. Pedagogy provides a broad framework for understanding the ways in which practitioners engage with young children and plan learning and development against the EYFS. The English context pedagogy is often perceived as being synonymous with teaching, Alexander (2005: 540) however argues “pedagogy encompasses the performance of teaching together with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform and shape it”.

I therefore suggest pedagogy provides a platform for evaluating whether adult actions are responsive to the needs of children in terms of supporting their developing cultural identities, as well as allowing for further exploration of reciprocal relationships that may inform pedagogy.

Leggett & Ford (2013) research suggest that early years teachers act with specified goals in mind when working with young children. Argued here is an idea that there appears to be an assumption that practitioners possess wide ranging knowledge of how children learn and develop. Theoretical discourses on what constitutes the role of the early years pedagogue in helping children reach their potential have been traditionally viewed as co-constructor or scaffolder of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1962) in guided participation (Rogoff et al., 1993), where sustained shared thinking with knowledgeable others (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) facilitates children’s interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005). Theoretical conversations pertaining to children’s co-construction of knowledge via pedagogic action is discussed in depth in Chapter 2 and Appendix 3. As have proposals for theorising the conceptualisation associated with the development of children cultural identity. Barron’s (2014) *figured worlds research* opened pivotal and new ways of understanding how young children make sense of identity and develop sense of self from the customs, practices and situations that are inhabited. Barron’s research extended understanding of learner identity by suggesting that children’s identities emerge from the stories, artefacts and cultural practices shared with significant others before entering early years education. Offered for consideration however is a view that tensions between practitioner and learner’s agency exist in the ideology of the child-centred curriculum framework of the EYFS.

Correspondingly, Chapter 2 provided insights from Vygotskian (1962) thinking that view the adult as the co-constructor of higher conceptual learning, to more contemporary research

that provide insight and understanding of children as having dispositions to learning (Wood, 2014). Principles that also appear to have influenced the design of curricula learning outcomes stem from notions that see children through the lens of Piagetian (1971) thinking, that children construct learning through participation. Further tensions are evidenced in comparably established discourses that consider young children's innate ability to engage in child initiated free play experiences. Together with notions that see 'choice' as a key component of children's play experiences, these ideas extend to widely accepted views that the principles and ideology of the EYFS (DfE, 2017) should involve the planning of activities based on the 'unique child's' needs and interests.

These dominant discourses have been seen to guide understanding of early years pedagogy, particularly where the promotion of agency and efficacy is viewed as being central in planning for developmentally appropriate activities. Extending arguments presented in Chapter 2, useful insights into the capabilities of young children suggest they need opportunities in an environment where "their own interests and strengths find a voice and place" Broadhead (2006: 192). With additional evidence in literature that suggests children can benefit from the freedoms associated with the structures and routines seen in many English based early years settings serve to conflict with professional agency of the adult. Wood (2014: 2) concurs with these suggestions by arguing there are "increasing tensions between play-based approaches and the structural curriculum goals in national policy frameworks".

The presented arguments disrupt conversations surrounding 'teacher agency' as the knowledgeable 'other' (Dalberg, 2005) and views that align with adult as the co-constructor of knowledge (Bruner, 2006), as there appears to be emergent views that promote learner agency in the acquisition of knowledge, together with recommendations that children should experience relatively uninterrupted adult intervention. It is to these contributions that I now turn.

### **3.6 Teacher-Learner Interface**

Contributions in literature suggest that practitioners will use their own assumptions, associated stereotypes and prejudice to inform their understanding of children's identities and thus their practices in relation to these understandings. Bradbury (2014: 351) proffers the compelling idea that "circulated discourses related to class, race, religion, gender, migration and the inner city have an impact on how children are constituted as learners...".

These views provide a useful lens for understanding the ways in which early years practitioners may engage with young children, and how in turn this may shape the planned

learning and developmental experiences offered in curricula. Also highlighted in Bradbury's (2014: 351) studies are opinions that whilst adult actions are responsive to the cultural needs of children in terms of supporting developing identities, also proffered is a thought that "learner identities are the way in which teachers constitute [children] as successful or unsuccessful, well-behaved or badly-behaved, teachable or not teachable, through the deployment of discourse".

Ways of thinking beyond the taken for granted ideas of practitioner agency in the social construction of learner identities are seen in 'working theories' of researchers (Claxton, 1990; Lindfors, 1999; Rogoff, 1990; 2003) who suggest children will reach their potential in their attempts to connect, edit, extend and deal with discrepant pieces of knowledge in an endeavour to build new understandings through guided participation. Similarly known pedagogical approaches that build children's knowledge and enabling theorising to occur in areas of self-motivated interest can be found in studies by Rinaldi (2006). Whilst Bronfenbrenner (1979) adds to these theories in his attempts to provide a wider ecological theory for understanding children's development and learning, problematising the validity of all these theoretical approaches demonstrates wider implications in practice.

### **3.6.1 Changing views about the developmental child**

Adding to a discourse for challenging contemporary assumptions about the image of the developmental child, researchers have challenged opinion due to diversity seen in society (in terms of for example ethnicity, religion, social class, disability and languages) and the tacit power of overriding ideologies and institutions Papatheodorou and Potts (2013, cited in Palaiologou 2013: 60). it is plausible to argue that traditional theories that propose stages and ages of development as well as assuming distinct universal features applicable to all children, at all times, and in all societies can no longer be applied to descriptions about the developmental child. Judgements using these descriptions appear somewhat contextually limited if they choose to ignore social and cultural influences (Dahlberg et al, 2007; Moss, 2008).

### **3.6.2 Child initiated approaches v structured curriculum goals**

Although Wood (2014: 2) offers the view that "it is widely accepted a curriculum based on children's needs, interests and patterns of learning promotes agency, self-regulation and control", theorising children's agency to participate in the context of interaction and

theorising children's agency to participate in the context of interaction and participation in planned curriculum experiences is far more complex.

Appearing to be at odds with each other and therefore exacerbating challenges within pedagogy is one; a requirement to implement play-based approaches where children are free to make their own choices and two; a requirement to regulate and take control of their learning and structured curriculum goals in national policy frameworks of the EYFS (2017). Implementing a curricula framework that combines freedom of choice with structured curriculum goals, whilst clearly benefiting children conflicts with what Palaiologou (2013) considers as the lens by which theoretical standpoints, policy requirements and recognised good practice is evaluated and interrogated.

### **3.6.3 The use of Assessment**

A significant factor within the requirements of the curriculum and therefore pertinent to supporting meaningful understanding of the relational context of agency is evaluation programmes that have as their focus an emphasis on child-centred assessment. Within the EYFS (DfE, 2017: 5) is a requirement that preschool children acquire a "broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life". Also situated within this policy framework is the requirement that "each child's level of development must be assessed against the early learning goal(s)" (DfE 2012: 14).

Policy rhetoric underpinning inclusion and cultural diversity does offer critical perspectives about how and to what extent the issue of cultural diversity is engaged with in the context of the early years curriculum. What is challenging in the EYFS is an expectation that assessment of each child's level of development must be addressed against early learning goals without 'knowledge' of what constitutes, shapes and defines the issues surrounding children's identities so that this learning can occur. I suggest methods of assessment in the framework (based on practitioner assumptions and judgments from observations) has the potential to adversely impact on policies for inclusion, as well as potentially reproducing patterns of inequality.

Overall emergent views in the theories discussed so far place an emphasis on the impacts of socialisation and policy approaches on children's learning and development. However, in line with the intentions of this study, children's interpretations of what has been taught appear not to be considered within these bodies of research. In other words, the 'voice' of the child is not evident in the presented explanations. Furthermore, consideration of these

theories does not appear to question whether it is realistic to expect practitioners to have the depth of knowledge required to facilitate learning in such a complex arena.

In light of the presented perspectives, reference is made to Hedges's (2010) research, suggesting that a critical distinction needs to be made by the early years practitioner between children's "*play interests and enquiry-based interests*" (2010: 29). Relevant to the purpose of this study, Hedges (2010: 29) also argues that "deeper engagement with... (children's) funds of knowledge, skills and dispositions from school, home and community contexts".

Chapters 2 and 4 make a case for using FOK theorisation alongside the judgments that are made to facilitate children's learning and development. Worthy of further consideration are thoughts that practitioner judgments should also include children's in-depth enquiries into subjects such as identity and culture in curriculum planning and development. Fundamentally espoused is an opinion that the views of children need to inform not just assumptions made by early years practitioners, but children's cultural FOK should become an essential part of pedagogic knowledge. In this way possibilities that practitioners might undermine children's culturally influenced interests because of misinterpretation, would mitigate the judgments that are made (Hedges, 2010).

Recognising research that problematizes children's agency in the EYFS play-based curriculum offers opportunities to explore possible constraints such adult roles, routine, dichotomies in the curriculum framework as well as agency between young children and early years practitioners. I now turn to these discussions in the following section.

### **3.7 Children's agency and the right to participate**

Although contexts associated with children's right to participate is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4, it is acknowledged here that United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) has made an important contribution to understanding children as citizens with rights and has arguably changed the landscape for early childhood education and care. At a policy level EYFS (DfE, 2017) principles in terms of pedagogical practice can be seen to align its priorities and targets in meeting these rights. Relevant to this study educational rights are related to children's right to participate in decisions that affect them, which in turn makes relevant and raises awareness of 'listening' to the voice of children in early years practice. Global research has similarly greatly influenced widening understanding about the many ways that young children can and do express their opinions. Bodies of research appertaining to adults working in early childhood education have made clear the requirement of actively listening to the views of young children when planning

experiences for their learning and development. From Malaguzzi's (1993) 100 languages, Rinaldi's (2001) concept of a pedagogy of listening, Clarke and Moss (2001) mosaic approach for listening to young children to Pascal and Bertram (2009) thought provoking insights about listening to the voices of young children that are silenced in the production of knowledge and understandings about their lives. All of which have provided awareness that has greatly influenced both policy and practice.

### **3.8 Connecting the relevance of play with rights to participate**

There is a considerable body of literature advocating the positive benefits that play has in contributing towards children's learning and development. Thought has been given to the contrasting opinions provided in literature about what constitutes play. Chapter 2 presents theories associated with definitions of play, where it was not surprising to find that defining play is complex and difficult to clearly define. Raising awareness about the purpose of play in relation to this research study Broadhead and Burt (2012) work positioned the potential play has by acting as a powerful 'bridge' between children's home and 'school' communities. Using play as a mediation tool for connecting ideas about how mixed ethnic children choose to share and co-construct knowledge about their ethnic identity with peers and practitioners was presented as being pertinent in this study.

#### **3.8.1 Right to participate**

Also implied in research are long held beliefs that emphasise the centrality of playful learning as being an important aspect of childhood education. Whilst there are endless possibilities for what children do in play and how they expand upon skills and experiences, literature offers play can be regarded as a vehicle through which children can express attitudes that can also be manifested through various kinds of behaviour. Provided are useful insights into how children's repertoires in self-initiated play activities can be influenced by home-based, child rearing practices. Changes in the maintenance of social boundaries in children's self-initiated play activities and conversations can be seen to be shaped by ethnicity. It is reasonable to acknowledge the practices engaged in the home and community will influence the choice of play activities engaged in, in the setting. In seeking to support interpretation of the connectivity between home and the setting Wood (2014: 7) argues: "children's repertoires of participation in the classroom can be influenced by ethnicity, social class and ability/disability".

In terms of ethnicity, it is not beyond reasonable doubt that motivation to enact forms of agency may be influenced by the names, labels and situations which may have been learnt in the home environment. Where in line with an interpretive approach Corsaro (2015) offers

children's peer culture can be demarcated by established activities, values and behaviours that children share in their interactions with peers and practitioners. Through this lens, agency can be seen to involve the ability to "learn, to teach oneself and to develop reflexivity and metacognitive capacities" (Wood, 2013: 7). The use of artefacts in enacting playful participation offers a particularly useful insight in supporting children's association with notions that may be culturally appropriate.

### **3.8.2 Problematising children's agency**

Findings taken from studies using naturally occurring observations of what and whose agency or choices are exercised, indicate children will exercise their agency in their choices by making use of "existing funds of knowledge, individual dispositions and a willingness to disrupt the rules of the setting and ability to manage events and peers" (Wood, 2014: 9).

Notions of children's ability to disrupt the rules of the learning environment and to manage events in the process of learning provide useful evidence for problematising practitioner/learner agency. Earlier conversations support comprehension that children use free choice and free play for their own purposes. These choices can and do impact on others and therefore need to be carefully considered in issues surrounding identity and culture (Hedges, 2010). Hedges studies offer ideas that children's agency may be denied in other contexts such as adult directed activities in the classroom. Contributing to deeper understanding are ideas that children's engagement in activities with each other can be socially challenging particularly where there are relational complexities which involve managing the social dynamics of power between learner/peer interactions.

Compounding matters further but important for supporting reader understanding, are thoughts that in child-initiated experiences with peers as well as adult-directed intentional activities, children can and do exercise whether they choose to participate or not. Butler and Markman (2016) propose children learn from the influence of pedagogic cues to assess the intent behind the information being offered to guide their perceptions. It is considered that play boundary maintenance between the learner and the practitioner can be challenged in children's attempts to question 'knowledge' being shared by the adult.

Comparable with methods that will be used in this study, Wood (2014) made use of observations in practice to illustrate how children engage with and express their agency in a range of activities and experiences. Recognising that opportunities to develop agency and self-efficacy in routines and play activities does not always put children in control of their choices, nor are they always empowered or free to make choices. Acknowledged are views that adult agency becomes more prevalent, particularly where "young children may be

viewed in different ways according to the lenses that adults use to see children and childhood” (Clark, 2005: 489).

Attitudes that do not allow children to have a ‘voice’ or seeing children as experts in matters regarding their own cultural identity may also contribute to what (Pugh and Duffy, 2006) define as the unwritten values and norms that permeate in early years practice. Attention is also directed towards participation in adult directed experiences in this inquiry, as these experiences may offer opportunities for exploring construction of a sense of self for the mixed ethnic child.

Further complexity can be seen in the conflicting obligations for practitioners to deliver against curriculum goals and outcomes whilst listening to the voice of the child, including their voice in decision making. These attitudes may contribute towards the purpose and nature of adult intervention and thus the dominance of a discourse where children cue into and learn from the educator’s value position. The EYFS (DfE, 2017) can be seen therefore to influence and shape pedagogical practice due to its distinct pedagogy, emphasised by planned purposeful play-based experiences (Roberts-Holmes, 2012), where play pedagogy is predominantly focused on facilitating learning towards desired curriculum learning goals. Rather than developing repertoires for supporting for example children’s developing identities, as well as developing strategies that truly foster young children’s ability to engage in assessment processes.

### **3.9 Summarising key issues in the role of early childhood education**

The review of literature provides substantial evidence to support understanding why play would feature as a plausible approach in the early education framework (DfE, 2017). Presented so far are interpretations that perceive children as active participants (Clark, 2005), where their capacities for agency incorporate their ability to create what is viewed as their own social and cultural worlds. Of further importance are thoughts that identities emerge from the activities shared with significant others. Barron (2014) interestingly proffers that experiences in figured worlds provide a sense of self from the customs, practices and situations that are inhabited. Taken together it is clear to comprehend how these findings contributed towards the rationale for their use in curriculum guidance such as Early years foundation stage profile handbook (Standards & Testing Agency, 2020).

Research has shown children’s agency can be linked to the demonstration of skills and knowledge, as well as being a “testing ground for whose freedom, power and control can be exercised” (Wood 2014: 9). When questioning notions about ‘power’ consideration appears to have been limited to the nature and purpose of adult intervention only in the

EYFS (DfE, 2017). I believe that fostering children's engagement in child-initiated play as well as planned developmental play strategies are needed to help children to manage socially complex situations such as enacting their right to participate in decision making processes. Focusing on children's development of ethnic and cultural identity Wood (2014: 15) expresses fostering and managing complex situations may include "orchestrating tasks, negotiating power relationships, managing inclusion and exclusion, maintaining self-regulation, developing resilience and taking risks".

Exploration of the issues associated with professional identity and agency, there appears to be a perpetuation of government ideology that positions the early years professional as being of low skill and knowledge and therefore perceived as needing up-skilling (Baldock et al, 2009). The introduction of national standards for teaching as well as in the many revisions of the EYFS at a structural level, have been historically perceived as undermining as well as devaluing practitioner agency (Miller, 2008b). Particularly where it is perceived that there were limited opportunities to provide contributions in the development of such reforms. In complete contrast, research by Vähäsantanen (2014) contends that at an organisational level, the agency of the early years practitioner becomes stronger, predominantly in their ability to make decisions about pedagogical issues. These interpretations of literature show practitioner agency have become intertwined with perceptions of their professional 'self' and their working relationships with the children.

Literature also provides evidence about how policies on assessment have influenced practitioner agency. Suggested in the work of Bradbury's (2014) are views that consider practitioners may feel pressured to assess children in ways to meet curricula outcomes, rather than basing their judgements on knowledge of children's learning and development from their interests and engagement (or not) in learning experiences. By positioning a dominant discourse practitioner agency in assessment processes has the potential to adversely impact on inclusion policies as well as reproducing patterns of inequality. Taken together discoveries in the review of literature illuminate the fluid nature surrounding the interpretations of the professional identity of the practitioner, as well as their agency in the tide of every changing educational reform.

### **3.10 Reflection**

Notable in studies that have informed policy and curriculum content are notions that the key characteristics of effective pedagogy included interaction where effective teaching is associated with an instructive learning environment. Also identified are views that a sustained shared thinking strategy is used to extend children's learning in policy frameworks. Whilst there is rigour in research evidence, assessments of pedagogy appear

to have no direct correlation with the principles and guidance made explicit in the EYFS (DfE, 2017). This chapter has presented ideas that key features of effective play pedagogy are associated with the co-construction of learning by practitioners and children in the use of child-initiated play approaches together with opportunities for play in accordance with curricula goals.

These debates in literature highlight the dominance of a top down, target driven education system for early years education, where achievement is measured by academic ability against curriculum goals. All of this is premised on aims for preparing children for the next stage of schooling, and in the longer term positioned are intentions of equipping children with a range of knowledge and skills "...for good future progress through school and life" (DfE, 2012: 12). I offer an attainment driven curriculum compels one to rethink the purpose of early education, and how in turn it has inevitably influenced teaching practice and the agency of the early years professional.

Interestingly, a report by UNESCO (2010), that compared integrated models of early education and care systems, warned against the 'schoolification' model of an education system for *all*, primarily because of its implications for teaching practice. Considering these interpretations, I offer that the narrow view of children and childhood could in part be driven by the purpose of a political agenda of early intervention for improving socio-economic outcomes. I also suggest, for further deliberation, the ultimate aim of interventionist strategies is for the greater benefit of society (Moss, 2013; Penn, 2008). Taken together, there would appear to be an emerging consensus of a neoliberal ideological view of the role of early years education; as a form of 'human capital' investment relevant for later economic return for future generations and the 'public good'.

Whilst recognising debates for policy intervention and investment, the purpose of this chapter has been to explore the impact that such downward pressures of targeted intervention has had on pedagogical practice and agency of practitioners, as well as exploring concepts that demonstrate the influences that practitioner agency within the curriculum framework of the EYFS may have had on children's developing identity formation.

Significant evidence in research guides understanding that child development and learning occurs as a social process emphasised by interdependence in respectful relationships with others. Ideas presented in Chapter 2 alongside perspectives shared in this chapter equally demonstrate there are expressed difficulties for clearly defining cultural diversity and play and its influences on curriculum framework development in the early years context. In addressing learner/practitioner agency this chapter has engaged with debates associated

policy reform to consider the merits of bodies of work that problematise the 'power' relationships within learner/practitioner agency and its influences on pedagogy.

### **3.11 Chapter Summary: Whose agency?**

Insights provided by researchers as early as Dewey (1939, cited in Ang 2014) suggest the practitioner's role is to utilise professional skill and knowledge to make thoughtful judgements to identify learning experiences, as well as the environment for interaction, interpretation and/or reproduction of knowledge to facilitate learning. In the context of this study I refer to 'raced' and cultural knowledge.

The challenge or tension presented is who should make the decision on the content being taught? should it lie in:

- curriculum outcomes expected to be achieved by the practitioner; or
- agency and rights of children to influence their own learning trajectory.

Advocated is a view that outcomes should remain deliberately broad in nature to allow for negotiation with principles embedded in the EYFS (DfE, 2017) curriculum framework and its supporting guidance about how children learn and develop. Wood (2010:5) contributes by advising "more complex conceptualisation may be difficult to achieve in practice, because institutional and policy versions of free choice... provide socially approved (and restricted) opportunities for children's agency".

Educational effectiveness may be viewed as being somewhat inadequate because demands on an outcome led curriculum may not privilege children's choices. In other words, adult interpretation of the curriculum outcomes as opposed to children's free agency will be the key drivers where outcomes are interpreted developmentally in relation to curriculum goals. I reason ideas of child centeredness and theories that value play are at odds with policy frameworks here. In agreement with this perspective Wood (2014: 3) comments "restricted versions of planned and purposeful play are juxtaposed because the choices offered must align with curriculum goals".

Arguably disjuncture exists in understanding the purpose of young children's choices, which can be influenced by experiences that are learned and shared in the home and community environment, as well as the consequent level of skill and knowledge of the early years professional. English policy contexts promote the unique child as being a competent active learner, however practice guidance Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017) portray young children as needing skilled practitioners who will scaffold learning.

There appears to be a juxtaposition between the pendulums of ideologies in early years education policy, especially in relation to the formation of a skilled early years workforce responsible for educating young children. Whilst compelling insights have been presented from the review of literature, it is important to move beyond long established discourse. Concurring Papatheodorou (2012, cited in Palaiologou 2014: 70) argue “the ability to critique and negotiate different and often conflicting and polarised discourses can only enable creativity and flexibility of thinking and thus advance practice”.

I therefore propose the only way to provide parity between professional and learner agency is to develop structures for assessment in curriculum frameworks that offer practitioners the opportunity to engage in observations of children in action, where opportunities for getting to know children well are in place.



## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the methodology used to look at mixed ethnic children's perspectives on 'ethnic' identity, explored within the situated context of an early years setting. Contrasting with dominant sociocultural theorisation that child development and learning occurs as a social process of interaction with significant individuals, this research unequivocally draws on the responses of children to gain a nuanced understanding about how different ideas pertaining to ethnic identity play out in the day-to-day interactions and experiences of young mixed ethnic children.

The inquiry also sought to explore new ways of knowing about how principal models of early years pedagogy, as well as the resources for supporting learning within the early years foundation stage facilitate mixed ethnic learner's ability to share understanding about their own mixed ethnic identity and perspectives surrounding the identity of others. The inquiry made use of filmed recordings in playful learning experiences to consider insider participant perspectives. Audio-visual technique is chosen because of its affordance for looking at the social processes of listening to the recorded discussions that enabled the children to lead the research.

### **4.2 Research questions**

The research questions were defined to demonstrate a commitment for respecting insider voices that specifically address participatory methodologies with young children:

1. Using the 'voice' of the child, what are the key influences on mixed ethnic children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their ethnic identity in an early years setting?
2. What opportunities exist in the early years policy framework (EYFS, 2017) that allow 'mixed ethnic' children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences in their education?
3. How does the implementation of a play-based pedagogical approach provide 'space' for mixed ethnic children to explore their ethnicity?

Many ethnographic studies premise methods of data generation using participant observation in everyday learning experiences. For example, Corsaro's, (2005a) work presents significant inferences for understanding pedagogy and practice, where ideas proffer children in early years settings actively participate, retain and go on to replicate the cultural information provided by adults. Influencing my studies design and methodology, this

conception has the potential to support practitioner knowledge for facilitating new ways of understanding how mixed ethnic children perceive and categorise their ethnicity.

Comparably Riojas-Cortez et al (2001) work took a micro ethnographic approach to observe the cultural features or FOK displayed by young Mexican American children during sociodramatic play in a pre-school classroom. This research indicates sociodramatic play can be used as a tool for observing children to draw on their FOK to implement a culturally reflective curriculum. This work is particularly useful for engaging in ideas that examine interconnections between the social relationships that serve to facilitate the exchange and development of knowledge surrounding identity formation.

Barron's (2014) research on the other hand, made use of 'figured worlds' analytical approaches and sociocultural and critical race theorisation to examine the complex ways in which children experience and perform their ethnic identities. Particular interest in this body of work lies in approaches used to examine how children choose to respond to and act upon educational practices within particular contexts in the early years 'classroom'. Whereas Kabaron (2017), through FOK framework methods, examined how children act as active experts in the mediation of agency and power in their learning. Thoughts here suggest knowledge is achieved by placing the educator as the learner in observations for determining what cultural knowledge students offer for curriculum planning and development contexts.

Other lenses that extend ideas about children's FOK can be seen in Hedges (2014) research, who made use of working theories to attempt to explore the processes that children use to connect their experiences and understanding to make sense of the worlds they participate in. Termed as a 'spiral of knowing' (Hedges, 2014: 47) contended are strategies that support pedagogy and professional practice for progressing insights about children's thinking, learning and knowledge building processes. Advanced through observation of their participation, discussion, skills and attitudes in activities. Hedges (2014) work has my evolving awareness about how young children are developing useful theories and perceptions about their cultural and educational worlds.

Taken together, these bodies of work have influenced the methods used in this study, the principal intention of which is supporting practitioners to be better positioned to implement a culturally reflective curriculum that is representative of the children they are working with. This is significant because rather than a focus that is dependent on displaying cultural artefacts seen in many early years settings, descriptive accounts of children's perspectives of their self-identity from their perspectives affords the practitioner an opportunity to

observe, 'listen' and develop a pedagogical approach that provides children with a positive sense of self identity in a culturally appropriate learning environment.

### **4.3 How the chapter is organised**

The next section starts by positioning the research paradigm used in this study. The chapter moves on to address prevailing research contexts that have informed a methodology for centralising issues associated with participatory research with young children and practitioners. Consideration is then given to child rights-based approaches that give 'voice' to listening to young children. I make a case for using praxeology as methodological approach for exploring a pedagogy of play, its role in facilitating the co-construction of ethnic identity; and seeking transformation in practice. I discuss the methodological research that has been used to inform and demonstrate a right based approach. The approaches adopted also facilitate opportunities for the democratic co-construction of robust evidence from the children, their peers' and the practitioners' perspectives. Detailed in Appendix 5 is a summarised account about how I undertook a pilot study to clarify the purpose of the research design and negotiating participation processes. I explain how I tested methodological tools, as well as how I addressed the challenges and limitations involved in using audio and video-based technologies in the pilot interview and observation phases. The account concludes with a researcher reflection about the lessons learned. The information from the pilot study was used in parallel with the ongoing review of pertinent literature, all of which provided invaluable insight for re-evaluating the research design and final articulations discussed within the main study site.

Explanation is provided that sets the context for the research study, including issues relating to how access to the field was negotiated. I detail not only sampling considerations, but how reciprocal relationships were established and maintained with the research participants. Also offered are explanations about how the research design enabled children's participation, and the ethical considerations that this entailed.

Regarding positionality of the researcher, viewed as being significant in this inquiry, I discuss the complexities that were incurred as a black academic researcher. My attention to events that occurred in the data collection phase became significantly heightened when the scheduling of agreed activities became more and more disrupted. This gave cause for deliberation about the agentic power of the practitioner and the setting's owner to influence and disrupt the process of data collection.

Historic research by Ladson Billing (1998) advises naming one's reality involves paying attention to incidents or events that affect the researcher. In a similar vein Rodriguez (2006)

work while valuing the exposure of personal experiences, acknowledges 'unmasking' experiences is necessary in healing the feelings of hurt encountered by women of colour in research. Appendix 6 outlines a small number of incidents I encountered whilst conducting research, which are not only salient to sharing the additional challenges that these experiences placed on research processes, but also serve as a key element for signifying reflection and reflexivity as a researcher. I do this to also provide insight into the complex ways in which I consider my identity as a black researcher has influenced the methods used in the context of this project.

Peshkin (1994) eludes that awareness of subjectivity requires an overview of the research being undertaken, where consideration should be given to the focus, context and methodological processes of research. Being naturally reflective Peshkin's philosophy that researchers should discuss their experience of subjectivity has guided my thinking about my capacity to influence and dictate the decisions made throughout the methodological phases in this study. I understand that I am subjective because my background, values and beliefs as a woman of colour will have undoubtedly influenced and shaped the direction of this research. Awareness of the presence of my subjectivity has helped me to understand that the foundation of the research that I do involves searching for ways to identify how diverse groups of children can contribute to shaping contexts associated with ethnicity identity and culture in early childhood education. Guided by the suggestion that the researcher should examine their relationship with research (Peshkin, 1994), I recognise my relationship with early years education is fundamentally focused on the exploration of how play-based pedagogy and curricula adapts to ensure inclusivity for diverse groups of children.

The chapter moves on to detail the stages of my qualitative data collection, where the use of 'interpretive reproduction' hypothesis is proposed to gain deeper insight into the interrelationships that occurred between the focus children, practitioners and the researcher in intentional play-based experiences. I provide an explanation of my rationale for the research methods deployed. Particularly a rationale for specifically making use of audio-visual methods for eliciting the perspectives of the children participating in the study. The chapter concludes by explaining that the perspectives of all the participants, researcher field notes were triangulated to attempt to build a robust picture of the emergent themes and interpretations that were then used to identify and inform the thematic framework this case study.

#### **4.4 Positioning the research paradigm used in this study**

Humphrey (2011) identifies three key ontological and epistemological methodological conventions that may be used to frame research processes, Positivist, Interpretivist and Critical Theory.

Positivist research uses pure scientific methods for acquiring understanding and knowledge about the phenomena being studied. Methods seek definitive answers within a framework based on one reality. Positivist research is almost always dependent on scientific methods and theories invented for the task, where verified hypothesis is based on established known facts, and the social world is perceived as an extension of the 'natural' world awaiting interpretation.

Interpretivists on the other hand acknowledge the subjective nature of meaning that arises from social discourses that are holistically and culturally framed in research studies. Sitting well with the purpose of my study, an interpretivist approach allows the researcher to explore the complex world of lived experiences from the points of view of those who live it. This option allows interpretation of circumstances in which the forms of language (terminology) used between the research participants is being co-constructed, rather than perceiving what these may be. Using forms of language to interpret mixed ethnic learners' experiences lends itself to using an interpretivist approach, because it rests on assumptions that not just mixed ethnic learners but peers as well as adults create and re-create their social worlds as an ever-changing meaning system. Rather than following methods adopted by previous researchers who in their studies placed the significance on contexts associated with culture and the adult role, this study seeks to foreground the mixed ethnic learner to garner their interpretations of how they make sense of their own raced identity, that then serve to inform cultural and raced contexts in interactions with practitioners and peers in play learning experiences.

A research project that implies from its inception that inequalities may exist in education for a particular group of learners, in this case mixed ethnic learners cannot do so without considering critical theory. Concerned with lived experiences being socially constructed and mediated via power relations critical theory adheres to ideological arguments underpinned by notions that the promise of democracy through services like education is flawed as the 'state' will hold the ultimate power.

Critical theorists espouse that power will not always work for the interest of true social democracy, despite the deliberate appearance of neutrality or rhetoric (Macfarlane, 2006). Basic tenets that allow for understanding of how critical theory works are based on ideas

that facts can never be truly separated from beliefs, values or ideology; and oppression exists in many forms and is part of many interconnections (Ponterotto, 2005). It is easy to see how one might be seduced into engaging in theories that debate power as a repressive force that is imposed largely by state apparatus of policy development and implementation of statutory curriculum frameworks. Here critical theory sits well within the field of early childhood education, which has witnessed significant legislative intervention over the last decade (Bradbury, 2014).

However, considering these three key ontological and epistemological methodological conventions, an interpretivist approach aligns well with the aims and purpose of this study. Because interpretivist methods recognise that reality is a social construction and that it is the research who reveals the particular reality being investigated. Afforded are opportunities to interpret the circumstances and influences under which young mixed ethnic learners develop notions associated with a raced identity. Rather than focusing on statistics to evidence validity in my study it is my intention to use qualitative arguments to evidence authenticity in my research project.

#### **4.5 Research contexts that have influenced the methodological approaches used within this study**

Shenton (2004) contends that the ability of the researcher to relate his/her findings to existing bodies of knowledge is a key criterion for evaluating workings in qualitative studies. Chapter 2 explored existing bodies of research that are similar to my inquiry and therefore serve to inform its theoretical frame. Grounded in sociocultural theory this inquiry has turned to existing epistemologies concerned with thoughts about education and learning as social and interactive processes (Vygotsky, 1978), where children actively respond to situated contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Informing methodological approaches contributing studies contend children do not enter early years settings without knowledge about their 'raced' identity. Although young children may know very little (or maybe they do) of their ethnic grouping, interpretations drawn from research provide plausible conceptions that the cultural features of children's sociodramatic play may include a language and forms of expression that are drawn from previously shared experiences in the home and community environment. Moll et al, (1992); Karabon, (2017) convincingly reason children will be entering educational settings rich in cultural knowledge from their home and community. FOK theory is used within these studies to explore how young children mediate their cultural knowledge across participatory contexts. In this inquiry the instrumental processes of data collection were concerned with exploration of whether these cultural elements assist mixed ethnic children to create their own perspectives

surrounding their ethnic identity, even if they are unable to identify themselves with a particular ethnic group.

Principally, my research is concerned with discovering new and innovative ways of empowering and involving young children. Exploration therefore contemplated the interrelationships between children, play pedagogy and practice. Emergent thoughts were also concerned with the interrelated nature of the children's learning through active participation with peers and skilled professionals. Recognising practitioners must make use of wide-ranging pedagogic techniques when working with young children, guiding research methodologies was exploration about how pedagogic techniques, interactions, and the use of resources facilitate opportunities for engaging with children's previous cultural and raced experiences. The idea was to see if a pedagogy of play enables the mixed ethnic child to participate in reflective perspectives surrounding their ethnic identity, and how the influence of pedagogic action enables (or not) sharing of these thoughts. The rationale for doing so is influenced by Lee (2006) who expresses a view that where children are unable to effectively exchange cultural experiences there is a risk that limited opportunities of participation may result in limited opportunities to learn.

Moving on, in the context of this study it is important to question how play governs the behaviour of young children and adults. Key for supporting the methods used within this study are notions about how play can act as a mediation tool for connecting, co-constructing and sharing young children's ideas about ethnic identity (Hennig and Kirova, 2012; Karabon, 2017). I make a case for its inclusion in the theoretical framing of this research because of its potential to act as a powerful 'bridge' between children's home and 'school' communities (Broadhead and Burt, 2012). As an alternative lens, play is useful for articulating the circumstances and discourses through which children explore their cultural and ethnic identities in early childhood education.

Informed by the sociocultural contexts summarised above, as well as contexts in Chapter 2, the following sections now address epistemologies that have informed a methodology for centralising issues associated with participatory research with young children and practitioners. Deliberations then focus on knowledge associated with rights-based approaches for giving 'voice' and 'listening' to young children.

#### **4.5.1 Origins of children's rights to be heard**

Studies of childhood have been greatly scrutinised across the range of disciplines, particularly studies concerned with views, values, rights and ethics together with methodologies of gathering and analysing data concerning children. Momentum for a real

commitment to take the rights of children seriously started with the Declaration of Rights of the Child by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1959, which laid down ten fundamental rights to which the UN said that children should be entitled to. Ranging from the right to equality regardless of race, religion sex or nationality; rights to education and play; to the right to be protected from cruelty and neglect; these principles were redefined in 1989 by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNCRC (1989), which set the international context for declaring children to be citizens of the world with rights to protection, provision and participation.

Of the 54 Articles, the most relevant to discussion in this chapter is Article 12, which asks societies to provide all children with the right to participate freely in all matters that affect their lives or the right to have a 'voice'. Interestingly, although the article suggests children's expressed views should be given due weight relevant to age and capability of the child, how participation is encouraged (or how their voice is captured and heard) in daily issues affecting them is open to interpretation by the adult and not the child. UNCRC may be perceived as bestowing on children the status of being right holders, however the unenforceable nature of these rights, unless adopted into domestic law renders rights to participation as being far from guaranteed.

Based on the adoption of a rights-based pedagogic approach, research undertaken by Pascal and Bertram (2012: 249) offers "meaningful, situated and culturally responsive methods for research that provide for democratic co-construction of evidence" from child and practitioner perspectives. They also share thought provoking insights about listening to the voices of young children that are silenced in the production of knowledge and understandings about their lives. Also offered is a viewpoint that children from diverse communities are less likely to be heard.

Inspired by strategies for raising consciousness, approaches of empowerment and the development of self-efficacy for children (as well as practitioners) methodological approaches adopted by Pascal and Bertram have influenced the approaches adopted in this study. Particularly key is making use of techniques that co-construct generative themes from the meaningful dialogues between all the participants. Advocated are approaches for forming what Pascal and Bertram (2009) coin as 'creating cultural circles' in which children are provided opportunities to generate their own ideas. Furthermore, it is advocated that "dialogue is symmetrical in terms of power distribution" (Pascal and Bertram, 2009: 257). I interpret this to mean practitioners must relinquish what could be deemed as power and influence through their pedagogical practice, so that discourse is generated by the participants (in this case the children) themselves.

Synthesising philosophies associated with rights to participate and young children's capacity for sharing knowledge additional theories that position young children will bring with them 'funds of knowledge' (Barron, 2014) from the home into their play and learning repertoires have influenced the methods that were adopted in this inquiry. Starting from a point that considers the influences from the epistemological assumptions presented in Chapter 2, and the discussion above, the principal aim was to gain a nuanced understanding about how 'mixed ethnic' children share (or do not share) views about their ethnic identity in their play experiences.

#### **4.5.2 The 'voice' of the child**

From the outset, this research has always been about ensuring that the children's 'voices' are actively positioned as being highly significant. The relevance of which accommodates sociocultural theories about children's capacities for engaging in complex ideas surrounding identity and difference. Acknowledging studies that argue children enter early years settings with 'funds of cultural knowledge' (Barron, 2014) acquired within the home and community environment, this inquiry explores further how mixed ethnic children may or may not share ideas about their own raced identity when engaging in conversations with peers in their play. Also explored is how knowledge surrounding a raced identity is shared in interactions with practitioners. Of interest is how through play pedagogy these children have learned to evaluate perspectives of themselves and other individuals based upon their own mixed ethnicity (Park, 2011).

In concurrence with a conceptual framework that recognises young children's agency, conversations consider recent contexts associated with listening to young children's voices in early childhood research. A full explanation of how the research design prioritised respectful and reciprocal engagement with the children as research participants is detailed later in this chapter.

#### **4.5.3 Listening to young children**

There is a considerable amount of literature based on UNRC 1979, Article 12 to demonstrate approaches that have been developed in the UK to encourage participation by young children. This next section is concerned with reviewing approaches in policy, research and practice regarding children's evolving capacities for participating in research, as well as the extent to which listening occurs. Comparisons with national and international approaches for child participation are drawn on to provide a clear rationale for using methodological approaches that consider children's participation. Before moving on it is important to mention that adding to the complexity of understanding contexts for listening

to young children and child participation is the use of differing terminology in literature. Terms such as rights to be heard; voice; decision making; due weight; children's perspectives to interpreting and responding to evolving capacities all shape the differing lens through which child participation is understood and made use of in research.

In agreement with Pascal and Bertram (2012), listening to young people is an essential element for understanding what they are experiencing and feeling in the here and now. Particularly in appreciating their interests, wishes and concerns in what could be viewed as their first formal educational experience. Signifying the importance of listening in the process of this study, Pascal and Bertram (2012: 254) provide the insight that "giving status to children's voices in our research work acknowledges children's right to be listened to and for their views and experiences to be taken seriously".

For this project listening is a fundamental component of ensuring participation, for tuning into, and giving power to, the status of the children. Giving them the power, space and time to express views about their developing identities in whatever form of expression they choose is key to developing methodologies that go some way towards transforming understanding.

#### **4.6 The potential for uncertainty and inconsistency in participatory methods**

I begin by accepting that there will be uncertainty, inconsistency and potential for incoherence in my research because of the challenges associated with adopting an inclusive and participatory stance with young children that calls for a redistribution of power. Particularly when disrupting what could be reasonably perceived as "entrenched, inequitable practices and relationships in order to support the silenced voice" (Pascal and Bertram, 2009: 255).

Embracing postmodern ideas that normative judgements in relation to culture, race and identity are not viewed as 'absolute norms' but are constantly in a state of fluidity (Mac Naughton, 2005), also gives cause for acknowledging inconsistencies will occur, because interpretation of meaning will be constantly changing within the dynamics of participation in the social and cultural conditions appertaining to ethnicity. Questioning whether dialogue stems from negotiated interactions where the practitioner acts as a mediator in drawing on the children's existing knowledge from the home and wider community will hopefully mitigate some of the inconsistencies in interpretation of meaning.

There is also potential for uncertainty in children's ability to engage in complex ideas surrounding a mixed ethnic identity particularly where explorations challenge complex

embedded and fixed conceptualisations of ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’ that may have become hidden in the language of those in positions to influence and shape meaning surrounding ethnic categorisation with young children. Gaither, Chen et al (2014: 2311) suggestion that “biracial children have a fluid racial identity that can shift depending on the context” will afford the children participating in this study the opportunity to demonstrate flexible cognitive preferences when choosing among significant peers and practitioners.

#### **4.7 Introducing praxeological research methods and techniques**

Demonstrating its usefulness and trustworthiness in research, praxeology is defined by principles concerned with the enactment of rigour and ethics in qualitative studies. Briefly reviewing the history of practice based and participatory research sees the roots of praxeology stemming from studies undertaken by historic pioneers who foregrounded the need for change in participatory practice. Pioneering scholars such as Freire (1970) promoted liberation for those who may be silenced via approaches associated with empowerment, development of self-efficacy to enable individuals to name their worlds and viewing *praxis* as a reflection on and in human action. Premising ideas surrounding reflection Schon’s (1983) work promoted ideas of reflective practitioners. When thinking about processes of learning about how ‘mixed ethnic’ children share knowledge for categorising self and others from their existing FOK, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) pioneering studies radically reformed conceptualisation about learning, by stepping away from epistemological accounts that considered learning as the reception of ‘factual’ information. Instead, an emphasis is placed on the whole person, as well as an emphasis where agency, activity and the world are viewed as being reciprocally equivalent. Their body of work locates what we understand today as learning is a process of participation in communities of practice.

More recent studies support understanding surrounding the aims of praxeological research methods. Viewed as operating on two levels, it is contended that praxeological methods aim to “produce knowledge and actions which are directly useful for individuals. It also seeks to empower individuals to seek social transformation through a process constructing and using their own knowledge” (Pascal and Bertram, 2012: 482).

Providing a strong definition about what praxeology is, for them praxeology describes the “theory and study of praxis and embeds this in a situated context in which power and ethics are fundamentally realised and explored in an attempt to engage in participatory practice to better understand human actions...and to transform them” (Pascal and Bertram, 2012: 481)

This study therefore acknowledges these factors as being relevant in the decision for using praxeological methods of inquiry for connecting meaningful social research to the social practices of young mixed ethnic children in their interactions with peers and practitioners in educational contexts. Embracing praxeological methods recognises the need to “extend the range of voices” participating in the research, as well as exploring “different ways of doing” (Pascal and Bertram, 2012: 488). The purpose of using praxeological techniques was to enrich the research process by enabling practitioners to use their own knowledge and understanding about the ethnic identity of the children they work with.

Opportunities are correspondingly afforded for detailing thick descriptions of localised actions and the contexts in which they relate to mechanisms for the transfer of knowledge. I refer here to the determinants of cultural and raced knowledge in early childhood education settings that appear to emerge from previously externally encountered social practices. Reinforced again here scholars such Barron, (2014), Lam and Pollard, (2006), Moll et al, (2001), Riojas-Cortez, (2001) convincingly reason children will be entering educational settings rich in cultural knowledge. Attempting to go beyond traditional and orthodox research methods, the principle aim within this study was to find ways of drawing on the cultural traits associated with how young mixed ethnic children perceive their identity in their sociodramatic play experiences. Praxeological techniques therefore afford an opportunity for the researcher to find ways of encouraging the stories of those who may have otherwise been silenced to be told. So, whilst I did make use of orthodox research methods such as interviews and observations there was a clear drive to consider the storytelling of the focus children. Determined by the evolving and unpredictable situated contexts or actions in which the learning experiences were being undertaken.

Adding to what Pascal and Bertram (2012: 489) term as the “praxeological toolbox” of researchers, the research methods also endeavoured to seek out and make visible a wider range of expression in the form of the children’s drawings and paintings; their dialogic conversations from their learning experiences; as well as rich descriptions from video-cues ethnographic accounts with peers and practitioners.

Not espousing to a single method or specified techniques, praxeological methods also offered up open and flexible approaches that allow the researcher to be involved in the transformation process. Afforded are opportunities to engage not only as a critical friend, but to also act as a direct practitioner, which was particularly helpful when the children invited me to participate in their learning experiences. When considering my positionality in the research processes praxeological techniques allowed me to be more closely engaged in monitoring the transformational nature of pedagogical action.

#### 4.7.1 The locus of praxis

The transforming potential of research became a key feature of the study, where techniques adopted from Pascal and Bertram (2009) and Formosinho and Pascal (2016) for encouraging the dialogues and narratives of children to be listened to have significantly influenced the methods adopted within this inquiry.

Accepting that pedagogical research focuses on exploring praxis in early childhood education, praxis within the scope of this inquiry is concerned with more than a practice of doing. Drawing insights from Formosinho and Oliveira- Formosinho (2012), praxis is defined within this inquiry as being concerned with grounded, coherent, situated and contextualised practice. Particularly where practice is imbued with the beliefs and values of the practitioners, as well as the educational and situated actions in the setting. Praxis here then is concerned with unifying the process of developing knowledge and pedagogical practice from the co-construction of young children's formation of a mixed ethnic identity.

#### 4.7.2 The locus of pedagogical praxis

Moving forward, Chapter 2 presented ideas that knowledge is never neutral (Bruner, 1996), and pedagogic action does not occur in isolation, rather it occurs amongst ongoing dynamic adult-child interactions, where children's ability for learning from pedagogic interactions may be driven by an automatic, cue driven process. I offer pedagogy is organised around knowledge (Formosinho and Pascal, 2016), where it is recognised social learning allows complex cultural knowledge to be learned (Butler and Markman, 2016). Adopting a sociocultural approach to focus on the conversations of 'mixed ethnic' children, particularly their explanations about how they categorise self and others from their existing FOK is therefore relevant for supporting understanding about how this particular group of children categorise ethnicity. Brought together, Formosinho and Oliveira- Formosinho, (2008: 597) contend pedagogical praxis is:

*educational action infused with theory, supported by a belief system and ethical code conveying emotions and feelings. [where] teaching is organised around the practical knowledge that builds on situated actions, together with the theoretical concepts (theories and knowledge) and beliefs ... which are translated into a specific ethics for the development of pedagogical action.*

Pertinent to this inquiry was seeking participatory methods for gathering data to enable critical reflection and appraisal of what is and is not working in pedagogical action, and its influence on developing cultural and raced identities. The intention being to establish a rigorous systematic collection of practice-based evidence that is constructed from the daily real world (Robson, 2011) lives of the participants. The purpose of which was twofold, one

to present methods that have documented and analysed pedagogic practice and its' influence on the formation of young children's mixed ethnic identity. The second purpose is to critically reflect on the power of pedagogic action in the transformation of learning and development for the research participants.

Formosinho and Pascal (2016: 28) helpfully cite two modes of developing pedagogy: Transmissive and Participatory. Transmissive pedagogy focuses "on the knowledge that is to be conveyed", whilst participatory pedagogies focus on the "actors who co-construct knowledge by participating in the learning process". Concerned with the latter the motives for questioning participatory pedagogies are to create better learning situations, and deeper respect for the voices of children in the context of praxis.

### **4.7.3 Pedagogy in Participation**

Sitting in the family of participatory pedagogies, pedagogy in participation is fundamentally concerned with the formation of situated contexts in which interaction is sustained in relationships via joint activities and experiences (Formosinho and Pascal, 2016). This body of work provides thought provoking ideas that are embraced in providing a rationale for making a case for the methodological approaches used in the inquiry. The authors argue that unlike other scientific domains identified by the formation of clearly defined margins, pedagogical knowing and knowledge is fashioned in "the ambiguity and complexity of a space that knows its boundaries but does not define them, because its essence lies in interrogation" (Formosinho and Pascal, 2016: 28).

Positioning democracy at the heart of a 'pedagogy in participation' was much harder than anticipated. Particularly during the negotiating access and observation phases when trying to discuss contexts associated with redistributing power, exploring pedagogic action, and children's rights to participate. These challenges were expressed in many ways; from the refusal to complete learning journals; practitioner responses to how they perceived aspects of their pedagogic practice; associated behaviours resulting from awareness of limitations within pedagogic practice and the cultural knowledge of the children. The chapter discusses contexts in which the difficulties associated with pedagogy in participation occurred in more detail in later sections of this chapter. For now, methodological processes identified the need for practitioners to develop new confidence, as well as competencies for relinquishing and redistributing power before balanced dialogues could begin.

The methodologies set out in the subsequent sections therefore demonstrate the adoption of a rights based pedagogic approaches that are meaningful, situated and culturally responsive to those involved. The approaches adopted also facilitate opportunities for the

democratic co-construction of robust evidence from the children, their peers and the practitioners' perspectives.

#### 4.8 Research Methodology

This qualitative research study makes use of a single instrumental case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2012) to explore the three research questions in an early years setting. Addressing critique of this method of research, I turn to Yin (2012) suggestion that case study assists the researcher to extensively respond to the research questions (Charmaz, 2014) so that in-depth descriptions are provide from the adopted methodological procedures. Whereas Stake (1995) advocates a single site case study is beneficial to organise projects around pertinent issues. The issues relevant to this inquiry are explained in Chapter 1. Although writing case study research can be considered as telling the story of the phenomena being researched (Stake,1995), this inquiry uses it as a way of closely examining the specific conditions in which mixed ethnic identity is being co-constructed. It is not used to solve 'problems' associated with the phenomena of a mixed ethnic identity. The aim is to inform the reader of what precisely is going on. In other words, I draw attention to the specific issues that will be closely examined; processes used to code and analyse these issues; and the emergent findings stemming from the sources of data. Table 1 therefore illustrates a summary of the research design and the methodologies that were used in each phase. See Appendix 7 for the full research design document.

|   | <b>Stage 1</b>   | <b>Stage 2</b>  | <b>Stage 3</b>  |
|---|--|---|---|
| Research questions 1-3  | <b>Interviews</b><br>- Semi structured interviews with 3 practitioners | <b>Observations</b><br>- Filming using video-cued techniques and intentional teaching resources<br>- Dialogic conversations with children and practitioners | <b>Focus Group Interviews</b><br>- Practitioners<br>- Parents |
| <b>Additional research tools:</b> Audio-visual materials, Setting documentation, Practitioner reflective journals, Researcher diaries/journals. |  |   |   |

*Table 1 How the data will be gathered (instrumentation)*

It is hoped that the deep commitment to the adoption of rights-based pedagogic approaches and wishing to create an authentic space with early years practitioners will be evidenced to critically think about 'real world' experiences from the perspective of the mixed ethnic child. The qualitative mode of inquiry used to report on the complexity of the 'issue' is supported by methods that make use of action (praxis) combined with reflection (phronesis) to provide insight and greater understanding.

#### **4.8.1 Interview phase**

In keeping with the research design, the first phase of the data gathering process involved interviewing practitioners. Interviews were undertaken using semi-structured questions to elicit practitioner interpretations of knowledge, learned patterns of values, behaviours, beliefs and language of the practitioners. Interviews were undertaken in both the pilot and main study settings, as it offered a more relaxed environment for eliciting the views of the practitioners surrounding my research topic. The technique deployed in interviewing also allowed me to add in more spontaneous questions, so that the interview process flowed. More importantly semi structured questions provided a space for practitioners to think about their responses. Flewitt (2014) suggests individuals may be unaware of what their views are, or what knowledge they possess until questioned. This was certainly the case in my project, because in both the pilot and main study, none of the participants had sight of the interview questions. The semi- structured nature of the questions therefore provided the space for thought and reflection about the offered response to the questions. Also considered is the view that participants may not be familiar with processes seeking critical reflection of perceptions. Again, Flewitt's (2014: 142) recommendation that 'informal and indirect methods are often considered preferable' are considered in the approach to interviews.

#### **4.8.2 Observation Phase**

The challenge in studies that attempt to adopt an inclusive and participatory stance for all is the redistribution of power amongst its participants. Particularly where challenges are being brought to bear that expose potential entrenched, inequitable practices and relationships which may serve to silence and domesticize children from designating their cultural 'worlds'. In the observation phase of data collection, a praxeological approach was used in the methodological process for reflecting on and documenting the relationship between teaching, learning and the transformation of practice. Moving beyond the responses provided by practitioners in the interview phase, observations can be a useful methodological tool for exploring whether individuals do what they say they do in practice. They are also a useful tool for exploring the behaviours practitioners say they adopt when working with children (Bell and Waters, 2014).

The primary aim in this phase was to give voice to those children usually silenced in everyday play experiences. Observations sought to provide evidence which would open interactions and dialogues between the children, their peers and practitioners. Provided over time were opportunities for mixed ethnic children to 'name their worlds' when considering thoughts about their biracial identity. For the practitioners, the observation

phase offered opportunities to enhance skills of active listening, as well as opportunities for open dialogue and engagement in critical reflection of assessment and evaluation of practice. Data collection employed qualitative processes that included practitioner interviews and observations that started off with child-initiated play-based experiences, but for the reasons offered in earlier sections in this chapter, shifted into the development of purposeful intentional experiences, informed by reflective practice. Practitioner decision to introduce purposeful intentional experiences was also based on trust and understanding of the children's responses.

Where practitioners did not have detailed knowledge of the children's cultural influences outside of the setting, parental views were sought (see practitioner/parental journals in Appendix 8) to better comprehend the wider influences that prompted the children's responses in their play repertoires. Awareness of the tensions existing between power and ethics must be acknowledged here. Particularly when asking practitioners to relinquish what could be perceived as power and influence over their own 'voice' so that discourse is generated solely from the thoughts of the focus children and handing over the types of activities they would normally offer through their pedagogical practice.

#### **4.9 Video-cued Ethnography**

Research studies demonstrate the many benefits and effectiveness of using audio visual methods as an approach for capturing thick descriptions of ethnographic accounts that are informed by a sociocultural theoretical framework (Riojas-Cortez, 2001; Barron, 2013; and Chesworth, 2016). The design within these studies draws on a research design that emphasises children's capabilities for drawing on previous social and cultural knowledge. As Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) and James and Prout (1997) helpfully suggest ethnographies in qualitative studies applied in early childhood education offer new voices to be heard.

Ethnography, rather than offering a particular method, may be conducted using a range of methodologies in studies that aim to provide what Geertz (1993) referred to as 'local knowledge', in which descriptions about individuals' locally embedded ways of understanding and acting in the world can be explored. In such cases the researcher is cautiously advised to refer to their work as providing "a partial ethnographic account' (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010: 271). Because accounts and processes will incorporate interpretive generalisations of what is being discussed, the complexity and challenge will be isolating and making explicit the key actions and behaviours of the actors participating in the research.

Epistemologies in this study therefore aim to provide a space for capturing thick descriptions that involve the everyday participative activities in which emergent unstructured data evolves to demonstrate case study vignettes of young mixed ethnic children's sense of self-identity. Whilst simultaneously demonstrating how these children explore awareness of cultural differences, attitudes and expectations within their established relationships with practitioners and peers. Pausing to define interpretation of meaning or thick descriptions of the research participants, Denzin (1989: 83) offers:

*a thick description does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another...It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals are heard.*

Moving on, the approaches and techniques used in this project are similarly influenced by the messages taken from research that make use of tools for capturing young children's voices in equitable and respectful dialogues. The work of Pascal and Bertram (2009) resonate here where strategies used in their *Children Crossing Borders Project* (Bertram and Pascal 2008a) and the *Opening Windows Programme* (Bertram and Pascal, 2008b) sought to develop approaches that empowered individuals to open dialogue between young children, their families and practitioners. Other ethnographic studies that have used data generation through observation can be seen in the work of Riojas-Cortez (2001), whose micro-ethnographic research used FOK theory to explore the capability of young Mexican American children to identify themselves as members of a particular ethnic group during their socio-dramatic play in a preschool classroom. Barron (2013) more recent research focused on the ethnography of British and Pakistani children's experiences of ethnic identity as they started kindergarten in the northwest of England.

Interestingly, Barron cites his rationale for choosing ethnographic approaches stemmed from the lack of previous research into children's experiences of ethnic identity. Supporting the focus for this inquiry he argues "ethnography is an ideal method for documenting children's evolving membership in their culture" (Barron, 2013: 118). Similarly, the benefits of using ethnographic descriptions along with FOK theory provided an affordance to focus on the experiences of young children that emerge from structures such as everyday family traditions, behaviours, communication styles and activities. Corroborating with understanding that thick descriptions are beneficial characteristics emerging from ethnographic research and are therefore worthy of being utilised in this study, Chesworth, (2016) offers there are possibilities for children to collaborate in and co-construct meaning garnered from social and cultural practices, where play is a key aspect for understanding, responding to and implementing a culturally responsive curriculum.

It does not go without saying that disadvantages exist when using ethnographic approaches. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) caution the use of video may present unwelcome disadvantages when used to capture ethnographic accounts. In practice challenges did occur in the observation stage in the main study. Being accustomed to having the autonomy to shape and influence their play, when autonomy and agency to influence the reflection of the recordings was handed over to the children, the primary focus became actions of stopping and starting the recorder rather than focusing on what was occurring in the previously recorded play experiences. In other words, the focus of play was centred on operating the video recorder. This prompted the decision to introduce a colleague that would operate the machinery, whilst the children, practitioners and myself focused on the reflection of the participative activities. The colleague who was film maker is a qualified senior academic, with an enhanced DBS check. His role as film maker was agreed with practitioners. Consent for access from the children and parents was obtained thus giving due regard to ethical review processes. As the observation phase progressed, ethnographic approaches had to be adapted following the request from practitioners that the descriptions of the children's dialogic conversation and interactions be transcribed from the video recordings rather than separate reflective sessions with the children.

Taken together, the examples above explain the benefits and challenges of using ethnographic approaches in the observation of everyday experiences. This study differs in its approach for generating thick descriptions in so much as the co-constructed learning experiences in the video recordings act as cues for contributing to the generation of the descriptions and understanding about the influence of peers and pedagogic action for facilitating mixed ethnic children's judgements and preferences about their own racial identification and that of others. The seminal research of Tobin et al (1989: 2009) that used filmed material to explore global perspectives on local preschool everyday practices in specific countries, evidence methods of ethnography that Tobin defined as 'multivocal ethnography' (2009: 261). This definition is helpful for describing the approach of generating thick descriptions in the observation phase that are adopted in this study.

Having explained the proposed research methods the reader is advised that a pilot study was undertaken to test the above methodologies; discuss the purpose of the research and its design; practice negotiating participation in the field; and test researcher skill development in the use of technological tools that would be used for data collection in the main study site. The complete account of the pilot study, the questions that defined the sample choice of child participants; challenges/limitations in using video-based technologies in observation phases; and researcher reflective thoughts from the pilot can be viewed in Appendix 9. The next section provides an explanation about how I undertook the main study.

#### 4.10 Main Study

A particular challenge for any study surrounding ethnicity concerns the complexity in decision-making processes for identifying what cultural traits (Barron, 2014) can be regarded as 'ethnic identity' and indeed what is 'not an ethnic identity'. Particularly when the research takes as its focus the many complex ways that children will interpret and respond to contexts associated with ethnicity. Chapter 2 highlighted that there is rigour in studies surrounding theorisation about how young children draw on cultural traits associated with their mixed ethnic identity. Cultural traits within this thesis is defined as the FOK that are evidenced in the sociodramatic play experiences in an educational setting.

Another challenge in the decision-making process was associated with what is considered as play within the early childhood classroom. Sutton-Smith's (1997) characterisations of play and definitions of learning through play seem somewhat incongruent with ideas in research literature, because potentially child-initiated play and child centred pedagogy in practice may come with biases and cultured ways of operating, which are defined for the most part by the values of those who lead the setting. Thoughts in Chapter 2 highlighted achieving an appropriate and sensitive balance between child initiated and adult directed play-based experiences will be dependent on practitioner confidence, training and experience. Especially when also operating with the external influences from outcome driven inspection frameworks. Within this thesis the rationale for using play is associated with contexts that consider play as a powerful medium for crossing what Broadhead and Burt (2012) describe as a cultural bridge between the home and early childhood setting. Children's awareness of ethnicity and attitude development is applicable in supporting developing understanding of the theoretical framework applied within this inquiry. Recognising playful activities hold educational meaning, methods draw on socio-dramatic play episodes to characterise the type of play being used by mixed ethnic children and their peers to garner deeper understanding about how these children reconstruct and make meaning of their pre-existing diverse repertoires of sociocultural activity in the setting. Hughes (2002) conveys socio-dramatic play can be viewed as children's enactment of 'real' and potential experiences, stemming from personal, social or interpersonal nature.

A concluding thought centres on the challenge in decision-making processes about how pedagogic action enables (or not) the co-construction of ethnic identity. Attention here focuses on the factors that facilitate further understanding about how and in what ways pedagogic action and the use of culturally appropriate resources serve to influence children's viewpoints about self and others.

Finally, it is important to reiterate again the video recordings were not in themselves sources of data, they acted as visible cues for engagement in dialogic conversations between the children, practitioners and the researcher. The purpose of the cues was to enable the children to provide their own narratives regarding their ethnic identity. The other purpose was to support reflection of the pedagogic actions including reflection of the artefacts used in the co-construction of naming one's identity.

#### 4.11 Sampling considerations and reliability

Lessons learnt from piloting the video-cued research tools served to significantly influence the decision-making process surrounding the selection of the children that would participate in the main research study. Contributions provided by Faye proved invaluable for shaping researcher thoughts for clearly defining the sample group of children that would participate in the main study research. The rationale for the choice of ethnic categorisation of the children is detailed in more depth in Chapter 1, but to support understanding here, influencing factors stemmed from the difficulty in deciding which children to focus on in the pilot observations. Partly because the children were from a mix of diverse descents. Ortlipp (2008) suggests using critically reflective journals supports the researcher to look back on instances during research processes, so that acknowledgment can be given to experiences associated with *opinions* or *feelings* that serve to influence the focus or choices made within research. Subsequent conversations after filming (see the extract from researcher field journals below) were a key influence in enabling decisions regarding the categorisation of the focus children.

Extract taken from research field notes 17.5.17

*Following a conversation with Faye about the ethnic mix of the children for consideration in my research. Faye explains it is difficult to respond to questions about how practitioners support children's cultural needs unless the ethnic categories to which they belong is clearer! It is difficult to explain practitioner understanding about the different and similar cultural traditions observed in the setting unless I can explain which groups the focus of my study is!*

*Following a period of reflection and further discussion, Faye helps me to realise that my own culture will influence the category of the participants, as well as the census data that I have already researched. I define the group of 'focus' children will be of **'Black Caribbean/other and African/other ethnicity**. Need to ensure that I justify my rationale for this decision in my Introduction.*

*Faye explains that it will be difficult to support my research because whilst the nursery cohort of children is very diverse, they do not have children on roll that meet my research criteria. Fiona does recommend another setting immediately.*

As it became apparent that no children met the criteria in the racial categorisations, age and stages of development for participation in the pilot, Faye's questions surrounding my rationale and choice of the children as research participants did prompt further focus and decisions regarding the ethnic origin of the children.

When considering sampling choices McNaughton and Rolf (2010: 27) suggest selecting the representative sample in any research study is complex and entails decision making about not only the “characteristics of the participants”, but also “how many of them should be included”. The research participants within the scope of this study are those children whose ethnic origin are categorised as mixed Black Caribbean/Other and/or children from a mixed Black African/Other ethnic origin. The term ‘mixed’ is used because it encompasses the range of racial differences among the children in the study.

Categorisation of the focus children did serve as a significant influence in not only the sample size of the children that would participate in the study, but also the choice of private day setting that was selected. When considering the choice of provision, a key factor in the decision-making process was the ability to locate the children that met the specified categorisation. This was because to reiterate earlier claims, the aim of the methodological approaches was to explore the influence of play pedagogy on mixed ethnic children’s ability that relate to and connect with constructs surrounding their ethnic identity. It was therefore essential to not only locate a setting in which mixed ethnic children attended, but it was equally important to identify a setting where opportunities were already readily available for these children to explore constructs associated with their ethnicity.

The study’s approach to sampling therefore could be viewed as being ‘purposive’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010), inasmuch as the intensions of the sampling strategy used was informed by the need to explore and collect multiple representations that recognise the interpretations of the research participants (children and practitioners). This is an appropriate sampling strategy because the research does not intend to generalise to children beyond the categorisation of the children used within the scope of this inquiry.

The study reasons generalisations from the findings cannot be applied to children beyond the grouping used because to generalise from one group and another, the group studied would need to be the same or representative of the larger group who is being generalised (McNaughton and Rolf, 2010). It is therefore acknowledged that the sample size of the group of mixed ethnic children participating in this study cannot be applied to the diverse mixed grouping of children in other early childhood settings in the United Kingdom.

When considering the scale and sample Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) obligingly advise the representative processes by which the sample is selected; the rationale for that selection; the decisions that are made and carefully explained and documented by the researcher should offer reliability in the process of qualitative research. Whilst quantitative studies tend to use measures that incorporate large scale representative samples to provide reliability in research studies, Siraj-Blatchford (2010: 282) helpfully contends that while

ethnographic research may not “set out to make strong claims about the representative nature of the sample choice”, it should make clear for the reader the reasons for choosing the sample. Reasons for the choice of sample is incorporated in detail in Chapter 1. Correspondingly, Chapter 6 incorporates the background information for each of the selected children. The purpose is to position and make visible the importance of the chosen sample children, where the intention is to also make visible their role as major ‘actors’ in terms of the perspectives that informed the judgments made in this study.

Focusing on how many children participated in the study, the use of ethnic categoricities of Black Caribbean/Other and Black African/Other did significantly influence the sample size of children that could participate in the study. Based on these ethnic categorisations, six ‘focus’ children were initially nominated by the nursery manager and deputy manager as appropriate participants. Other factors influencing the selection of children other than meeting the ethnic categorisations were based on the managers’ knowledge about the children’s competence to respond to situated contexts about their own ethnic identity and the ethnic identity of others, as well as their stages of development.

It is significant to note here that during the interview phase, practitioner responses argued through their play all children share knowledge about their ethnic and cultural self and others. Similarly, the responses to the interview questions evidenced practitioner views that the children’s knowledge is observed most often in the dialectal nature of conversations, when they make use of the materials brought in from the home. However, following observations of the children’s conceptual learning in the video recordings, the decision was made to withdraw three children from the study (Appendix 10).

The reason for withdrawing these children was based on practitioner understanding about the maturation and stage of development of three of the children. Recognising practitioners have significant knowledge about the children they work with, the decision to withdraw was completely accepted. Reflection on their participation in the activities evidenced a strong preference for engaging in ‘creative’ and ‘exploratory’ play (Hughes, 2002). Decisions to withdraw was therefore also based on understanding that their ability to engage in concepts surrounding ethnic identity proved to be a challenge for some of the children. Practitioner confidence about the maturation and stage of development of the remaining children therefore influenced the final sample. This study therefore makes use of three children as research participants, sampling choices consisted of two children from mixed Black Caribbean/White origin, and one child from Black African/White origin.

It is important to make clear the children (within a pedagogy of play) decided what constituted the emergent perspectives within this inquiry. This was a significant

methodological decision because the adopted approach enabled the children to exercise their autonomy and agency to shape and influence their shared perspectives. The children were also afforded opportunities to influence the reflection of the recordings throughout the whole of the research process. Later chapters will show the video cued conversations of these children, where the findings are presented from the perspectives of the three focus children as they engage in cultural activities associated with their own and others ethnic identity with their peers, practitioners and the researcher.

Returning to research undertaken by Ortlipp (2008), offered are noteworthy views that the researcher would be advised to evidence their choices, experiences, actions undertaken throughout the research process. It is imperative to conclude this section by explaining reliability within this study is supported by a process of systematically and carefully documenting all the agreed actions and decisions made throughout the whole of the fieldwork. Appendix 10 evidence the interview/observation schedules that maintained all the key dates and agreed actions. Whilst researcher reflective thoughts and subsequent decisions are carefully documented in the study's research design and matrix document (see examples at Appendix 7 and 11). Sample field journals and researcher reflective diaries can be viewed in Appendix 12.

#### **4.12 Gaining Access to the Field**

A key factor that influenced the choice of setting was locating children within the defined categorisations of the sample. Again, the quality and practice manager at the pilot site was crucial in supporting the search for an appropriate study site. Being part of the best practice network, as well as participating in the continual review of the research design in the pilot study phase meant Faye was positioned to recommend a private day setting that would be geographically placed in meeting the criteria for the study.

It is also important to mention here that my own career as a lecturer, early years teacher and previous owner of a private day nursery were perhaps significant factors in gaining access to the field. I also acknowledge gatekeeper concerns surrounding credibility and trust were likely to have been reduced because of participant perception that the researcher would possess knowledge surrounding ethical research and the associated sensitivities of participatory research with young children.

Initial contact was subsequently made following an introduction from Faye (quality and practice manager at the pilot study). The manager of Brooke Childcare (pseudonym) responded immediately because I was known to her as a student on the masters' degree programme at Leeds Beckett University. A meeting was subsequently arranged with Katy (manager) and

Amanda (assistant manager) to talk through the aims of the research study. Main points of discussion at this early stage focused on how ethical considerations (particularly concerns surrounding anonymity) would be addressed to provide assurances for parents.

#### **4.13 Introducing Brooke Childcare**

The setting employs eighteen staff (between the ages of 18-27). Of these, fifteen possess appropriate qualifications at level three or above, including one member of staff who is an early years teacher, three who possess early years degrees and two who have a relevant master's degree. The setting opens all year-round Monday to Friday. Sessions are from 7.30am to 6pm. The 2017 Ofsted report shows that there are currently ninety-four children on roll at the setting. Brooke Childcare also includes out-of-school provision which operates at another site. It is these staff that are called on to support annual leave and sick absence.

The type of care and education provided follows an approach where time is taken to explore what fascinates and thrills children. Staff then use this knowledge to shape learning experiences to meet children's precise needs. The environment is organised so that up to forty-two children can be in attendance on any given day. Organisation is based on following the children's emergent ideas and interests, and so the setting prides itself on not having distinct areas of learning seen in many early years settings. Unique to this setting children are part of a 'key family tree' which supports children to spend time with their siblings as well as children from other age groups. Early observation shows that there is a combination of focused activities, where there is a strong emphasis on physical (particularly outdoor experiences), personal, social and emotional development, healthy lifestyles and respect for others. The children regularly visit the local residential care home as well as engaging in experiences that support the preparation of foods to consider healthy eating.

The influence of political and educational policy permeates throughout the whole setting. Timetabling of sessions predominantly incorporate lots of time where the children are in aged appropriate groupings to engage in child-initiated experiences. Staff use Kindles to observe, track children's progression and capture picture evidence against learning outcomes. Although all staff are secure in their knowledge of the curriculum, what is significantly notable is all assessments of the children's learning and development outcomes against the early years foundation stage is undertaken by the management team alone.

The nursery team in the two-plus room is newly established. Elsa (assistant deputy manager) is the room leader and supports Amanda with her role as the setting's special educational needs coordinator. Cover in the room includes four other nursery practitioners,

as well as Amanda. It is Amanda's pedagogy that appears to most influence and shape the experiences and approaches characterised not only in this room, but throughout the setting. With a background in play, there is a strong and highly visible approach to teaching that incorporates a strong commitment towards consulting with children, listening to their play experiences to establish what 'fascinating play' is for them. Access to a wide range of resources is available for most of the day. Resources are sourced to follow the interests of the children and so it is reasonable to conclude the pedagogy of the room is one which uses a developmental approach consistent with child led experiences. The adults consciously remain removed from the children's play, unless they are invited 'into' or must step in to manage conflicts, behaviour or risks.

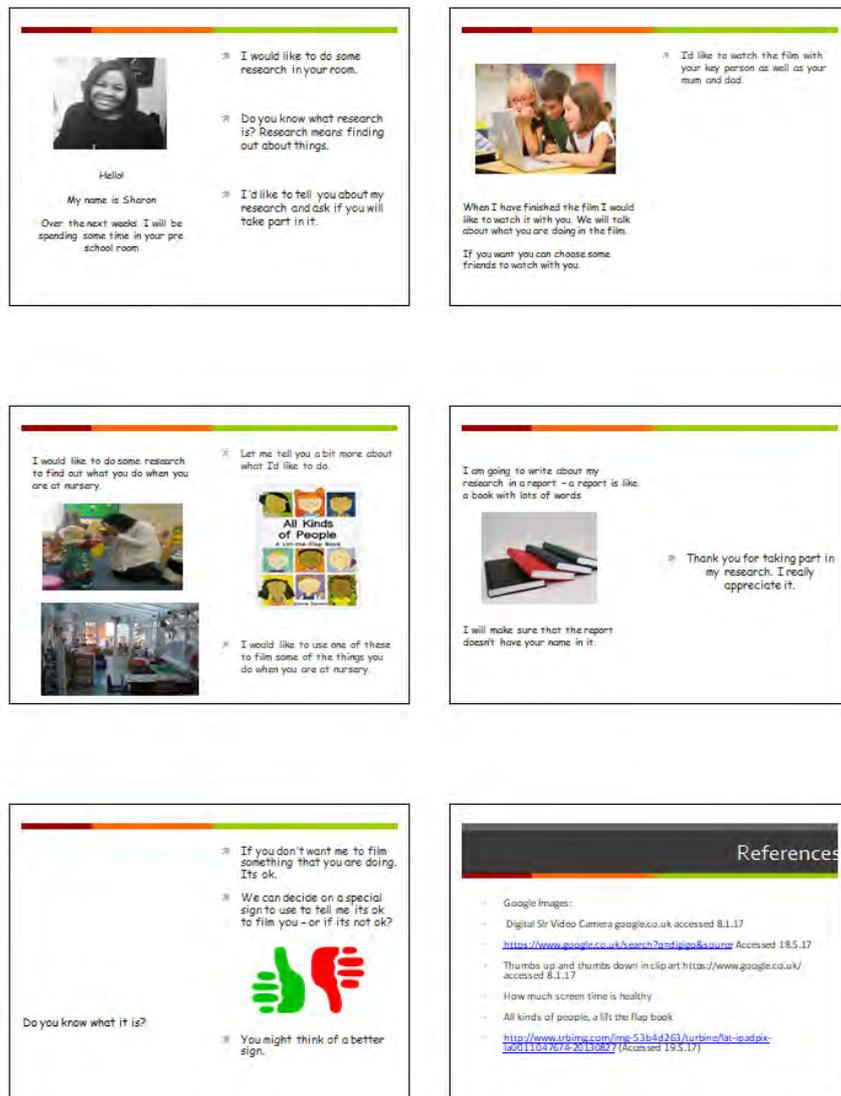
#### **4.14 Ethics - developing ethical relationships and negotiating participation**

Ethical consent was granted by two universities in September 2017; however this section details the ethical considerations that extend beyond university regulations. I present how I established respectful relationships with the research participants. Chapter 1 positions insider/outsider considerations as black female researcher in more depth, whilst Chapter 7 provides critical incidents that shaped the analysis of data pertinent to pedagogic action in the research process. For now, Shenton (2004) maintains that establishing a relationship of trust is achieved through regular and sustained visits before the research process begins. Where the researcher is advised to make themselves available to build rapport and answer questions surrounding ethics and logistical arrangements.

Rather than what Pascal and Bertram (2012) term as adopting a '*hit and run*' approach, the study allowed enough time to develop rapport, as well as time for reciprocity to evolve in the relationships with the children and the practitioners. Chapter 1 acknowledges my innate ability to build rapport quickly with young children and adults but acknowledged here is what Siraj-Blatchford (2010) argues can be the limitation of small-scale qualitative studies. Although I had a previous relationship with the manager via study on a masters' degree, I had no prior knowledge of the assistant manager that I would be undertaking the study with. I was also unfamiliar with the staff and the group of children and their families that would be participating in the research. Built into the research design therefore was a period where I attended drop-in sessions to spend time with all the children and practitioners. Provided in the following section is an explanation about how I developed reciprocity and an ethical relationship with the research participants.

#### 4.14.1 Initial contact with the children, their families and staff

Over a period of one month, three hours per visit was spent following the children's play interests where I participated in their everyday routines. I engaged in activities such as reading, drawing, and cooking. I later found out that cooking was not only a favourite interest of the children but was part of the ethos of the nursery for supporting the children's knowledge about developing healthy food choices. Welcomed were opportunities to engage in conversations with all children to explain my role and the purpose of my research, and to pay attention to developing positive relationships with the focus children. Undertaking ethically led procedures around child assent I designed a photo book to support children's understanding about my research.



The photo book was sent home so that children and parents who showed interest were also involved in the process of discussion about my research. Whilst in the room I maintained field notes to capture the children's names, as well as noting their preferred friendships groups.

Second, I engaged in outdoor play opportunities around 'pick up' time, where focused time was spent informally addressing the probing questions of not just those parents whose children were identified as research participants, but of all parents who had been informed about my study. I used this time to distribute documentation that provided a preamble about my research (see Appendix 13), but significantly the time was used to demonstrate to parents the relationships I had developed with children and the nursery team.

Third, I met with all the staff, where I was able to distribute the preamble sheets (see Appendix 14 and 15) about my research. Over time conversations in the practitioners' everyday routines provided opportunities for them to get to know me, ask questions, or air concerns about the study. I attended a staff training day as a participant observer. Afforded were possibilities to further develop relationships with practitioners outside of everyday practice. It was an excellent opportunity to observe how managers facilitate staff training to inform pedagogy and curriculum development.

Finally, to develop emergent research relationships, I attended debriefing meetings (which continued throughout the whole of the field work) to gain views surrounding the progress of the inquiry, including my role, and how it might be adapted to best articulate and document the children and practitioner understandings.

In many ways my previous experience as the owner operator of a private day setting, as well as duties where I was an assessor for the award of Early Years Teacher status (EYTs) eased my entry into the field. Being familiar with early years environments, I find that I can establish a relationship of trust with individuals easily. When thinking about the role of the researcher Robson (1993: 194) suggests the quality of the case is dependent on observational methods where the researcher enters "the social and symbolic world through learning [the participants] social conventions and habits, their use of language and nonverbal communication".

Chapter 1 explains why children 'invite' me into their play where, tendered is a view that this could be due to children's ability to recognise that I am genuinely interested and engaged in matters that are important to them.

Choices about the level of researcher participation; whether to be a 'pure' participant observer or a member of the group was important in the methodological decision process. Recognising that children 'invite' me into their social worlds easily influenced the conscious decision to deliberately avoid the typical behaviours of the practitioners in the rooms. Particularly behaviours associated with the organisation and management of the daily activities and routines. I went to great lengths to continually explain my role so that the children did not

confuse the researcher role with the practitioner role. Adopted then was a role of *participant as observer*, because afforded were opportunities to participate in the learning opportunities where my role was accepted in the group, but in a similar vein a passive role could be adopted to review the recording, write up field notes and leave the room for meetings whilst stepping away from activities and routines.

The adoption of this role became familiar and helped with establishing the researcher character and identity with the children. The children quickly accepted my role, regarding me as an occasional visitor to the setting. In the analysis of vignette 12, clearly understanding the purpose of the activity, and without being prompted by Amanda, Jake is observed to ask “*is Sharon coming today? I love Sharon*”.

#### **4.14.2 Gaining initial consent and negotiating participation**

It is important to explain that in the negotiation of participation phase, I was keen not to assert decisions about the choice of the children that would participate in the study. The rationale for this decision stemmed from the responses provided in the interview phase where practitioner views espoused that the children not only engaged in culturally appropriate activities, but they also share knowledge about their own ethnic identity and the identity of others in everyday conversations.

It must also be explained that conversations about the choice of learning experiences that would be introduced in the observations phase yielded a consensus amongst the management team that the ethos and culture of the setting would shape the type of play contexts undertaken in the study. Section 4.13 provides an explanation that central to play pedagogy is an approach aligned with following the fascinations of the children. Therefore, practitioner insistence that the children would decide when, where and how they played was respected without contention by the researcher.

Characterised as a child centred or a child-initiated approach, observations of play started out by giving ‘voice’ to a small group of selected mixed ethnic children in freely chosen activities. I propose play in this period was more adult focused because activities appeared to be planned to coincide with experiences such as UK national ‘reading week’ initiative. Most observed activities involved storytelling from adult choices of children’s literature, but these selections were known favourites of the children. Evidenced in everyday routines was how play involved following the children’s ideas in their freely chosen and intrinsically motivated ways of being in the setting. In which the environment offered a myriad of loose materials sourced by the children from their own encounters in the home and wider community. Considering these explanations about the settings approach to socio-dramatic

play contexts, the subsequent sections move on to explain how participation and consent/assent was attained.

**Managers:** The research preamble and proposal documents were an invaluable resource for starting conversations about the aims/methods at the start of and subsequent stages of the research process. Documents such as the Interview and observation schedules acted as a useful aide for talking about the philosophies that underpinned the ethos, aims and values surrounding inclusive practice; exploring what existing pedagogical strategies for inclusive practice were in place. They were also helpful for facilitating conversations about how data would be collected, participant roles, and how the data would be shared. Research documents helped to address confidentiality, provide details of predefined questions and to encourage all participants to ask questions before signing an opt-in consent form.

**Practitioners:** Once consent to undertake the study was approved by the management team, an outline of the research proposal was provided to the pre-selected practitioners. Through carefully deliberated and sensitively aware conversations I obtained an initial overview of the current observation, planning and assessment strategies deployed by the setting around inclusive practice. Additionally, conversations explored what sorts of activities mixed ethnic learners engaged in; the practitioners' role in learning; pedagogical strategies for recognising the diversity of mixed ethnic learners; and any parental engagement that supported practitioner developing knowledge about the children. Particularly knowledge that served to explore philosophies for underpinning their existing practice.

It is recognised that sensitivities did arise when questions were asked that tested pedagogical understanding about the ethnicity of the children and families in the setting. Particularly conversations that shared understanding taken from the review of literature that children's social learning about ethnic identity may be influenced by pedagogic interactions and the medium of language used in those interactions (Butler and Markman, 2016). Sensitivities also arose in discussions when practitioners were questioned about the representation of resources (loose materials sourced to support children's fascinations) in the setting. I therefore arrived at every meeting prepared to account for any assumptions or developing philosophies drawn from the ongoing research process. This practice was done to put minds at rest, and to provide assurances about the methods in the study.

**Children and Parents:** Having established with the practitioners the sample group of children that would be involved in the research, I held informal conversations with the children's parents. An outline of the research proposal was provided, and parental consent was gained following the completion of the necessary paperwork. Section 4.13.1 details

how the photo-books were used to introduce the research project to the children. An additional child information assent form as well as the photo books was sent home so that parents could talk some more with their children. Emphasised in the photo books was pictorial cues about using the cameras to talk about learning at nursery. As a result, assent was gained from the sample children.

#### **4.15 The ongoing process of negotiating consent with young children**

Approaches for developing relationships and initial assent/consent with the children and their families and practitioners are presented in section 4.14.1 and 4.14.5. However the researcher is reminded that gaining formal permission at the start of a study is not enough, it should be recognised that consent in participant observation is of “ongoing significance” in ethnographic studies, (Siraj-Blatchford 2010: 277). Whilst no issues were presented in obtaining consent from parents, with gatekeepers such as children the notion of obtaining ongoing assent was always at the forefront of the researcher’s mind. Particularly thoughts for ensuring that the children were able to engage in purposeful activities where they would be able to freely express their own thoughts. It was of utmost importance that the children were not placed in situated contexts where the agenda of an activity, or the responses within those experiences were provided because of what could be perceived as the hidden agenda of adult participants.

Understanding that parents may not be present in the research processes, Coady (2010) offers, it is desirable to monitor children’s desire to participate during the course of research to maintain their best interests. Prior experience of working with young children positioned the researcher well to monitor continual assent. The photo books contained a diagram of a thumbs up and thumbs down and formed the basis of conversations about participation. Parents and practitioners alike were encouraged to reinforce messages about the use of the symbols and rights to participate when the books were left in the setting or sent home. Ongoing monitoring in the observation phase was via scrutiny of the children’s non-verbal cues or behaviour. The moment any child showed signs of boredom or disengagement with the activity the learning experience was appropriately ended by the practitioner.

The children were always afforded opportunities by the practitioner to express what the subsequent direction of their play or routines would take following the activities. From the onset of the research the children actively shaped the developing relationship between all the participants, as well as the direction the research took. The vignettes of play (Appendix 16) incorporating the children’s responses associated with ethnic identity demonstrate their ability to share their thoughtful perceptions of their ideas in unique ways of understanding. What is

significant are insights that provide an unexpected lens into views arising from home experiences.

**Summary of the recorded footage taken from Vignette 15.2 - 15.3**

Situated in the training room, the four children take it in turn to paint a self-portrait. The purpose of this learning experience is to provide the children with an extended opportunity to paint themselves using skin coloured paint. Observation shows that Amanda's focus and interaction is with Freddy. Using pedagogic skills that makes use of open questioning, Amanda makes use of the children's interaction to explore their thoughts about their ethnicity.

**Extract from transcript**

The children demonstrate a confident and strong preference for the terms:

- 'light brown' (used to define self)
- 'dark brown skin' (used by Freddy to describe his mother)
- 'well I've got a sort of white colour' (used by Jake to describe self)
- 'but my mummy's got white colour' (used by Jake to describe his mother)
- 'My daddy got black like' ...*doesn't finish her sentence* (used by Fay to describe her father)

When Amanda questions Edie about other members of her family, Edie's responds, and then totally unprompted Jake offers his thoughts about his father ethnic identity

Oh, he's got, he's got black skin, the same as Freddy's mummy (Jake shares his thoughts with Fay about his Father).

Demonstration of their ability to provide assent/withdrawal was originally negotiated through a process of showing 'thumbs up, thumbs down' between the children and the researcher. Also used were methods that involved eye contact with the practitioners when filming needed to be immediately stopped. The thumbs up/down method was rarely used however, as the children felt comfortable and were confident to express their desire to change or stop the activity verbally. The children's ability to verbally express themselves provided an assurance that the process of consent was being continually negotiated, which was pleasing because central to the approach of consent was developing a mutual reciprocal relationship of trust between the researcher and the children.

As time moved on, I became more familiar and attuned to the children's personalities and behaviours, respectfully making ethical decisions to stop recording when, for example, Freddy showed any signs of frustration due to his stammer and ability to respond to conversations with his peers and the practitioners. Or times when Edie and Fay were so engaged in their play that they did not notice my presence. I respected their need for privacy in moments like this. In these instances when the direction of play was unpredictable the methods had to be purposefully fluid to respond to the children's indications for consent to film. I was mindful of advice provided in literature that argues researchers in obtaining the "best possible data must take care of overly distorting the case by their presence" Edwards (2010: 67). I went to great lengths to ensure that all participants were used to my presence prior to and during the data collection process, however it is recognised that in the process of providing evidence for this case my presence will have caused disruption to everyday routines in the setting. I acknowledge that whilst carefully introducing new practices exploring co-construction of ethnic identity my presence will to some degree distort the study (Edwards, 2010).

The saliency of non-verbal communication exhibited by the focus children is deliberately emphasised in all the transcribed vignettes. This was done to not only capture what I term as 'habits of attention' for informing ethnic role behaviours, but for also capturing the negotiated nature of consent with the children. I used instances when the children would move away from the intentional activities to play with other resources, or when their behaviours or characters became 'agitated' as strong non-verbal cues for filming to be suspended. Always acknowledged was the children's rights to withdraw from the activities and dialogic conversations.

Another notable methodological decision in the process of data collection related to cues for assent/decent. For example, when revisiting earlier recordings footage shows that the children became frustrated with what could be perceived as the repetitious nature of questions linked to comparisons about their skin colour. It is noted that filming of the activity ceased immediately once these behaviours were exhibited. Respecting the children's ethical right to withdraw from the practice of critically observing their changing disposition towards the research was managed by the flexibility of the researcher to adjust and make changes in the observation schedule.

#### 4.16 The research schedule

Table 2 provides a contextual summary of the interview and observation processes.

|   | Location                           | Number of Interviews/Observations                            | Number of Participants | Timing                           |
|---|------------------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Interviews</b>   | Staff room                         | 3  | 3                      | 60 mins x 3<br>Total 120 minutes |
| <b>Observations</b><br>Children<br>Practitioners          | Two-plus room<br><br>Training room | 8<br>recorded play activities<br>16<br>transcribed vignettes | 4<br><br>2             | 135 hours                        |
| <b>Focus Group Interviews</b><br>Practitioners<br>Parents | Staff room                         | 1<br><br>1   | 2<br><br>2             | 120 minutes<br>120 minutes       |

*Table 2 Summary of Interviews/Observations*

##### 4.16.1 Interviews: Stage One

Taking forward the lessons learned from the pilot study, which were to garner greater understanding of the: design of the physical space for exploring an ethnic identity with children; the cultural resources used; and what pedagogical interactions and decisions looked like in the exploration of ethnicity, I conducted semi-structured open-ended

interviews with three practitioners. Being pre-selected by the manager, practitioners participated in the interviews on a one-to-one basis for sixty minutes in the staff room. Following the distribution of the research documentation the interviews started off by addressing concerns about the research process to ensure practitioners felt comfortable. Once the interviewees were at ease, conversations elicited details about the practitioners professional learning experiences; understanding of the curriculum and procedure surrounding inclusion in the setting; as well as exploring views about how children's FOK (developing ethnic identity) is incorporated into their practice. The interviews provided a space for exploring early emergent ideas about the existing learning experiences that already facilitate children's ability to explore constructs surrounding ethnic identity. Permission to record for transcription and analysis was sought in the negotiating access stage. After each interview, the responses were transcribed to categorise and analyse the emergent themes from the responses against the research questions. This phase of the research included following up expressed ideas, as well as investigating possible motives for the responses given in the initial interviews to further probe responses.

#### **4.16.2 Observations: *Stage Two***

Data collection took place on one day per week, over a period of approximately five months. The observation schedule focused on filming all three focus children for up to a maximum of two hours. It is important to explain that this time also incorporated dialogic conversations with the children, as well as time spent in separate conversations with the practitioners. Observations usually took place in the afternoon sessions, unless otherwise changed to follow the routines and attendance of the three focus children. All self-initiated activities were originally recorded in the room for children aged two onwards (two-plus room) on the ground floor of the setting. However, the nursery manager requested that filming of the activities be moved to the first floor 'training room'. This was a reasonable request because it became clear that focusing on filming the three focus children was becoming challenging in a room that accommodated up to forty children between the ages of two to five years.

Although titled the 'training room', it was apparent that the room was very familiar to the children because it is set up to focus on topics stemming from their interests. Resources (including images on the walls) used in the setting's main rooms are replicated here and represent the shared learning experiences between smaller groups of children and practitioners.

Appendix 17 details the summarised activity data sources from the recorded and photographed interactions that took place within the child and adult initiated play experiences. Formosinho and Pascal (2016: 82) are supportive of the range of experiences

that were recorded in the observation phase, as they contend using forms of expressive activities such as storytelling, drawing, painting and filming making use children's narratives in methodologies, provide "more authentic accounts of pedagogic practice... as well as unmask[ing] some of the often-hidden aspects of understanding and meanings which flow from evidence".

It is important to explain that the children would invite me to participate in their learning experiences, particularly when they referred to characteristics that compared their parents' ethnic identity with mine. Post observation reflections were written up immediately, in part to reflect on thoughts about the children's emergent ideas, but to also record decisions made in maintaining confirmability (Cutter-Mackenzie, Edwards; Quinton, 2015) and dependability (Shenton 2004) in the research process.

In addition to the recorded activities ethnographic field notes (Appendix 12) detailed contexts and dialogue to facilitate and evidence understanding of the social interactions taking place. It was imperative to capture the language and check their associated meaning in the children's and practitioners' responses, because these methods acted as important analytical techniques for recording what I termed as *critical incidents* when typing up the vignettes (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). The critical incidents were especially significant for explaining the children's behaviours as well as terminology used to express their views about their own ethnicity and the ethnicity of others. Finally, these notes included descriptions of the role and purpose of the physical space (the setting itself and the training room).

My ability to document rich ethnographic field notes was due to the support offered by an academic colleague who was proficient in using video equipment and had current research experience. Alan recorded the interactions between children and the practitioners which enabled me to write the supplementary notes to corroborate with the videoed recordings at a later stage in the process. Review of the recorded footage highlights how proficient Alan was at being a "passive though completely accepted participant" (Robson, 1999: 198). Although he never joined in the activities with the children his presence was obviously recognised by the children. Vignette 12 evidence conversations where the children discuss which 'researcher' they like best. Freddy is heard to say '*I like the man best*' in deliberations with his peers and Amanda.

#### **4.16.3 Viewing the recordings**

To deepen understanding documenting post observation of the activities involved projecting the activities onto a wall for the children, their peers and practitioners to review. If the activity was in the morning the review of the recorded session usually occurred in the afternoon

immediately following lunch. On many occasions the children viewed the footage immediately after the activity had naturally ended. The reason for doing so was to gather the children’s perspectives and elicit their interpretations and understandings immediately. I was also mindful of being the least disruptive I could be to the routine of the setting. Table 3 details a summary of all the participants that viewed the recorded episodes and whose perspectives have contributed in some way towards the study:

| Focus Children                                     | Practitioners   | Parents  | Supporting Peers |
|--|---|--|------------------|
| Jake<br>Freddy<br>Fay<br>Zachary<br>Kaleb<br>Brady | Faye (pilot study)<br>Katy<br>Amanda<br>Leah<br>Linda | Michael (Jake’s Dad)<br>Hannah (Edie’s Mum)<br>Naomi (Fay’s Mum) | Edie             |

*Table 3 Summary of research participants*

Pseudonyms are used for all the participants to guard their anonymity. I make a case in Chapter 6 for incorporating extracts provided by Edie to signify the importance of friendships, as well as informing incidents where her strong sense of self, insightful knowledge about her own and differing ethnicities, and support of her peers to confidently express their developing ideas about their ethnicity provided significant contributions worthy of analysis in the study. Shown here is a deliberate commitment towards respectfully understanding perspectives within the sociocultural context in which it occurred. Fay and Edie came as a ‘package’, they entered every session with the explanation that they were ‘best friends’. Reinforced is the importance of addressing ethical matters associated with assent and consent beyond the considerations of the three focus children.

Dissimilar to the methodological approach adopted in Tobin, Wu and Davidson’s (1989) original study, no attempts were made to edit the filmed footage before showing them to the children and practitioners. The rationale for this decision was to limit subjectivity in the choice of recording by the researcher. Concerns here centred on the creation of meaningful opportunities for the children (and practitioners) to participate as co-researchers. As detailed in section 4.5.3, I was committed to establishing respectful conditions for listening to the children rather than tokenistic approaches of participation.

Instead, each recording was re-run after the activity, adopting approaches like that of Tobin’s (1989) model and Pascal and Bertram’s (2009) participatory data collection methods, in so much as the videoed footage served to act as prompts for encouraging reflection and focusing discussion. It is important to note that similar to instances when the

children either expressed or showed non-verbal cues for filming to be suspended, the dialogic conversations from viewing the filmed footage were also suspended immediately in acknowledgment of the children's rights to withdraw.

Approaches using the recordings as well as the detailed ethnographic field notes acted as material for interpretation and analysis. The methods detailed in stage one and two have in common the principle aim of endeavouring to seek understanding about how the participants interpret their 'worlds' and lived experiences. It is recognised that researcher prior knowledge and practice will have influenced how and what was documented from the learning experiences, and that real-world research is never neutral impartial or value free (Edwards, 2010). The ethnographic concern was to consider the importance of recording in as much detail as possible evidence that ensured emergent theorisation was based on carefully recorded events (Barron, 2013).

From the start it was important to capture accurate documentation of the 'voices' occurring in the children's activities, but it is also important to acknowledge that researcher reconceptualisations of knowledge in the study's findings would not produce universally applicable theory (Taylor, 2010). The purpose of this study was not to create new knowledge about how a play-based pedagogy influences young mixed ethnic children's ability to relate to and share constructs about their ethnicity that could be applied across many contexts. Nor are they intended to produce a model that can be reproduced.

Instead, these findings are presented as being partial and localised to this research study, where it is intended that the findings discussed in the following chapters can be used to generate discussion points about how this group of children view their mixed ethnic identity and the identity of others. Similarly, the intentions of the study are to act as points for professional deliberation about the choice of pedagogic practice and resources that are used to ensure inclusivity for these groupings in early years educational settings.

Using Corsaro's (2015) "interpretive reproduction" theory is helpful in supporting existing epistemologies that advocate children's social development is dependent on internalisation of knowledge shared by adults. However, this inquiry aimed to move beyond these contexts towards emergent doctrines that demonstrate how children's active social contributions can inform cultural production and change in pedagogic practice. Put another way the purpose of this study aimed to demonstrate how children's contributions may serve to inform new categorisations that they ascribe to similarities and differences in mixed ethnic origin. Methods that made use of reflexivity in the actions of the researcher, combined with reflection was required to be able to respond to the constantly changing dynamics of the research context (Cutter-Mackenzie et al, 2015).

#### 4.16.4 Field diaries and Journals

Drawing on authors such as Silverman, (2004), (who talked about the benefits of field diaries), journals were maintained to provide additional information to triangulate and supplement the collected data. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 151) argue field notes are an invaluable part of the invisible oral tradition for crafting knowledge where the researcher finds their way of undertaking the activity of journaling. Although it was initially difficult to decide what was relevant to record, due diligence and attention to the practice of maintaining field notes soon became a routine feature in shaping note taking activities for recording: the development of shared knowledge between children, practitioners and myself; the personal and subjective choices made as a researcher; and my own development. Particular attention is given to Barron's (2013) view that there is no real consensus amongst ethnographers regarding how and what to record when writing field notes. Indeed, in his own research he describes recording what he found interesting and sometimes unfamiliar to his own western practices in his study with Pakistani British children. What Barron does helpfully explain is the error he made with note-taking practice, which was failing to record his reflections on the process of 'mediation' and 'representation' (2013: 120). Due diligence was therefore attached to reflecting on mediation processes in both my field notes and the transcribed vignettes of play. I tried hard to record terminology possibly learnt and replicated from linguistic practices of the home that were then used in the responses shared in the situated context of the educational environment with peers and practitioners. This practice was very challenging, especially deciphering what the difference was between the language of the home environment and the language of the setting.

Appreciation of having the disposition for overthinking and over analysing situations, journal entries therefore supported the process of clarifying and understanding the children's responses, as well as being an invaluable resource for member checking in both the interview and observation phases of data collection. I recorded what provided a sense of relevancy and transparency regarding what was going on (particularly in the play activities) in the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). Here, journaling supported not only the documentation of what I was learning during these encounters, but also served as a point of reference during dialogic conversations with practitioners about the children's responses to the learning experiences. Similarly, using field notes helped with difficulties experienced in the process of writing up interpretations and nuanced meanings shared by both the practitioners and the children.

To embrace ideas offered by Tobin (2005) that rather than noting what is literally said researchers should try to interpret wider meanings beyond the words uttered by research participants. Practitioners were asked to maintain reflective journals of their pedagogic

practice and their own interpretations of what they perceived was being learnt in the shared play experiences (Appendix 8). Interestingly only one practitioner engaged in the research practice of maintaining detailed notes. Amanda, whilst willing to engage in most of the dialogic conversations about the children's learning, refrained from using the journal template to record critical reflection of her own pedagogy. She also refrained from journaling thoughts about the influences of pedagogic action and resources in co-constructing and sharing young children's ideas about ethnic identity.

Appendix 6 discusses in more detail incidents in the data collection phase that highlighted tensions between practitioner/researcher positioning and the persistence of negotiating an insider/outsider status. Focus here is on acknowledging how the significance of maintaining and referring to research diaries, field notes and journals afforded transparency in the: experiences and decisions that shaped the focus of the research process; data selection; interpretations of that data (Ortlipp, 2008). These research diaries, field notes and journals also illuminate how reflection on critical incidents in the research process prompted changes in approach and methods that had not been initially planned in the research design. I refer here to the critical incident (discussed in more depth in Appendix 6) that culminated in the cancellation of agreed observations of play and dialogic conversations. Disruption in the operational running of the nursery due to significant staff changes was sighted as the rationale for preventing access into the setting. This necessitated the need to undertake practitioner/parent focus group interviews to complete the field work.

Appendix 15 presents a summary of the focus group interview with practitioners and parents to demonstrate how I adapted my research design. The approach used, and the benefits and limitations experienced in undertaking interviews of this type is explained. Pertinent for providing clarification in this methodological approach also detailed is my rationale for meeting with practitioners and parents. Obtaining practitioners collective views about inclusive practice, as well as garnering parental perspectives about: their children's emergent responses; their understanding about similarity and difference in ethnicity in relation to family, peers, and practitioners; as well as identifying or seeking understanding whether parents recognised the children's responses as being previously learned and shared in the home or wider community provided another rich source of data for triangulation with emergent perspectives from the interview and observation phases.

#### **4.17 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a rationale for the choice of methodology used to explore contexts associated with the formation of ethnic identity from the perspectives of young mixed ethnic children. Working towards trustworthiness, it has documented and reflected

on research processes that prioritised ethically respectful and reciprocal engagement with the children and practitioners as research participants.

Discussion purposely demonstrates the numerous ways in which the design of this study provided agency for young mixed ethnic children to engage as research participants. Illuminated are opportunities for young children to meaningfully display cultural knowledge learned from outside of the setting, that in turn informed the methodology and methods.

Potter (2004, quoted in Hardy and Bryman, 2009: 607) suggests discourse is a central element of life where language “provides the categories and terms for understanding self and others”. Defined by principles concerned with the enactment of rigour and ethics in qualitative studies, praxeological research methods have been deliberated to position the children as lead voices to better understand participatory social practices of young mixed ethnic children in their interactions with peers and practitioners in educational contexts.

I also reflect upon the complexities and sensitivities in methodological techniques that when questioning pedagogic practice necessitated a change to the original design of the study. Opportunities were sought to engage with the views of parents to garner their perspectives about the children’s emergent responses and to seek understanding whether parents recognised the children’s responses as being previously learned and shared in the home or wider community. Here focus group interviews were incorporated to provide another rich source of data for triangulation with emergent perspectives from the interview and observation phases.

After the formal data collection ended, analysis from the interviews, observations, field diaries and focused group interviews drew on Denzin’s (1978) ‘methodological triangulation’ to attempt to build a robust picture of the emergent themes and interpretations in this case study. The following chapter will discuss how the perspectives of the children and practitioners were analysed to identify and inform the thematic framework.

## **Chapter 5: Generating a thematic framework for the analysis of data**

### **5.1 Introduction to the chapter**

With a focus on the research questions, this chapter discusses how a systematic analysis of the data led to the development of a thematic framework related to mixed ethnicity children's perspectives surrounding formation of ethnic identity. It is recognised that the process of analysis involves conceptualised themes and sub-themes surrounding ethnicity and identity that may be unfamiliar to the research participants (children and practitioners) involved in the research process. However, the themes and sub themes within the framework are an attempt to present as accurate as possible the perspectives of the research participants.

I tentatively offer the view that research does not occur in a social vacuum, rather the process of analysis is interactive, where past experiences, and current interests are brought into research processes. It is important therefore, to acknowledge that any attempts to convey participants' perspectives surrounding ethnic identity from the play-based learning experiences, can only be representations, and will therefore involve an element of subjective selection and interpretation (Barron, 2013; Charmaz 2014).

#### **5.1.1 How the chapter is organised**

The chapter commences with an account of the analytical process. It clarifies how the transcribed perspectives of the 'focus' children and practitioners was used to establish a thematic framework. Discussion then moves on to introduce the themes and sub themes within the framework before reporting on the methods that were adopted to present the findings.

### **5.2 The process of analysis**

The study's approach to data analysis has been influenced by Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). The use of positivist grounded techniques is well established in the field (Glaser, 2001; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Bryman, 2012) having been adopted for advancing constructive social critique and change through qualitative research. Building on original conceptions developed by Glaser and Straus (1967), Charmaz proposes techniques from grounded theory offer a mode of analysis that allows the researcher to remain close to their participants 'worlds', as well as processes constituting how these worlds are constructed. The approach supported the development of an integrated set of theoretical concepts that emerge from synthesised and interpreted empirical sources, rather than from pre-existing hypothesis. Pertinent to this study,

hypothesis emerges from particular social and cultural contexts where a localised approach in generating, analysing and presenting data consider factors where the researcher plays an influential, as well as integral role. Provided are tools for exploration beyond reporting. It is hoped the processes detailed in the following sections move beyond mere reporting, by lending themselves to the analysis of the relationship between human agency and social structure, as well as unexploited potential for studying power and inequality in those relationships.

Application of these techniques locates and makes clear theoretical insight, afford evidence for evaluative claims of the data, as well as situating a strong empirical foundation for achieving credibility in this study. It is hoped the reader can then consider the merits of the findings on offer.

Ultimately, the intention was to generate a thematic framework, and present an analysis about mixed ethnic identity formation that remained true to and was informed predominantly by the children's viewpoints. Also important in analysis, are the perspectives of practitioners, whose support in facilitating young children's understanding and subsequent vocalisations. Pertinent to this inquiry is garnering understanding about the ways in which young children may internalise views and beliefs about their ethnicity from the home environment. Analysis sought to explore how practitioners utilise children's knowledge that may have been learned from the everyday activities with parents in planned learning experiences.

Set within the parameters of this inquiry, key to analysis of the gathered data was bringing together perspectives from the research participants to consider their contribution towards answering the research questions, which are:

Research Question 1:

*Using the 'voice' of the child, what are the key influences on mixed ethnic children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their ethnic identity in an early years setting?*

Research Question 2:

*What opportunities exist in the early years policy framework (EYFS, 2017) that allow 'mixed ethnic' children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences in their education?*

Research Question 3:

*How does the implementation of a play-based pedagogical approach provide 'space' for mixed ethnic children to explore their ethnicity?*

Rather than seeking clear definitions of what a mixed ethnic identity is from the expressed narratives, analysis sought to categorise the nuanced ways in which the activity of identifying drives the terminology heard. The selected responses are therefore based on the analysis of rich sources (see Tables 4 and 8, pages 108 and 117) of emergent information that advanced the thematic direction and synthesis of the collected data, as well the development of the subsequent thematic framework. Consequently, the research questions and the associated thematic framework informed but did not lead the analysis.

Used to explore how ethnicity and culture occurs and is valued in an early years setting, are theories drawn from, funds of knowledge (FOK) theory (Moll, 2010; Parks 2011; Riojas-Cortez, 2014) to position and give 'voice' to children. Chapter 2 explains culture goes beyond material resources in early years classrooms. In the context of this inquiry cultural traits also referred to FOK will include children's: prevailing and accepted perspectives acquired in social relationships; language; and values and beliefs (Riojas-Cortez, 2001; Moll et al,1992; Barron 2014).

Similarly, analytical principles adapted from Flanagan, (1954) Critical Incident Technique (CIT) are utilised to provide systematic procedures for collecting interpretations of the behaviours observed in the filmed recordings. The use of these principles enabled the participants 'voices' to be positioned at the forefront of the study, because the presented incidents provide as clear as possible evidence of critical incidents through which inferences could be made. The essence of this technique is that it allowed 'simple' judgements, reporting and evaluation (Flanagan,1954: 335) to be made by the observer. Methodological approaches that give due regard to the judgments that are made in reporting and evaluation is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. I offer FOK and CIT techniques first and foremost supported the positioning of the participants perspectives, but also aided in making visible researcher subjectivities that are unavoidable in the process of analysis and reporting. Using these principled approaches offered authenticity, credibility and trustworthiness to this study (Shenton, 2004).

Accommodatingly, critical incident technique does not consist of rigid sets of rules governing data collection. Making use of this method provided an opportunity to flexibly develop procedures for assembling, evaluating and reporting on specific behaviours in a transparent way. Adaptation of this technique was particularly concerned with making it easier to draw on the inferences of behaviour made by the children within each recorded vignette of play, and to undertake a comparison of those behaviours across all the activities. Principally, the aim was to report on those incidents believed to be the most valuable for accurately classifying the data's relationship to previously developed definitions associated with ethnic identity constructs, and to consider providing consistent interpretation and reporting.

### 5.3 The process of Initial coding

Constant comparative methods associated with approaches established by Glaser & Straus (1967) are used to create analytical distinctions and thus make comparisons at each level of the analysis of the data. Accepted are views that what the researcher sees in the data is in part dependent on previous perceptions (Charmaz, 2014), so attention must be given to try to view ones' own views as one of many. I acknowledged that my conceptions about pedagogical practice for example from previous experience in the early years sector could potentially influence the coding ascribed to my data. I hoped that having gained more awareness of differing concepts throughout the inquiry, would prevent myself from imposing my preconceptions on how the coding was employed. Heightened awareness also informed how I might prejudge what was happening in the initial coding of the data.

The data comprised of three transcribed practitioner interviews, sixteen transcribed vignettes detailing ethnographic narrative accounts from eight recorded play experiences and dialogic conversations with the children. This represented one hundred and thirty-five hours of engagement with the focus children and practitioners, as shown in Table 4.

| <b>Participants</b>                  | <b>Number of Interviews and video simulated discussions</b> | <b>Total time</b> |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Amanda                               | Interview recall from memory 1 hour                         | 1 Hour            |
|                                      | Conversation in interaction in play in six vignettes        | 10 min 18 secs    |
| Leah                                 | Interview recall from memory 1 hour                         | 1 Hour            |
|                                      | Conversation in interaction in play in ten vignettes        | 52 min 32 secs    |
| Linda                                | Interview recall from memory 1 hour                         | 1 Hour            |
| Children (includes multiple viewing) | 16 transcribed vignettes from 8 recorded activities         | 135 Hours         |
| Jake                                 | Dialogic conversations:                                     |                   |
| Fay                                  | Children recall from memory 1 Hour 52 minutes               |                   |
| Freddy                               | Children recall from viewing 4 recordings 51 min 11 secs    |                   |
|                                      | Conversation in interaction in play 135 Hours               |                   |
|                                      | <b>Total</b>  | <b>138 Hours</b>  |

*Table 4 The contributions from each group of participants*

The initial stages of analysis involved ascribing codes to study closely words, themes and incidents from the transcribed responses. Taken from Charmaz (2014), coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing emergent themes to explain that data. Initial coding of the transcribed interviews aided me to capture the important points that the practitioners made about what they say and do when working with children. Initial coding developed within the interviews supported the process of making practitioner responses that reflect action transparent, as well as remaining open to possibilities to test out ideas to see where they might lead when reading through the data. Initial coding provided a direction

for forming preliminary ideas to look for more concrete meanings and insights as the analytical process progressed. Having the flexibility to revisit descriptions of ideas throughout the analytical process, not only helped to unify emerging ideas, but also supported the construction of theoretical possibilities drawn from deeper understandings elicited within the data. To support reader understanding further, Appendices 13 to 15 and 19 evidence the templates that were designed and used to undertake the iterative process of data analysis.

#### **5.4 Generating categories and themes – Interviews**

Early interpretations and meaning derived from responses to the interview questions were ascribed immediately after interviewing the practitioners. This proved invaluable in the process, as these provisional codes were later checked and revised following subsequent visits to the setting. Interestingly reading from research indicates analytical ideas can occur in the process of hearing the accounts of participants, observation of interactions, and witnessing participant's non-verbal behaviours (Charmaz 2014). I was able to check the validity of emerging analyses through the discursive nature of meetings with the practitioners. The initial stages of member checking (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Shenton 2004) reinforced validity within the process of analysis and involved leaving the transcripts with practitioner's in-between visits to the setting, negotiating time for them to review the accuracy of their responses, ensure accuracy of my interpretation of those responses, and to annotate where changes if any were needed. Although these processes presented challenges, such as finding time to meet to review the emerging data, what transpired over time was the affordance to observe the interactions and non-verbal behaviours of practitioners. Chapters 1, 6, 7 and 8 elaborate upon the impact my identity had on research processes as a black female researcher; the nature of the experiences I had when working with participants; and the difficulties I encountered during the inquiry. Countered is the view that reflective journaling can support the researcher in these instances to record ideas for later development and checking.

Detailed journaling also supported the process of reorganising, rewording and revising the coding. Particularly when new understanding emerged during the data collection period. It is important to recognise the unavoidable subjectivity of analysis where sensitivity and complexity surrounding cultural understanding became apparent. The aim of ensuring a relationship of trustworthiness was key in these instances, where practitioner contributions in regular debriefing sessions were upheld, to provide as accurate representations of the responses as possible.

Hence initial codes were never discarded but maintained in research diaries. Appendix 20 details excerpt from an interview transcript, with entries to indicate how initial coding was annotated and utilised in developing emergent categories and themes from the practitioner’s responses. Evidenced are entries where emergent categories have been changed or reworded as new understandings emerged in the phase of data collection. To make my research experiences visible entries also contained sections that summarise what I was learning as the process of analysis progressed.

Table 5 shows an example of the extract from one of the interviews, including the initial coding system allocated to the practitioner’s responses to the research questions to create categories.

| Transcript   | Coding   |
|--|--|
| <p>I like to listen as far as they have got so many stories and bringing the whole family in.</p> <p><b>Working closely with children</b> and talking with them and meeting what they specifically like to do, what their interests are and then moulding activities around them and meeting their needs and what do they want to get out of it.</p> <p>so, they can come into nursery and talk about it and all their cultures and like celebrations so like we have just had Diwali that we have done all day yesterday doing Diwali activities and they were able to talk about it and what activities they were going to do at home.</p> | <p>RQ1 – Comments on listening/sharing children’s experiences from the home/setting. <b>Interaction</b></p> <p>RQ1 – Comments on listening/sharing children’s experiences from the home/setting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Respects the importance of following the children’s interests</li> </ul> <p><b>Interaction</b></p> <p>RQ2 - Links cultural experiences in the home to planned experiences in the setting.</p> <p>RQ3 – Reflects on Pedagogic approaches that support children’s needs</p> <p><b>Interaction/Activities/Resources</b></p> |

Table 5 Extract from transcript 2 to indicate initial coding

Interview transcripts were then colour coded:

- relevant and rich = yellow
- relevant and good = pink
- discard = blue

The process of coding facilitated the selection, separation and categorisation of the data, so that each piece could be simultaneously summarized and accounted for. As the research continued and coded transcripts were gathered deeper understanding and further ideas from the transcribed interviews helped to frame the codes. Correspondingly summarising the emergent themes and annotations across all the interview transcripts (Appendix 21) provided a wider view of new ideas and emergent questions that were being generated from reading the transcripts. It is important to note here that social interaction rather than a focus on language was used in defining the salient codes. This was done in acknowledgment that no researcher can maintain a position of neutrality, because language confers “form and meaning on observed realities” (Charmaz, 2014: 114). It was a complex and lengthy

process that required frequent returns to the original transcripts and journals to ensure that the process of abstraction served to illuminate rather than detract from what would inform the categories and themes for exploration of the recorded play experiences.

Concentrated active involvement in the process helped to develop and pinpoint the most salient codes. These codes were chunked together to test larger groups of data and emergent themes. Rather than having a reliance of what I heard, good practice in grounded theory procedures suggests researchers should also test what they see from those responses. Hence descriptions (codes) from the practitioner pedagogical beliefs in the interviews were taken forward and used at the start of the process for confirming and disconfirming evidence of what was later observed in the recorded observations of play. Understanding that initial methods assert the researchers' learning occurs as they start to make sense, construct, and shape subsequent analysis, the process for selecting focused categories and themes to explore observation of play experiences, as my learning progressed is detailed next.

### **5.5 Generating categories and themes – Observations**

Initial codes and themes that evolved from the analysis of interview data subsequently helped to focus and inform thoughts in this second phase of data analysis. Intentionally broad categories associated with interaction, activities, resources, and philosophy were taken forward to generate the interpretation and writing of thick narrative descriptions from the recorded play experiences. Comparison of the themes in response to the research questions across all the analysed vignettes was undertaken to look for deeper explanations and patterns of similarity and differences in the data.

As the process of analysis progressed, theoretical sampling provided a useful tool for tracking the most salient themes across all vignettes. Deductive processes (Miles and Huberman, 1994) helped to alleviate feelings of confusion and ambiguity, particularly when reviewing such large amounts of data. For example, systematically reading and re-reading the practitioner responses in the interviews and deducting those replies down to locate and tag answers that responded to the research questions, whilst also looking for patterns across all interviews, and tagging text for retrieval informed analysis. Systematic checks to condense, refine and sharpen what was identified as not only important, but also rich data helped to advance the thematic direction and synthesis of the collected data. Having identified these early categorisations, next steps involved a process of further analysis to inform the development of a thematic framework. At this point I began to draw upon existing theoretical understandings from sociocultural discourse to support the analytic process.

## 5.6 Funds of knowledge (FOK) Theory

Although young children may have little knowledge about their ethnic group, Riojas-Cortez (2001) advises that children's use of ethnic role behaviours and customs may be a precursor of ethnic knowledge. FOK theorisation (Moll et al., 1992; Barron, 2014) is defined and its usefulness is expanded upon in chapter 2. Understanding that cultural elements are seen to help children create their ethnic identity, cultural elements in children's play may include terminology used to describe family, foods eaten, music preferences, celebrations, values, and language or terms used within particular ethnic groupings (Riojas, 1998). The challenge for this research inquiry is deciding what elements represented the cultural elements relating to mixed White/Black Caribbean and mixed White/African ethnicities.

Research maintains children will practice the cultural behaviours transmitted by their families, using them as a resource to enhance their play (Moll et al., 1992). Buoyed by the ideas seen in the studies of Riojas-Cortez, (2001) and Moll et al., (1992) these elements were used in the initial identification of the categories/themes used in analysing the focus children's actions and behaviours in the recordings.

As a way of looking beyond the surface level of culture Riojas-Cortez (2001) suggests researchers should learn how to identify and categorize the children's funds of knowledge. This was not an easy task, identifying what was going on in the children's play, whilst 'parking' pre-conceived expectations surrounding the children's knowledge about Black Caribbean cultural elements was particularly difficult.

Previous studies tended to use FOK frameworks to examine contexts such as professional development in teaching (Moll et al., 2001), exploring teacher FOK in pedagogical decision-making processes (Hedges, 2012), and investigating pedagogical dimensions between power and agency (Rodriguez, 2013). This inquiry in development of the thematic framework has focused on contexts which consider children's capabilities in drawing on previous social and cultural knowledge (Riojas-Cortez; 2001; Barron, 2013; Chesworth, 2016; Karabon, 2016).

Although I have drawn on FOK theorisation, I am mindful of the limitations that can exist within studies of this kind. From views that reason challenges exist for the researcher in determining what aspects of play determine children's funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) without applying their own culturally upheld values and beliefs in observational reflections, to concerns with children's participation in research and their ability to identify themselves as members of particular ethnic groups (Riojas-Cortez, 2001). Other limitations are

portrayals from a single case can only facilitate naturalistic generalisations (Stake, 1995) and should therefore be treated with caution.

Conversely, the benefits of using FOK theory in the analysis of data is an affordance that children's interests are allowed to emerge from structures such as everyday family traditions, behaviours, communication styles and activities whilst engaging in play with their peers. Worthy of consideration is the idea that children integrate these interests into their play to further understand cultural contexts learned in the home and wider community contexts (Kabaron, 2017). Corroborating with this understanding Chesworth, (2016) offers possibilities for children to collaborate in and co-construct meaning garnered from social and cultural practices is a key aspect for understanding, responding to, and implementing a culturally responsive curriculum.

Analysis of the video recordings purposefully set out to explore factors such as children's interaction with peers and practitioners and resources used to determine how the selected 'focus' children connect, mediate and share perspectives from socially and culturally learned practices about their ethnic identities. Being mindful of these suggestions, the purpose of exploration in the analysis of the play experiences intends to exemplify original interpretations of some of the many ways' children offer insight into matters associated with constructing a mixed ethnic identity. The aim was to also move beyond broad interpretations in early childhood research surrounding 'surface level' matters associated with inclusion of culture in the curriculum, to matters that reflect a culturally reflective pedagogy and a culturally relevant curriculum.

When it comes to matters surrounding diversity, children will display cultural elements through their behaviours transmitted by their families' Riojas-Cortez (2001). These behaviours can be seen to be used as resources in children's play, such as expressed values and beliefs in terminology used. Nelsen's (2015) work on intelligent dispositions, habits and modes of response to situations, offered theoretical concepts that resonated with the categories emerging from the data. Whilst participant's insider perceptions of ethnic identity acted as a vehicle for the generation of themes and subthemes, the study's sociocultural framework also influenced the lens through which the data was interpreted and analysed.

## **5.7 Focused coding**

Using a constant comparative technique (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2007), descriptive analysis occurred initially through constantly reading the vignettes from the transcribed video recordings. Data generated from the interviews,

videoed recordings and field notes were analysed to appreciate how children are empowered to mediate their FOK across sociocultural contexts of the home, community and the educational setting.

To identify the cultural elements exhibited in the activities, Table 6, below, shows the template I developed to interpret the narrative account generated from the recorded observations. Buoyed by the theoretical concepts discussed in earlier sections, Table 8 shows the categories used in the process of determining the many ways in which the focus children demonstrated elements of their ethnic identity.

Also highlighted are themes that emerged to reflect not only the thematic nature of the funds of knowledge exhibited by the children, but also the thematic elements that emanated from the EYFS curriculum that are passed on wittingly or unwittingly in pedagogical practice. Adapted from Formosinho and Pascal (2016) studies that looks at methodological assessment and evaluation possibilities when researching with young children and practitioners, the template incorporated categorisations to grade the quality of the data. Again, Table 6 shows the categorisations used to grade the quality of the data, and how 'X' was used to denote the perceived quality of the cultural elements exhibited in the vignettes of play.

| 0 = Other     | 1 = Discard  | 2 = Relevant but Ordinary   | 3 = Relevant and Good   | 4 = Rich |   |   |   |   |  |
|---------------|--|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|--|
| Clip position | EYFS   | Category  | Themes  | 0        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |  |
| 15 min 33 sec | <b>People and Communities</b><br>- Know things that make them unique | <b>Knowledge</b><br>- Skill<br>- Beliefs/Values (who's)<br>- Strategies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs</li> </ul> Evidence<br>FR: <i>but my mummy has dark skin</i><br><b>Critical incident</b><br>R: <i>I have a nose piecing too but it's in a slightly different place. she's very pretty</i><br>Fr: <i>Yeah</i> |          |   |   |   | X |  |

Table 6 Categorisations used to grade the quality of the data

Although analysis primarily focused on 'rich' categorisations, later iterations reviewed categorised sources of 'other' to check for what Charmaz, (2000) and Silverman, (2000) cite as looking for what is missing in data. Systematic reviews meant that any significant categories and themes that could have been missed in the narrative were addressed. Because of the sheer amount of data being reviewed at any given time I recognised that sources could have been misread. My own limitations as a researcher in the review process is also acknowledged. Revisiting data sources over long periods of time supported not only changing lines of thought that inevitably influenced interpretations of participant perspectives, but also provided strategies for applying credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) into this study.

Concluding points in developing the thematic framework offer categorisation that considered the descriptive accounts from the dialogic conversations that took place between the focus children and the practitioners. These conversations were captured in my research field notes (see Appendix 12). Observational tracking methods for establishing dependability included member checking strategies for incorporating researcher perceptions of the quality of the extrapolated narrative descriptions. The purpose being to openly declare the subjective nature of assessment in the analysis of data. Correspondingly, methods for triangulation consider reflective practitioner explanations, where responses about the children's learning, and the influence of their pedagogy on sociocultural learning, were added to narratives to help in the interpretation of a coherent analytical framework. Examples of which can be seen in the vignettes of the play experiences.

### **5.8 The observation process**

Approaches for understanding what factors influence, and how children are enabled to mediate their FOK involved viewing 135 hours and 20 minutes of video recordings across eight learning experiences. Sixteen vignettes detail rich conversations and descriptions that occurred in the play experiences between the practitioner and the focus children. All the children were present in each vignette, however the examples used in subsequent chapters make use of the responses where there is the richest data from one child to provide coherence and depth in responding to each theme. The selected examples identify and categorize the experiences and responses from the other children but not as separate vignettes. How I make best use of the vignettes is explained on page 125. Making use of techniques of colour coding to highlight the most salient categorisations, the focus was on the children's knowledge to identify the cultural elements exhibited during sociodramatic play.

Five iterations of data reduction and summarising occurred until saturation was reached, culminating in the construction of summary Tables 4 and 8. Indicated are emergent themes from the focus children's shared actions, responses, and habits of behaviour. Techniques for capturing observed incidents of the children's behaviour made use of principles seen in Flanagan's (1954) critical incident technique (CIT), which was explained in an earlier section of the chapter. Descriptions of the children's behaviour in response to pedagogical actions was established by watching all the video recordings again without sound as a distraction. These observed actions were incorporated alongside the transcribed ethnographic responses in blue ink, as detailed in excerpt Table 7, below.

| 0 = Other    1 = Discard    2= Relevant but Ordinary    3 = Relevant and Good    4 = Rich |   |  |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|--|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| Clip position   | EYFS  | Category   | Themes   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self- confidence and Self- awareness</li> <li>- Emotional</li> <li>- Confident self- identity</li> <li>- Pride in who they are</li> <li>- Pride in their family and culture</li> </ul> | <b>Interaction</b><br><i>What is the child doing? - Activity</i> | <b>Activity is developed by dialogue</b><br><i>: I think it's white</i><br><i>Fa: I think it black</i><br><i>A: I think so too. Now</i><br><i>Fr: Well Fr has an angry expression on his face. He is looking directly at the group. His body is leaning forward, and he has his hands by his side</i><br><i>Fr: No, its stammers I'm just, no I'm</i><br><i>Fa: black like me?</i><br><i>Fr: Its, I'm just, I'm just...</i><br><i>J: White</i><br><i>Fr: No, I'm not white I'm, I'm just... Fr looks down at his picture. His expression is sad.</i> |   |   |   |   | X |

Table 7 Extract of descriptions of the children's behaviour from vignette 16

Tables 4 and 8 emphasise the most salient themes and patterns that emerged from systematic comparative checking to refine the data. In the same way the tables indicate the number of occurrences appearing against each theme, which participants were involved, and where the data source could be found. Being mindful of Charmaz's (2000) advice to pursue leads that may otherwise have been missed in analysing data, final steps involved looking back over all the vignettes to ensure no new categories emerged. The summarised activity data sources table (Appendix 17) confirms the check made against the observed play experiences; it also details which activities respond to which research questions. Incorporated are two extra vignettes, included following the check of the discarded data sources. Upon further review these vignettes showed good sources of information worthy of inclusion of analysis of the children's perspectives.

The themes and subthemes that constitute the thematic framework are presented in Table 8 and Table 9, below. The next section endeavours to explain how the framework's indicative categories and themes were derived from the systematic analysis of the coded data. It is important to situate that resonating throughout and positioned at the heart of thematic framework are the voices of the children. Similarly resonating in the explanations of the categories and themes, and therefore influencing the terminology used, are concepts that have been informed by conceptual ideas derived from sociocultural theorisation to illustrate the 'story' being told.

| Category   | Theme  | Emergent categories generated from the coded data                     | Data Source                      |
|--|--|---|----------------------------------|
| Knowledge<br>- Values,<br>- Beliefs<br>- Attributes                            | Ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs (8)                            | Previous family experiences stimulate shared interest from - FofK (C) | V1.1, V4.1, V6.1, V16.1          |
|  |  | Draw on constructs associated with ethnic identity (J, F2)            | V8.1, V13.1, V16.1               |
|  |  | Convey thoughts about own/family ethnicity (J, F1)                    | V14.1, V15.1, V16.2              |
|  |  | Position own identity to validate sense of self (C)                   | V16.3                            |
|  | Responses of children - terminology heard (8)                                  | Reconstruction of ideas regarding identity (F2, C)                    | V1.2, V1.3, V15.2                |
|  |  | Use ethnic identity constructs interchangeably (C)                    | V15.3, V16.1                     |
| Distinctions made between colour differential (F1)                             |  | V16.2   |                                  |
| Capacity for theorising about ethnic identity (2)                              | Strong sense of understanding about skin colour (C)                            | V8.1, V13.1, V14.1, V15.2, V16.3                                      |                                  |
|  | Disposition for negotiating contexts (J, F1)                                   | V6.1, V8.1  |                                  |
| Identifies with familial individuals (3)                                       | Reflect on knowledge about family members (C)                                  | V15.2, V15.3  |                                  |
|  | Limited cultural elements relating to family(P)                                | V3.1  |                                  |
| Share knowledge about similarity and difference in ethnicity (2)               | Motivation/disposition to share knowledge (J)                                  | V6.1  |                                  |
|  | Use play as a tool to think about similarity/difference (F2, P)                | V15.4   |                                  |
| Interaction<br>- Social Skills   | Relationships –importance of friendships (7)                                   | Agency and power (C)  | V3.1                             |
|  |  | Collaborative disinterest (C)   | V3.2, V4.4                       |
|  | Activity is developed by dialogue (7)  | Sustained friendships (C)   | V16.9                            |
| Peer membership influences responses (F1, E, F2)                               |  | V13.5,  |                                  |
| Familiarity and strong foundations (C, P)                                      |  | V14.6, V15.7  |                                  |
| Behaviour<br>- habits of attention (5)<br>- Interest sparked and sustained (2) | Peer and practitioner dependency (F2)  | V15.8   |                                  |
|  | Deflection strategies (C)  | V4.10, V16.25   |                                  |
|  | Connecting deeper understanding (C, P)   | V8.11   |                                  |
| Behaviour  | Dialogue focuses attention on task (C, P)                                      | V12.12  |                                  |
|  | Dialogue acts as a mediating tool (P)  | V13.13, V15.16, V16.17  |                                  |
|  | Dialogue allows children to claim expertise (C)                                | V15.18*   |                                  |
| Behaviour  | Co-construction of ethnic identity (J, P)                                      | V15.16, V16.19  |                                  |
|  | Interest sparked and sustained (C)   | V13.14,   |                                  |
|  | Perspectives shared (C, P)   | V14.15  |                                  |
| Behaviour  | Self-actualised ideas (F1, E)  | V16.20  |                                  |
|  | Actively challenging difference  | V16.29  |                                  |
|  | Lead actor in play (J)   | V3.3, V16.18  |                                  |
| Behaviour  | Low levels of motivation and interest (C)                                      | V1.22, V3.23  |                                  |
|  | Strong sense of self (C)   | V15.7, V15.28   |                                  |
|  | Active engagement (F1, P)  | V13.14, V14.6, V16.30   |                                  |
| Behaviour  | Non-verbal communication cues (C, P, F1, F2)                                   | V1.21, V13.14, V14.24, V16.25, V14.26                                 |                                  |
|  | Behaviour management skills (P)  | V14.28  |                                  |
|  |  |   |                                  |
| Resources  | Children explore artefacts (8)   | Resources accommodate/inhibit construction of ethnic-identity (C, P)  | V1.1, V8.2, V14.3, V15.4, V16.5* |
|  | Resources do/do not support developing understanding about ethnic identity (5) | Act as a stimulus to reconnect with previous cultural experiences     | V16.6*                           |
| Pedagogical action   | Adapt and facilitate learning to meet the needs of the children (11)           | Mediate new meaning/understanding                                     |                                  |
|  |  | Accommodation of construction of self-identity (C, P)                 | V12.8, V12.9, V14.11             |
|  |  | Dialogue and Questioning acts as a stimulus (P)                       | V1.1, V4.4, V15.14               |
|  |  | Adult directed instruction (P)  | V15.13, V16.15                   |
| Pedagogical action   | Adapt and facilitate learning to meet the needs of the children (11)           | Enable/marginalise construction of identity formation (P)             | V1.2, V6.6, V8.7, V13.10, V14.12 |
|  |  | SST (C, P)  | V2.3, V4.5                       |

Key:

F1 = Fay, F2 = Freddy, J = Jake, C = All 3 focus children, P = Practitioners

\* = Rich data source

(8) = Number of occurrences seen

Table 8 Theoretic Sampling: Thematic Framework with indicative categories (a)

| Category  | Theme  | Emergent categories generated from the coded data   |
|---|--|---|
| Knowledge<br>- Values,<br>- Beliefs<br>- Attributes | Ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs                            | Previous family experiences stimulate shared interest - FofK (C)<br>Draw on constructs associated with ethnic identity (J, F2)<br>Convey thoughts about own/family ethnicity (J,F1)<br>Position own identity to validate sense of self (C)  |
|   | Responses of children - terminology heard                                  | Reconstruction of ideas regarding identity (F2, C)<br>Use ethnic identity constructs interchangeably (C)<br>Distinctions made between colour differential (F1)<br>Strong sense of understanding about skin colour (C)   |
| Interaction<br>- Social Skills                      | Relationships – importance of friendships                                  | Agency and power (C)<br>Collaborative disinterest (C)<br>Sustained friendships (C)<br>Peer membership influences responses (F1, E, F2)<br>Familiarity and strong foundations (C, P)<br>Peer and practitioner dependency (F2)  |
|   | Activity is developed by dialogue  | Deflection strategies (C)<br>Connecting deeper understanding (C, P)<br>Dialogue focuses attention on task (C, P)<br>Dialogue acts as a mediating tool (P)<br>Dialogue allows children to claim expertise (C)<br>Co-construction of ethnic identity (J, P)<br>Interest sparked and sustained (C)<br>Perspectives shared (C, P)<br>Self-actualised ideas (F1, E)<br>Actively challenging difference |
|   | Behaviour - habits of attention  | Lead actor in play (J)<br>Low levels of motivation and interest (C)<br>Strong sense of self (C)<br>Active engagement (F1, P)<br>Non-verbal communication cues (C, P, F1, F2)<br>Behaviour management skills (P)   |
| Resources   | Children explore artefacts   | Resources accommodate/inhibit construction of ethnic-identity (C,P)   |
|   | Resources do/do not support developing understanding about ethnic identity | Act as a stimulus to reconnect with previous cultural experiences<br>Mediate new meaning/understanding  |
| Pedagogical Action                                  | Adapt and facilitate learning to meet the needs of the children            | Accommodation of construction of self-identity (C,P)<br>Dialogue and Questioning acts as a stimulus (P)<br>Adult directed instruction (P)<br>Enable/marginalise construction of identity formation (P)  |

Key:

F1 = Fay

F2 = Freddy

J = Jake

C = All 3 focus children

P = Practitioners

Table 9 Theoretic Sampling: Thematic Framework with indicative categories (b)

## 5.9 Introducing the thematic framework

This section introduces the categories and themes that constitute the thematic framework. Analysis of the collected data generated four overarching categories and associated themes. Emerging initially out of the interviews, then exemplified by the vignettes are the themes that determine the presentation of the research findings. Discussion within each theme is presented separately, however it is important to emphasise that the themes are overlapping and interdependent of each other. It must also be pointed out that development of the presented themes originates from an integrated set of theoretical concepts that emerged from the everyday observed experiences between the children, practitioners and the researcher, thus making the explicated themes and their associated categorisations

artificial in interpretation and construction. By artificial I mean the ways of looking at the themes and their associated categorisations are researcher generated rather than reflecting actual reality. Reinforced here the themes and subthemes that are explained next are derived from the most salient themes and patterns that emerged from systematic comparative checking (of the vignettes of play) to refine the data.

Outlined below is an explanation about the focus of each theme.

### 5.10 Theme 1: Knowledge

| Category   | Theme   |
|--|---|
| Knowledge - Values,<br>- Beliefs<br>- Attributes | Ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs |
|  | Responses of children - terminology heard       |

The focus of this theme is upon young children's knowledge, particularly their ability to go beyond internalised thoughts to actively sharing ideas surrounding cultural production of knowledge in their everyday 'talk' with peers and practitioners.

The theme of knowledge constitutes two sub themes:

**5.10.1 Ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs** relates to the key influences on the children's ability to mediate with and make sense of ideas surrounding development of an ethnic identity. Illustrated are the multifaceted and complex ways in which the children connect with familiar family experiences in the home. Focus here is on the children's ability to theorise and connect with concepts that compare similarities/differences in ethnicity. Particularly preferences for making use of ideas about differentials in skin colour. Also included are examples of how the children make direct comparisons in their participation in the play experiences to reconstruct perspectives from external encounters shared in the community around the nursery.

**5.10.2 Responses of children - terminology heard** endeavours to explain the diverse ways in which the children knew how and in which situations to make use of terminology associated with ethnicity. Included are examples expressed in conversations with peers, practitioners and the researcher that afford opportunities to move beyond existing known categorisations to a position of learning how to identify and categorise the children's funds of knowledge.

Chapter 2 engages with literature that dispute young children’s ability to share knowledge relating to ethnic identity constructs. Park, (2011) proposes that by nature of their age and cognitive immaturity, children will have rudimentary understanding of ethnicity based on physical traits. In other words, their ability to engage in ethnic identity formation is predictable given their age. Caution is therefore needed not to view the themes in this category as static notions by which the children are creating their ethnic identity, instead they should be viewed as the fluid and interchangeable ways in which young children make use of internalised thoughts, values and beliefs based on previous external encounters with family and the community.

### 5.11 Theme 2: Interaction

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Interaction<br>- Social Skills | Relationships – Importance of friendships |
|                                | Activity is developed by dialogue         |
|                                | Behaviour<br>- habits of attention        |

This theme focuses on the interconnections between how social relationships (shaped through discourse), facilitate development of constructs surrounding ethnicity in the early years setting. Attempts are made to move beyond what could be perceived as the seemingly superficial outcomes expected within the EYFS framework (where assessment in the area of personal, social and emotional development guides the practitioner to look at how children play co-operatively, take turns, and take account of one another’s ideas about how to organise activities) to focus on constructs that consider some of the key influences that may facilitate a child’s ability to connect with and name preferences about ethnicity. Central to this theme is trying to illuminate the complexities in understanding how interaction in significant relationships allows the young mixed ethnicity child to meaningfully display cultural knowledge learned from outside of the setting.

The theme of interaction constitutes three sub themes:

**5.11.1 Relationships** – Chapter 2 proffered development of identity in the early years setting is never wholly a category imposed by the environment (resources) and individuals (practitioners), offered is the view that identity formation can be open to manipulation on the part of the actors involved. The sub-theme relationships relate to prominence of friendships in the study, and the agentic ways in which the children in the group were able to use their

agency to manipulate the play (having formed positive relationships) to offer their conceptualisations associated with ethnicity. Illuminated are the complex ways in which participatory peer relationships facilitated thoughts about how the children perceived own and family ethnic identity.

**5.11.2 Activity is developed by dialogue** - closely connected to relationships, this sub-theme focuses on how the influence of learning experiences can support or hinder dialogic conversation in eliciting the children’s cultural understanding about themselves and each other. Explored is understanding about the ways in which ethnic diversity is influenced or reinforced in the children’s conversations with peers and practitioners, informed by externally encountered experiences.

**5.11.3 Behaviour - habits of attention** Explained earlier in this chapter are thoughts that children incorporate FOK from structures such as everyday family traditions, behaviours, communication styles and activities whilst engaging in play. Similarly argued are views that that children will use ethnic role behaviours as a precursor for creating their knowledge, as well as developing ethnic identity (Riojas-Cortez, 2001). The saliency of non-verbal communication exhibited by the focus children could not be ignored in this inquiry. The sub-theme therefore focuses on understanding the alternate forms of expression that the focus children chose to demonstrate their views and beliefs about their ethnicity. Focus here is on unveiling the displayed traits, elements or habits of behaviour that contribute towards fostering understanding about the nuanced nature of non-verbal cues, such as gestures and behavioural responses. The intention is to show how these behaviours may serve to expand interpretation of the relationship between the responses provided by the children and the non-verbal cues they choose to display in their interactions with practitioners.

**5.12 Theme 3: Resources**

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Resources | Children explore artefacts   |
|           | Resources do/do not support developing understanding about ethnic identity |

Recognised in Chapter 3 are insights that socio-dramatic play is characterised by, and fosters engagement in, behaviours whereby children can take turns, have control of their feelings and communicate their ideas creatively. Similarly discussed are ideas that the use of multi-cultural resources can act as a *bridge* for not only fostering creativity, but also for enabling children to participate in and connect home-setting cultures in reconstruction of

'knowledge' about ethnic groupings (Corsaro, 2015). The focus of this theme is upon how resources accommodate young children's ability to mediate with constructs about their own and others ethnic identity, particularly notions that are potentially learned in the home and then shared in peer cultures in the nursery setting. Emphasis within this theme is dependent on looking at symbolic meanings, rather than specific actions that may signify an association with a particular ethnic group or groupings. It is more concerned with how the children use materials as tools to connect and reinforce views about these learned groups. Artefacts such as mirrors, skin-coloured paints, multicultural children's literature and photographs of family events are used to examine children's understanding within the peer culture of the nursery setting. The sub-theme *children explore artefacts* therefore examines the wide-ranging way in which resources may accommodate or inhibit construction of ethnic identity. Closely interrelated with the category interaction, attempts are made to investigate emergent patterns of how and in what agentic ways the children's values and beliefs about ethnicity emerge when resources are used as a stimulus in supporting those constructed as well as reconstructed thoughts about ethnicity. Looked at are the variations in terminology (responses) that the focus children express in their understanding about what mixed ethnicity means to them. The sub-theme *resources do/do not support developing understanding about ethnic identity* attempts to move beyond theoretical perspectives that support arguments centred on play as an experience firmly connected to educational outcomes, to a focus that seriously considers the skilful addition of resources appropriate to the origins of the children, so that deeper understanding may be shared and developed through the co-construction of new meanings. Fundamentally so that these children can not only see themselves in the learning process, but resources are seen to act as provocations for countenancing the naming of children's preferences. The sub theme therefore locates resources for exploring the multiple ways in which the focus children interact with the intentional resources, and how these resources accommodate the exchange of thoughts between the children and practitioners within the play experiences.

#### 5.13 Theme 4: Pedagogical Action

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Pedagogical Action | Adapt and facilitate learning to meet the needs of the children |
|--------------------|---|

Finally, focus in theme pedagogical action centres on the choices, interests and descriptions used by the 'focus' children (and practitioners) in the developing play experiences. Data is interrogated to establish whether children are supported to explore aspects about themselves that relate to, or build on beliefs about ethnic origins, and what makes them similar, different, or unique to the individual child. Considered are the pedagogic actions

that facilitate focus children's understanding in both child-initiated and adult directed play. In the studies undertaken by Gaither, Chen et al. (2014) are compelling ideas that young children are sensitive to social group information. Positioned also are thoughts that children will demonstrate preferences when choosing among significant adults. This research identified that young children requested and endorsed information from familiar teachers over unfamiliar ones and that this learning preference was also affected by the racial groups to which teachers belong. With these considerations in mind, questioned in this theme is how these preferences apply to children who can identify with more than one ethnic group. The theme focuses on the pedagogic actions that are undertaken (or not) in not only scaffolding children's interests, but then analysis examines praxiological capabilities for enabling dialogic conversations that extend beyond the children's existing repertoires and behaviours associated with known ethnic identity traits or elements. The sub-theme *Adapt and facilitate learning to meet the needs of the children* relates to how children are guided to learn and develop by participation in communities of practice. Motivated by Rogoff's (2003) concept of 'guided participation' explored are the behaviours, values and beliefs that are shared in the interactions between the children and the practitioners in the nursery community. The concept of children engaging in cultural processes in communities of practices is discussed in Chapter 3. Where the complexity about what the meaning of 'culture' and 'community' are debated. Within this sub-theme attempts are made to garner participant perspectives about how the promotion of socio-cultural practices in the early years setting are modified to meet the needs of the mixed ethnicity child. The sub-theme looks at how for example the questions of the practitioner's in the learning activities act as a stimulus for encouraging and maintaining sustained dialogic conversation about ethnic identity constructs. Similarly explored are the ways in which the practitioners expand upon their own existing cultural knowledge, and the limitations that may exist to reach common meaning and understanding with the children.

#### **5.14 Reporting the findings**

This section provides the rationale for reporting the research findings in the subsequent chapters. Charmaz (2014) offers a useful idea for writing research findings. Guiding thoughts for reporting on findings, it is advised that researchers need to consider the difference between analytical writing and writing for an audience. Having developed the thematic framework, careful thought was given to the options for presenting participant perspectives:

1. *Organisation by vignette*. Selecting vignettes to exemplify each category and theme side by side offered a compelling option for presentation of the findings. Review of the sixteen vignettes whilst foregrounding the children's interpretations, also

evidenced the enduring presence of adult perspectives and pedagogic actions which serve to marginalise the children's perspectives. The amount of detail within each vignette made feasibility of using this method untenable.

2. *Organisation by participant.* This method provides ways of looking at the every day world views of the participants engaged in the study. Also offered is a method that allows opportunity to explore taken for granted hierarchies that may be perceived as being dominated by class, ethnicity or gender, which can be seen to exist in the culture of nursery settings. This method of reporting is not without its challenges, making a cohesive discussion of the findings from the participants perspective presents significant complexity. Similarly, challenges exist in making transparent only the actions of each participant without interposing the researchers own judgments about those observed actions.
3. *Organisation by theme.* This method of reporting offers opportunities for presenting clear structured discussions emanating from the thematic framework. A risk with this style of reporting is privileging adult perspectives rather than ensuring that the focus children meanings and co-constructed understandings are the central focus. The findings are the vignettes of the play experiences shared between children, practitioners and the researcher. Afforded therefore are opportunities to carefully present salient vignettes of the children's actions and behaviours as examples in each theme.

The decision for choosing which reporting method is the most effective for communicating with audiences interested in studies about how children explore their ethnic identity is key. Essential are thoughts about how the reporting style tells the story of the research participants. Also imperative to this study, is a position that the gathered data should be presented in such a way that makes as transparent as possible the representations offered by the children.

Findings generated four key overarching categories and themes that shape the many ways the children expressed their ethnic identity. Organisation and reporting is therefore structured a theme at a time to 'bring to life' these perspectives. Each theme is exemplified with extracts from a carefully selected range of vignettes to illustrate where these viewpoints came from. It is intended that this approach offers a partial ethnographic account of what Geertz (1983) refers to as local knowledge about how mixed ethnicity children reveal ways for understanding and acting in the social world of a nursery setting.

Recognised are limitations in reporting methods that make use of ethnographic approaches for interpreting and making explicit the day to day communication of young children. Acknowledging social interaction and meaningful communication is based on a background of previously encountered experiences, attempts to interpret accounts and report on them as clearly as possible from the insider perspectives is difficult to achieve without including the researchers own judgements and assumptions. Whilst it is easy to incorporate the researchers own cultural frameworks of understanding, Siraj-Blatchford (2010 cited in Mac Naughton et al 2010) helpfully advises, to provide adequate accounts in reporting the researcher must endeavour to suspend personal values and judgement, and to as much as possible act as an outsider of familiar institutional contexts, to be able to question commonly understood and accepted practices when interpreting insider perspectives

Thinking about the best use of the sixteen vignettes, I draw heavily on a sample of six vignettes, as these learning experiences individually focus on each of the children, and show how the most salient discoveries from each focus child emerged throughout the research process. I do draw on the remaining vignettes where the highest number of occurrences in each theme show sources relating to constructs surrounding ethnic identity formation (see Table 2). In meeting the protocol for word/page count, a sample of the vignettes can be viewed in Appendix 16. Furthermore, the findings are supplemented with pictorial evidence across the themes from the videoed recordings, as well as the children's work to further demonstrate occurrences where the children demonstrate their ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs.

### **5.15 Chapter Conclusion**

This purpose of this chapter was to introduce the categories and themes developed from participant responses that constitute the creation of a thematic framework for this study. Presented is deliberation that acknowledges limitations in the process, whilst also demonstrating the researchers accounts that remain true to the participants perspectives surrounding co-construction of ethnic identity with young children.

The following two chapters reveal the interrelated nature of the relationships of all the participants, as well as the independent meanings shared by the children and practitioners. Also made visible within the themes and subthemes are researcher interpretations in those learning experiences. The closing chapters bring together these varied perspectives in the themes to consider their contribution to the research questions.



## **Chapter 6: Children's perspectives of mixed ethnic identity**

### **6.1 Introduction to the chapter**

This chapter explores and examines ethnic identity formation in vignettes of play in an early years setting. The emergent discoveries presented throughout this chapter relate to research question one which was established to give 'voice' to the children participating in the inquiry: *Using the 'voice' of the child, what are the key influences on mixed ethnic children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their ethnic identity in an early years setting?* For this reason, the findings are presented from the perspectives of three mixed-ethnic children, from video cued conversations engaged in with practitioners, peers and the researcher. Informed by sociocultural theory the responses are embedded within the culturally connected context of the setting and the children's funds of knowledge brought into the setting from the home and community.

Acknowledging the subjective nature of the selection process, vignettes have been selected based on the most significant responses of the children that emerged in the analysis of the data. Selection was informed by the children's emergent rich sources of knowledge that have been regarded as having been learnt from the everyday experiences with family and community. It is also acknowledged that information may have been learnt from media influences. The selected responses are therefore based on the analysis of rich sources (see Table 8 and Table 9) of emergent data that advanced the thematic direction and synthesis of the collected data, as well the development of the thematic framework.

### **6.2 How the chapter is organised**

The chapter commences by drawing to the attention of the reader the children's profiles presented in Appendix 2.2. I introduce the four children, three of whom are the focus of this inquiry, and who were research participants in in this study. Provided is information about their ethnicity and family background. The aim here is to support the reader to have a degree of contextual understanding about the emergent perspectives of each of the star children as they engage in cultural activities associated with their own and others' ethnic identity.

Selected vignettes of play are used next to analyse and present the children's perspectives, where still images from recorded footage in the one-to-one focused activity, as well as the children's work (self-portraits) are used to illuminate their responses. I endeavour to draw on the most salient modes of communication that each child chose to express their aspects of their ethnic identity. Chapter 3 draws on debates surrounding the variety of patterns and ways in which individuals engage in their worlds of human expression (Dewey, 1972).

Considered in this chapter are the children's predispositions, actions or habits for expressing thoughts about selfhood that draw on responses from previously encountered experiences in traditional structures such as family knowledge of self. Noted here is the importance of ethical research, any still images or photographs have deliberately blurred the faces of the children using photo editing software.

As outlined in Chapter 5, illustration of the children's conversations, comments and behaviours are presented predominantly under:

- Theme1 – Knowledge; and
- Theme 2 - Interaction

The interrelated nature of theme three and four (resources and pedagogical action) also capture the children's conversations, comments and behaviours but are incorporated in Chapter 7. This chapter positions the children's FOK and associated interactions with peers and practitioners, which is facilitated by their ability to draw on previous understanding about how they categorise their own and others ethnic identity. The decision to use this approach to present the children's responses also informed the choice to include salient extracts from the transcriptions within discussion. To facilitate understanding for the reader, also included in the extracts are the responses of the practitioners and the researcher. The intention is to show how the voices of the children's dialogic conversations was supported as they reflect on their play experiences in the filmed footage. It is important to stress the children's narratives were seldom articulated in lengthy accounts. So, it should be noted that captured communication was sometimes brief, at times fragmented, and sometimes significant modes of communication were expressed in the differing behaviours (nonverbal communication) of each child.

The transcriptions shown throughout the chapter capture only parts of the full play episodes in a day and include several breaks rather than the entirety of the interactions between the children and the practitioners. The aim being to provide examples of interaction, pedagogic action, including the resources that supported exploration in these conversations and behaviours (noted in blue italics). The chosen modes of expression are essential for contextualising how co-construction of ethnic identity was influenced and facilitated in the activities. The purpose of which is to demonstrate the complexities involved in reporting, and to also show how the supporting responses provide contexts in which to triangulate the children's perspectives drawn from their existing knowledge. Informing the thematic framework, theme pedagogic action (Chapter 7) explores these dialogic conversations from adult voices in more detail.

It is important to momentarily reflect on, and note the significance of, peer relationships and friendship in the reporting of these findings. Although not of mixed-ethnic origin, I am compelled to incorporate extracts where Edie's strong sense of self, insightful knowledge about her own and differing ethnicities, and ability for instilling confidence in others to express their developing thoughts about their ethnicity, deserve serious consideration.

Giving thought to the many factors that could potentially support understanding of the phenomena being explored, compromise was needed in terms of presenting the most salient elements of the children's social worlds as a research report. As the main 'actors' in this study, this chapter makes a determined effort to truly represent the voices of the focus children, and to minimise the possibility of privileging other voices. Chapter 7 brings to the forefront of discussion the practitioner perspectives through themes which integrate their pedagogic actions, as well as the choice of resources. The aim being to provide extensive analysis of practitioner involvement and their contribution to this research inquiry.

It is important to recognise that it is neither possible nor desirable to deny my own personal suppositions and theories that will emerge when reporting the findings from the data. Attempts have been made to declare them, and where appropriate to contrast and compare them with existing suppositions and theoretical understanding outlined in existing literature. Combined with my interpretations, it is hoped that this chapter, presented by themes and sub-themes will bring to the forefront the narrative accounts of the children's perspectives.

### **6.2.1 Summary**

Having introduced the children in Appendix 2.2, it is hoped that contextual understanding can be garnered about the distinct modes of response in the recorded activities the children chose to use. Reiterated again is the importance of being receptive to the children's differing verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. Attempting to report on the influences that facilitate mixed ethnic identity formation met with inevitable compromise. However, to facilitate reader understanding the selected examples using narrative discussion was chosen as an appropriate method for conveying the thick descriptions of the diversity of participant perspectives.

Introduced in the following sections are the interpretation of the responses from the children's perspectives. Analysis of data emanating initially in the review of literature provided a thematic framework in which four main themes emerged. The purpose of the following discussion is to illuminate the complexities involved in the process of analysing each of the study's themes. As mentioned previously no theme can be viewed independently of the other. They are all inextricably integrated in facilitating understanding

of the iterative co-construction of knowledge between the children, practitioners and the researcher.

Where possible however, the same vignettes are revisited numerous times throughout the chapter to enable multiple understandings from the perspectives of the children, practitioners and the researcher. However, there are occasions where habits or where particular thoughts emerged as significant for only one participant. In these instances, vignettes are explored through one perspective whilst others are revisited and examined through numerous perspectives.

Recognising that narrative aids understanding of the social world, whereas theory aims to seek explanation Bruner (1996), this thesis aims to search for understanding about the co-construction of mixed ethnic identity, whilst also offering cautious explanations within what is a highly localised small-scale study. Siraj-Blatchford (2010) cautions there should be continuous interplay between the observations being made and the theories being developed and introduced to explain them. Likewise, it is considered important when producing holistic accounts to recognise that they are within wider sociocultural and institutional contexts. Therefore, the subsequent chapters present participants' perspectives interlaced with discursive commentaries from sociocultural theories discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Accordingly, the discussion becomes a co-constructed understanding of explored pedagogical influences that served to facilitate mixed ethnic identity formation, in which my interpretations are made explicit alongside the voices of the children and practitioners. It is hoped that the participants' voices combined with academic analysis will enable meaningful engagement with the study's findings in relation to how play-based pedagogies influence mixed ethnicity identity formation in a nursery setting.

### 6.3 Theme 1: Knowledge

| Category   | Theme   |
|--|---|
| Knowledge - Values,<br>- Beliefs<br>- Attributes | Ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs |
|  | Responses of children - terminology heard       |

This section draws upon examples from the study to discuss how mixed ethnic children demonstrate an ability to connect with and respond to constructs surrounding the formation of ethnic identity. Deliberated first is the subtheme *Ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs*, in which ideas from previous chapters that explored notions about how young children are supported to co-construct meaning about ethnic similarity and difference to self

and others is revisited. Discussion moves on to the sub-theme *responses of children - terminology heard*, where endeavours are made to present the ways in which the children express their thoughts about categorisations of ethnic identity.

### **6.3.1 Subtheme 1a: Ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs**

Discussion draws upon two examples. In the first example Freddy and I share an instance in which ideas about his own and family ethnicity is shared when looking at a picture. This instance also goes some way towards presenting how children can convey thoughts about themselves within family structures. Comparably the second excerpt provide an explanation about how children can convey thoughts about their own identity to validate their sense of self, as well as understanding about others.

### Summary of recorded footage

Sitting in a small circle on the floor, Leah holds a camera case with photos inside it, which is of great interest to the children. Jake chooses to sit on a small chair whilst Fay and Edie are sat crossed legged close to Leah. Freddy is laying down on his tummy. Leah carefully shows the children pictures of themselves and family members, people they have met at the care home on their community visits, and pictures showing family events that the children have attended. The children are motivated to look at the pictures of past events and the significant people who they have shared the experiences with. Through open ended questions such as: can you remember what is happening in the picture? what can you see? who is in the picture? what are you/they doing? why did you visit the care home and who did you meet there? the children are asked to share their understanding from these pictures with the researcher.

#### Example 1

Extract from transcript

#### Vignette 1.2

**Leah:** Can you show your mummy to Researcher (whispers)

Freddy moves round Fay and Edie to show me his picture

**Fr:** me and mummy and I was a baby

**Researcher:** You were and isn't your mummy beautiful

**Researcher:** Does your mummy look a bit like me, I have glasses like that

**Fr:** Yeah but... **pauses, looks thoughtful.**

**Researcher:** I haven't worn my glasses today

**Freddy is looking back and forth at the picture of myself and his mummy**

**FR:** but my mummy has dark skin **Critical incident**

**Researcher:** I have a nose piecing too but it's in a slightly different place. she's very pretty

**Fr:** Yeah

#### Vignette 1.3

**Researcher:** Your daddy showed me a picture that you drew of them, can you remember what you said? You said this is my mummy and she's brown, and I'm brown and baby R is brown, but what did you say about daddy, can you remember?

**Fr:** White **Critical incident:**

Family experiences stimulated a shared interest among the children. In the example above Freddy appears to be theorising about concepts that connect similarities in ethnicity between his mother and myself. Although I refer to physical features such as glasses and nose piercings, Freddy appears to be connecting understanding about similarities in skin colour. He makes use of the picture to recall thoughts to make connections between his lived experience in the picture with his family. More significantly Freddy can recall the conversation he had with his father from his drawing. He is accurately able to inform me

that his father is 'white'. Arguably, Freddy demonstrates an understanding about constructs of ethnic identity groupings.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Summary of recorded footage</i></p> <p>Situated in the training room, the four children take it in turn to paint a self-portrait. The purpose of this learning experience is to provide the children with an extended opportunity to paint themselves using skin coloured paints. Observation shows that Amanda's focus and interaction is with Freddy. Using pedagogic skills that makes use of open questioning, Amanda makes use of the children's interaction to explore their thoughts about their ethnicity.</p>   |   |
| <p><b>Example 2</b></p> <p><i>Extract from transcript</i></p> <p>Vignette 15.2 - 15.3</p> <p>The children demonstrate a confident and strong preference for the terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'light brown' (used to define self);</li> <li>- 'dark brown skin' (used by Freddy to describe his mother)</li> <li>- 'well I've got a sort of white colour' (used by Jake to describe self)</li> <li>- 'but my mummy's got white colour' (used by Jake to describe his mother)</li> <li>- 'My daddy got black like' ...<i>doesn't finish her sentence</i> (used by Fay to describe her father)</li> </ul> <p>When Amanda questions Edie about other members of her family, Edie's responds, and then totally unprompted Jake offers his thoughts about his father ethnic identity;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Oh, he's got, he's got black skin, the same as Freddy's mummy (Jake shares his thoughts with Fay about his Father).</li> </ul> |  |

The above example offers insight into how children's preferences align with terminology heard in institutional mechanisms such as the ethnic census categorisations of 'black' and 'white' seen in the Office for National Statistics (ONS 1991; 2001). All the children (including Edie) appear to exhibit a strong sense of cultural understanding about skin colour difference. Discourse between the children elicit thoughts not only about how they perceive their own ethnic identity, but also expressed are views about how they perceive the ethnicity of their family members. The example shown above illuminate how internalisation of constructs associated with the appropriation of skin colour could have been learnt in previous experiences of participation with parents, extended family and communities (Milner, 1983; Robinson, and Jones Diaz, 2006; Mac Naughton, 2005).

In turn it could be reasonably argued that these conversations have the potential to influence the children's internalised thoughts that are then shared when a stimulus is offered to encourage sustained thinking. Positioned for thoughtful consideration is a view that young children will tell others who they think they are, whilst at the same time acting out who they

say they are (Sfard and Prusak, 2005). Seen in example two, above, is terminology that is used by the children to demonstrate their preferences with terminology to describe self and their peers. Similarly, the children show confidence in using terminology to define how they categorise family members. Arguably what is less known are the specifics about how and where the children come to operationalise the co-construction of their identities in this learning experience. Instead, as identified in Chapter 2, explanations contend identity development occurs through experience, the most outspoken advocate of this position being Wenger (1998).

Findings presented so far corroborate with understanding from early positions that viewed identity development as “ways of being in the world”. Particularly where reflection about one’s own identity and the identity of others is expressed through words, Lave and Wenger (1998: 151). Other descriptions whilst agreeing that identities originate in daily lived experiences forged in communities of practice, add the “activity of identifying” (Sfard and Prusak, 2005: 17) is particularly beneficial when discussing children’s ability to relate to identity constructs.

In summary, facilitating meaningful interpretation of the conversations in this section supports theorisations that it is not only the ‘acted out’ lived experiences observed in the play activities alone that constitute identities, but the discursive narratives used within those activities. Informing research question one, elicited from the children’s funds of knowledge the narratives have created perspectives for supporting new terminologies constructed through the lens of mixed ethnic children. That said, narratives that constitute one’s identity through actions is extremely challenging, particularly when they can be seen to evolve from the stories that are passed down through generations. Similarly, what a person endorses as true about their identity may not be what others see as enacted. In other words, the stories that the children choose to tell other people about themselves may not be how others see them. The thoughts presented here are particularly beneficial as conversation moves on to discuss the responses of the children. Rather than seeking clear definitions of what a mixed ethnic identity is from the expressed narratives, it is advocated that the reader needs instead to be mindful of the nuanced ways in which the activity of identifying drives the terminology heard.

### **6.3.2 Subtheme 1b: Responses of children - terminology heard**

Two examples are used to illustrate the key influences surrounding how the children reconstruct ideas regarding identity within this subtheme. Like examples that focus on how young children are supported to co-construct meaning about ethnicity, the first example focuses on the specific terminology used by the children. The second example exhibits how

ethnic identity constructs are used interchangeably by the children. The purpose here is to offer further insight from the children's perspectives as to how conversations are mediated and shared about groups of people with similar and differing origins.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><i>Summary of recorded footage</i></p> <p>The purpose of this activity is to encourage discussion about family and friends. In this vignette of play the children are encouraged to draw themselves and their family using coloured pencils. To facilitate the activity Leah joins in with the children and starts discussion by talking about her own family. As she is drawing her own picture, she explains the distinct features her family have.</p>  |   |
| <p><b>Example 1</b></p> <p><i>Extract from transcript</i></p> <p>Vignette 8.1 - Painting each other activity</p> <p><b>E:</b> <i>I'm drawing J E is using large brush strokes on and off her paper,</i></p> <p><b>S:</b> <i>does that look like you J?</i></p> <p><b>J:</b> <i>No I'm white (critical incident)</i></p> <p><b>S:</b> <i>You're white</i></p> <p><b>J:</b> <i>White</i></p> <p><b>S:</b> <i>Is there a white colour</i></p> <p><b>J:</b> <i>White, there's none - points to the paint pallet, shaking his whole body and head.</i></p> <p><b>Leah:</b> <i>no it's pink but not white, oh well.</i></p> |  |

In vignette 8 Jake uses agentic ways to appropriate with societal notions that his ethnicity is 'white'. He could be seen to be conveying thoughts associated with constructs negotiated with encounters experienced outside of the nursery environment. Understanding that individuals have different origins and/or ethnicities is illuminated in this response. Review of the videoed recordings highlight that Jake also refers to there being no white paint, interestingly he does not consider pink paint appropriate for Edie to use.

*Summary of recorded footage*

In these two vignettes of play, the four children are sat at a circular table in the training room. Taking it in turn to paint a self-portrait, observation of the recorded footage shows that each child has been asked to individually produce a self-portrait using only one finger and to clean their finger each time they choose a different coloured paint. Using a pedagogy that makes use of skills of questioning. The purpose of this learning experience is to provide the children with an extended opportunity to paint themselves using skin coloured paint. The focus is on Freddy, however conversation is centred on constructs about self, where Amanda makes use of the children's interaction to explore their thoughts about their ethnicity

**Example 2**

Vignette 16.1

*Excerpt from transcript*

The star children demonstrate a confident and strong preference for the terms:

**Fr:** *Because I'm black*

**Fr:** *I'm light brown*

**J:** *White*

**Fa:** *black like me*

*Here they are seen to use ethnic categorisations interchangeably.*



**Example 3**

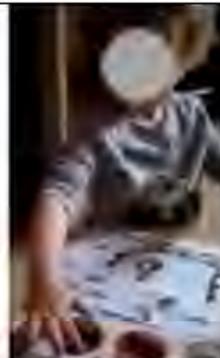
Vignette 16.2

Using their funds of knowledge each child questions the other ideas about ethnic identity, where previously they agreed

**Fr:** *Because I'm black*

**Amanda:** *Ah ok, that really good*

**J:** *You're not black*



Although the activity is focused on the development of Freddy's self-portrait, conversation in this vignette discloses a rich exchange of dialogue between the star children about how they perceive ethnic identities. Video footage reveals that within their group membership, the children are comfortable in expressing views with each other, where the expressed terminology reveals a strong sense of cultural understanding about skin colour difference. Similarly, originating in the everyday discursive conversation's engagement in dialogue between the children also provokes views/beliefs about each other's ethnicity. Collectively these perspectives are key to understanding aspects of the lives of mixed ethnic children.

Relatively little is known about the extent to which young children engage with thoughts surrounding their ethnicity other than to explain their preferences in terms of skin colour (Barron, 2011). Literature in Chapter 2 also warned against a reliance on expression for defining constructs associated with identity. However, interpretation of the responses from young mixed ethnic children helps to illustrate how children's expressed thoughts accumulated from engagement in activities in the setting can be interpreted as funds of knowledge.

Fay, Freddy and Jake's responses indicate how capable they are at drawing on their funds of knowledge (conceivably from previous conversations with their parents and family) to ascribe meaning to categorisations about ethnicity in their play. Aligning with Barron (2011) thoughts that early years settings provide an affordance for children to play out and relate to internal processes linked to ethnicity in inseparably linked communities of practice with peers and adults. Fay, Freddy and Jake's mutual knowledge enabled them through conversation to exchange opinions about each other's ethnic identity. The ability to make these distinctions maybe attributed to internalisation of constructs associated with appropriations of skin colour, that could have been learnt in experiences of participation with parents, family and community.

#### 6.4 Theme 2: Interaction

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Interaction<br><br>- Social Skills | Relationships – Importance of friendships |
|                                    | Activity is developed by dialogue         |
|                                    | Behaviour<br><br>- habits of attention    |

This section draws upon examples from the study to discuss how mixed ethnic children demonstrate an ability to connect with and respond to constructs surrounding the formation of ethnic identity. Focus here is on the key influences that facilitate the children's ability to connect with and name preferences about ethnicity.

Deliberated first is the subtheme, *Relationships – Importance of friendships* in which ideas from previous chapters explored notions about how peer interaction can act as a mechanism by which children share knowledge when co-constructing meaning about their sense of self and others. Illuminated are the agentic and complex ways in which

participatory peer relationships facilitated the children's expressed perceptions associated with their own ethnicity as well as thoughts about the ethnic identity of their family members and the other children in the group.

Discussion moves on to the sub-theme *Activity is developed by dialogue*, where endeavours are made to present the observed dialogic conversations, as well as the reflective accounts of the children and practitioners from the play-based learning experiences. Again, the idea here is to illuminate how the influence of pedagogic actions in the learning activities supported or hindered dialogic conversation for eliciting the children's cultural understanding and categorisations about themselves and each other.

The final sub-theme surrounding *Behaviour - habits of attention* advances explanations surrounding how the children made use of ethnic role behaviours to demonstrate their views and beliefs about ethnicity. The saliency of non-verbal communication exhibited by the star children is unveiled, to expand understanding about the nuanced nature of the non-verbal cues, such as gestures and behaviour that were exhibited in the episodes of play.

#### **6.4.1 Subtheme 2a: Relationships – importance of friendships**

Discussion in the next section draws on examples from two vignettes of play, where taken together they demonstrate how the interrelated nature of significant friendships serve to facilitate conversation surrounding ethnic identity constructs amongst the children. The first example recognises that hierarchies exist in children's play, where the main actors can and do assert their own values and beliefs about contexts being discussed within friendship groups. Although sound foundations in positive relationships have already been formed, the children use membership within the group to challenge and influence their chosen responses within their play.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Summary of recorded footage</i></p> <p>Observed as the 'major' actor in play, Jake views dominate emergent perspectives within the vignette below, where he is observed to directly challenge perspectives not of the significant adult who is directing the play, but instead Freddy's view (who is the central focus of the practitioner's attention) is challenged.</p>   |   |
| <p><b>Example 1</b></p> <p><i>Extract from transcript</i></p> <p>Vignette 16.9</p> <p><b>Amanda:</b> <i>there you go, oh you've got your black on. Why are you putting your black down there?</i></p> <p><b>Freddy:</b> <i>Because I'm black</i></p> <p><b>Amanda:</b> <i>Ah ok, that's really good</i></p> <p><b>Jake:</b> <i>You're not black</i></p> <p><b>Freddy:</b> <i>Yes, am are</i></p> <p><b>Amanda:</b> <i>So Fr describes himself as black but he has talked about how his skin as brown</i></p> <p><b>Jake:</b> <i>It's not brown</i></p> <p><b>Amanda:</b> <i>Oh what do you think it is?</i></p> <p><b>J:</b> <i>It's purple</i></p> <p><b>Amanda:</b> <i>What! purple</i></p> <p><b>E:</b> <i>I think its white</i></p> <p><b>Fa:</b> <i>I think it black</i></p> <p><b>Amanda:</b> <i>I think so too. Now</i></p> | <p>Still footage from vignette 16.9</p>  |

The second example illustrates the significance of the friendship that exists between Fay and Edie. In the peer membership of this small group of children Fay and Edie's friendship is a key influence on Fay's ability to respond to the opinions offered in the illustration below. Review of the video footage shows both children always enter the training room together, holding hands. Within the culture of the setting the friendship that exists with Edie enables Fay to confidently share perceptions about herself amongst her peer group. Her responses are not elicited through cues from the practitioner, instead they are expressed from Fay's positive sense of self formed in part with her friendship with Edie. Through participation in play, Fay is also confident to correct the perspectives offered by her peers about her ethnic diversity.

### Summary of recorded footage

The focus in this vignette of play is on Fay. Conversation is centred on constructs about self, where Amanda makes use of the children's interaction to explore their thoughts about their ethnicity. Positive relationships between the star children is again evidenced in vignette 13 and 15. Fay is actively engaged in the learning experience, where she makes use of verbal and non-verbal form of communication to share her viewpoint about elements about her ethnic identity.

#### Example 2

Extract from transcripts

##### Vignette 13.5

Fay shares knowledge about how she perceives her skin colour. Descriptions are shared (verbally and non-verbally) about the colour of her skin and hair colour.

**Fay:** *"My skin is Brown"* strokes the outline of her face with both hands. She uses her right index finger to dip into the chosen colour.

**Edie:** *Hers is black*

**Fay:** *This is brown* Holds up her index finger up to the camera, with the paint on it.

**Fa:** *and my hairs black - strong emphasis on the word Black, which she pats.*

##### Vignette 15.5

**Fa:** *My daddy got black like ...doesn't finish her sentence*

**E:** *Mummy and moo have white skin like me.*

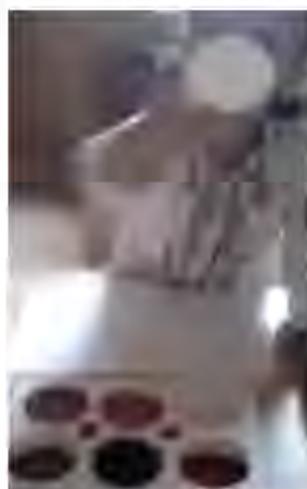
**Amanda:** *Mummy and moo have white skin like me.*

**E:** *And baby Ma*

**J:** *Oh he's got, he's got black skin*

**J:** *the same as Fr's mummy*

Still footage from vignette 13.1



It could be seen that Fay is making distinctions here to explain the differences between the colour brown appropriate for her skin tone, and 'black' as being a more appropriate descriptor for her hair colour. The video footage confirms Fay is comfortable amongst her peers and has a strong sense of cultural understanding about her skin tone being 'brown', as nonverbal messages are observed when she holds up the painting to show her peers

the difference between brown and black as a colour differential. Like other examples presented in this chapter, internalisation of constructs associated with the appropriation of skin colour, could have been learnt in experiences of participation with parents, family and community. Features of the play that support Fay's contributions could be due to the predictable and safe reoccurrence of this activity; being in a familial group; and feeling of security to undertake the set task because she has the support of her peers as well as the practitioner.

Advocating formation of ethnic identity is not only dependent on how individuals see themselves but is also dependent on how others see them in any given context. The examples above mark the children's ability in noticing differences for themselves. Descriptions also evidence children's capacity for understanding perspectives not only about their own ethnicity, but also the ability to share thoughtful deliberations about their peer's ethnicity. At times observations show expressed views were challenged if the children considered them different to their own or incorrect.

**Jake:** *You're not black*

**Freddy:** *Yes, am are*

**Jake:** *It's not brown*

**Jake:** *It's purple*

**Edie:** *I think its white*

**Fay:** *I think it black*

The children's responses negate arguments that consider children are likely to foster a ready acceptance of cultural differences. Instead offered are emergent interpretations that the significance of friendship elicited balanced responses, as well as behaviours to showed empathy and acceptance of the categorisations offered amongst all the children. It might be perceived that behaviours were on occasions managed by the practitioner, particularly where some of the children's perspectives were challenged in the self-portrait learning activity. It is also reasonable to suggest the children's ideas were negated by the actions of the practitioner. However, observation of the videoed recordings shows acceptance of the categorisations offered by all the children.

Chapter 2 reviewed studies by Gaither, Chen et al. (2014) where informative proposals explained children's identification with perceptions of both their racial in-group and out-group are learned through observations of the social statuses associated with those racial groups. Emergent ideas outlined that children will show a preference for friendships in play

with children considered to be from a higher status i.e. 'white' (Leman and Lam, 2008). However, discoveries in this inquiry, even though small scale in nature, showed that constructs associated with 'race' and perceived social status did not impact on children's social behaviours. Instead, prevalent amongst the group of children was what Barron (2011) described as fluid aspects of individual and social identity. Through processes rooted in the product of social interaction, contexts associated with peer interaction and friendship were key proponents in eliciting perspectives surrounding ethnic identity by the star children.

In response to research question one my claims identify a need for practitioners to recognise the powerful influence of peer interaction and friendship in their observations of young children's play experiences. Particularly where these influences are key in facilitating ethnic identity formation amongst young children. Chapter 8 will pick up the influence of peers and friendship on ethnic identity formation in more depth to answer the research question fully. Recommendations for future practice will also feature in this chapter.

#### **6.4.2 Subtheme 2b: Activity is developed by dialogue**

This section uses data drawn from three vignettes of play to discuss how discourse between the children and practitioners was developed in experiences that facilitated the co-construction of thoughts relating to ethnic identity. The vignettes were chosen because they represent the richest sources of information relating to how dialogic conversations elicit the children's cultural understanding about themselves and each other. The first vignette illustrates shared dialogue from two examples between the practitioner (in this instance Amanda) and the children to reveal how dialogue can act as a strong mediating tool for exploring children's perceptions about themselves and each other. The play episodes below provide the salient aspects of the children's sense of self, as well as illuminating a saliency for challenging differences to self.

*Summary of recorded footage*

The purpose of this learning experience is to provide the children with an extended opportunity to paint themselves and their families, using skin coloured paint. The activity takes place in the training room, at the circular table. Conversation with the children is centred on constructs about self and family.

**Example One**

*Extract from transcript*

**Amanda:** Jake do you think that's the right colour that Freddy is using?

**Jake:** No

**Amanda:** Oh I don't think you've even looked. So do you want to have a look.

**Jake:** Oh he's using the same colour like I used

**Amanda:** Oh he's using a similar colour to what you used. It is isn't it?

**Fay:** it's like mine

**Amanda:** It is like yours

**Freddy:** This is light brown

**Amanda:** Do you think Freddy that your skin colour is a bit similar to Fay?

**Freddy:** Yeah

**Fay:** K... likes me (K... is mixed ethnic origin)

**Amanda:** K... looks like you. Does your mummy have the same skin colour as you?

**Jake:** NO (shouts)

**Amanda:** Does your mummy have the same skin colour as you?

**Freddy:** No. My mummy has dark, dark brown skin

**Example two**

**Amanda:** Jake so you've just told me that your mummy has the same skin as you, but what about your daddy?

**Jake:** Oh he's got, he's got black skin

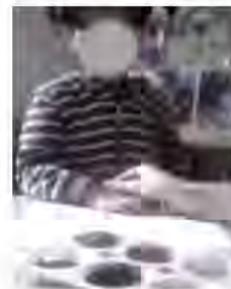
**Amanda:** he does have black skin doesn't he? Erm and what about.....

**Jake:** interrupts the same as Fr's mummy makes the comparison across parents, even though they are different gender types. Fr looks up from his picture stops painting and looks at Amanda

**Amanda:** Yes and we talked about how Freddy's mummy. Fr interrupts Amanda, he looks at her, then points to his picture to bring the attention back to his self-portrait.

**Freddy:** I did that because I wanted to be like that

Still footage from vignette 15.16



Example one exemplifies how interaction allowed the children to claim expertise privileging knowledge about salient aspects of their sense of self. Also afforded are opportunities to challenge similarities and differences with each other. Although the focus of the learning experience is on Freddy, Fay is observed to use her knowledge about another child in the setting (not included in the study because of his maturation) to compare and align similarities to her own skin colour. Dialogue also demonstrated that identities can be relational; whilst completing his self-portrait Freddy confirms his maturity as a learner in the way he describes his mother's identity as being 'dark brown'. Although dialogue during this activity does facilitate conversation where Freddy considers likeness and differences aligned to perceptions of his own skin colour, what is less clear is if he views these characteristics as being aligned with or opposite to a mixed ethnicity.

The second example in this vignette demonstrates how complex narratives about ethnic identity can be co-constructed by children in dialogue. The focus of the learning experience should be centred on Freddy, however Jake being a lead 'actor' in the group in terms of membership and dominating the play appears to command discussion. Jake knows enough about the make up his family to make assumptions that articulate thoughts about the ethnicity of his parents, even though the responses in this activity should be predominantly from Freddy. Although Freddy's mother is of African origin and Josh's Father is of Black Caribbean origin, Jake confidently explains his father and Freddy's mother have the same ethnic identity by comparison of their skin colour. It is possible however that neither Jake nor Freddy could have constructed these ideas independently from previously informed encounters within their families. What is significant is the influence of the practitioner. Amanda is unable to provide new ways of knowing in ZPD to extend the children's knowledge. A plausible explanation for this could be because, at the time of recoding the learning experience, she did not possess the cultural knowledge about the ethnic makeup of the children's parents.

The second vignette takes as its focus Amanda's pedagogic action for facilitating Freddy descriptions about his ethnicity whilst he paints his self-portrait.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Summary of recorded footage</i></p> <p>Amanda makes active attempts to engage the children through questions and dialogue to open wider conversations. The focus in this vignette of play is on Freddy, so he is asked questions to stimulate his thoughts about how he would categorise his ethnicity. As Freddy tries to respond his stammer becomes prevalent. Aware of the friendship between Freddy and Jake, Amanda gives Freddy more time and encouragement to respond by seeking support from his friend. Jake is asked to think about how he would define Freddy's identity.</p>  |   |
| <p><i>Extract from transcript</i></p> <p>Vignette 16.2<br/> <b>Amanda:</b> <i>there you go, oh you've got your black on. Why are you putting your black down there?</i><br/> <b>Freddy:</b> <i>Because I'm black</i><br/> <b>Amanda:</b> <i>Ah ok, that's really good</i><br/> <b>Jake:</b> <i>You're not black</i><br/> <b>Freddy:</b> <i>Yes, am are</i><br/> <b>Amanda:</b> <i>So Fr describes himself as black but he has talked about how his skin as brown</i><br/> <b>Jake:</b> <i>it's not brown</i><br/> <b>Amanda:</b> <i>Oh what do you think it is?</i><br/> <b>Jake:</b> <i>it's purple</i><br/> <b>Amanda:</b> <i>What! purple</i><br/> <b>Eddie:</b> <i>I think its white</i><br/> <b>Fay:</b> <i>I think it black</i><br/> <b>Amanda:</b> <i>I think so too. Now</i></p> | <p>Still footage from vignette16.2</p>  |

Video footage makes apparent the children's active engagement in discourses where they are sharing previously acquired knowledge about ethnic identity constructs. Concurring with ideas seen in research that acquisition of identity is not an automatic development proceeding in passive children (Barron, 2014), discourse constructed in an environment of

the adult directed learning activity is seen to influence the children's conscious and hypothetically unconscious beliefs. Interestingly supporting this standpoint, Fay and Edie are observed to consciously seize upon the dominance of Jake's presented viewpoint to offer self-actualised ideas about how they perceive Freddy's identity. Their views however appear to align with categorisations aligned with themselves e.g. Edie: *I think it's white* and Fay: *I think it's black*.

Contended is a view that through interactional discourse and engagement in the painting of self-portraits the children are demonstrating active attempts to understand, interpret and participate in the co-construction of their own and others' ethnic identity. However, other than cross-examining Jake's explanation about Freddy's ethnicity by paraphrasing his response, footage does not elicit further pedagogic attempts to explore how or where the children have come to share their existing understanding in the elicited responses.

Similarly, no attempts are made to probe why Jake made use of an abstract colour to define Freddy's skin tone. Ascribing a colour that is non-threatening to racial constructs, nevertheless, denies meaning making and the co-construction of new ways of knowing about how the mixed ethnicity child would choose to identify. Recognising the significance of the practitioner role is of paramount importance here. Connecting deeper understanding with children's existing rich funds of knowledge could be potentially planned and shared in a discourse of interaction within these activities to extend the children's critical thinking about identity.

The third and final vignette in this sub-theme focuses on conversations where the practitioner extends dialogue by way of questioning the children, because of the challenges they make about each other's ethnicity.

*Summary of recorded footage*

Amanda makes use of the children's dialogic challenge to extend Freddy's thoughts about how he chooses to categorise himself (and perhaps the other children) by paraphrasing the children's responses.

**Amanda:** So, Fr describes himself as 'black', but he has talked about how his skin as brown.

Rather than allowing Freddy to answer, Jake uses his dominant position (*membership*) in the group to again challenge notions surrounding identity.

**Jake:** You're not black and It's not brown (in response to Freddy's skin colour).

*Extract from transcript*

Vignette 16.19

**Freddy:** Well

**Freddy:** No its (stammers) I'm just, no I'm

**Fay:** black like me?

**Freddy:** its, I'm just, I'm just....

**Jake:** White

**Freddy:** No I'm not white I'm, I'm just... Fr looks down at his picture. His expression is sad.

**Jake:** What colour

**Amanda:** it's ok, Fr just trying to get his words, have a think, while he talks about it. J starts to speak again. One minute Jake, Let's just give Freddy a bit of time

**Jake:** I remembering that!

**Amanda:** OK, Let's just give Fr a little bit of time. He's trying to say it Fr is looking at the group. He still has his hands by his side.

**Freddy:** Looking directly at the camera - I'm light brown his body rocks forward as he expresses his view.

**Amanda:** There we go

*Vignette 16.19 - still footage shows how Freddy's confidence is reduced via dialogue (looking down, rocking, hands at his side)*



This exchange between the children reinforces earlier thoughts that dialogic conversations between the children provide noteworthy features in which they actively choose to express thoughts relating to their sense of self. There is evidence to suggest the children are capable of challenging differences in opinion about constructs associated with an ethnic identity. By making use of ethnic identity constructs interchangeably

Interestingly the findings in the research data shows that these children make use of ethnic identity constructs interchangeably. Terminology heard amongst the children ranges from 'light brown', 'white', 'black like me' to 'black'.

Additional findings in the data guide understanding about hierarchies in play (Reay, 2008; Chesworth, 2016). Data confirms that dialogue is used to position dominant perspectives amongst the children. Significant in this vignette interaction between Jake and Freddy

confirms how the power of hierarchies can serve to reduce and on occasion 'silence the voice of child'. Jake shows his competence of presenting his views, in such a way that they serve to trivialise Freddy's position and status in the group 'othering'. Whether intentional or unintentional data confirms a child's ability (at such a young age) to reduce the confidence in another child via discourse in peer interaction.

Summarising the above, in agreement with notions positioned in the review of literature (Chapter 2), video footage from analysed data makes apparent the children's active engagement in discourses where they are sharing previously acquired knowledge about ethnic identity constructs. Concurring with ideas seen in research that acquisition of identity is not an automatic development proceeding in passive children (Barron, 2014), the activity of painting a self-portrait constructed in an adult directed learning activity not only advanced dialogue but also reveals the influence on children's conscious and hypothetically unconscious beliefs.

Example one within the subtheme: *activity is developed by dialogue* exemplifies how the process of interaction allowed the children to claim expertise privileging knowledge about important aspects of their sense of self. Example one also emphasises the children were afforded opportunities to challenge views regarding similarities and differences in their ethnicity with each other. Footage demonstrates that the children used their internalised thoughts derived from previous lived experiences to challenge ideas about ethnicity.

Concurring with contrasting thoughts taken from Wertsch (2001) theorising that suggest the dialogical nature of language is not neutral, because spoken words are always responding to another utterance. Mixed-ethnicity children are seen to not only challenge ideas associated with ethnic identity constructs, they will also go on to make use of these ideas by using terminology interchangeably. Claims here offer further insight from the children's perspectives as to how conversations are mediated and shared about groups of people with similar and differing origins.

Contributions from this study concur with Vygotskian notions of children's internalisation of language learnt in interaction with others (Park, 2011; Corsaro, 2015). Active attempts to understand, interpret and participate in the co-construction of their own and others' ethnic identity are seen through interactional discourse and engagement in the painting of self-portraits.

Ideas that deserve serious consideration is the children's ability to present views (at such a young age) that trivialise another child's position and status in the group 'othering'. Whether

intentional or unintentional data confirms Jake's ability to challenge the perspectives and reduce the confidence in another child via dialogic processes in peer interaction.

#### **6.4.3 Subtheme 2c: Behaviour – habits of attention**

Explained in Chapter 5 are thoughts that children will incorporate funds of knowledge from structures such as everyday family traditions, behaviours, communication styles and activities whilst engaging in play. Similarly reasoned are views that that children will use ethnic role behaviours as a precursor for creating their knowledge, as well as developing their identity, notwithstanding ethnic identity (Riojas-Cortez, 2001).

Three examples are used to represent the non-verbal communication exhibited by the children, where emphasis is placed on understanding the alternate forms of expression that the children chose to use to respond the ideas in the co-constructed learning experiences. As well as discussing the exhibited non-verbal cues the examples also highlight the behaviours exhibited as the children navigate the intentions meant behind pedagogical actions. These examples endeavour to show the children's level of motivation to engage in the activities.

The first episode of play outlines the observed low level of motivation or interest displayed by the children. In this vignette the focus is on Freddy and Fay behaviour in the camera case and photo activity. Being a quieter member of the group, Fay remains silent and chooses to read a book with their associated puppets rather than joining in the activity. Interestingly observation of Freddy's actions or non-verbal cues are indicated in many of the episodes of play, generally indicated by movement away from the activity, looking thoughtfully to the practitioner for support, swaying, rolling about on the floor, rocking back and forth and holding his hands at his side when sat with his peers. Data also highlights that Freddy's stammer can become quite prevalent when he needs time to formulate his thoughts to be able to respond to the exchange of ideas with his peers.

*Summary of recorded footage*

Like play experiences in the setting, family celebrations in the home, visits to the community care home stimulate a shared interest among the children. The children are sat in a circle with Leah who is holding a camera case containing pictures. The children are motivated to look at the pictures of past events and the significant people who they have shared the experiences within camera case and photo activity. The children have engaged in this activity before. In the example below Freddy appears to be theorising about concepts that connect similarities in ethnicity between his mother and myself (researcher). Although I refer to physical features such as glasses and nose piercings, Freddy appears to be connecting understanding about our similarities in skin colour.

*Extract from transcript*

Vignette1.1

Evidence

Leah: *Can you show your mummy to Researcher (whispers)*

Freddy moves round Fa and E to show me his picture

Freddy: *me and mummy and I was a baby*

Researcher: *You were and isn't your mummy beautiful*

Researcher: *Does your mummy look a bit like me, I have glasses like that*

Freddy: *Yeah but.... pauses, looks thoughtful.*

Researcher: *I haven't worn my glasses today*

*Fr is looking back and forth at the picture of myself and his mummy*

Freddy: *but my mummy has dark skin Critical incident*

Researcher: *I have a nose piecing too but it's in a slightly different place. she's very pretty*

Freddy: *Yeah*

Evidence

Researcher: *Your daddy showed me a picture that you drew of them, can you remember what you said? You said this is my mummy and she's brown, and I'm brown and baby R is brown, but what did you say about daddy, can you remember?*

Freddy: *White Critical incident:*

Researcher: *your daddy is going to share that picture with me. Is that ok.*



The footage shows Freddy holding the pictures of himself and his family close to himself (perceived as a desire for privacy). When he is asked to show me the member of his family by Leah. His initial behaviour is to lie down on the floor with the picture face down in his hands. Freddy also chooses to face away from me by placing his whole body in the opposite direction. Being aware that he needs time, I patiently wait for Freddy to decide if he wants to show me his picture.

There is an observed moment between Freddy and myself, where I ask him to consider the similarities and difference between myself and his mother. Freddy is seen to contemplate this request by making use of long pauses, look at the picture and myself to make meaning and deeper understanding of our similarities and differences. It is interesting to note that whilst I ask him about similarities in our feature such as glasses and nose piercings, Freddy chooses to draw on our similarities in skin colour. What I term as a critical incident marks for serious consideration Freddy's ability to connect with his knowledge about skin colour

differential and concurs with research that explain young children are aware of differences (Robinson, and Jones Diaz, 2006). Similarly, Mac Naughton (2001; 2005) work contends young children not only recognised skin colour, but they are also able to decode the value attributed to skin colour in larger society. It is acknowledged that this inquiry is small in terms of its scale and design, Freddy's response nevertheless goes some way towards confirming thoughts that children enter early educational settings with a myriad of perceptions learnt potentially from family, community, peers and media (Glover, 1991).

In summarising this vignette of play, the children display varying degrees of interest in this activity, possibly because resources around the training room (which are usually used for specific developmental themes with key children and staff) act as a source of distraction. The children must also wait in turn to look at the pictures selected by the practitioner that are relevant to their previous family experiences. The pictures whilst depicting previous family events, do not appear to provide sustained stimulus to support conversations about family linked to constructs associated with previously encountered cultural experiences. There appears to be a distinct disconnect between the intended purpose of the activity (co-constructing concepts that connect similarities and differences in culture and ethnicity) and the children's understanding about how they are expected to engage in and respond to dialogic conversation.

My findings concur with contexts positioned by Hennig and Kirova (2012), who suggest thought needs to be given to the resources used in planned play activities to ensure they have the capacity to connect with the children's worlds outside of the setting. I make the claim that if children cannot recognise and attach cultural meaning to these objects when they are introduced, little meaning can be attached to reconnecting with their cultural identities and the intended learning in the setting.

Moving forward, the second episode supporting evidence that responds to subtheme *2c: Behaviour – habits of attention* is focused on Fay in the self-portrait activity. Footage indicates that Fay is actively engaged in painting her self-portrait, where she makes use of both verbal and non-verbal communication to share her perspectives about aspects of her ethnic identity. Her responses are not necessarily elicited through cues from the practitioner, instead they are confidently expressed from Fay's positive sense of herself. It is perceived that her positive disposition is due to the relationships seen between Fay and her peers. Fay's friendship with Edie also facilitates behaviours associated with a positive sense of self.

*Summary of recorded footage*

Fay's nonverbal actions relate to her ability to demonstrate positive aspects surrounding her ethnicity (hair type). She is confident in her choice of paint to describe her skin colour and hair. Whilst she clearly follows Amanda's instructions to clean her hands between the uses of each colour, she confidently uses black paint and large circular motions to create circles to represent her curly hair.

*Vignette 13.14*

Fay: "My skin is Brown" strokes the outline of her face with both hands. She uses her right index finger to dip into the chosen colour.

Fay: Circle looking up from her painting at Amanda. She holds the paper with her left hand whilst painting her face in a circle. The whole page is used to create the circle for her face.

Amanda: it is isn't it pointing to the paint pallet "Now what colour is best to show your skin? It looks brown and Edie is describing it as black.

**Critical Incident**

Edie: Hers is black

Fay: This is brown Holds up her index finger up to the camera, with the paint on it.

**Fa:** and my hairs black (strong emphasis on the word Black, which she pats which Amanda paraphrases).

Amanda: Can you see what Fa is doing with her finger, she's doing something very similar to what Jake did? She's going around and around, and why's that Fay?

**Fay:** Because my hair is like that

Fa winds her ponytail around in her hands. She looks to Amanda for help with describing the texture of her hair.

Jake: no it's got bobbles and things in

Jake: gently reaches out and touches Fa's hair

Amanda: it does, doesn't it, it's beautiful, it's got lots of different bobbles

Fay makes her circles in one concentrated area on her picture. Possibly to represent her ponytail, which today sits at the top of her head.

*V13.14 – Fay developing her portrait painting.*



The recording shows Fay is comfortable to confidently contribute her views. Features of the play that support Fay's contributions could be due to the predictable and safe reoccurrence of engaging in painting activities; being in a familial group; and feeling secure in her ability to undertake the set task. She is also secure in the support afforded by the practitioner. Pertinent to understanding transcription, whilst attempts to engage and sustain all the children's interest about their self-portraits is met with indifference, the recorded footage (evidenced above) does show Fay making use of nonverbal actions to express herself. Habits of behaviour is seen in expressions where she strokes the outline of her face with both hands whilst describing her skin as being 'light brown'. Even though Fay looks to Amanda for help to describe the texture of her hair, actions in the footage show that she is still capable of expression by means of patting her hair whilst placing a strong emphasis on the term 'black'. Fay is also seen to wind her ponytail around in her hands, whilst making concentrated circles in one area of her picture, possibly to represent her ponytail which today sits at the top of her head.

The third and final vignette presents evidence to demonstrate the significance of non-verbal communication in children’s play pursuits in response to pedagogical actions. Noteworthy for contributing to existing bodies of knowledge is raising awareness of how observation of these cues can support deeper understanding about how pedagogical and peer interactions can be seen to influence an individual’s sense of worth and wellbeing.

It must be acknowledged that Freddy is a highly competent learner, perfectly capable of tuning into and understanding the pedagogical intentions and cues in activities. However, whilst endeavouring to make sense of the perspectives that are being shared with him by his peers, Freddy’s attempts to respond give the impression that they are a cause of frustration for him. His stammer becomes more pronounced, delaying his ability to provide a response as quickly as he would like to explain his choice of paints in the development of his self-portrait. Similarly, his distress manifests through his body language, he is rocking back and forth, and his arms are held straight down the side of his body. In these instances, Freddy is observed to look to the adult for support.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><i>Summary of recorded footage</i></p> <p>Non-verbal cues are evident within this play experience, where Freddy makes use of his body language to display his distress and frustration at not being able to express his response to the views of his peers, whilst painting his self-portrait.</p>   |  |
| <p><i>Extract from transcript</i></p> <p><u>Vignette V16.25</u></p> <p><b>Habits of attention</b></p> <p>Observed are behaviours that indicate the stress that is being caused in interaction with Freddy’s peers:</p> <p>Freddy has an angry expression on his face. He is looking directly at the group. His body is leaning forward and he has his hands by his side</p> <p>Freddy looks down at his picture. His expression is unhappy.</p> <p>Freddy is looking at the group. He still has his hands by his side.</p> <p>Observed are strategies of deflection away from self. The skill of being able to use resources in the environment (picture on the wall) to shift the focus away from himself allows Freddy to feel more relaxed in this situation.</p> <p>Freddy points to the picture of a black lady on the wall</p> <p>Freddy is smiling, his arms are more relaxed as he recalls his visit to the care home</p> | <p>V16.25 - <i>Insert still footage</i></p>  |

Further analysis of the videoed footage indicates that whilst Freddy does continually look to the practitioner for support, he is also constantly scanning his group of peers as if to monitoring their interactions to assess whether Amanda's actions are intended to be moments of teaching and observing how his peers are undertaking this activity. Evidence does show Freddy considers via his behaviour likeness and differences aligned to perceptions of his own skin colour during these conversations. It is not clear however if he views these characteristics as being aligned with or opposite to a mixed ethnic identity. Interpretation that is noteworthy for practice positions ongoing practitioner cultural and ethnic awareness (surrounding not just Freddy's, but all the children's family backgrounds) that could have been offered to support Freddy further is absent. The lack of practitioner knowledge about the children's cultural and raced origins limited her ability to respond to and support the opinions positioned by Freddy and his peers.

The suggestion is not that some of the children are not sensitive to pedagogical cues, or that some are less capable of tuning into these cues. In early childhood settings young children are capable of distinguishing actions immediately supported by practitioner cues. What is positioned is some children may treat an intentional action that comes with contextual teaching, (for example, positioning probing questions to elicit personal responses about ethnicity, when asking children to paint a picture of themselves) the same as explicit pedagogical actions.

Butler and Markman (2016: 29) argue that in these instances "there may be a developmental shift from children using globalised distinctions between pedagogical action and non-pedagogical situations to beginning to distinguish whether individual actions are pedagogical or not, regardless of the global context in which they occur".

The developmental shift described by Butler and Markman (2016) is emphasised in the distinctions made between Freddy and Jake. Whilst Freddy is sensitive to and capable of tuning into the pedagogical cues, as well as distinguishing which pedagogical actions support these cues, the dominance of Jake's challenges (hierarchies in play) mean he is potentially less skilled at picking up on and tuning into the cues provided (or not) by the practitioner at this time. Instead, Freddy responds using the non-verbal behaviours described earlier. Jake, on the other hand appears to be more attuned to which practitioner actions are meant as pedagogical demonstrations by drawing on his existing knowledge and understanding about ethnicity. Jake is also more confident in his knowledge of which cues are meant as merely instrumental actions taking place within the context of his ability to draw a portrait of himself.

Moving discussion on, data provides rich evidence surrounding the children's ability to manipulate the actions of both the researcher and practitioners' intentional actions when trying to elicit their understanding about similarity and differences in ethnicity. When I make inferences about similarities in features with Freddy's mother associated with glasses and nose piercings, after a long pause looking back and forth at the picture of his mother and myself, Freddy chooses to draw on similarities in skin colour when he responds:

**Freddy:** *but my mummy has dark skin*

Similarly, a conversation in the self-portrait learning experience between Amanda and Freddy about how he chooses to describe himself, illuminates Jake's competence in distinguishing nuances between pedagogical cues and intentional explicit pedagogical actions, when he is observed to directly challenge the practitioner's perspectives surrounding Freddy's descriptions about himself:

**Amanda:** *So Freddy describes himself as black but he has talked about how his skin as brown*

**Jake:** *It's not brown*

**Amanda:** *Oh what do you think it is?*

**Jake:** *It's purple*

**Amanda:** *What! purple*

Like experiments undertaken by Butler and Markman (2014), the children recognised whether information was being explicitly communicated for pedagogical benefit to guide inferences about their ethnicity. It is hoped the examples drawn on above clearly demonstrate the developmental differences amongst the children, and their capacity for recognising whether information is being explicitly communicated by the knowledgeable adult with the intention of being relevant to their learning. It is important to note that it is impossible to measure if each pedagogical action was carried out intentionally or not to guide inferences for the benefit of the children involved within the scope of this inquiry. Also worthy of further consideration is raising awareness of how observation of these cues can support deeper understanding about how pedagogical and peer interactions can be seen to influence an individual's sense of worth and wellbeing.

Presentation of this third episode of play endeavoured to demonstrate the significance of non-verbal communication in children's play pursuits in response to pedagogical actions. Contended are views that in this episode of play all the children are capable of distinguishing actions immediately supported by practitioner cues. Whilst Freddy is a highly competent

learner, who is perfectly capable of tuning into and understanding the pedagogical intentions and cues in the self-portrait activity. Observation of his behaviour when he is challenged by his peers served to demonstrate there is a developmental shift in his demeanour. Manifesting in this situation through his body language; rocking back and forth, and arms held straight down the side of his body. Notably, Freddy's stammer becomes more pronounced, delaying his ability to provide a response as quickly as he would like, to explain his choices. When his perspectives are challenged by more dominant peers, like many children in these situations Freddy looks to the practitioner for support. Positioned earlier is a view that the absence of practitioner cultural and ethnic awareness about Freddy family background may have limited the support that could have been offered to him, to help him respond to the opinions positioned by his peers.

Summarising general points for broader consideration about the significance of recognising children's non-verbal communication in response to pedagogical actions, my contributions confirm, whilst there is lots of focused attention from the practitioner in the presented play episodes, complexity exists where the children's thoughts move on so quickly. Analysis shows it is extremely challenging for practitioners to keep up with children's thinking whilst providing individual support and managing nuanced behaviours of peers who directly challenge and manipulate pedagogical intentions. Even though this is a small group of children, the recorded footage highlights how challenging it is to listen and manage behaviours with only one practitioner present. In a similar vein reflection demonstrates the challenges that exist when a practitioner must pick up and extend an activity that they were not engaged in. Evident when Leah was asked to facilitate conversations with the children following their engagement in the self-portrait activity. Researcher notes reveal it was clear that a handover did not take place between the practitioners so that learning could be scaffolded with the children when the dialogic conversations took place. Which in turn accounted for the low level of interest and engagement by the children when Leah attempted to facilitate these conversations.

### **6.5 Researcher impact on the research process**

It would be remiss to conclude this chapter without reflective thoughts about the impact and influence I had on the children's participation in the process of data collection. Particularly when engagement in conversations with the focus children yielded comments such as 'Sharon I can tell you, you are categorically black'. I was so shocked by Jake's correct analysis of my ethnicity that it prompted me to reflect on the influence I was having on the children's ability to learn from pedagogic interactions. Ideas gleaned from Sfard and Prusak, (2005) that suggest young children will tell others who they think they are, whilst at the same time acting out who they say they are, prompted reflection surrounding my influences on

the children. Incorporated here are two examples where the researcher clearly influenced the process of data collection, as well as the responses provided by the children.

Seen at 6.3.1 in this chapter is a critical incident when, in a conversation with Freddy, inferences are made by the researcher about similarities in features associated with glasses and nose piercings. However, after a long pause looking back and forth at the picture of his mother and the researcher, Freddy chooses to draw on similarities in skin colour:

Vignette 1.2

**Researcher:** *Does your mummy look a bit like me, I have glasses like that*

**Fr:** Yeah but.... *pauses, looks thoughtful.*

**Researcher:** *I haven't worn my glasses today*

*Freddy is looking back and forth at the picture of myself and his mummy*

**FR:** *but my mummy has dark skin*

**Researcher:** *I have a nose piecing too but it's in a slightly different place. she's very pretty.*

Whilst looking at the picture of his family members the influence of the researcher's skin colour clearly acts as a prompt for Freddy to draw comparisons with the similarities in colour of his mother skin and the skin colour researcher. Despite intensions to avoid cues that elicit responses about ethnicity. Similarly, in the same activity Freddy initial behaviour (section 6.4.3) is to lie down on the floor with the picture face down in his hands. He also chooses to face away from me by placing his whole body in the opposite direction. Being aware that I am accessing Freddy 'private thoughts' when I ask questions about his family. I patiently wait and give Freddy the time to decide if he wants to show me his picture.

The second incident where the researcher's influence is observed is in activity 4 - the tea party. In the conversation the researcher influences the conversation about cultural foods shared in the home:

Extract taken from Activity 6 Vignette 4 – conversation about the foods we like to eat at home:

*Researcher: provides a prompt to elicit conversation about culturally relevant foods by saying she likes plantain and yam at home do you know what they are? Fr nods in acknowledgement and Fa shouts they're 'dinner:' Demonstrating awareness and understanding of 'typical' Afro Caribbean/African foods.*

Jake repeats the items but does not appear to acknowledge previous experience of trying these foods.

J turns to Fr and asks if he can make that to which Fr says "yes" (demonstrating *knowledge of rice and peas*).

J and Fr both turn to look at me in interest *Interaction*.

Concurring with Butler and Markman's (2016) suggestion that children will learn via the effects of pedagogic cues and the actions of adults, these examples are just a few of what would have been many occurrences in which I impacted upon the children's behaviours and perspectives in the research process. The three incidents are provided to acknowledge the influence of the researcher, and to make transparent what was going on in the research process (Ortlipp, 2008).

## 6.6 Chapter conclusion

The chapter aimed to make visible analytical processes of children's perspectives surrounding constructs associated with the formation of mixed ethnic identities in a pedagogy of play. Facilitating meaningful interpretation of the conversations support theorisation that it is not only the 'acted out' lived experiences observed in the play activities that constitute identities. Elicited from the children's FOK the narratives have created perspectives for supporting new terminologies constructed through the lens of mixed ethnic children.

Examples presented throughout the chapter provide insights into how children's preferences align with terminology heard in institutional mechanisms such as the ethnic census categorisations of 'black' and 'white' seen in the Office for National Statistics (ONS 1991; 2001). All the children (including Edie) appear to exhibit a strong sense of cultural understanding about skin colour difference, where discourse between the children elicit thoughts not only about how they perceive their own ethnic identity, but also views about how they perceive the ethnicity of their family members are seen. Many of the dialogic conversations provide examples of how the children's internalisation of constructs associated with the appropriation of skin colour could have been learnt in previous

experiences of participation with parents, extended family and communities (Milner, 1983; Robinson, and Jones Diaz, 2006; Mac Naughton, 2005).

That said, narratives that constitute one's identity through actions is extremely challenging, particularly when they can be seen to evolve from the stories that are passed down through generations. Similarly, what a person endorses as true about their identity may not be what others see as enacted. In other words, the stories that the children choose to tell other people about themselves may not be how others see them. In turn it could be reasonably argued that the dialogic conversations occurring in this inquiry have the potential to influence the children's internalised thoughts that are then shared when a stimulus is offered to encourage sustained thinking.

Positioned for thoughtful consideration is an idea gleaned from Sfard and Prusak (2005), that young children will tell others who they think they are, whilst at the same time acting out who they say they are. Examples offered in this chapter represent the actual terminology used by the children, demonstrating their preferences for terms to describe not only themselves and each other, but similarly positioned is the terminology they confidently used to define how they categorise their family members. In attempting to respond to research question one about the influences that facilitate expression about ethnicity; what is less known are the specifics about how and where the children come to operationalise the co-construction of their identities in these learning experience. Key influences on mixed ethnic children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their ethnic identity will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

For now, findings show mechanisms exist by which practitioners can leverage children's knowledge in co-constructing their perceptions about ethnic identity. Important findings explain children's dialogic conversations provide noteworthy features in which they actively choose to express thoughts relating to their sense of self. Data provides contributions towards existing epistemologies to demonstrate children are capable of challenging differences in opinion about constructs associated with an ethnic identity.

Concurring with contrasting thoughts taken from Wertsch (2001) theorising that suggest the dialogical nature of language is not neutral, because spoken words are always responding to another utterance. Highly significant to contributing to new understanding, discoveries in the research data make explicit that mixed ethnicity children are seen to not only challenge ideas associated with ethnic identity constructs, they will also go on to make use of these ideas by using terminology interchangeably.

Terminology heard amongst the children provides new contributions to bodies of research. Vocabulary shared by the focus children range from 'light brown', 'white', 'whiteish', 'black like me' to 'black'. Interpretation of the responses from young mixed ethnic children is useful for illustrating how children's expressed thoughts accumulated from engagement in adult initiated experiences in the setting can be interpreted as funds of knowledge. I will discuss contexts associated with children's dialogic conversations, interaction and their funds of knowledge in more depth in Chapters 8 and 9. In the interim Fay, Freddy and Jake's responses indicate how capable they are at drawing on their knowledge (conceivably from previous conversations with their parents and family) to ascribe meaning to new categorisations about their own ethnicity, as well as the ethnicity of each other in their play. These views align with and add to Barron's (2011) thoughts that early years settings can provide an affordance for children to play out and relate to internal processes linked to ethnicity.

Key new knowledge is also identified in the influences that facilitate the children's ability to connect with and name preferences about ethnicity. Compelling insight is gleaned from the friendship between Fay and Edie, which contributes to understanding about the significance and importance of friendships that were forged before the start of this study. Although not of mixed ethnic origin, Edie's strong sense of self; insightful knowledge about her own and differing ethnicities; and ability for instilling confidence in others to express their developing thoughts about their ethnicity necessitated the inclusion of her contributions within the presented vignettes of play.

Examples highlight that Fay's responses are not elicited through cues from the practitioner, instead they are expressed from Fay's positive sense of self formed in part with her friendship with Edie. Similarly, Jake exhibits behaviours that show compassion for his peers, where he is seen on many occasions to offer praise to his peers. Interpretations that the significance of friendship elicited balanced responses, as well as behaviours that showed empathy and acceptance of the categorisations offered amongst all the children is evident throughout the analysed data. It could be perceived that the practitioner made use of dialogic conversation to manage behaviours over discourse about culture and ethnicity, particularly when one child's perspectives were being challenged by the other children in the learning experiences. Positioned is a suggestion that the children's ideas were on occasion negated by the actions of the practitioner when behaviour management intervention was needed. That said the consensus reached across the findings show acceptance (in the majority of instances) of the categorisations offered by all the children.

Emergent ideas in literature explain children will show a preference for friendships in play with children considered to be from a higher status i.e. 'white' (Leman and Lam, 2008).

However, discoveries in this inquiry, even though small scale in nature, showed that constructs associated with 'race' and perceived social status did not impact on children's social behaviours. Instead, prevalent amongst the group of children was what Barron (2011) described as fluid aspects of individual and social identity. Through processes rooted in the product of social interaction, contexts associated with peer interaction and friendship were key proponents in eliciting the children's assertions surrounding their own values and beliefs about the contexts being discussed within friendship groups. In other words, my claims indicate the interrelated nature of friendship served to facilitate conversation surrounding ethnic identity constructs amongst the children. What is emphasised in the findings is the children's responses negate arguments that consider children are likely to foster a ready acceptance of cultural differences.

Findings from the analysis of data provide clear evidence to guide understanding that hierarchies do exist in play (Nesdale and Flessner, 2001; Reay, 2008). Claims address how power in children's hierarchies can serve to 'silence the voice of the child. Confirming dialogue can be used to position dominant perspectives, Jake demonstrates his capability of presenting his views in such a way that they serve to trivialise Freddy's position and status in the group – 'othering'. Whether intentional or unintentional, these discoveries confirm children's ability (at such a young age) to reduce the confidence in another child via discourse in peer interaction.

Discussion in this chapter positioned plausible explanations that concur with views that children will use ethnic role behaviours as a precursor for creating their knowledge, as well as developing their ethnic identity (Riojas-Cortez, 2001). Examples drawn from the data identify the alternate forms of expression that the children chose to use to respond the ideas in the co-constructed activities. Also evidenced and discussed are the exhibited non-verbal cues that the children chose to use in the vignettes of play, where examples highlight the behaviours exhibited as the children navigate intentions meant behind pedagogical actions. The key new findings gained through research on how children's understanding about culture and ethnicity evidence will be built on in the discussion chapter.

Deserving of serious consideration is evidence that demonstrates all the children participating in this study are capable of distinguishing actions immediately supported by practitioner cues. More significantly, children can differentiate between pedagogical cues to identify actions that are meant for them. Like experiments undertaken by Butler and Markman (2014) the children participating in this study recognised whether information was being explicitly communicated for pedagogical benefit to guide inferences about their ethnicity. The findings shown in this chapter clearly demonstrate the developmental differences amongst the children, and their capacity for recognising whether information is

being explicitly communicated by the knowledgeable adult with the intention of being relevant to their learning. Mentioned earlier and reinforced here, it is important to note that it is not possible within the scope of this study, to measure if pedagogical actions were carried out intentionally or not in guiding inferences for the benefit of the children involved.

Finally, thoughts that can be gleaned from the findings are children are able to selectively apply intentions they deem as relevant, irrelevant or incidental to their learning. Discussion here positioned evidence to clearly demonstrate developmental differences amongst the children and their capacity for recognising whether information is being explicitly communicated by the knowledgeable adult (practitioners) with the intention of being relevant to their learning. Concluding contributions that are important for raising awareness concern how important it is to observe children's nonverbal cues. Because these cues can support deeper understanding about how pedagogical and peer interactions can be seen to influence an individual's sense of worth and wellbeing.

Taking the discoveries discussed throughout this chapter forward, Chapter 7 will discuss in more detail the analysed findings that incorporate practitioner perspectives about how pedagogic actions influenced shared understandings and meaning of a co-constructed mixed ethnic identity with the children. Positioned by Hennig and Kirova (2012) is a suggestion that thought needs to be given to the resources used in planned play activities to ensure they have the capacity to connect with the children's worlds outside of the setting. Chapter 7 therefore considers in more detail how influential the resources are in the learning experiences. Particularly as early ideas deemed them as being essential for contextualising how co-construction of ethnic identity formation was influenced and facilitated in the recorded footage. In conclusion It is considered important to exercise a degree of flexibility in the judgments being made from observed actions of participants in research processes. The concluding chapters will bring these voices together to consider their contribution to the research questions.



## **Chapter 7: Practitioner perspectives of mixed ethnic identity: the influence of pedagogic action and resources**

### **7.1 Introduction to the chapter**

Presented in this chapter are findings from vignettes of play that discuss how pedagogic actions and resources influence co-construction of perspectives about ethnic identity. Evidence presented throughout this chapter relate to all of the research questions, which were established to examine: the key influences on mixed ethnic children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their ethnic identity; what opportunities exist in the early years policy framework that allow 'mixed ethnic' children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences in their education? and how the implementation of a play-based pedagogical approach provide 'space' for mixed ethnic children to explore their ethnicity.

The findings consider the perspectives of two practitioners who participated in this research inquiry from video-cued conversations engaged in with three mixed ethnicity children, one peer and the researcher. Informed by sociocultural theory, the responses are embedded within the culturally connected context of the setting and incorporate the children's funds of knowledge brought into the setting from the home and community. Acknowledging the subjective nature of the selection process, like Chapter 6, the vignettes have been selected based on the most salient responses of the children as well as the practitioners (see Tables 4 and 8) that emerged in the analysis of the data. The selected responses are those based on emergent rich sources of information that advanced the thematic direction and synthesis of the collected data, as well the development of the subsequent thematic framework.

### **7.2 How the chapter is organised**

The chapter commences by signposting the reader to Appendix 2.3, where I introduce the three practitioners who agreed to participate in this study. Provided is information about their professional career background. The aim is to provide a degree of contextual understanding about the emergent perspectives of each of the practitioners as they engage in cultural activities associated with not just their own but the ethnic identities of the children.

Advancing discussion, perceived as being inextricably linked with pedagogic actions, examples of the artefacts used in the study are presented under:

- Theme 3: Resources

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Resources | Children explore artefacts   |
|           | Resources do/do not support developing understanding about ethnic identity |

The aim here is to provide examples from findings to demonstrate how the resources used throughout the learning experiences supported (or not) mixed ethnic children’s ability to connect with and respond to constructs surrounding ethnic identity.

Discussion is moved on by making use of selected vignettes of play to present how pedagogical actions serve to shape and influence children’s learning about similarity and differences in ethnic identity. Practitioner perspectives taken from reflective journals, dialogic conversations with the researcher, still images from recorded footage in the learning experiences are used to illuminate these responses. I endeavour to draw on the most salient modes of communication that the practitioners chose to express their ideas and beliefs about their influence in facilitating formation of young children’s ethnic identity in the setting. Essentially the aim was to establish whether the practitioner explanations provided in the interview phase of the inquiry were overt in practice. Discussion uses the planned learning experiences initially chosen by the practitioners, and then ones that introduced intentional cultural resources. Following the same structure as Chapter 6, illustration of the practitioner’s conversations, comments and behaviours are presented under:

- Theme 4: Pedagogical action

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Pedagogical Action | Adapt and facilitate learning to meet the needs of the children |
|--------------------|---|

The chapter positions the practitioner’s knowledge based on their cultural experiences of work with diverse groups of children, and associated interactions with the children that facilitated their ability to draw on previous understanding about how they identify self and others by ethnicity. The decision to use this approach to present the practitioner’s responses

also informed the decision to include significant extracts from the transcriptions within discussion.

Examples of pedagogic action, including the resources that supported exploration in these conversations are essential for contextualising how co-construction of ethnic identity formation was influenced, and facilitated in the play experiences. Like Chapter 6, it must be noted that when using examples from the vignettes of play; working with the children the practitioner narratives were seldom articulated in lengthy accounts, so the captured communication is sometimes brief and fragmented.

This chapter makes a determined effort to truly represent the voices of the practitioners, and to foreground the influence and contributing factors that impact upon the co-construction of children's identities. Brought to the forefront of discussion are practitioner perspectives through themes which integrate their pedagogic actions, the aim being to provide extensive analysis of practitioner involvement and their contribution to this research inquiry.

Like Chapter 6, it is important to recognise that it is neither possible nor desirable to deny the researchers own personal suppositions and theories that will emerge when reporting the findings from the data. Again, attempts have been made to declare them, and where appropriate to contrast and compare them with existing suppositions and theoretical understanding outlined in the review of existing literature. Combined with the researcher's interpretations, it is hoped that this chapter, presented by themes and sub-themes will bring to the forefront the narrative accounts of the practitioner's perspectives and the resources used that enabled pedagogic actions. Appendix 2.3 introduces the practitioner profiles, where it is hoped that some depth of understanding can be garnered about the distinct styles of engagement of each practitioner.

### **7.3 Summary**

The Interviews indicated that each practitioner has a clear understanding of the nurseries policies and ethos about inclusion. Yet each practitioner had their own unique understanding about inclusion and practice when working with the children. Reiterated again is the importance of being receptive to the practitioners differing verbal and non-verbal forms of communication.

Attempting to report on the practitioners influences that facilitate mixed ethnicity identity formation met with inevitable compromise. However, the selected examples using narrative

discussion was chosen as an appropriate method for conveying the thick descriptions of the diversity of participants perspectives.

Introduced in the following sections are the researcher interpretations of the responses from the practitioner's perspectives. The purpose of the following discussion is to illuminate the complexities involved in the process of analysing the pedagogic action theme. The reader is again reminded that there are inevitable overlaps in explanation and discussion of the themes, and so no theme should be viewed independently of the other. All are inextricably integrated in facilitating understanding of the iterative co-construction of knowledge between practitioners, the children and the researcher.

Not dissimilar to Chapter 5, there are instances where the same vignettes are revisited numerous times to enable multiple understandings from the practitioner's perspectives. Like the perspectives of the children, there are occasions where thoughts emerged as significant for only one participant. In these instances' vignettes are explored through that one perspective whilst others are revisited and examined through numerous perspectives.

Finally incorporated are examples of a small number of incidents I encountered whilst conducting this research. Here the findings are not only salient for sharing the additional challenges that these experiences place on the 'black' researcher, they also reference my position as a black female researcher exploring potential inequalities in early years practice and pedagogy. I do this to provide insight into the ways in which I consider that my identity as a black female researcher and academic have been ignored, misjudged and devalued in the context of this project. In a similar vein, these examples serve to illuminate debate surrounding the persistence of negotiating insider/outsider status. I will refer to these incidents again in my discussion in Chapter 8, as well as reflecting on them in my contributions and recommendations to research in Chapter 9.

#### **7.4 Theme 3: Resources**

This section draws upon examples from the study to discuss how resources supported the focus children to demonstrate an ability to connect with and respond to constructs surrounding ethnic identity. The findings emerged out of the analysis of the settings physical environment that provided the tools for mediating understanding with the children. It must be noted that also incorporated are examples that come out of analysis of resources that were deliberately chosen by the practitioners and researcher. The resource of skin-coloured paints for example was introduced after practitioners acknowledged existing resources in the physical environment did not facilitate exploration of the children's funds of knowledge

transferred from home experiences, and therefore did not necessarily facilitate wider exploration within the setting.

Deliberated first is the subtheme *children explore artefacts*, where ideas from previous chapters that explored notions about how young children make use of cultural tools to co-construct meaning about ethnic similarity and difference to self and others is explored. Discussion moves on to the sub-theme *resources do/do not support developing understanding about ethnic identity*, where endeavours are made to present the ways in which resources act as a cultural tool for affording agentic and situated ways of sharing ideas about issues associated with identity and group membership.

### **7.5 Subtheme 1a: Children explore artefacts**

Discussion draws up on three examples to discuss how resources act as a cultural broker for prompting the children's memory about past events, as well as engaging in explorations of the children's perceptions about ethnicity and shared cultural events. In the first example, being aware that an empty camera case currently features as a 'curiosity', Leah makes use of a selection of collected photographs and the empty case to help the children reconnect with previous 'lived experiences. The intention being to draw on the children's existing knowledge about cultural experiences with their families.

This example shown below goes some way towards presenting how Freddy, in conversation with the researcher uses the photograph to not only reconnect with a previous experience shared with his family, but also to make an unprompted observation that makes a comparison between the researcher and his mother's skin colour similarities. Conveyed in the extract from the Vignette is Freddy's judgement that we have "*dark skin*".

*Summary of recorded footage*

Sitting in a small circle on the floor, Leah holds a camera case with photos inside it, Freddy makes use of the pictures of his family to share his knowledge about his mother's skin being similar to mine. His behaviour is thoughtful as reflects on the questions being asked as he draws on his knowledge about the similarities and differences between us.

Example 1

*Extract from transcript from Vignette 1.1*

Freddy: *me and mummy and I was a baby*

Researcher: *You were and isn't your mummy beautiful*

Researcher: *Does your mummy look a bit like me, I have glasses like that*

Freddy: *Yeah but.... pauses, looks thoughtful.*

Researcher: *I haven't worn my glasses today  
Freddy is looking back and forth at the picture of myself and his mummy*

Freddy: *but my mummy has dark skin Critical incident*

Researcher: *I have a nose piecing too but it's in a slightly different place. she's very pretty*

Freddy: *Yeah*

*Insert pictures of the artefacts/environment*



I also refer here to an earlier conversation with Freddy's father (who is 'white') in the negotiation phase of the study. Freddy father expressed concerns about how his son will go on to identify his ethnicity in the future. In our conversation dad expressed concerns about the 'choice' Freddy will need to make. Dad believed that Freddy would have to choose the ethnic categorisation of 'black'. Assumptions are made here that these conversations have been exchanged either with or around Freddy, thus informing internalised FOK from the home environment. It is presumed that Freddy went on to share terms learnt outside of the setting in some of the examples of terminology presented throughout the chapter. Analysis of how Freddy makes use of resources available to him appear to be informed by the initial encounters with his father, as well as those conversations with practitioners about his dispositions and attitudes towards learning about ethnic similarities and difference.

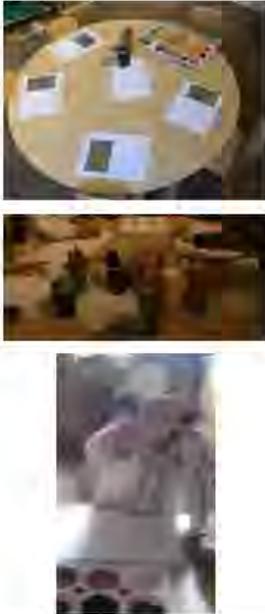
Comparably the second excerpt provides an explanation about how resources support the children's developing understanding about ethnic identity but are not used to challenge the children's ability to articulate externally encountered experiences further. Discourse using skin-coloured paints does not explain how for example Jake is able to formulate his views about his 'white' identity. Pedagogical actions are discussed in more detail in later sections of this chapter, but for now the introduction of skin-coloured paints into the settings play environment provided commonly used diversity related tools for the children to match a wide range of skin colours, that in turn facilitated conversations between the children and practitioners.

In the recorded videos Jake describes that he will mix pink and brown paint. He is seen to go to great lengths to mix the paints to achieve just the right skin tone to paint his self-

portrait. In the presented vignette Jake has agreed to paint his friend Edie. He appears to demonstrate his capacity for theorising about constructs associated with ethnicity. Data reveals that he achieves this by using descriptors associated with his developing attempts in mixing paints to the appropriate colour to match his own skin tone, that he describes as being 'whiteish'.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>Example 2</p> <p><i>Extract from transcript - Vignette 8.2</i></p> <p><b>Edie:</b> <i>I'm drawing Jake. Edie is using large brush strokes on and off her paper,</i></p> <p><b>Researcher:</b> <i>does that look like you J?</i></p> <p><b>Jake:</b> <i>No I'm white (critical incident)</i></p> <p><b>Researcher:</b> <i>You're white</i></p> <p><b>Jake:</b> <i>White</i></p> <p><b>Researcher:</b> <i>Is there a white colour</i></p> <p><b>Jake:</b> <i>White, there's none - points to the paint pallet, shaking his whole body and head.</i></p> <p><b>Leah:</b> <i>no it's pink but not white, oh well.</i></p> <p><b>Researcher:</b> <i>Would pink do J?</i></p> <p><b>Jake:</b> <i>butckh.... Rocks forward and back.</i></p> | <p><i>Insert pictures of the artefacts/environment</i></p>  |
|--|--|

The example above offers insight into the complexities of how not only Jake, but all the focus children show interest and are developing their expertise in theorising about contexts associated with an ethnic identity when using a culturally appropriate artefact. Moving forward, the second example also provides explanations about how cultural resources can offer contexts for exploring ethnicity and identity with young children.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><i>Summary of recorded footage</i></p> <p>Situated in the training room, the four children take it in turn to paint a self-portrait. The purpose of this learning experience is to provide the children with an extended opportunity to paint themselves using skin coloured paint. Observation shows that practitioner focus and interaction is on Fay. Using pedagogic skills that makes use of open questioning, Amanda makes use of the children's interactions to explore their thoughts about their ethnicity.</p>   |  |
| <p>Example 1</p> <p><i>Extract from transcript - Vignette 14.3</i></p> <p><b>Amanda:</b> Your cheeks, Ok what colour are your cheeks?</p> <p><b>Fay:</b> erm brown like</p> <p><b>Amanda:</b> Yeah brown like, yeah I think that's a pretty good choice. <b>Pedagogy</b></p> <p><b>Amanda:</b> are you using different colours for your face?</p> <p><b>Fay:</b> Yeah</p> <p><b>Amanda:</b> ok that's your nose</p> <p><b>Habits of attention - Behaviour</b></p> <p>Fay holds her index finger out to show Amanda the selected brown colour on her finger.</p> <p>Fay continues to hold her picture out but is constantly looking at the paints. It would appear that she still wants to continue painting her self-portrait.</p>  |  |
| <p>Researcher reflective journal entry:</p> <p><b>important note:</b> Amanda exercised her right as a research participant not to complete reflective field notes of the learning experience she participated in. Analysis is based on researcher review of the recording provided by Amanda. Analysis also considers field notes from the dialogic conversations held on 12.1.18.</p> <p><u>Dialogic Conversation with Leah and Amanda, Review of study- 12.1.18 at 2pm:</u></p> <p><b>Researcher:</b> Looking at the nuanced differences of those children. Fay might be quieter and doesn't share her knowledge. Boys are very different in what they share and their confidence levels. All of these things make up their identity more.</p> <p><b>Leah</b> It also depends whether she (Fay) is with adults or not, because when she is playing with her friends, the majority of the time she is the one who is leading: 'No you do this, no I do this'. It is interesting because then, when you appeared, you ask Fay to share she is very quiet.</p> <p><b>Researcher</b> These are exactly the types of things we need to capture in your reflections. Because you will look back and the children may say something, pick something up, do something that has been influenced by the activities we did with them. It might change when they are playing with their peers. The children will distinguish between the rooms they are in.</p> |  |

Whilst dialogic conversation with Leah following the self-portrait activity disclose aspects of Fay's personality, observation of the videoed recordings elicits thoughts that pedagogical actions (dialogue, skills, knowledge) alongside the use of the skin paint resources do not appear to provide prompts for scaffolding and eliciting deeper understanding to determine the influences on Fay's responses. Fay provides clear views surrounding her choice to describe and paint the features of her face, but these responses, possibly from previous external experiences with parents and the wider community are not challenged.

Narratives in the vignette again offer explanations towards presenting how the purpose of play experience is shifted from exploring ethnicity and cultural understanding of self and others, to scaffolding ideas surrounding kindness and respect for each other by the practitioner. Demonstrated here is an example of the inevitable overlaps in explanation and discussion of the themes, where the focus should be on discussion about resources but is

influenced by the changing nature of pedagogic action. Whilst discussion about pedagogical actions is discussed in more depth in the subsequent sections of this chapter, offered here is a tentative thought that pedagogic actions could have been used alongside this resource to maintain the focus on the purpose of the play experience. Understandably, focus is deviated towards actions for supporting Fay's self-esteem, sense of belonging and wellbeing because Freddy laughed at Fay's picture. Knowing the children well, Amanda redirects her pedagogical action to reinforce behaviours associated with kindness.

The final examples provide emergent findings where resources clearly do not support the purpose of the learning experience. In the first example Leah actively encourages the children to talk about their families and friends after reading a story book about Tango the penguin.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><i>Summary of recorded footage and conversation:</i> Situated in the training room, Leah and the children are sat in a circle on the floor. The purpose of the activity should have been to engage the children in reflective conversations about the self-portrait painted with Amanda. Not wishing to facilitate the dialogic conversation Amanda asks Leah to work with the researcher at short notice. Dialogic conversations evidence that a hand over did not take place to support facilitation of this activity. The paintings are not in the training room to support the activity. So realising that the children do not have the paintings (because they are drying) to engage in conversations about themselves and each other, Leah's improvises by using the story of Tango to ask the children to reflect on the individuals who live in their house.</p> |  |
|    | <p>V2 - Insert still picture of Tango the Penguin Book</p>  |

Although the purpose of the activity is to support children to have awareness of, and to learn about, similarity and difference of self and others, the example used here offers insight into how this resource (Tango story book; a small penguin and egg artefact) does not build on the children's existing understandings of self, family and peers in terms of ethnic groupings or cultural encounters in the home environment. Instead, the children display low levels of motivation and interest in the story. Only Fay shows interest and does engage in solitary play with the penguin toy and egg.

There appears to be a clear disconnect between the story, the questions being asked and the intended purpose of learning that are drawn from the children's cultural funds of knowledge about self and others. Like the previous examples a plausible explanation for the disconnect between the purpose of the activity and the exploration with this artefact could be because Amanda should have facilitated a handover with Leah about the dialogic

discussions she had with the children about their paintings. Instead, Leah was made to stand in; where upon realising that some of the resources were missing (children's pictures) she adapted the activity by making use of an alternative artefact, but still asked the children to recall lived experience pertinent to accounts discussed in the self-portrait activity.

It is reasonable to contend that confusion is caused because the resources used, and the questions being asked were inconsistent with the children's play experiences. Lack of interest and motivation by the children is observed because the purpose of the intended learning experience is lost when the children's paintings are replaced with a story book. Although there is evidence of strong reciprocal relationships between the children and Leah, resources here do not stimulate the children's dispositions of enquiry. There appears to be a discrepancy between the physical space of the setting and the artefacts used (not to mention shared understanding, terminology and behaviours) to be able to integrate or bridge ideas about ethnicity and cultural contexts between the home and setting.

What is significant in the findings above are ideas that culturally appropriate resources can act as powerful tools for engaging young children in explorations about how they choose to engage with resources to categorise their mixed ethnicity and shared cultural understandings. Findings provide some insight into the complexities of using artefacts as a stimulus for purposeful learning alongside pedagogic actions. Concurring with research literature (Milner, 1983), the presented examples reinforce arguments that the significance of cultural resources used by practitioners cannot be underestimated, because children are seen to attach meaning from the types of resources provided in the educational environment. Similarly, examples demonstrate how resources can cause confusion for young children if careful consideration is not given to their purpose in learning experiences. In these instances' examples show how artefacts provide contexts where opportunities meant for developing knowledge and meaning quickly disengage children's interests and therefore lose their intended purpose.

### **7.6 Subtheme 1b: Resources do/do not support developing understanding about ethnic identity**

Being interrelated with findings presented in the previous subtheme, the findings used in this section again illustrate how resources can act a source of mediation in facilitating young children's explorations about how they choose to participate in and categorise their mixed ethnicity and shared cultural understandings. Of significance, vignette 16 seen below, also illuminates how artefacts in the training room acted as a stimulus for reconnecting with previous cultural experiences. Discussion draws on a incident that occurred whilst Amanda worked with the group of children to create their self-portraits. Analysis of the video footage

reveals a moment when under increasing pressure from his peers to categorise his ethnicity, Freddy uses a picture on the wall to reflect on externally encountered experiences with an individual from the wider community group to deflect attention away from himself. It could plausibly be argued that Freddy shows a tangible sense of self-efficacy here.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Summary of recorded footage</i></p> <p>Situated in the training room, the four children take it in turn to paint a self-portrait. The purpose of this learning experience is to provide the children with an extended opportunity to paint themselves using skin coloured paint. Observation shows that practitioner focus and interaction is on Freddy. Using pedagogic skills that makes use of open questioning, Amanda makes use of the children's interactions to explore their thoughts about their ethnicity.</p>   |  |
| <p>Example 1</p> <p><i>Extract from transcript - Vignette 16.6</i></p> <p><b>Jake:</b> You're not black<br/> <b>Freddy:</b> Yes, am are<br/>         No its stammers I'm just, no I'm<br/> <b>Fay:</b> black like me?<br/> <b>Freddy:</b> its, I'm just, I'm just....<br/> <b>Jake:</b> White<br/> <b>Freddy:</b> No I'm not white I'm, I'm just... <b>Freddy looks down at his picture. His expression is sad.</b><br/> <b>Jake:</b> What colour?<br/> <b>Freddy:</b> Because I'm black<br/> <b>Jake:</b> It's purple<br/> <b>Edie:</b> I think its white<br/> <b>Fay:</b> I think it black<br/> <b>Fay:</b> black like me?<br/> <b>Freddy:</b> its, I'm just, I'm just....<br/> <b>Jake:</b> White<br/> <b>Freddy:</b> No I'm not white I'm, I'm just...<br/> <b>Jake:</b> What colour<br/> <b>Freddy:</b> I'm light brown</p>                         | <p><i>Use examples of children's work and the resources used</i></p>    |
| <p>Example 2</p> <p><i>Extract from transcript - Vignette 16.6</i></p> <p>Freddy identifies with familial individuals:<br/> <b>Freddy:</b> Look that's we, when I meet that lady – <b>points to the picture of a black lady on the wall</b><br/> <b>Amanda:</b> can you remember her name?<br/> <b>Freddy:</b> No<br/> <b>Amanda:</b> Her name was Alison when we went to the care home. We saw some of our friends<br/> <b>Jake:</b> He's not, He's not Alison<br/> <b>Amanda:</b> It's Alison, and she's holding a big gold plate<br/> <b>Freddy is smiling, his arms are more relaxed as he recalls his visit to the care home</b><br/> <b>Observational note:</b> Freddy seems more relaxed because he has managed to move the focus away from himself. He has managed to deflect the conversation away from himself.<br/> <b>Self-efficacy.</b></p> | <p><i>Use examples of children's work and the resources used</i></p>  |

Findings in the data confirm that the introduction of skin-coloured paints acted as a mediation tool for opening conversations between the children and the practitioners. In the extract from transcribed vignette peer interaction elicits views where the children are confident in expressing preference using familial categorisations of 'black' and 'white'.

Preferences that are potentially learnt from externally encountered experiences. This extract (Vignette 16.6) confirms that although Freddy's ideas are negated by other dominant 'voices' in the peer interaction of the group (particularly Jake), he persists and is able to categorise himself using the term 'light brown' to describe his mixed ethnic identity.

This occurrence also offers an insight into how Freddy makes use of the learning environment by pointing to a picture of a 'black' lady from a recent visit to an elderly care home. Even when Jake persists with undermining Freddy's views (to try to put the 'spotlight' back onto Freddy by saying '*He's not, He's not Alison*') pedagogic action following Freddy's interest enable him to momentarily move the focus of the conversation away from himself by using resources so that he has the time to ignore the interjection and refocus attention back to what is important to him. It is apparent that Freddy recognises that his views are being challenged by his peers. It is interesting therefore to observe that Freddy makes use of deflection strategies to shift attention away from his self-portrait and himself to the picture on the wall.

Therefore, culturally appropriate artefacts and authentic resources in the immediate environment (images) have the potential to offer empowerment for children to persist with their perspectives. Similarly, benefiting learning processes considerably appropriate resource could be utilised in planned and unplanned activities to extend children's understanding in the process of learning about ethnic identity.

Moving discussion on, like the subtheme *children explore artefacts* the following two activities illustrate how self-selected resources did not support developing understanding about ethnic identity. The methodology chapter explains that this setting has a strong ethos for following children's curiosities, however in doing so in this vignette of play, challenges are presented in focusing the children's attention on conversations for exploring thoughts about contexts associated with ethnicity.

*Summary of recorded footage*

Primarily focused on connecting children’s learning in the setting with externally encountered lived experiences, the children are encouraged to collect artefacts from the sounding environment. The practitioner then asks the children to bring their chosen artefacts to the table so that they can all engage in a tea party.

Example 2

*Extract from transcript - Vignette 4.4*

In this play experiences whilst the focus is on foods eaten in the home. All four children use the sociodramatic nature of play to engage in their own immediate interests rather than focusing on the practitioner planned

Findings reveal exchanges focused on physical appearance (Fay and Edie), whilst the task of making and the task of making pasta peaks the interest of Freddy and Jake. Sustained bonds of *friendship* and support very evident in this group.



Findings reveal the activity above had elements where the focus children did engage in dialogue relevant to constructs about identity and ethnicity. However, the lack of culturally appropriate resources meant opportunities for the co-construction of sustained shared thinking was limited. Instead, the focus children engaged in deflection strategies to avert questioning about the Caribbean or African foods eaten at home. Interestingly the children were happy to discuss commonly eaten foods such as cheesy beans and pasta. Quite rightly, the children drew on their own ‘beliefs’ about their favourite foods. Without the appropriate resources to extend conversation about culturally relevant foods, for example yam and plantain (known to Fay and Freddy) opportunities to extend learning and draw on existing experiences that the children may have encountered with these foods was lost. A consequence this session was ended quite quickly because the children became bored. Ultimately the data in this vignette did not yield salient emergent discoveries surrounding ethnic identity constructs from the children.

**7.7 Summary**

Understanding the social constructs of how ethnic identity is developed with the use of resources is not apparent in the findings. Observed in the analysis of the data are mitigating circumstances that undermine the children’s ability to negotiate and mediate new understandings about what mixed ethnicity means to them. Consideration of the analysed data presents findings that highlight the views/beliefs of the children appear to predominantly stem from the influence of peer interaction; where participation with culturally appropriate resources enhances the children’s ability to connect with existing knowledge about ethnic identity constructs. The influence of pedagogic actions that make use of the

resources to facilitate the children's learning is less obvious in the sources of data. Where pedagogic action is prevalent in the discussed vignettes, influence appears to be focused on inducing behaviours associated with kindness rather than action for scaffolding conversation to extend and elicit new ways of ascribing meaning to previous existing knowledge.

Tentatively offered are interpretations that pedagogical actions (dialogue, skills, knowledge) do not provide prompts to elicit or challenge co-construction of deeper meaning making that may serve as a source of provocation for determining the influences on the focus children's responses. Findings for revealing the influence of pedagogic action is explored and discussed in more depth now.

#### **7.8 Theme 4: Pedagogical action**

This section draws upon examples from the study to discuss the key influences of pedagogic action that influence and facilitate the children's ability to connect with and name preferences about ethnicity. Considered in the subtheme, *Adapt and facilitate learning to meet the needs of the children*, are ideas about how complex processes of play pedagogy accommodate co-construction of self-identity. Vignettes from the play activities are examined to elicit findings about how pedagogical dialogue and questioning is used by the practitioners to stimulate responses from externally encountered experiences amongst the focus children. At times focus on the data centres on the adult directed instructions that are used in the interactions between practitioners and children. Endeavours are made here to expose whether contexts for co-constructing ethnic identity are enabled or marginalised by pedagogic action. Examined are ideas taken from Rodriguez (2013) who examined movement away from ideas of culture as a unifying construct towards exploration concerned with how practitioner agency and power acts to influence pedagogical actions in learning experiences. Opportunities to deliberate tensions experienced between the researcher and a practitioner are therefore incorporated within the findings of this chapter.

As outlined in Chapter 1, afforded here is the opportunity for the black female researcher to give due attention to events that affected the research process. The intention is to present findings that name and validate "one's own reality" (Ladson-Billings, 1998: 14) without the claims being viewed as threatening (Hill Collins, 1990). Situated around ideas associated with Bourdieu's notions of 'cultural capital', I consider these experiences to be salient for sharing the challenges I encountered; the impact of what I hope was the unintended consequences of engaging in participatory research relating to 'ethnicity' and 'race'; and the resultant perspective that one can never truly be an insider when participating in research.

Events that affected the research process of data collection are discussed at the end of the chapter.

## **7.9 Subtheme: Adapt and facilitate learning to meet the needs of the children**

Discussion in the following sections draw on three examples from the analysed vignettes. Discussion here is presented in two parts; how play pedagogy accommodates co-construction of ethnic identity and examples of pedagogical dialogue and questioning that serve to influence co-construction of perspectives surrounding mixed ethnicity.

### **7.9.1 How play pedagogy accommodates co-construction of ethnic identity**

Data shows the unique and individual ways in which the practitioners work with the children in this setting. Starting with Leah; from the outset it must be recognised that Leah is known to the children extremely well. Corroborating with thoughts expressed in the interview phase of the study, Leah is particularly attuned to the individual interests of the children. Observation of her pedagogy demonstrates that she likes to engage in activities drawing on her belief that every culture is different, but it is also possible to find similarities. It is evident in the data that Leah likes to recount her own cultural experiences in Spain, in her conversations with the children. Vignette four is a typical example where Leah attempts to adapt the activity by speaking about the favourite foods she enjoyed eating with her grandmother in Spain. The aim here was to prompt the children's thoughts about the cultural foods they enjoy eating with their family. Without cultural awareness of Caribbean and African foods however Leah finds it challenging to maintain sustained interest or to explore possibilities for extending play with the children's self-selected resources. Although attempts are made to bring the children back on task, the session is quickly ended because the children continually move away to select resources for their tea party. Correlating with the theme resources; this example demonstrates complexities in following children's interests whilst endeavouring to utilise play pedagogy for eliciting children's funds of knowledge about their ethnicity. Without culturally appropriate resources (actual foods or at the least pictures of the foods) it proves difficult to garner new understandings for the study.

Learning from the complexity of using freely chosen resources in the learning experiences, skin-coloured paints are introduced in activity two, to encourage the children to paint pictures of each other. The children are helped through pedagogic practice using dialogic conversations to see the ways in which their identity and cultures are similar and different. Confined to generic terminology in free play all the children do express ideas about their skin colour easily. For example, Fay and Freddy make use of the term 'black' and 'light brown' interchangeably to describe themselves and their family members, whilst Jake is

happy to express his perspectives about his ethnic identity being 'white'. Jake's view (captured below) about his own ethnic identity is made visible because he explains that there "isn't any white paint, only pink paint", which as far as he is concerned is not the correct colour. Further evidence can be seen in the children's attempts to mix the paints to a colour appropriate for use in their paintings of each other.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>Activity 2 (part 3) - Painting each other<br/>Vignette 8<br/> <b>Researcher:</b> does that look like you Jake?<br/> <b>Jake:</b> <i>No I'm white (critical incident)</i><br/> <b>Researcher:</b> <i>You're white</i><br/> <b>Jake:</b> <i>White</i><br/> <b>Researcher:</b> Is there a white colour<br/> <b>Jake:</b> <i>White, there's none - points to the paint pallet, shaking his whole body and head.</i><br/> <b>Leah:</b> <i>no it's pink but not white, oh well.</i><br/> <b>Researcher:</b> <i>Would pink do J?</i></p>   |  |
| <p><b>Leah's practitioner journal entry:</b><br/> <b>How did it go?</b><br/>         I think it went fine, but that the children were a bit agitated, so it was a quick session.<br/> <b>What were my thoughts and feelings?</b><br/>         I was very curious about how the children will compare themselves with their own families, and what would they say and feel.<br/> <b>What have I learnt?</b><br/>         I've learnt how to ask to the children better, so they can explain what the really want to say.<br/> <b>What would I do differently?</b><br/>         I will suggest some activity if I see the children are not engaged in the session.<br/> <b>Have I learnt anything about myself?</b><br/> <i>That now I see things with other perspective, as where I live now there's so many more cultures.</i><br/> <b>How can I use the experiences in the future?</b><br/>         I can use it in my daily practice, in the way I try to communicate.</p> |  |

Play pedagogy can be seen here to accommodate co-construction of ethnic identity, Jake uses agentic ways to appropriate with societal notions that his ethnicity is 'white'. In this critical incident in play, it is plausible to argue that Jake could be conveying thoughts associated with constructs negotiated with encounters experienced outside of the nursery environment. Understanding that individuals have different origins and/or ethnicities is also illuminated in this response. Jake refers to there being no white paint in the learning experience. Displaying complete indifference, he does not consider the pink paint appropriate for Edie to use.

Moving forward, discussion focuses on contrasting approaches in the pedagogic practice used with the focus children. The aim being to guide understanding about how differing play pedagogies serve to accommodate co-construction of ethnic identity. Centred on one activity that produced five vignettes of rich data focus turns to Amanda's pedagogic practice. Pausing momentarily, it is important to note before discussing the findings in data that Amanda's role is peripatetic in nature, in so much as her pedagogic practice is focused on making sure staff are supporting the 'everyday experiences of capturing the children's 'fascinations' across the whole nursery learning environment.

After reviewing Leah's activity (discussed above), where the children were encouraged to paint pictures of each other to explore the ways in which their identity and cultures are similar and different, Amanda decided to extend the learning experience outside of the agreed research process. In this adult directed play activity, the children are provided with specific instructions on how to develop their self-portraits. The activity is undertaken one child at a time, where each child is directed to produce their self-portrait using only one finger. Each child is instructed to clean their finger after each use of the paint before they are encouraged to choose a different coloured paint. The learning experience is twenty minutes in duration.

Although I was not present in this activity, analysis of the approach used shows pedagogic skills of interaction where co-construction of ethnic identity is facilitated by encouraging the children to share their ideas about each focus child's developing portraits. Findings highlight all the focus children are highly capable of defining characteristics associated with their ethnic identity, as well as that of their peers and family members. Paraphrasing the children's responses accommodates the shared terminology that is heard and discussed. I do not go into detail about the terms that are expressed that are used by the Amanda, as examples are evidenced in Chapter 6, again demonstrating the interrelated nature of the findings. Similarly, focus on pedagogical dialogue as well as the questioning used in these vignettes is discussed in more depth later.

What is significant is it is difficult to gauge how play pedagogy accommodated the needs of each individual child. What appeared to be missing is pedagogic discourse for deeper extended learning with the children, to explore more complex ethnic constructs. As a researcher it is easy to review recordings and make decisions (as an outsider) about the practitioner competencies for developing constructs about ethnic identity and to offer a narrative that would make pedagogical actions and decisions appear superficial in nature.

Acknowledged instead is the idea that in everyday practice 'snapshot' assessments are constantly being made surrounding curriculum driven outcomes. What could reasonably be questioned is practitioner skill and capability for making judgments about children's level of attainment surrounding understanding about ethnic and cultural similarities and differences. Particularly when there are no apparent guidelines within Development Matters (DfE, 2012) for example to make the pedagogue question their skills to develop/extend the children's knowledge beyond what they already know. Interestingly, Leah is seen to reflect on the concerns raised in her reflective journal, where she questions her knowledge about differing cultures and her changing perspectives surrounding children's capacity for engaging in constructs associated with ethnicity.

Taken together, what is emphasised in the emergent findings is play pedagogy has the potential to accommodate co-construction of ethnic identity, particularly where findings in the data demonstrates that the children are sensitive to skin colour identities. What is emphasised in the findings are the focus children make use of terminology associated with ethnic categorisations interchangeably, where the mixed ethnic child makes specific reference to similar and differing shades of 'brown'. Interestingly these ideas are shared by the children without prompts from the practitioners or the researcher. Findings also highlight that the children's responses must have been learned in externally encountered experiences within the immediate family or wider community because there is limited if no evidence to suggest that interpretations have been learned in the co-construction of shared experiences with the practitioners. How these terms have been learnt is uncertain within the scope of the study.

Scrutiny of the approaches used by both the practitioners provide limited indication about how co-construction of ethnic identity is being facilitated beyond what the children already know. In other words, there is little sense of how the practitioner's own knowledge and awareness of differing cultural and ethnic groupings is being used. Approaches are centred on familial practice about similarity and difference in ethnicity from known societal groupings. There is a gap between the practitioner's knowledge and what the child knows about ethnicity and culture attributed to biracial groupings. The social structures of pedagogical action appear to be constraining the contributions offered by the children due to the challenging nature of exploring constructs surrounding ethnic identity, particularly when Amanda provides such adult directed instructions to the children.

### **7.9.2 Examples of pedagogical dialogue and questioning**

Taken from two vignette of play, discussion focuses on how dialogue and questioning provided a stimulus for prompting the children's perspectives. Vignette one provides rich evidence of how Leah's dialogue supports the children to connect with their understanding about familial individual's, i.e., family members, visits to the care home, past family celebrations and relationships centred of friendship in the setting. However, challenges exist in the expertise of the practitioner's pedagogic skills in scaffolding deeper connections to help the children to move beyond what they already know from their existing FOK. The vignette highlights that there are limited opportunities used to explore deeper development of conceptual knowledge about ethnicity. Play pedagogy via conversation shows high level interaction between the practitioner and the children, however interpretation of insights into the children's understanding as they connect with constructs about ethnic identity are very limited.

Review of dialogic conversation between Leah and myself following play activities with the children elicit thoughts from Leah that a worthy of further consideration. Being highly reflective, Leah explains the children like to ‘play’ with her, and so will not respond to the questions she asks them. Whereas they will respond to Amanda’s questions about her activity. In the research field notes commentary reflects on the perceived complexities surrounding agentic power between the practitioners because of their differing positions in the nursery:

### **Field Notes**

**Researcher Journal entry:** Meeting Main Study: Dialogic Conversation with Leah and children; Reflection of Play Activities (5, 6, 7) - 24.1.18 at 2pm

*Looking at Pictures of Family and friends in the care home using the camera case – Activity 7 (part 1)*

#### Reflective thoughts

- Very challenging for a practitioner to pick up and extend an activity that they were not engaged in. Clear there hasn’t been any form of handover so that the children can scaffold their earlier learning experience.
- Very challenging to listen to and to manage behaviour with only one practitioner present. The children’s thoughts move on so quickly; it is challenging for the Leah to keep up with the children’s thinking.
- Lots of focused attention but low levels of engagement.

The second example provides a rich indication of the types of questions used with the children to elicit their responses. Vignette fifteen provides rich evidence of the pedagogic questions used by Amanda to elicit the children’s ideas about constructs associated with ethnicity:

### **Vignette: 15**

**Activity 4:** Freddy paints a self-portrait with Amanda

#### Pedagogic questioning types used

- Jake do you think that’s the right colour that Freddy is using? (**recall**)
- Oh I don’t think you’ve even looked. So do you want to have a look? (**direct**)
- Oh he’s using a similar colour to what you used. It is isn’t it? (**Probing**)
- *It is like yours*
- Do you think Fr that your skin colour is a bit similar to Fa? (**Open**)
- K... looks like you. Does your mummy have the same skin colour as you? (**probing**)
- he does have black skin doesn’t he? Erm and what about..... (**Affirming thought**)
- I think that’s awesome to be honest kid (**praise**)
- Oh J that’s really kind of you. I’m really proud of you all. (**praise**)
- Now then we have done Fr face. Hmmm shall we do his hair? Now who’s got hair like Fr? (**direct**)
- Fa must have pointed or gestured to herself because Amanda says, Fa you think do you? (**probing**)
- I don’t think Fr agrees with that (**implicit/interpretive**)
- it is isn’t it a bit like yours? (**Affirming thought**)

Findings show that Amanda makes use of the children's interaction to explore the children's thoughts. Her skilful use of question types acts as a stimulus to encourage dialogue and to maintain sustained thinking amongst all the children. With some provocation to elicit ideas, a rich exchange of dialogue is heard between the focus children, (see Chapter 6, sections 6.3.1 and 6.4.2), not only about how they perceive their ethnic identity, but also seen are expressed views about their family members. Jake, Freddy and Fay (including Edie) exhibit a strong sense of cultural understanding about skin colour difference. Discussion to explore how, where and why they have come to formulate these judgments is not particularly apparent. However questioning techniques deployed by Amanda is seen to influence the focus children's preferences for the terms highlighted here:

- 'light brown' (used to define self)
- 'dark brown skin' (used by Freddy to describe his mother)
- 'well I've got a sort of white colour' (used by Jake to describe self)
- 'but my mummy's got white colour' (used by Jake to describe his mother)
- 'My daddy got black like' ...*doesn't finish her sentence* (used by Fay to describe her father)  
V15.2, V15.3.

Even when Amanda questions Edie about other members of her family, Edie's responds, and then totally unprompted Jake offers his thoughts about his father ethnic identity:

- Oh he's got, he's got black skin, the same as Freddy's mummy (Jake shares his thoughts with Fay about his Father).

Jake appears to be mediating ideas surrounding similarity in ethnicities of his father, Fay's father and Freddy's mother to make sense of the social constructs surrounding the term 'black'. This vignette exemplifies how questioning in play, interaction and socialisation skills of interaction are used as tools for encouraging expression and thinking (FOK) about a sense of self, as well as how these ideas correlate with perceptions about the ethnic identity of family and peers.

Mentioned previously, discussion is not apparent surrounding opportunities to explore how, where and why the children have formulated these judgments. Instead, the viewpoints of the children are accepted as given, with limited challenge by the practitioner. Criticism is not levied here, instead recognised is the challenge of managing the dynamics of a group of children, focusing on the development of the activity (in this instance Freddy's self-portrait), as well as supporting Freddy's sense of self, wellbeing and belonging. Pedagogic action in this activity involved deploying a complex set of skills. Overriding the purpose of the study, Amanda's pedagogy rightly provides lots of praise and encouragement, so that

Freddy is confident to provide his views. Freddy's stammer is present during this learning experience, so Amanda offers empathy in her actions by using different types of questioning to encourage Freddy to share his ideas. The same questioning skills are used to encourage peer support.

### **7.10 Summary**

In summarising how pedagogic actions are adapted to meet the needs of mixed ethnic children the subthemes of *how play pedagogy accommodates co-construction of ethnic identity* and *pedagogic dialogue and questioning* have been explored in the analysed data. Examples used throughout the chapter so far reveal the unique and individual ways in which the practitioners work with the children in this setting.

Accepted in the findings is agreement that all the children are comfortable to discuss and challenge knowledge about how they perceive their own ethnic identity as well as the ethnic identities of their peers and family members. Although different approaches are used by the practitioners; play pedagogy can be seen to accommodate co-construction of ethnic identity with children. Data demonstrates the children are particularly sensitive to identifying with skin colour differentials. What is significant in the findings is the mixed ethnic child makes use of terminology associated with ethnic categorisations interchangeably, where these children make specific reference to similar and differing shades of 'brown' to describe ethnicity.

However, opportunities for providing space in which the children can either reaffirm understanding between existing classifications of 'black' 'white' and 'brown' to describe skin being appropriately associated with adult constructs are not explored in the language used with either practitioner. The children's latitude to make sense of, refine, or extend ideas about the interchangeable use of these terms has not extended in any of the play experiences. Although culturally appropriate resources (skin-coloured paints and mirrors) are introduced into the play environment, scrutiny of the approaches used by both the practitioners provide limited indication about how co-construction of ethnic identity is being facilitated beyond what the children already know.

Pertinent to these discussions, examination of the physical environment does not represent multiculturalism. Missing in the *physical space* are any multicultural images or artefacts that are representational of the diversity of the children attending the setting. Claimed is a view that if the physical environment of nursery settings does not represent the diversity of the children opportunities for exploration about identity give way to what can be perceived as a relative '*silencing*' around the topic of ethnic diversity. This silence extends to the planned

learning experiences as well as the spontaneous conversations in both the training and classroom environments of the setting.

That said, it is recognised that dialogic conversations and pedagogic skills using effective questioning types do provide a degree of stimulus for prompting the children's perceptions in these learning activities. Similarly, practitioner discourse offers lots of praise to encourage the children's participation, praise is reinforced on many occasions by paraphrasing the terminology used by the children. Pedagogic action does ensure the purpose of the play experiences is directed and maintains a focus on exploring ethnicity and cultural understanding of self, however practitioner discursive dialogue accompanying the children's responses in the learning experiences appears to be underdeveloped. Concurring with studies of Han, West-Olatunji and Thomas (2011) the emergent themes only display limited cross-racial/cultural awareness (particularly on a personal level), where practitioner perspectives appear to be drawn from views learnt from practice with other colleagues.

Although all the children clearly express views surrounding ethnic identity, what is emphasised is pedagogic actions do not scaffold ideas to support the children to fully articulate their position regarding a mixed ethnicity. Positioned here are thoughts that the skill of the practitioners does not help the children to expand their thinking beyond the limits of their own understanding to co-construct new ways of thinking about a mixed ethnic identity. The themes discussed in this chapter highlight limited practitioner awareness of the impact of their own identity in teaching young children. Only Leah shows understanding of the need for skill, competence and awareness about ethnic and cultural status is needed, in her reflective journal entry in Vignette 8; Activity 2 (part 3).

Reflection of the follow up conversation with the practitioners on 16.3.18 interestingly exposes contrasting evidence to Leah's understanding about competence and awareness about cultural awareness. Presented is conflict between Amanda's philosophic thoughts about her pedagogy and her practice. Articulated is a stance that the children's agency dominates; and is reflected in her own pedagogy. Amanda also contends her philosophical views provided the rationale for undertaking the adult directed approach used and the length of time taken to undertake the self-portrait activity with the children discussed earlier in this chapter.

I positioned at the beginning of the section: pedagogic action, that opportunities to deliberate the tensions experienced between the researcher and a practitioner would be incorporated within discussion to give due regard to events that affected the research process. The reader is politely asked to consider the presented claims as being salient for sharing: the challenges encountered whilst undertaking this inquiry; and the impact of what

I hope was the unintended consequences of engaging in participatory research relating to 'ethnicity' and 'race'. Presented next is discussion concerned with how practitioner agency and power acted to influence pedagogical actions, as well as the decisions that influenced and shaped the resultant progression of this research inquiry.

### **7.11 Practitioner/researcher positioning and its influence on the research process**

Introduction of this thesis made a bold announcement to situate myself as a 'black female researcher' to make clear how being a woman of colour has shaped the decision-making processes throughout this inquiry. Not knowing the direction this research inquiry would take, I was open to recognising the importance in exercising a degree of flexibility in the judgments being made from observed actions. However, I did not fully comprehend the difficulties I would encounter during the inquiry, nor did I think about the impact my identity as a black female researcher would have on the nature of the experiences I would have when working with participants.

Chapter 4 presents an explanation about research methods appertaining to the scheduling of agreed activities that became more and more disrupted by the owner of the setting. In terms of practitioner/researcher positioning, Appendix 6 focuses on three incidents in the data collection phase that became significantly heightened in terms of pedagogic actions and the reflective dialogic conversations between the researcher and practitioner.

Ladson Billing (1998) advises naming one's reality involves paying attention to incidents or events that affect the researcher. I therefore make use of researcher field notes and dialogic conversations following the learning experiences to present these incidents. The purpose of which is to illuminate the tensions experienced between myself and one practitioner; the agentic influence of senior practitioner; as well as highlighting debate surrounding the persistence of negotiating insider/outsider status. I do not present them here to ensure that this chapter solely focus on practitioner perspectives that respond to how pedagogic actions and resources influence co-construction of perspectives about ethnic identity.

Invalidation of the PhD field work not only undermined researcher confidence and the contributions offered by the children, but also prevented the transition of fittingly ending the field work with the children. Helpful conversations with research supervisors supported the strategy of undertaking focused interviews with the nursery manager and parents, which for the researcher process seem like an appropriate approach for professionally exiting the field.

### **7.11.1 Summary**

Exposing narratives pertaining to pedagogy and its power/resistance/impact on the research process has hopefully facilitated some degree of understanding from the position of the researcher. Certainly, encounters with senior practitioner perspectives throughout the data collection phase caused me to seriously reconsider my researcher status. This involved significant amounts of time reflecting on research processes, member checking, and compiling thorough field notes. I tentatively question whether these incidents, that served to devalue and undermine research process, would have been afforded to a 'white' researcher? On a positive note, the events detailed in these incidents make explicit the experiences that have affected me as a black academic researcher. Opening possibilities that give due attention to naming events that affected the research process Ladson Billing (1998) have been helpful. Utilisation of a counter narrative to scrutinise hidden feelings as well as opportunity to analyse my research experiences from an outsider-within perspective (Hill Collins, 1990) have been cathartic.

### **7.12 Chapter conclusion**

Findings in Chapter 6 showed how through the process of social interaction practitioners can leverage children's knowledge in co-constructing their perceptions about ethnic identity. More significantly discussion in Chapter 6 explained children do differentiate between pedagogical cues to identify actions that are meant for them. Discussion highlights young children will also selectively apply intentions they deem as irrelevant or incidental Butler and Markman (2014). This chapter aimed to provide contextual understanding about the emergent perspectives of the practitioners that engaged in cultural activities associated with not just their own but the ethnic identities of the children. Perceived as being inextricably linked the chapter has presented and discussed examples of the artefacts used alongside pedagogic actions in the study.

Recognising that adult-child interactions actions could be viewed as being implicit in nature, it is important to also acknowledge that children need to not only recognise cues and navigate the intentions meant behind a pedagogical interaction, but they also need to be supported to sort out which are moments for teaching and hence learning. Consideration of the analysed data presents findings that highlight the views/beliefs of the children appear to predominantly stem from the influence of peer interaction, where participation with culturally appropriate resources enhance the children's ability to connect with existing knowledge about ethnic identity construct. The influence of pedagogic actions that make use of the resources to facilitate the children's learning is less obvious in the sources of data. Examples provide insight where resources clearly do not support the purpose of the

learning experience e.g., Activity 7, vignette 2, Tango story book; a small penguin and egg artefact where the purpose of the experience was to facilitate children's existing understandings of self, family and peers in terms of ethnic groupings or cultural encounters in the home environment.

What is significant in the findings are ideas that culturally appropriate resources can act as powerful tools for engaging young children in explorations about how they choose to engage with resources to categorise their mixed ethnicity and shared cultural understandings. Findings provide insight into the complexities of using artefacts as a stimulus for purposeful learning alongside pedagogic actions. Concurring with research literature (Milner, 1983), the presented examples reinforce arguments that the significance of cultural resources used by practitioners cannot be underestimated, because children are seen to attach meaning from the types of resources provided in the educational environment.

Contended as being inextricably linked, play pedagogy has been explored, where differing approaches by the two practitioners have been examined. Although different approaches are used by the practitioners; play pedagogy can be seen to accommodate co-construction of ethnic identity with children. Findings illustrate the children are particularly sensitive to identifying with skin colour differentials. What is significant in the findings is the mixed ethnic children make use of terminology associated with ethnic categorisations interchangeably, where these children make specific reference to similar and differing shades of 'brown' to describe ethnicity. Interestingly these ideas are shared by the children without prompts from the practitioners or the researcher.

Opportunities for providing space in which the children can either reaffirm understanding between existing classifications of 'black' 'white' and 'brown' to describe skin being appropriately associated with adult constructs are not explored in the language used by either practitioner. The children's latitude to make sense of, refine, or extend ideas about the interchangeable use of these terms has not been extended in any of the play experience. Although culturally appropriate resources are introduced into the play environment, scrutiny of the approaches used by both the practitioners provide limited indication about how co-construction of ethnic identity is being facilitated beyond what the children already know. Findings suggest the children's responses must have been learned in externally encountered experiences within the immediate family or wider community. How these terms have been learnt is uncertain within the scope of the study.

It is recognised that challenge and complexity exist beyond simplistic notions that pedagogic action and culturally appropriate resources have the potential for engaging young children in explorations about how they choose to co-construct and categorise meaning about their

mixed ethnicity. Chesworth helpfully contends policy structures create challenges for practitioners in understanding diverse sociocultural practices that children will bring to their play activities. In agreement with Chesworth (2016: 305) interpretations of play are governed by curriculum frameworks that “privilege universal, individualised learning intentions over every day lived experiences of children”.

Contended is a view that what is missing are interpretations of play pedagogy that incorporate children’s ethnic and cultural funds of knowledge. These rich sources have the potential for offering an alternative lens in which practitioners can interpret children’s play, reflect on their practice and transform pedagogical practice rather than delivering provision that serves to privilege certain interests over others. Again, Chesworth (2016: 297) helpfully offers sociocultural perspectives help practitioners to obtain deeper knowledge and understanding of the “whole child”.

Views offered here are supportive in counteracting deficit models of ethnic and cultural knowledge. Taken together what is emphasised in the emergent findings in this chapter is children’s existing funds of knowledge, play pedagogy and culturally appropriate resources have significant potential for accommodating co-construction of ethnic identity. However, recommendation from summarising the findings is all three must connect, otherwise children will mediate/manipulate play to create their own narratives. Narratives that feasibly mirror the dominant and normalised ethnic identity and cultural ways of being within the early years setting.

In drawing this chapter to a close, appreciation is given to the affordance of an opportunity to define my reality in a way that I hope gives voice to what is often experienced, internalised, and goes unsaid for black women researchers. Discourse surrounding black feminism was critical for presenting reflective thoughts through the three incidents presented in Appendix 6. Brought to academic debate are issues that served to ignore, devalue and undermine researcher confidence in carefully designed research methods. Methods that centralised the children’s and practitioner’s welfare as research participants. Whether conscious or unconscious bias existed in the pedagogic actions that ensued, light has been shone on some of the tensions that affected the research process. It is hoped that the reader considers a firm rejection of notions that affirm and give value to insider/outsider positioning. Instead, endeavours have been made to offer reflective thoughts for enhancing understanding of the findings surrounding the influence of pedagogic actions between practitioner/children, senior practitioner/practitioner and practitioner/researcher relations in the data collection phase of the study.

The concluding chapter brings these voices together to consider their contribution to the research questions.



## Chapter 8: Discussion

### 8.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 defined my justification for undertaking this study, whilst the review of literature chapters presented explanations in research to frame the research problem. One of which stems from mandates in EYFS, (2017), where practitioners are directed to support children to develop positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusion. This study argues inadequacies exist in implementation, insomuch as practice tends to witness planning couched in 'cultural celebrations' in early years settings. In support arguments in literature offered this practice could be due to practitioners having "different understandings of central concepts such as culture, ethnicity, equity and participation" (Buchori & Dobinson, 2015: 72).

In such contexts of differing understandings, it was reasoned that young children could conceivably be viewed as being immersed in the culture of the setting. Early ideas about limitations in pedagogic practice stemmed from debates that report on the influence of government ideology perpetuating the stereotype of the nursery practitioner, as being low in skills and knowledge' and therefore in need of up-skilling (Baldock et al., 2009). Similarly, Konstantoni (2013) observations of adult interactions indicated a lack of confidence in tackling narratives associated with 'race' amongst children. Drawing on these arguments, scholarly debate supported contentions that the early years practitioner could be plausibly perceived as not being culturally sensitive because of teaching approaches that appear to adopt a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to pedagogy. Particularly where individuals may be assigned assumed shared characteristics when practitioners exchange best practice, resources, celebrations and experiences with children who have a mixture of more than one or two cultural heritages.

This study positioned an idea that children's individual rights to express opinions associated with their developing ethnic identities may be limited. I also suggested that there may well be limitations in young children's ability to express their emergent ethnic identities because their ability to do so may be hindered by the practitioner who makes "use of their own realities of the dominant culture to determine what belongs and what does not belong" (Buchori & Dobinson, 2015: 76) in the early years educational environment. Suggestions in research offer the educator may inadvertently forget to acknowledge the culture and traditions of different children, whilst at the same time knowingly or involuntarily revealing their identities to the children (Derman-Sparks and Edwards, 2010; Han et al., 2011) they are working with.

Funds of knowledge theory was therefore well-suited to make sense of the complex ways in which young mixed ethnic children choose to (or possibly not) express their thoughts about their own sense of self in terms of their ethnic origin. From the start this study has been committed to using methodologies and evaluation that serve to position the perspectives of the children at the heart of the inquiry. Embracing approaches advocated by Bertram and Pascal (2012) methods for authentically and ethically acknowledging children as 'active partners' in research processes has been key throughout this study.

With these thoughts in mind, this chapter brings together perspectives from the research participants to consider their contribution to the research questions which are set within the parameters of this inquiry. In my evaluations I take the position of interpretivism to consider the merits of this body of work and am charged with presenting informed decisions using a sociocultural lens to inform new ways of knowing that enhance and transform principal models of pedagogical understanding about ethnic identity within early years curricula. The basis of my inferences, whilst acknowledging historical concepts are grounded in sociological and psychological theory to inform perspectives surrounding a mixed ethnic identity.

### **8.1.1 Orienting potential audiences**

Acknowledging advice that good case study design should consider intended audiences rather than making the error of composing discussion from an egocentric perspective (Yin, 2018), the emergent theorisation presented in this chapter is initially intended for my doctoral supervisors and thesis committee. It then addresses audiences whose research interests lie in studies concerning ethnic identity formation in early childhood. Audiences include academic colleagues interested in social science research, policy makers and special interest groups such as early years professionals.

Discussion in the subsequent sections will be enhanced by a balanced explanation from the thematic analysis of data as well as findings identified in the review of literature. The purpose of which is to contribute towards developing effective early years provision and pedagogy that values and gives voice to mixed ethnic learners identity formation.

### **8.2 How the chapter is organised**

Taylor (2010) reminds the researcher to be mindful of conceptualisations when endeavouring to contribute and advance social change in research, so whilst the chapter commences by addressing each research question in turn, it is acknowledged that in an endeavour to produce knowledge, presentation of my findings can only ever be viewed as

being partial and context dependent. It is therefore important to stress that claims to universal truth are not made in this chapter. Instead, the reader is reminded that the arguments presented in the subsequent sections are intended to be used to generate discussion points about how this group of children view their mixed ethnic identity and the identity of their peers participating in the inquiry.

Similarly, the intention of this study is to act as points for professional deliberation about the choice of pedagogic practice and resources that are used to ensure inclusivity for these groupings in early years educational settings. I reiterate again an acceptance that inconsistency and potential for incoherence in my claims will exist in the responses to the research questions and the claims made because of the challenges associated with adopting an inclusive and participatory stance with young children and practitioners. By this I offer one example of a challenge that existed with the one of the practitioners, who challenged the purpose of the study. Taking advice from Taylor (2010: 297) that if I challenged '*truths*' behind her behaviours, I would not be able to claim that my findings had confirmable proof. In this way my claims relate more to trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004) rather than proving '*truths*' in my research. For me this meant remaining respectful of the changing responses and perceptions of the practitioner.

The chapter moves on to present new contributions towards funds of knowledge theorisation using the children's perspectives about their diverse ethnic identities. Subsequent sections include my claims relating to the key influences on mixed ethnic children's ability to interact and respond to constructs associated with ethnic identity in the setting. Considered as being interrelated explanations about how my inquiry adds value to existing discourse about the influence of play-based pedagogic approaches on ethnic identity formation are presented. As are contributions about the significance of peer relations, friendship and the use of culturally appropriate resources.

Subsequent sections provide contributions for the implications of my findings on policy and curriculum frameworks such as EYFS (2017) curriculum framework and its associated guidance/handbooks (Development Matters, 2012; EYFS profile: 2020 handbook). I address what opportunities exist in the principal model of the early years foundation stage curriculum for facilitating children's ability to reproduce externally informed understanding about their own mixed ethnic identity. Particularly when confronting underlying attitudes and perceptions about how to support young children's developing ethnic identities and the funds of cultural knowledge they may bring into early childhood educational settings. Rhetoric in educational policy that underpins inclusion and cultural diversity provided a critical standpoint with which to explore how and to what extent issues associated with cultural diversity is engaged with in the context of the early years curriculum.

The chapter culminates with a presentation of the theoretic model illustrated at Figure 1, where my contributions to originality from the findings in this study are provided. Figure 1 is used to illustrate new contributions to theoretical understanding and bodies of work that situate a pedagogy of play and young children’s perspectives about mixed ethnic identity at the heart of their studies.

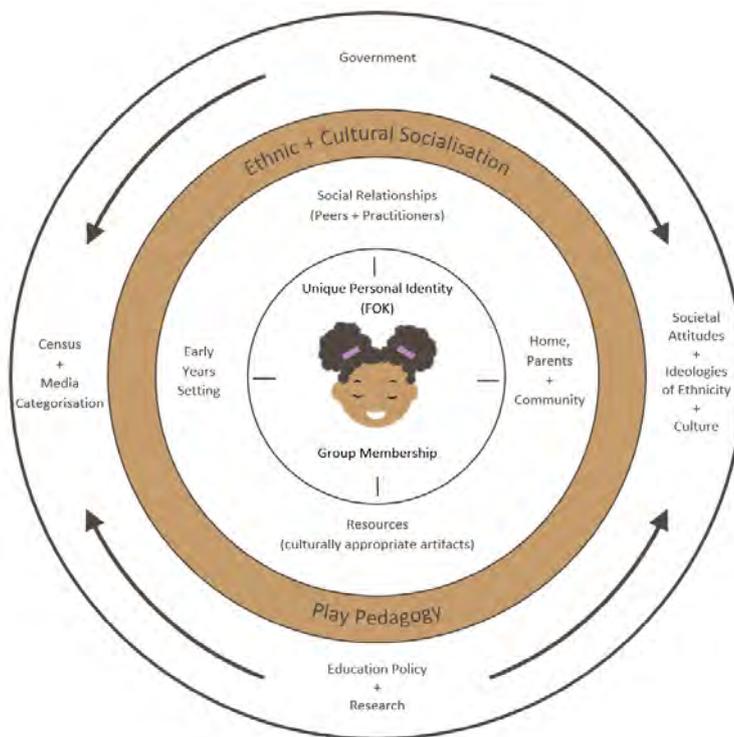


Figure 1 Theoretic model of ethnic identity formation

Outlined is a theoretic model of ethnic identity formation that synthesises established education theory, research in early childhood development, ethnic identity development and socialisation processes. Based on findings from this research study the paradoxical process of developing an individual sense of self is based on group membership and involves external impacts as shown.

Chapter 2 provided an explanation about the process of identity formation in early childhood where identity was described as being “anchored in a web of relationships, group solidarity and communal culture” (Flum and Kaplan, 2012: 240). Discussion outlined difficulty existed in establishing decisive terminology used in the formation of ethnic identity. However, it was proposed that the process of identity formation offered a lens into understanding the nature in which issues are engaged with in early years educational contexts. Similarly, pioneering explanations about the implications that group membership has on an individual’s sense of identity regarding intergroup relationships provided contrasting contexts to explore how young children can furnish a sense of identity (Tajfel, 1979).

Chapter five introduced the themes and subthemes originating from an integrated set of theoretical ideas that emerged from the children's shared actions, responses, and habits of behaviour in their everyday observed experiences. Acknowledging that children do not develop thoughts about ethnicity in isolation, my theoretical conceptualisation build on insights drawn from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory to demonstrate the interplay between the child and the interrelated nature of significant environmental influences. Similarly, the theoretic model utilises Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus to make visible the reproduction of social stratification, and the covert tensions that can and do exist in social relationships.

Connections are made between the emergent themes in chapter 5 and the development of the theoretic model of ethnic identity formation. Figure 1 connects with theme 1 to indicate children's ability to go beyond internalised thoughts to actively sharing ideas about cultural production of knowledge in their everyday 'talk' with peers and practitioners. Influenced by theme 2 the central circle signifies the interrelationship of thought and activity that can transpire in research processes between the child and members of a social group. Figure 1 also makes connections with theme three to situate how resources accommodate young children's ability to mediate with constructs about their own and others' ethnic identity. Particularly how children use materials as tools to connect and reinforce views about learned ethnic groupings. Finally, the theoretic model draws on theme four, pedagogical action and established debates relating to ethnic identity development and socialisation processes to locate how children are supported to explore aspects about themselves that relate to and build on beliefs about ethnic origins.

The following section will now address each research question in turn. To orientate the reader the research questions are:

1. Using the 'voice' of the child, what are the key influences on mixed ethnic children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their ethnic identity in an early years setting?
2. What opportunities exist in the EYFS (2017) policy framework that allow 'mixed ethnic' children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences in their education?
3. How does the implementation of a play-based pedagogical approach provide 'space' for mixed ethnic children to explore their ethnicity?

Great effort is made to follow principles for demonstrating, as authentically as possible, answers to the questions. Endeavours are made to present my theorisations from the perspectives of the children and the practitioners participating in this study, so that readers

may consider the transformational orientation of pedagogical practice (Bertram and Pascal, 2009).

### **8.3 Research Question 1**

*Using the 'voice' of the child, what are the key influences on mixed ethnic children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their ethnic identity in an early years setting?*

The children's funds of knowledge narratives have created perspectives for supporting new terminologies constructed through the lens of this group of mixed ethnic children. Findings provide insight into how children's preferences align with terminology heard in institutional mechanisms such as the ethnic census categorisations (ONS 1991; 2001). They also indicate that this small group of children exhibit a discerning eye for features such as skin, hair and eye colour. The focus children (and especially Edie) exhibit a strong sense of cultural understanding where dialogic conversations between them demonstrate not only how they perceive their own ethnic identity, but also exhibited are opinions about how they perceive the ethnicity of their family members.

Recognising these children are confident, active learners, it is theorised that levels of confidence and wellbeing is a determining factor for signifying how and when the children articulated understandings about matters associated with ethnicity. A positive sense of self and belonging (group membership) is also another contributing factor towards levels of engagement and participation in the study. The significance of group membership and friendship is particularly evident when the mixed ethnicity child is challenged (or 'put on the spot' by peers) to articulate how they choose to identify themselves. Inference pertinent to the influence of peers and friendship is discussed in a later section of this chapter.

#### **8.3.1 Mixed ethnic children's funds of knowledge**

Arguing that the voices of the children is what makes my research innovative, dialogic conversations provide examples of the children's ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs where a strong preference for using the terms *black*, *white*, *light brown* is observed. All the focus children demonstrate that they are capable of expressing views that show a strong sense of cultural understanding aligned with skin colour differentials. An example of the interchangeable nature of preferences ascribed to skin colour is observed when Jake aligns his ethnicity as being 'white'. He then argues his skin tone is a '*whiteish colour*'. Fay on the other hand describes her skin tone with '*black*', where in other play experiences she defines her skin tone as '*light brown*'. It is difficult however to establish whether the term '*light brown*'

or *'whiteish'* as ascribed by Jake and Fay is a new construct established in the process of learning in the setting.

The excerpts evidenced in Chapter 6 highlight in more in-depth descriptions that fit what I want the reader to understand about preferences pertaining to the biracial nature of social features associated with 'race' that appear in the children's narratives. Alternative perspectives provide a counter narrative about young children's ability to share knowledge relating to ethnic identity constructs. Arguments in Park (2011) body of work contend children by nature of their age are egocentric and therefore only have basic understanding about ethnicity based on physical traits.

Although I acknowledge this standpoint that children's inability to engage in ethnic identity formation is predictable given their age and cognitive immaturity, findings in my study are distilled enough to provide illustrative responses surrounding the children's ability to relate and respond to ethnic identity constructs. Focusing on the activity in which Freddy was developing his self-portrait, conversation between the children provoked views/beliefs about each other's ethnicity. Findings confirm the children are not only able to recognise skin colour and ascribe terms to themselves and their peers. They are also able to decode the value attributed to skin colour terminology used in larger societal contexts (Mac Naughton, 2005). To deflect attention away from himself, this example also indicates how Freddy skilfully aligns the skin colour of a member of the local community to move his peers' attention away from himself. Taken from vignette 16.25 the transcription below captures the terminology used:

Extract from transcript: Vignette 16.25

- Responses of children - terminology heard

**Freddy:** *Because I'm black* **Jake:** *It's purple* **Edie:** *I think its white*

**Fay:** *I think it black* **Fay:** *black like me?* **Freddy:** *its, I'm just, I'm just....* **Jake:** *White*

**Freddy:** *No I'm not white I'm, I'm just...* **Jake:** *What colour?* **Freddy:** *I'm light brown*

- Identifies with familial individuals

**Freddy:** *Look that's we, when I meet that lady – points to the picture of a black lady on the wall*

**Amanda:** *can you remember her name?* **Freddy:** *No*

**Amanda:** *Her name was Alison when we went to the care home. We saw some of our friends*

**Jake :** *He's not, He's not Alison*

**Amanda:** *It's Alison, and she's holding a big gold plate Fr is smiling, his arms are more relaxed as he recalls his visit to the care home.*

The above example confirms the children's ability to use the terms 'white' and 'black' to describe skin colour similarities and differences relating to themselves. However, contributing to wider knowledge, I contend that these children are not using these terms in the 'political' sense understood by adults. Instead, I perceive the children are interacting with terminology in an attempt to make sense of the funds of knowledge they already possess from previous externally encountered experiences. Judgments made in my undergraduate studies argued that young children will often express their thoughts obtained from adult contexts when attempting to understand more complex social constructs such as ethnicity and a sense of ethnic self, to understand the world around them (Colilles, 2011). This view is offered because there is limited evidence to demonstrate that the children's descriptions have been influenced by either the verbal or non-verbal cues of the practitioner. Instead extracts such as vignette 16 above demonstrate how the children are adept at exploring racial differences for themselves from messages that may have been previously absorbed in experiences external to the setting.

Viewed as the dominant lead in the play experiences, focus on many occasions' centres on Jake, because his responses for the most part govern many of the emergent responses amongst the children. Vignettes exemplify Jake's use the terms black, white and brown interchangeably. Confirmed is a view that significant evidence exists to indicate that the children's discourse aligns with terminology heard in institutional mechanisms such as the ethnic census categorisations of 'black' and 'white' seen in the Office for National Statistics (ONS 1991; 2001). I make this point to reinforce the position that the terminology used by

the children has been informed by experiences outside of the nursery environment. Throughout all the time spent in the field, practitioners did not refer to ethnic identity categorisations in the day-to-day routine of the setting.

I take Jake's responses to argue that he is drawing on perspectives that have been internalised to inform his current funds of knowledge about variances in skin colour. Awareness that both of Jake's parents are educators, together with evidence from practitioners who advised that Jake's parents articulate thoughts surrounding ethnicity with him, it is plausible to see how Jake can articulate his perspectives so clearly. Jake is a highly curious and explorative child and can share terms learnt from wider influences, such as family, community and even, possibly, media.

In keeping with the purpose of this study, these examples are key in evidencing the interchangeable use of terminology heard in the responses of the children, as well as showcasing the children's capacities for sharing previously constructed discourse from external experiences. Vygotskian notions about children's internalisation of language learnt in interaction with others confirms my viewpoint. Similarly links to research literature that support my claims can be found in Waller et al. (2011) studies, which emphasise children can assert their agency and preferences through expression of ideas in their interactions within their learning environments.

That said, while complexity exists in discovering the most salient terminology aligned to mixed ethnic identity, the children's descriptions in the transcribed vignettes do indicate beneficial evidence for supporting understanding about their sense of a mixed ethnic identity. Aligned with descriptions of themselves preference is shown for the term '*light brown*', which concurs with evidence found in Tizard and Phoenix (1993) research. By interacting in complex cultural tools of thought, the children show that they can transform existing cultural ways of thinking, and independently make use of them for their own purposes (Rogoff, 2003).

Whilst these terms and behaviours allow the children to identify more flexibly with racial categorisation and identification tasks, limitations exist in the interpretation of this evidence, because what is less known are the specifics about how and where the children come to operationalise the co-construction of their 'ethnic' identities in these learning experiences. This could be because although practitioners are able to co-construct meaning where both children and practitioners have similar conceptions about skin colour differentials, I perceive that it would not be developmentally appropriate to use more verbally sophisticated terminology with children of this age. It was important to only elicit the children's naturally occurring internalised conceptualisations in their dialogic conversations.

I also contend the responses provided in supporting children's understanding about (in this instance) skin colour will require skill and a real understanding of children's racial attitude development, (Baldock, 2010). Acknowledged therefore are limitations in providing examples that demonstrate unambiguous understanding and clear definition of a mixed ethnic identity from the perspectives of the children in these narratives.

Advancing discussion to address research question one, the following sections position this study's contributions surrounding the key influences on mixed ethnic children's ability to relate, interact and respond to constructs associated with ethnic identity formation in the early years setting. I commence with the influence of peers and thoughts about the implications of friendship.

### **8.3.2 The influence of peers and friendship on ethnic identity formation**

Knowles and Holstróm (2013) argue that all individuals have an ethnicity, belong to an ethnic group, and have distinctive cultural features that serve to unite them. They also proffer practices that unite groups are the unique customs associated with the group that make them distinct from one another. Examples in Chapter 6 endeavoured to illuminate the deep appreciation that this group of children have for each other's cultural identity and sense of group membership. In comparison, Chapter 2 provided theoretical insight that children like to learn in peer relationships, where research defined peer culture as children sharing in interaction experiences, resources, values and concerns (Corsaro, 2015).

Starting from a viewpoint that all the children show dispositions for displaying significant empathy with each other's ideas. For example, Jake is seen on many occasions to exhibit behaviours that show compassion for his peers by offering praise and encouragement. All the children's narratives highlight a confident use of, as well as a capacity for questioning each other's ideas and responses about ethnic identity. On occasion they would also question ideas where they were previously in agreement. For example, when participating in activity 4 (drawing self and family' painting activity) Jake shouts 'NO' when there is a suggestion that his mother has light '*brown skin*' (his mother's ethnic origin is white). Within this learning experience all the children are confident to challenge each other's views, by pointing out colours not deemed appropriate to their own skin colour, and the skin colour family members.

Peer interaction and the importance of friendships does act as a mechanism by which children share knowledge when co-constructing meaning about their sense of self and others. Illuminated in my findings are the agentic and complex ways in which participatory peer relationships facilitated the children's expressed perceptions associated with their own

ethnicity and the other children in the group. Emerging from the analysis of data is evidence that children will position their own perceived ethnicity in an attempt to validate their own sense of self. Possibly because Jake is the most confident of the focus children, he often displays strong signs of leading the dialogic conversations with thoughts about how he perceives himself as well as strong opinions about his peers' ethnic identity.

Adding value to empirical understanding about peer relationships, my findings confirm the children have evolved beyond the strong emotional bonds established in interaction with parents, where they will through a process of interaction begin to participate in cultural routines outside of their family (Corsaro, 2015). Being extremely observant and having a strong sense of self in peer relationships Freddy is intrigued by others, often questioning differences and sharing similarities. In the vignettes Freddy is observed to highlight children who have hair or skin colour like himself. He describes himself as having "*fabulous black curly hair, like his mummy and baby sister*" to his peers. Freddy's awareness of self and others confirms children's capacities for participating in interaction processes that will illuminate discourse surrounding an ethnic identity.

Compelling insight is also gleaned from the friendship between Fay and Edie. Although not of mixed ethnic origin, Edie's strong sense of self, insightful knowledge about her own and differing ethnicities, and ability for instilling confidence in others to express their developing thoughts about their ethnicity necessitated the inclusion of her contributions within the presented play episodes. Video footage confirms the importance that friendships will have on children's sense of well-being. Instances in the vignette of play highlight that Fay's responses are not always elicited through cues from the practitioner. Instead, they are expressed from Fay's positive sense of self, formed in part with her friendship with Edie. Features of the play that support Fay's contributions are due to the predictable and safe reoccurrence of the activities; being in a familial group; and perceived feelings of security to undertake the set tasks, because she has the support of her peers.

Taking an alternative view, a small body of historic yet important studies considered development of ethnicity in relation to children's friendship. Views advocated children will choose friends with the same skin colour (Finkelstein and Haskins, 1983; Aboud, 2003). Also advocated is a perception that children choose friends with the same skin colour (i.e. what is the same rather than what is the 'other') due to egocentrism in early childhood (Aboud, 2003). This body of work goes on to suggest children's choice for same skin colour is mainly due to the difficulty children have in understanding other perspectives, and so they will show a preference for what is the same. Interestingly positioned are thoughts that children will not only demonstrate a developmental tendency not to engage with difference, they will withdraw from engagement with difference. Comparably, emerging from ideas in

literature are suggestions that children will show a preference for friendships in play with children considered to be from a higher status i.e., 'white' (Leman and Lam, 2008).

Countering these perspectives discoveries in this inquiry, even though small scale in nature, showed that constructs associated with development of ethnicity in relation to children's friendship and perceived social status did not impact on children's social behaviours. Instead, prevalent amongst the group of children is what Barron (2011) describes as fluid aspects of individual and social identity. Through processes rooted in the product of social interaction, contexts associated with peer interaction and friendship were key proponents in eliciting the children's assertions about ethnic identity. These assertions were drawn from their own values and beliefs about what was being discussed within this friendship group. In other words, the interrelated nature of friendship served to facilitate their conversation about ethnic identity constructs.

In summary, my findings confirm that the significance of friendship, group membership and peer interaction elicited the balanced responses evidenced so far. Behaviours amongst the children illustrate empathy, and in most cases an acceptance of the categorisations offered amongst all the children. Also confirmed are preconceptions that position status and hierarchies within peer group relationships do exist (Milner, 1983; Nesdale and Flessler, 2001). It is confirmed that in the process of interaction hierarchies existed in this peer grouping. Illuminated in the children's play repertoires are occurrences that displayed the power and status hierarchies can have in inhibiting other children's ability to share their views. Vignette 16.25, above, is an example where the responses of the children (particularly Jake's responses) serve to 'play down', reposition status, or question Freddy's attempts to share views about how he perceives his skin colour. It must be acknowledged that pedagogic action in these conversations (activity 4, vignette 16, self-portrait) are quite rightly focused on reinforcing children's thinking about kindness and patience to let others speak. In these instances, it is understandable that the children's ideas about ethnicity were negated by the actions of the practitioner, because of the implementation of behaviour management strategies.

Shifts in practice is a significant contributing factor that influenced the children's ability to share their funds of knowledge in these instances. What is emphasised in the children's responses are findings that negate arguments that children are likely to foster a ready acceptance of cultural differences. Instead, interpretation evidence children present ideas that offer self-actualised ideas about a peer's identity, where perspectives appear to align with perceptions of themselves.

### 8.3.3 The key influence of practitioners

Chapter 5 placed an important emphasis on explaining that the themes within this study are overlapping and interdependent of each other. Therefore, to support reader understanding there will be overlap when addressing research question one and three. Discussion below theorises how the practitioners influenced the focus children's ability to relate to and respond to constructs about their ethnic identity. Whereas any overlap surrounding play-based pedagogical approaches will be incorporated in the narrative at section 8.5 of research question three. It is acknowledged that there will be features that do interrelate between the influence of the practitioners' actions in co-constructing knowledge and pedagogic approaches, and so there will be inevitable overlap in the presented narrative. The overriding purpose however is to reveal the interrelated nature of the relationships between the children and practitioners that aim to bring together these varied perspectives to consider their contribution to the research questions.

Chapter 2 positioned a view that understanding the implications of skin colour preferences in supporting biracial children to better recognise social features associated with 'race' or skin tone differences allows them to identify more flexibly in racial categorisation and identification experiences. However, like other examples presented so far, children's internalisation of constructs associated with the appropriation of skin colour are interpreted to have been learnt in externally encountered experiences of participation with parents, family and community.

For the most part, the findings offer little evidence to suggest that the children's perspectives have been co-constructed in the interactions with practitioners. In other words, there is little evidence to demonstrate how the practitioner's own cultural and race knowledge about the children has been utilised in the learning experiences to further develop the children's understanding and attitudes towards culture, race and ethnicity. Transcriptions contain descriptions that evidence-priming mechanisms used to explore preferences amongst the children are somewhat limited.

Taken from the researcher's reflective field journal, the example below supports reader understanding regarding limitations in the practitioner's knowledge about the focus children. Here, Leah shares her concerns about the incomplete nature of her own cultural and raced knowledge about the focus children in the learning experiences.

**Researcher Journal entry: Dialogic Conversation with Leah- 2.2.18 at 2pm about Activities 5 6 7**

Reflecting on the above activities Leah suggests that she tried to make use of her cultural experiences of meals with her family, and her Grandmas cooking to try to get the children to open up about their own lived experiences (*drawing on her own cultural experiences and funds of knowledge*). She was shocked that they did not respond as anticipated. **Researcher:** What other resource could you have used if the children are unable to share knowledge of the foods they eat at home? **Leah:** talks a lot about why she can't understand why the children don't speak about foods other than British foods like fish and chips. My cousins would know the food cooked in the home. *I can't ask the relevant questions because I don't know or have a deep knowledge of the cultural foods the children would eat.* **Researcher:** I ask her if she considered asking the parents. **Leah:** No

We reflect that the children become distracted by playing with the resources particularly Freddy who asked for a vase! Very Cl. **Researcher:** would it have been helpful if you had chosen the appropriate resources and set the activity up before hand? What about your primary school teaching practice? **Leah** explains that she wants to develop her practice with play. *I provide the provocation. Do you believe that an AD activity is still considered as play by the children? Are they not playing?*

It is not possible to say if this interpretation is entirely true, but if this was the case, we could expect to see the practitioner effectively facilitating the exchange of shared cultural understanding from her own, as well as the children's internalised understandings about ethnic identity constructs in the dialogic conversations, which has yet to be observed. My findings concur with ideas found in the review of literature, where Baldock (2010) positions responses provided in supporting children's understanding of for example skin colour requires skill and a real understanding of children's racial attitude development. What still appears to be lesser known is how children who can identify with more than one in-group (for example biracial children) make their preferences known in the co-construction of ethnic identity.

### 8.3.4 Summary

Findings in Chapter 6 have been utilised together with research literature that draws on children's cultural traits (acknowledged as FOK) to establish the key influences that facilitate mixed ethnic children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their ethnic identity in an early years setting. The children's predispositions, interactions and habits of behaviour for expressing thoughts about their ethnic identity and the identity of others have been evaluated to draw on the evidenced responses from previously encountered experiences.

Arguments that are central to my theory identify that this group of children have a strong preference for using the terms *black, white, whiteish, light brown*. Where peer interaction and the importance of friendships acts as a mechanism by which children share knowledge when co-constructing meaning about their sense of self and others. Previous sections

present examples to illustrate the agentic and complex ways in which participatory peer relationships facilitated the children's expressed perceptions about a mixed ethnic identity. Within the scope of this study I position the mixed ethnic children not only demonstrate that they are capable of expressing views that show a strong sense of cultural understanding aligned with skin colour differentials, they also show a demonstrable ability to use ethnic identity terminology interchangeably. Findings also situated that children can evolve beyond the strong emotional bonds established in interaction with parents, where through a process of social interaction they do participate in cultural routines outside of their family (Corsaro, 2015). This chapter has so far presented narrative to evidence how all the children in peer interaction share perspectives about ethnic identity.

Alternative standpoints in literature have suggested that in the development of ethnicity in relation to children's friendship, children will choose friends with the same skin colour (Finkelstein and Haskins, 1983; Aboud, 2003). Comparably, literature also espoused children will show a preference for friendships in play with children considered to be from a higher status i.e. 'white' (Leman and Lam, 2008). A counter narrative to these perspectives highlights ideas associated with development of ethnicity in relation to children's friendship and perceived social status did not impact on the children's social behaviours. In contrast the children displayed behaviours and dispositions of significant empathy and acknowledgment of the categorisations offered. Even if these categorisations were not always accepted. In keeping with established arguments in the review of existing literature, the findings in this study about ethnic identity formation agree with claims appertaining to the malleable nature of identification by mixed ethnic children. There is also agreement about the ability of this group of children to 'shift' between in-groups to others, but this shift is dependent on the contexts in which they find themselves (Gaither and Chen et al, 2014).

## **8.4 Research Question 2**

*What opportunities exist in the early years policy framework (EYFS, 2017) that allow 'mixed ethnic' children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences in their education?*

### **8.4.1 Overview**

Exemplification to Chapter 3 (Appendix 3) introduced the curriculum framework and outlined the policy intentions that created a statutory framework based on a clear statement of what principles should underpin both learning and teaching in relation to equality of opportunity, inclusivity and meeting the diverse needs of children. Discourse also explained difference in policy aims and implementation of inclusive practice presents a problem in terms of the impacts on facilitating learner's identities within early years provision and pedagogy.

Personal social and emotional development (PSED) and understanding the world are areas situated as being central to the focus of this study, because it is where practitioners are mandated to support children's understanding of similarities and difference to self and others, having a positive sense of self, as well as being the areas in which opportunities to explore and offer deeper insight into complexities for facilitating inclusive practice are afforded. At policy level subsequent revisions in the EYFS framework have upheld the relevance of PSED, however omitted from revised curricula documents, until the proposed Early Years Foundation Stage profile: 2020 handbook, (STA, 2010) is the statement that raises practitioners' awareness about a policy commitment for inclusion of all individuals whatever their ethnic background and culture.

Remaining true to the aims and purpose of this inquiry, research question two addresses what opportunities exist in the principal model of this curriculum framework (EYFS, 2017) for facilitating children's ability to reproduce externally informed understanding about their own mixed ethnic identity. The three elements of PSED that have been evaluated within the themes to address existing opportunities that facilitate reproduction of externally encountered cultural experiences are 'self-confidence and self-awareness', 'managing feelings and behaviours' and 'making relationships'. Before I present contributions that respond to research question two, it is important to situate practitioner understanding about inclusion policy and provision.

#### **8.4.2 Practitioner interpretation and understanding of inclusion policy**

Dialogic conversations with the practitioners throughout the process of data collection confirm the group of focus children meet expected learning outcomes in this area (PSED). However, there is evidence in the study's findings to demonstrate that interpretation of curricula guidance is open to the practitioner's own interpretation and implementation in planned learning experiences. Emphasised in the field notes from the dialogic conversation with Amanda and Leah is the complexity and contradictory nature of interpreting and understanding policy guidance. For example, Leah confirms that the children are capable of *'comparing to each other after looking at how they look like'*. She explains they can talk about their families and makes comparisons to themselves, in terms their ability to talk about similarity and differences of hair, lips and eyes. She also advises awareness of cultural differences in attitudes and expectations *'is more an exploration of those notions, they (interpreted as the children) starting to understand it now. In this setting they are beginning to notice the different cultures'*. Whereas Amanda's explanations offer inclusion policies are achieved in the joint collaboration of *'the children, pedagogy, policy'*. She then goes on to describe that collaboration of the three elements of PSED is implemented in the setting in particular *'spaces'* (interpreted to mean the learning environment). Further into this

conversation however, Amanda offers contradictory thoughts, in the example below, when she expresses development of children's cultural attitudes '*comes from the children*':

**Journal notes from dialogic conversation Practitioners:**

Follow up conversation with Amanda on 16.3.18 (self-portrait activity)

**Researcher:** *thinking about inclusion policy and knowing about similarity and difference and the richness of what it told. Which has most agency; the children, pedagogy, policy,*

**Amanda:** *collaboration of all of them, we use them in the mini art studio (situated in the main play room). We've triggered the use of these resources.*

**Researcher:** *Is that something you would have thought of before.*

**Amanda:** *I'd like to say yes but not necessarily no. anything we develop downstairs it comes from the children...*

The above examples confirm problems associated with adult attitudes may still permeate in early years settings, particularly if issues aligned with inequalities due to poor understanding have not been addressed in policy guidance. Findings detailing the practitioners accounts contain descriptions to furnish understanding that policy guidance alone is not enough for facilitating effective inclusive practice. Particularly where there is conflicting practitioner understanding about policies for inclusive provision. what becomes more apparent is the absence of clear policy guidance to support practitioners to navigate the complexity of sociocultural awareness with the children and families that they work with. Moving forward, the next section provides an explanation about what opportunities exist in the early years policy framework that allowed the focus children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences with adults.

#### **8.4.3 Opportunities to reproduce externally encountered experiences with adults**

Acknowledging learning and development must be implemented through planned and purposeful play in a mix of child-initiated and adult-directed experiences provide possibilities to examine how practitioners facilitate opportunities to reproduce externally encountered experiences amongst children about similarity and differences in ethnicity. The following example and supporting narrative are intended to raise consciousness about how pedagogy is somewhat underdeveloped.

Vignette 13.5 - Reviewing EYFS in the areas of **People and Communities and Making Relationships**

Fay shares knowledge about how she perceives her skin colour. Descriptions are shared (verbally and non-verbally) about the colour of her skin and hair colour.

**Amanda:** *it is isn't it pointing to the paint pallet "Now what colour is best to show your skin? It looks brown and Edie is describing it as black.*

**Fay:** *"My skin is Brown" strokes the outline of her face with both hands. She uses her right index finger to dip into the chosen colour.*

**Amanda:** *it is isn't it pointing to the paint pallet "Now what colour is best to show your skin? It looks brown and Edie is describing it as black. Critical Incident*

**Edie:** *Hers is black Fay: This is brown Holds up her index finger up to the camera, with the paint on it.*

**Fay:** *and my hairs black (strong emphasis on the word Black, which she pats; which Amanda paraphrases).*

**Researcher field notes:** This learning experience observation confirm that Fay's ability to share information about her ethnic identity stem directly from previous FOK gained outside of the setting with parent's/community influences. Critical incidents of her response that her skin is 'light brown' appear to have been internalised from the shared every day experiences with her parents, family and then reproduced in her response to Amanda's enquiry whether she considers her skin colour being 'black'. She is exercising her agency to refute ideas that categorise her in her **behaviour** where she as she holds up the paint (**resources**) to show her peers the difference between brown and black as a skin colour differential. Positive relationships between Fay and Amanda is demonstrated in their **interaction**, pedagogic action of praise and reinforcement in the language used facilitate Fay's ability to make use of verbal and non-verbal communication to share her perspectives about elements of her ethnic identity. Fay shows dispositions of safety and comfort to express her views.

It would be reasonable to ask, so what is the problem? At a superficial level the outcomes within the early years curriculum are met. In the area of making relationships and people and communities learning outcomes associated with an ability to speak in a familial group; express their ideas; know things that make them unique and can talk about similarity and difference are met. Fay shares information about her sense of self (ethnic identity). Her perspectives appear to have been internalised from the shared everyday experiences with her parents, family, and are then reproduced in her response to Amanda's questions. Evidence shows that Fay is exercising her agency to refute ideas that categorise her perceptions differently, when she holds up the paint to show her peers the difference between brown and black as a colour differential. It is confirmed that the learning experience does support children to reconnect with previous 'lived experiences', however limited opportunity is observed to explore deeper development surrounding conceptual knowledge about ethnicity.

The above example confirms opportunities within the curricula framework do not necessarily explore the externally encountered experiences that may have influenced, for example, Fay's views about herself in any real depth. Fay provides clear choices, but her responses are not challenged by the practitioner. If this were the case, there would be an expectation

that emergent data would evidence discourse where the practitioner uses more co-constructed open questions to explore how Fay had developed her perceptions. Rather than dialogue that provides paraphrased accounts and directional instructions to complete the task.

I do not lay blame at the door of the practitioner here. Positioned instead is a view that opportunity to extend learning within the activity to fit with the purpose of the study is unlikely because it is not an explicit learning outcome required in the policy framework. It is accepted that dialogic conversation in the interactions between Amanda and Fay would not provide cues to elicit deeper understandings to determine where the influences on Fay's contributions have come from. I present a reflective conversation between the researcher and Amanda (on 16.3.18) to confirm my opinion, where Amanda argues this point:

*"Yes of course for the children. It has nothing to do with the EYFS! We've been playful with this exploration. The children loved different modes of expression. They love tea parties. It's been interesting to provide a different line of thought".*

Exploration of what opportunities exist in the early years policy framework (EYFS, 2017) that allow 'mixed ethnic' children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences in their education is at odds with policy mandates that require practitioners to support children to 'talk about similarity and difference in relation to peers and practitioners'. Ambiguity in interpretation of this requirement does not provide a clearly defined direction for early years practitioner to interpret and implement outcomes for enhancing children's categorisations about ethnicity in practice. Bradbury (2014) research supports understanding by indicated 'teachers' may feel pressured to assess children in ways to meet curricula outcomes, rather than basing their judgements on knowledge of children's learning and development from their interests and engagement in learning experiences. Whilst adult actions are responsive to the cultural needs of children in terms of supporting developing identities, there are implications in the judgments that are made about children's EYFS profiles, because the practitioners may feel compelled and are accustomed to assessing children in ways defined by policy guidance to meet the outcomes of curricula.

I therefore confirm that although there is lots of praise and questions to encourage participation, practitioner knowledge in the activity could be reasonably perceived as being underdeveloped. In other words, the practitioner's accompanying dialogue and cues for extending knowledge about sameness/difference is seen to impede extensive active discussion and co-construction of knowledge beyond the children's already understood

categorisations. It is important to acknowledge that this example cannot be deemed as being universally representative of early years practice, but it does provide an illustration of where a 'normalised' drive to follow guidance for expected learning outcomes can serve to inhibit a pedagogy for wider exploration of children's understanding.

The next section considers the impact of the physical environment and the use of purposeful resources for creating opportunities to support children to reproduce FOK learnt in externally encountered cultural experiences.

#### **8.4.4 The impact of the physical environment**

Analysed data of the setting's physical environment evidenced there are few artefacts or images that are representational of the multicultural diversity of the children attending the setting. The apparent absence of 'signs' in the environment means that resources do not instinctively facilitate spontaneous conversation with the children in both the training and classroom environments. It also signifies that there are limited resources that children can access that are culturally representative of themselves. Which gives way to what could be perceived as a relative '*silencing*' of the topic of ethnic diversity.

Chapter 6 explained the setting's physical environment is set up to support the naturally occurring curiosities of the children. Play processes therefore use approaches in which the physical environment offers a myriad of loose materials sourced by the children from their own encounters in the home and wider community environments.

This is not a critique of the approach adopted in the setting. In defence of the contributions offered in this chapter, it is important to signal that there is a need to move beyond making use of resources designed to be educational, which could be perceived as rendering them as being representative of "the school culture" (Hennig and Kirova, 2012: 229). Instead following the introduction of skin toned paints and culturally appropriate children's literature my findings confirm it is equally important to make use of culturally appropriate artefacts. I make this claim because these types of resources can act as 'socialising agents', as well as a 'toolkit' that children can access to identify with their own diversity, and the diversity of others if situated in the physical environment.

With a lens on children's self-awareness and self-confidence interpretation of the curriculum framework (DfE, 2017) guides practitioners to support children to talk about their ideas and to choose resources needed for those chosen activities. Whilst the framework details requirements of what is needed for a broad range of skills, knowledge and attitudes for a child's 'good future', I claim the power of environmental resources and their ability to

determine what children learn about themselves and people differing to them cannot be underestimated. Early years professionals need to give due regard to the cultural groups in the early years classroom and what resources help these groups of children to connect with their lived experiences outside of the classroom. Confirming these notions is a theorised perspective that more work is needed to better understand pedagogy and environmental resources that may be needed to facilitate experiences to achieve positive learning outcomes for children, particularly children who identify with socially disadvantaged minority racial groups, Gaither and Chen et al., (2014).

#### **8.4.5 The introduction of culturally appropriate artefacts**

Until I introduced culturally appropriate artefacts, consideration about how child-initiated and adult-directed play (aided with the use of purposeful artefacts) facilitated understanding amongst children about similarity and differences in ethnicity to self and others was rather limited. Vignette 4 in Appendix 21 evidence the limited responses from the focus children, despite awareness that cultural foods aligned with the African and Caribbean culture is eaten in the home environment.

The absence of culturally appropriate resources (e.g. known foods such as plantain, yam, or pictures of these foods), the practitioners' limited knowledge about the cultural foods eaten by the children outside of the setting and the absence of clear cues about the intended purpose of the learning experience limited opportunities to elicit and expand upon the children's knowledge from externally experienced encounters. Making use of resources freely chosen by the children in the training room prevents what Lam and Pollard (2006) term as crossing the cultural divide between home and the setting. In other words, the resources used by the children to participate in a tea party, rather than acting as a socialisation agent or a socialising tool to prompt participation and dialogic conversation about culturally different foods eaten in the home, ended up with the children becoming disengaged from the intended purpose of the activity. In this instance the activity was shut down so that the children could move on to follow their natural play interests.

Detailed below are the journal entries from the reflective conversations between practitioner and researcher following the activity, to demonstrate conflicts in the curriculum framework with learning outcomes and facilitating opportunities so that children can reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences exist.

**Leah reflection: paper Journal entry entitled Activity 6: 31.1.18**

**My opinion about pedagogy approaches** –... 'I also think that sometimes is necessary to lead the activities, so the children can learn and reach the learning 'goals' that they are meant to...that's why is so important to follow their interests in order to make the learning process something meaningful and for a long life term.

**Researcher Interpretation of emergent themes:** Taken from Leah's journal entry are philosophies which appears to compete with one another and demonstrate what could be seen as the complexities in delivering a culturally appropriate and inclusive curriculum. Entries stem from thoughts about meeting EYFS curricula outcomes and are then conflated with notions surrounding the importance of following children's interests to deliver learning processes that are meaningful. Interpretation of policy seem to conflict with meeting the individual needs of the children. **Pedagogic actions** offer limited opportunity for the children to reflect on thoughts about self (Park, 2011). Dialogue is used as a tool to adopt and facilitate learning to not only challenge, but to also provide a space for them to articulate their ideas. Park (2011:394) argues "*the language used to talk to young children ethnicity is an important tool, young children use in learning to understand these differences*". However the practitioner journal evidences reflective thoughts acknowledge the need for **structure** and appropriate use **of resources to focus the children**, so that deeper insights can be drawn on about their existing knowledge of culturally appropriate foods.

Confirmed here is an interpretation that it is important to consider the external social experiences and their impact on shaping children's identity. Particularly where better understanding is required about the meanings children ascribe to their own lived experiences whilst mediating their competence and capacity for understanding and acting upon definitions pertaining to ethnic categorisation. Evaluation of the activity confirm artefacts that are representational of the cultural diversity of the children attending the setting are absent in the environment. Which arguably makes it challenging for the children to see themselves in the play without culturally representative resources in the educational process of learning. With limited knowledge about the children's experiences and practices with culturally appropriate foods such as yam, plantain, rice and peas eaten outside of the setting, it is equally challenging for the practitioner to make use of pedagogic strategies without appropriate materials to co-construct knowledge with the children beyond the information they chose to share at that time.

By comparison, when the skin-tone paints are re-introduced in Amanda's adult directed learning experience, findings indicate that the paints act as a stimulus alongside the practitioner's directed cues and questions so that children can draw on their existing knowledge (FOK). This culturally appropriate resource is actively used by the children as part of their 'social toolkit' (Park, 2011: 406) for exploring their existing understanding about ethnic diversity.

Activities eleven through to sixteen (painting a self-portrait) provide rich evidence to indicate opportunities exist that allow the children to individually reproduce and share responses learnt from externally encountered cultural experiences. The practitioner's rationale for undertaking the adult directed learning experiences in this manner are explained in more depth in Chapter 7. Positioned here however is an interpretation that whilst culturally appropriate artefacts do afford opportunities for the focus children to share externally

encountered perspectives in this experience. Opportunities to reproduce and share responses beyond previously learnt categorisations of 'black' and 'white' is underdeveloped within the curriculum framework.

Similar to earlier interpretation, pedagogic strategies for understanding children's deeper constructions and responses about a mixed ethnic identity is absent in the findings. Without explicit policy guidance and training the curriculum framework falls short of equipping the practitioner with the skill and cultural awareness to implement inclusive pedagogical approaches that co-construct meaning beyond what the child already knows. Also positioned is a contributory view that practitioners will need time to research, plan and implement multicultural learning experiences appropriate to the diversity of the children they are working with.

#### **8.4.6 Summary**

Remaining true to positioning contributions from the participants perspectives, findings from the analysis of the children's perspectives have been utilised, together with reviews of literature to present the findings that responds to research question two. Recognising that learning and development must be implemented through planned and purposeful play in a mix of child-initiated and adult-directed experiences there is potential for opportunities to exist in the early years curricula to support the co-construction of ethnicity with children. The presented learning experiences confirm the focus children are afforded opportunity to reconnect with previous 'lived experiences'. However, limited opportunity is observed to explore deeper development surrounding conceptual knowledge about ethnic identity. Presented examples confirm opportunities within the curricula framework do not explore the externally encountered experiences that may have influenced the children's views in any real depth.

It is acknowledged limitations will exist where opportunities to extend learning to fit with the purpose of the study is unlikely because it is not an explicit learning outcome required in the policy framework. It is accepted that interpretation of the dialogic conversations in the interactions between the practitioners and the children would not necessarily provide cues to elicit deeper understandings to determine where the influences from the children's contributions have come from. Confirmed in literature Bradbury (2014) suggests this could be because practitioners may feel compelled to assess children in ways defined by curriculum guidance to meet the outcomes of curricula.

Interpretation foregrounds the power of environmental resources and their ability to determine what children learn about themselves and people differing to them cannot be

underestimated. Although guidance in curricula tasks practitioners to give due regard to the cultural groupings in the early years classroom, as well as due regard to what resources will help these groups of children to connect with their lived experiences outside of the classroom, my findings present evidence to indicate challenges exist in implementing inclusive pedagogic strategies without purposeful resources. Gaither and Chen et al., (2014) concur with my theorised notions, espousing more work is needed to better understand pedagogy and environmental resources that may be needed to facilitate experiences to achieve positive learning outcomes for mixed ethnic children.

Recognising that artefacts can act as a mediating tool between mixed ethnic children, their peers and practitioners, as well as an acceptance that no resource is 'culturally neutral', it is argued that early years practice needs to create a space using culturally appropriate resources (CAR) for interaction from an equitable standpoint in matters associated with the co-construction of ethnic identity. Whilst culturally appropriate artefacts do afford opportunities for children to share externally encountered perspectives, presented examples indicate that opportunities to reproduce and share responses beyond previously learnt categorisations of 'black' and 'white' is underdeveloped within the curriculum.

In support of my position, Moll (2010) suggests that cultural knowledge about children allows the practitioner to decipher and integrate the shared knowledge engaged in and learnt in the home and community into the learning experiences, behaviour and language used by the setting. Moll (2010: 456) also contributes to these thoughts by offering "when students witness the validation of their culture and language, hence themselves, within the educational process, when they "see themselves" in their schooling, they combine their home or community identities with an academic identity".

Without explicit policy guidance and training the curriculum framework falls short of equipping the practitioner with the skill and cultural awareness to implement inclusive pedagogical approaches that co-construct meaning beyond what the child already recognises. CAR that are representational of the cultural diversity of the children attending the setting are needed to act as a cultural bridge between the home and setting (Broadhead and Burt, 2012) environment. Practitioners will also require cultural knowledge about the children's experiences and practice outside of the setting. When children have a clear understanding about the purpose of learning experiences, findings indicate that resources will act as a stimulus, alongside practitioners directed cues and questions so that opportunities exist to support children to draw on existing FOK from externally encountered experiences in their learning.

Literary perspectives together with the presentation of interpreted findings have carefully considered several perceived problems within the early years foundation stage curriculum framework to respond this research question. Opportunities exist that can be related to early years education where constructed environments of adult directed experiences, routines and culturally appropriate resources can and do influence children's conscious and unconscious beliefs.

### **8.5 Research Question 3**

*How does the implementation of a play-based pedagogical approach provide 'space' for mixed ethnic children to explore their ethnicity?*

I commence this section by initially embracing the principled approaches towards research followed by Bertram and Pascal (2009; 2012), to offer my deep gratitude to the practitioner researchers, who exposed their practice in this study so that an alternative lens could be used to explore constructs associated with children's perspectives about ethnic identity, as well as contexts problematising pedagogic action.

Central to this study is exploration about how pedagogic techniques, interactions, and the use of resources facilitate opportunities for engaging with children's FOK from previous cultural and raced experiences. The idea is to see if a pedagogy of play provides a 'space' for the mixed ethnic child to participate in reflective perspectives surrounding their ethnic identity, and how the influence of pedagogic action enables (or not) sharing of these thoughts.

Chapter 2 presented theories that reflect on children's space, agency and power in developing a culturally and ethnically appropriate sense of belonging in educational settings. Whilst I appreciate that child development and learning occur as a social process emphasised by interdependence in respectful relationships with others, and there are difficulties in addressing cultural diversity in the early years context, I positioned the need to explore the mechanisms that exist in which practitioners leverage children's knowledge in co-constructing their perceptions about ethnic identity.

It is important to note here that interpretation of the findings and contributing claims presented in the subsequent sections make use examples of pedagogic action that was conducted outside of the agreed research process. To provide an assurance for the reader here, full ethical permission was granted to undertake this project. What I mean is the activity was undertaken at the discretion of the deputy manager, outside of scheduled meeting dates. That said vignettes eleven to sixteen have been analysed and the emergent

findings have been used in my contributions because they contain significant rich descriptions that fits what I want the reader to understand about play-based pedagogical approaches, and the actions that were used to explore ethnicity with the children.

### **8.5.1 A brief evaluation of play-based pedagogy**

This section commences by reiterating literary discoveries that supported the positioning of existing epistemologies about children's ability to learn from pedagogic interactions. Studies undertaken by Butler and Markman (2016) was utilised to position notions that the effects of pedagogic cues on learning may be driven by quite an automatic, cue driven process, where social learning allows complex cultural knowledge to be learned. Literature also contended that although social learning takes place via the medium of language, children also learn via the actions of others (Butler and Markman, 2016).

In keeping with perspectives derived from research studies this inquiry tendered actions and the underlying intentions behind them offer rich sources of information for understanding how pedagogic influences shape ethnic identity formation. Providing a response to research question three, this study recognised that intentions behind pedagogic actions in play-based experiences allow for further contextual interpretation about how mixed ethnic children make use of a pedagogical approach to inform their inductive learning. Discussion in the next section therefore moves on to present interpretations about how playful pedagogy enabled the focus children to engage in reflective thoughts about their ethnic identity, and how the influence of pedagogic action facilitated sharing of these thoughts in their play repertoires.

### **8.5.2 Pedagogue awareness and knowledge about ethnicity**

Notable in policy and curriculum guidance is an indication that pedagogy respects each individual child and values their efforts and interests as being fundamental to successful learning (Standards & Testing Agency, 2019). Key characteristics of effective pedagogy also includes interaction, where effective teaching is associated with an instructive learning environment, and where a sustained shared thinking strategy is used to extend children's learning. Recent Standards & Testing Agency (2019) best practice guidance also instructs practitioners to be aware of the funds of knowledge young children bring into early years settings. Informing discussion, I position policy recognition about the significance of children's funds of knowledge in pedagogical learning experiences. Policy reform acknowledgement of funds of knowledge confirms the instrumental role it plays in the co-construction of ethnic identity.

Similarly, review of literature confirmed pedagogy in participation is fundamentally concerned with the formation of situated contexts in which interaction is sustained in relationships via joint activities and experiences (Formosinho and Pascal, 2016). This thought-provoking notion has been embraced in data collection and analysis processes to provide a rationale for understanding contexts associated with pedagogical knowing and knowledge.

Acknowledging pedagogy is organised around knowledge (Formosinho and Pascal, 2016) necessitated an explanation about conceptual insights surrounding practitioner knowledge. Earlier sections presented examples to confirm approaches used by the practitioners provided inadequate indication about how co-construction of ethnic identity is being facilitated in the play activities beyond what the children already know. Instead confirmed here is a view that pedagogic approaches are centred on familial practice about similarity and difference in ethnicity from known societal groupings, rather than knowledge gathered from the day-to-day observations of the cultural funds of knowledge that children bring into the setting. In other words, there is little sense about how the practitioner's own knowledge and awareness of differing cultural and ethnic groupings has informed and then been utilised in practice. Identified then is a gap between practitioner's knowledge and what the child knows about ethnicity and culture attributed to biracial groupings. Demonstration of practitioner 'gaps in cultural knowledge' is identified in the researcher and practitioner conversations below:

Extract from researcher field journal: Main study 16.3.18

Researcher: I observe that Jake is very engaged and enjoys the activities, but I don't perceive that he has a concept of the purpose of them. That might be because there may not be those dialogues, conversations at home. So to get Jake's understandings we need the information from his parents.

Amanda: I agree, I think Dad's family (who is Black) live in Africa.

This example demonstrates the incomplete knowledge and assumptions that practitioners may make about the families they work with. In this example, Amanda perceived Jake's ethnic origin is African. Yet subsequent conversations with Jake's dad (23.5.18) confirmed that his ethnic origin is Jamaican. Whilst it is recognised that pedagogic actions do not occur in isolation, rather they occur amongst ongoing dynamic adult-child interactions. Interpretation of the examples presented here and throughout this chapter reinforce conceptions that practitioner knowledge could be reasonably perceived as being underdeveloped.

Creating a counterbalance in the evidence presented so far, there is some evidence to support play pedagogy deploys high levels of engagement in the interactions between the practitioners and the children. However, these instances bring to the fore instances where social structures of pedagogic action constrain contributions offered by the children, because of the challenging nature of exploring constructs surrounding ethnicity based on incomplete cultural and raced knowledge on the part of the practitioners.

Claims to original contributions therefore purposely maintain that the underdeveloped nature of practitioner knowledge can: limit the ability to extend children's existing knowledge beyond what is already known; lead to misrepresentation in planned experiences and the resources used with children; or in the worst-case scenario indicate that space for children to explore ethnicity is ignored altogether. Literature upholds the need for the early years professional to increase aspects of their cultural competence because it can be distinguished by "the affective understandings about students from different backgrounds, together with increased consciousness of their cultural competency" (Han, West-Olatunji and Thomas, 2011: 6).

Taking all the presented arguments together about practitioner knowledge, my theoretical claims contend attention needs to be given to the: diversity of the children in the setting; impacts that planned interventions could have on children's racial and ethnic identity development; and raised practitioner awareness about their own cultural competence.

### **8.5.3 How does pedagogic interaction provide space for knowledge development about ethnicity?**

Supporting the contributions presented in the previous section, descriptions aligned to children's co-construction of perspectives about their ethnicity is identified in vignette 15, where Jake indicates the many agentic ways in which he appropriates knowledge with societal categorisations of 'white' and 'black'. Jake is heard to describe himself as having a '*sort of white colour*', his mother as having '*white colour*' and his father as '*oh he's got black skin*'. It is reasonable to argue that Jake is conveying thoughts associated with constructs negotiated in encounters experienced outside of the nursery environment, that are then shared via the influence of interaction in play-based pedagogic approaches. In other words, a play-based pedagogic approach does have the potential to facilitate young children's ability to connect with, and name, preferences about ethnicity in daily interactions and routines.

#### **8.5.4 Interaction in dialogic conversation**

Further comprehension about young children's identities being viewed as dialogic in nature can be found in Barron's (2014: 255) research, who contends children find 'voice' "from the multidirectional sense of the world of self and others" that is, shaped in participation in, and response to, the social endeavours in such participation. With this argument in mind, an alternative view could suggest practitioners' dialogic conversations throughout the process of data collection did support the focus group of children to meet expected curriculum (DfE 2017) learning outcomes in PSED. However, when endeavouring to explore how a play-based pedagogic approach facilitates exploration of ethnicity, there is evidence in the study's findings to indicate that practitioner dialogic conversations with the focus children does not necessarily provide cues to elicit deeper understandings to determine where the influences from the children's contributions have come from.

I acknowledge that limitations exist in distinguishing how approaches that are learnt in conversations in one context (home and community) are flexibly adapted and shared in other dialogic contexts (nursery setting). Rogoff et al. (2018: 12) advise that children's ability to "develop adaptive flexibility in expanding their repertoires" across cultural contexts is an important phenomenon to recognise when researching children's lived experiences. It is also relevant for supporting children to skilfully participate in distinct cultural contexts.

Whether contexts for co-constructing ethnic identity are enabled or marginalised by pedagogic approaches is extremely difficult to say. What is clear is if children are afforded opportunities to flexibly expand their discourse in their play repertoires across these cultural contexts, the social features that mixed ethnic children ascribe to preferences in terminology about skin colour choices are shared in their interactions with practitioners. This contribution is relevant for supporting children to skilfully participate in distinct cultural contexts when researching children's lived experiences.

#### **8.5.5 Questioning children's thinking**

Overall interpretation across the vignettes features a range of practitioner questioning techniques that are utilised in the interactions with the children. Interpretation across the episodes of play provide rich description of the pedagogic questioning used by the practitioners. However, vignette 15 is used here to present the different questioning types that created a space for eliciting the children's ideas about constructs associated with their ethnicity.

**Vignette 15 - Activity 4:** Freddy paints a self-portrait with Amanda

**Adult directed pedagogy** is evident throughout the whole learning experience. The children are repeatedly asked to focus on the task, take turns, to be patient whilst each child takes their turn to paint their picture, and to clean their fingers as they create different aspects of their self-portrait. **Children are directed what to do** - Different **question types** are used to engage the children's thinking throughout the self-portrait learning experience.

Pedagogic questioning types used:

- Jake do you think that's the right colour that Fr is using? (**recall**)
- Oh I don't think you've even looked. So do you want to have a look? (**direct**)
- Oh he's using a similar colour to what you used. It is isn't it? (**Probing**)
- Do you think Fr that your skin colour is a bit similar to Fa? (**Open**)
- K.... looks like you. Does your mummy have the same skin colour as you? (**probing**)
- he does have black skin doesn't he? Erm and what about.....
- I think that's awesome to be honest kid (**praise**)
- Oh J that's really kind of you. I'm really proud of you all. (**praise**)
- Now then we have done Fr face. Hmmm shall we do his hair? Now who's got hair like Fr? (**direct**) Fa must have pointed or gestured to herself because Amanda says, Fa you think do you? (**probing**)
- I don't think Fr agrees with that (**implicit/interpretive**)
- it is isn't it a bit like yours? (**Affirming thought**)

This example showcases how the skilful use of questions acts as a stimulus for encouraging dialogue and maintenance of sustained thinking with all the children. Terminology expressed by the children not only elicits details about how they perceive their own ethnic identity, but also seen are expressed views about how they perceive the ethnic identity of their family members.

A contrasting interpretation about the challenges faced when endeavouring to use questioning skills is indicated in the Leah's pedagogic action. In a conversation with the researcher, Leah shares reflective thoughts that she does not yield the same results in terms of the children's participation and responses in her learning activities. Worthy of further consideration, Leah explains the children like to 'play' with her, and therefore will not respond to the questions she asks them. Complexities are illustrated here about the agentic power between the children and the practitioners. Research literature is used to position children's agency can be a "testing ground for whose freedom, power and control can be exercised" (Wood, 2014: 9).

Understanding the interrelationship between children, pedagogy and practice, and how children will negotiate and enact their agency and choice, the focus children assert their agency and preference through non-verbal expression to withdraw their participation in conversations with Leah about their ethnicity. It could be argued that the children are also aware of Leah's position and role in the setting, and so are used to engaging in child initiated 'play' in a more familial group (which in this case includes the adult).

In this way the children are causing change in their interactions by exercising their right not to participate. Literature suggests children are not always provided with opportunities to

develop agency and self-efficacy in routines and play activities do not always put children in control of their choices, nor are they always empowered or free to make choices (Wood, 2014). However, interpretation of the findings in this study indicates the focus children are in control and are empowered to make choices about their learning in most contexts, because of the settings ethos for following children's natural curiosities. The example used here is one of many illustrations of how Leah demonstrates her capacity to relinquish what could be perceived as power and influence over the types of pedagogic approach used in her practice.

Moving forward it is recognised that it is extremely challenging for practitioners to keep up with children's expressed views whilst providing individual support and managing nuanced behaviours of peers who directly challenge and manipulate pedagogical intentions. Findings in the inquiry confirm whilst there is lots of focused attention from the practitioners in the presented play episodes, where complexity existed when the children's verbal and nonverbal modes of communication moved on so quickly.

Worthy of further consideration when thinking about the implementation of a play-based pedagogical approach is the importance of recognising children's non-verbal communication. Chapter 6 explained that captured communication was on many occasions expressed through the differing behaviours of the focus children. Examples of which have been discussed in more depth in previous sections of this chapter. Here evidence in the findings highlight children's desire to interact can be swayed by dominant norms created in community groups. Referring to modes of communication, the boys tended to be vocally dominant in the group, whilst interpretation indicate Fay naturally reverted to nonverbal methods of communication in response to comments made about her ethnicity. Whilst being vocally competent Freddy would revert to nonverbal modes of communication to express various feelings from frustration, anxiety and anger to needing time because of his stammer to respond to comments made by his peers. It was also observed that he would revert to non-verbal cues to deflect focus away from himself to safeguard his privacy on matters associated with his ethnicity. These explanations are significant for raising awareness about how important it is to observe children's nonverbal cues, because these cues can support deeper understanding about how pedagogic and peer interactions can be seen to influence an individual's sense of worth and wellbeing.

Concluding interpretation draws on research literature to validate what children know and value should be linked to what they do not yet know to help them in the educational process of identifying with themselves and others. Research undertaken by Moll (2010: 456) supports understanding that "when children see themselves in their schooling, they combine their home or community identities within an academic identity".

Additionally, understanding about FOK theorisation advocate children will be entering educational settings rich in cultural knowledge from their home and community (Barron, 2014). However, what I have found out from this inquiry is the cultural knowledge associated with ethnicity that children bring into educational settings is often ignored, leading to feasible contentions that there is inconsistency with what is learned at home and what is learnt in the early years setting in terms of an ethnic identity.

Whilst evidence demonstrates that space has been afforded for the focus children to respond to explorations about their ethnic identity in the adult directed learning experiences, challenge exists in contexts associated with pedagogic actions. For example, there is an indication that practitioner awareness about the impact of their own identity on teaching young children is on occasion limited. Only Leah shows understanding about the need for skill, competence and awareness about ethnic and cultural status (vignette 8; Activity 2 (part 3)). However, her 'status' and position in the setting situates limited agency to exert transformational change in ethnic and cultural socialisation contexts that would be required for effective transformation in pedagogic practices.

Evidence in Chapter 7, section 7.11 also demonstrates how pedagogic action is seen to undermine both research and 'junior' practitioner confidence in the children's capacity for reflecting on constructs associated with ethnicity. I do not intend to reiterate interpretations about researcher experiences again here, other than to support what I want the reader to understand about how pedagogic action can expose accounts pertaining to pedagogy and its power, resistance and impact on research processes. Chapter 9 will facilitate discussion and personal reflection about the incidents that affected me as a black academic researcher. The aim being to provide understanding about the impact experiences of this kind can have on the research process.

To conclude, reiterated here is a standpoint for both research and practice, that attention needs to be given to the diversity of the children in the setting and the cultural capital that they bring with them; the impacts that planned interventions can have on children's racial and ethnic identity development, and raised practitioner awareness about their own cultural competence. Notwithstanding limitations in the different approaches used by the practitioners, limitations in the socialisation contexts discussed throughout this chapter demonstrate that space for implementation of a play pedagogy that allows mixed ethnic children to explore their ethnicity is underdeveloped.

## 8.6 Implications for Early Childhood Education

Findings so far have evidenced the significant challenges faced in early years practice for implementing inclusive early years programmes that follow policy rhetoric and curricula guidelines. Particularly when confronting underlying attitudes and perceptions about how to support young children's developing ethnic identities and the funds of cultural knowledge, they may bring into early childhood educational settings. Rhetoric in educational policy that underpins inclusion and cultural diversity provided a critical standpoint with which to explore how and to what extent issues associated with cultural diversity is engaged with in the context of the early years curriculum.

Review of literature also positioned early years educational policy has focused on neoliberal interventionist programmes aimed at identification of early problems for addressing social inequality for disadvantaged groups. I argue agendas associated with 'school readiness' has had a significant influence on the early years workforce because of a deliberate drive towards outcome driven goals. I acknowledge successive governments have shared in the moral ideal of valuing the implementation and delivery of inclusive educational provision (Pugh, 2010). This study positions the resultant impacts on pedagogy and the content of early years curriculum has presented significant complexity and challenge for the early years practitioner.

However, emerging in Early Years Foundation Stage profile: 2020 handbook, (STA, 2020) is guidance that proposes to develop practitioner knowledge and understanding about matters associated with assessment of children from differing cultural backgrounds. Although the handbook will be used to summarise and describe children's attainment at the end of the EYFS by capturing a wide range of children's learning and development outcomes, it also endeavours to directly address sociocultural contexts such as ethnicity and diversity in groupings. Observed is a serious commitment to support practitioner understanding that cultural backgrounds may determine how early education is perceived. Policy guidance that facilitates practitioners understanding that care must be taken to ensure the learning environment echoes children's positive cultural experiences is timely with the findings of this study. Of value is recognition of the role learning activities and the use of appropriate resources can have in children's attainment.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the handbook and its series of exemplification materials will significantly raise practitioner consciousness about contexts associated with ethnicity and children's cultural capital development, implications for early childhood education evidences a short-sighted view of policy reform. These measures whilst making great strides to provide clear examples of culturally informed judgments and assessment that are informed by

parents and practitioners, does not recognise the social processes appertaining to ethnicity that shape and influence young children's learning and development.

Findings in this inquiry demonstrate underdeveloped practitioner knowledge can limit possibilities to extend children's existing categorisations about their ethnicity beyond what they already know. Due regard is given in the proposed EYFS profile: 2020 handbook (STA, 2020: 17) to indicate practitioner knowledge will be developed from observation of children in their day-to-day interactions. Practitioners are informed that they "must be alert to the *general diversity of children's interests, needs and inclinations*".

My theorisation however contends practitioner knowledge should be initially developed from the day-to-day careful observations of children's cultural funds of knowledge. But of benefit for informing early childhood education policy is the need to move beyond mandated curriculum guidance that places responsibility on practitioners to be alert to the general diversity of children's interests, needs and inclinations, towards formalised training programmes that develop practitioner knowledge about children's cultural funds of knowledge. So that practitioners can take on the demanding and complex role expected of them with the diverse groups of children that they work with.

Expectations that practitioner knowledge surrounding inclusion will be solely developed from the day-to-day observations of children and partnership working with parents renders practitioner knowledge as being underdeveloped in terms of facilitating ethnic identity formation. Without explicit policy guidance and formalised training programmes the curriculum, its handbook and exemplification materials fall short of equipping the practitioner with the skill and cultural awareness (knowledge) to implement inclusive pedagogical approaches that co-construct meaning beyond what the child already recognises about their sense of self.

Also positioned is a contributory view that practitioners will need time to research, plan and implement multicultural learning experiences appropriate to the diversity of the children they are working with. Guidance for assessment and inspection that squarely discharges the onus of responsibility onto the practitioner, particularly guidance that positions a clear narrative that the government does not prescribe how ongoing assessment should be undertaken in its documentation leaves implementation and delivery within the early years sector open to the interpretation of the practitioner once again.

Moving forward whilst this study draws on a small sample size, the benefits that the use of *culturally appropriate resources* (cultural and ethnic resources that extend beyond celebrations) can have when developing contexts that support learning about inclusion with

young children cannot be ignored. Findings within this study demonstrate artefacts can act as a mediating tool between mixed ethnic children, their peers and practitioners. My contribution to bodies of research reasons play-based pedagogical approaches need to generate space for using culturally appropriate resources (CAR) to create an equitable standpoint in the interactions between practitioners and children, so that co-construction of contexts such as ethnic identity can be explored. It has already been argued that CAR can act as “socialising agents” as well as a “social toolkit” (Park, 2011: 406) that children can access to identify with their own diversity, and the diversity of others if situated in the physical environment.

Concluding theorisation acknowledges that challenge and complexity exist beyond simplistic notions that pedagogic action and culturally appropriate resources have the potential for engaging young children in explorations about how they choose to co-construct and categorise meaning about their mixed ethnicity. Chesworth (2016) helpfully supports these notions, when she argues policy structures create challenges for practitioners in understanding diverse sociocultural practices that children will bring to their play activities. In agreement with Chesworth’s (2016: 305) interpretations of play are governed by curriculum frameworks that “privilege universal, individualised learning intentions over every day lived experiences of children”.

Going forward, advocated is a standpoint that curriculum outcomes should remain deliberately broad in nature to allow for negotiation with the theorisations presented in this section, so play-based pedagogic approaches are afforded opportunities to include children’s in-depth enquiries into subjects such as ethnic identity and culture in curriculum planning and development. Pedagogic actions in the prime area of PSED and specific areas of understanding the world must move beyond experiences such as cultural celebrations to truly implement new ways of appreciating and embedding the contributions that children impart. Care must be taken not to adopt a one-size-fits all approach when planning experiences to explore and co-construct ethnic identity with children in these special groupings. Use of terms such as ‘disadvantaged groups’ and ‘minority ethnic groups’ positions a deficit view of children falling into these categorised groupings. The children who acted as research participants in this study displayed a demonstrable ability to act as social agents for informing findings about ethnic identity formation. The contributions above demonstrate novel ways in which children’s perspectives in response to those enquiries about ethnicity can become embedded in the EYFS (2017) curriculum framework and its associated guidance/handbooks (Development Matters, 2012; EYFS profile:2020 handbook).

## 8.7 Recognising funds of knowledge and children's diverse ethnic identities

I commence this section by concurring with research studies that listening to young children is a fundamental component of ensuring participation, for tuning into and giving power to the status of young children (Mac Naughton, 2005; Pascal and Bertram, 2012). Providing a space for children to explore their ethnic identity gives way to the contributions presented in the following sections. Respecting children's agency, rights to participate (and withdraw), and time to express views about their developing ethnic identities, in whatever form of expression they chose was key in developing understanding about the focus children's developing funds of knowledge surrounding their mixed ethnic identity.

This thesis makes a case for using FOK theorisation alongside the judgments that are made by practitioners to facilitate assessment of this group of children's learning and development. It is recognised that policy rhetoric underpinning inclusion and cultural diversity does offer critical perspectives about how and to what extent the issue of cultural diversity is engaged with in the context of the early years curriculum. What is challenging in early years curricula is an expectation that assessment of each child's level of development must be addressed against early learning goals without 'knowledge' of what constitutes, shapes and defines the issues surrounding children's identities so that this learning can occur.

Fundamentally my contributions offer children's perspectives need to inform the judgements that early years practitioners make about their learning and development in the prime and specific areas of the EYFS. The cultural and raced funds of knowledge that children bring into settings should also become an integral part of pedagogic knowledge. In this way possibilities for undermining children's culturally influenced interests might be mitigated. Particularly the judgement that practitioners may make because of misinterpretation of children's thinking, and misjudgements in their own learning and knowledge building processes about ethnicity (Hedges, 2010).

The rich sources of information that children share about themselves and others have the potential of offering an alternative lens in which practitioners can interpret, reflect on and transform pedagogical practice. Chesworth (2016: 297) accommodately offers sociocultural perspectives help practitioners to obtain deeper knowledge and understanding of the "whole child". Opportunities for providing space in which children can either reaffirm previously internalised understanding between existing classifications of 'black' and 'white' and new meanings categorising skin colour as 'light brown', 'brown' and 'whiteish colour' to describe ethnicity benefits a movement away from the language used by adults.

Supporting comprehension about national EYFS guidance in the elements of self-confidence and self-awareness Palaiologou (2016) rightly reasons that the acquisition of the concept of identity is important for children's wellbeing. Concurring with this advice, also stressed is the significance of adults in the process of identity formation. I have adapted a phrase used by Palaiologou (2016: 348) when she speaks of adults helping children to develop a "personal identity" by offering those individuals working with young children in the context of developing their ethnic identity should move towards helping children to develop a 'unique personal identity'. Which I argue might be used to transform a pedagogy of play that forefronts an acknowledgement of ethnic origin and can also embrace other aspects of diversity that make a child distinctly unique. I do this because this argument is central to my theory.

What I've found out in relation to existing epistemologies is mixed ethnic children not only demonstrate that they are capable of expressing views that show a strong sense of cultural understanding aligned with skin colour differentials, they also show a demonstrable ability to use ethnic identity terminology interchangeably. Adding value original contributions presented in section 8.3.1 evidences the children's latitude to make sense of, refine and extend ideas with the interchangeable use of the terms *black*, *white*, *light brown* to relate to mixed ethnic identity constructs. This contribution builds on and extends conceptualisations seen in (Ladson Billings, 1998) research who argued although there is a fixedness in notions of categorisation, the ways in which they operate is fluid and shifting.

I am compelled to acknowledge Riojas-Cortez (2001) research that acted as a catalyst when considering children's cultural traits (acknowledged as funds of knowledge) about their mixed ethnic origin. Similarly, Barron's influential research was beneficial for understanding relatively little was known about the extent to which young children engage with thoughts about their ethnicity, other than to explain their preferences in terms of skin colour (Barron, 2011). What I have found out is the complex ways in which young mixed ethnic children interact with 'political' terminology is being done to make sense of the FOK they already possess from previous externally encountered experiences. Children will often express their thoughts obtained from adult contexts when attempting to understand more complex social constructs such as ethnicity and a sense of ethnic self, to understand the world around them.

Contribution to wider research studies falls into three distinct areas. Significant factors that influence children's ability to share their FOK are: peer membership and friendship, the use of culturally appropriate resources and play-based pedagogy. Claims to originality pertaining to the influence of culturally appropriate resources and a play-based pedagogical approach for exploring a mixed ethnic identity is presented in the next section. Overall,

dispositions of substantial empathy and, in most cases, an acceptance of the categorisations offered was observed amongst all the children in this study. However, where my work adds value to existing epistemologies is from compelling insights about the importance of peer interaction and friendship.

Interaction in peer friendships has evidenced that young children can demonstrate not only a strong sense of self and insightful knowledge about their own and differing ethnicities, but also confirmed are skills of instilling confidence in others to express their developing judgements about their own and others ethnicity. This was predominantly indicated where children sensed (in their friendships) that there were low levels of confidence to do so.

Whilst conversations in educational research regard the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as the 'adult expert' interacting with the 'novice child' (Vygotsky, 1978), where interaction in dialogic conversation with practitioners will be needed to elicit children's knowledge about how they perceive their ethnic identity. Established are findings that children will also construct their ethnic identities through social interaction with their peers without the involvement of the 'expert'. These conversations are particularly relevant for supporting practitioners' developing understanding about how children make use of the 'funds of cultural knowledge' (Barron, 2014) acquired within the home and community environment.

There will be instances where the perspectives of children will not always be elicited through cues from the practitioner. Instead, they will be expressed in the predictable and safe reoccurrence of the activities; belonging to familial group memberships; and from a positive sense of self formed in secure friendships with peers. Informing pedagogy therefore, practitioners should be not only be aware of the importance that friendships will have on children's sense of well-being and sense of self. They should also be aware of how peer interaction will significantly elicit children's FOK, to be able to contribute to explorations about ethnicity in play-based pedagogic approaches.

Taken together, the contributions above are my claims to originality, in which I contend going forward there is a need for a careful balance between adult-directed and child-initiated interaction to foster children's positive sense of ethnic identity. The sensitive balance between child-initiated and adult-directed play-based experiences is dependent upon practitioner confidence, training and experience. Particularly when also operating with the external influences from outcome-driven inspection frameworks; constraints of adult: child ratios; pressures from parental expectations of early childhood education; and meeting expectations from more senior practitioners. Similarly, the practitioner's own ideology about the interests and needs of the children within their learning community will influence the

adopted types of play and pedagogy used to co-construct contexts surrounding ethnic identity. I make use of Wood's (2010: 5) contribution to inform "more complex conceptualisation may be difficult to achieve in practice, because institutional and policy versions of free choice... provide socially approved (and restricted) opportunities".

### **8.8 Tensions of power and agency and its influence on ethnic identity formation**

When considering the tensions between practitioner and children's agency in exploring contexts for the co-construction of ethnic identity, for the most part my findings indicate practitioners in this setting show a strong capacity for relinquishing what could be perceived as power and influence over the types of play-based pedagogic approaches used in their practice. My claims to originality provide a clear example (in section 8.5.2) of pedagogic strategies that evidence the practitioner's thoughts about why her practice does not demonstrate pedagogic control.

Bringing together debates about the complexities between practitioner and learner agency and power in developing children's culturally and ethnically appropriate sense of belonging, findings confirm the children are in control in most of the situated contexts and are enabled to make choices about their learning. I make claim to this view because the settings ethos for following children's natural curiosities is at the forefront of all practice. It is only on one occasion where an example of adult directed pedagogy prescribes the purpose and direction of play (section 8.4.6) in this study.

The work of Foucault (1980a) has been considered to locate the function of power and the many ways agency is enacted in the interactions between the children and practitioners. I questioned the effects of agency and power as a predictor of the influencing factors pertaining to this group of children's ability to express their insights about their ethnic identity within play-based pedagogic approaches. Observation of the tensions existing in the dynamics of practitioner-learner participation also supported the discovery of what Taylor (2010) contended are opportunities for privileging discourses which help with reaching the 'status of truth' (2010: 302). Much of Foucault's (2000a) work centred on how individuals become normalised through discourse that govern behaviour. In the context of this study, it was important to question how participation in adult directed play experiences governed the behaviour of the children and adults.

Taking a perspective through Foucault's (2000a) idea about governmentality, my contributions leave open to further debate questions surrounding how developmental discourses facilitated the co-construction of mixed ethnic identity from children's FOK, because descriptions in the findings evidence the priming mechanisms used to explore

preferences amongst the children are somewhat limited. Similarly, I have found little evidence to demonstrate how the practitioner's own cultural and raced knowledge about the children has been utilised in the learning experiences to develop the children's understanding and attitudes towards culture, race and ethnicity further than what the children already know.

Acknowledging limitations in my research, raised here is the dichotomy of whether governmentality of children's learning and development in this case study lies in:

- curriculum outcomes expected to be achieved by the practitioner; or
- the agentic and rights driven processes of the children to influence their own learning trajectory?

Contributions to knowledge indicate children's desire to interact can be swayed by dominant norms created in community groups. What I did find is children's modes of communication can switch between vocal forms of expression to share ideas or challenge practitioner and peer comments made about ethnicity, to non-verbal forms of expression to display frustration; exercise rights to privacy; and withdrawal from further participation. In this sense it is recognised that even if practitioners provide lots of focused attention, it is extremely difficult to keep up with children's expressed responses (particularly when providing one-to-one support, as was Amanda choice) and manage nuanced behaviours of peers who may directly challenge and manipulate pedagogical intentions. It must be pointed out that it is problematic to maintain pedagogic control in these situations. It is also plausible to assume that the pedagogue's behaviour management strategies may well have changed because of the presence of the researcher. Complexity therefore exists in precisely determining whose agency and power dominates when the children's verbal and nonverbal modes of communication move on so quickly.

My theorisation argues that care must be taken to observe pedagogic actions because they can shift the focus and emphasis of an activity almost instantaneously. Which in relation to existing epistemologies (Rodriguez, 2013) about ethnic identity development demonstrate how adult agency and power can contrive and change the purpose of playful learning experiences, and therefore the intended learning outcome. That is unless the play is revisited and the purpose of the experience is explored and extended at a later date. Findings in this study indicate, practitioners who interact with diverse children's informed funds of knowledge will need to take care to observe their verbal and more significantly nonverbal modes of communication in response to explorations about their ethnic identity.

It must be noted that limitations existed in distinguishing how approaches that are learnt in dialogic conversations in one context (home and community) are flexibly adapted and shared in other dialogic contexts (nursery setting). My work adds value to Rogoff et al. (2018) research by offering better understanding can be realised if children are afforded opportunities to flexibly expand their repertoires across cultural contexts, so that the social features that mixed ethnic children ascribe to preferences in terminology are shared in their interactions with practitioners. This contribution is relevant for supporting children to skilfully participate in distinct cultural contexts when researching children’s lived experiences. Additional limitations in my study exist here because it is extremely difficult to explicitly say whether contexts for co-constructing ethnic identity are enabled or marginalised by pedagogic approaches.

### 8.9 The theoretic model of ethnic identity formation

Influenced by the findings in this research study, introduced in Figure 2 is the theoretic model of ethnic identity formation.

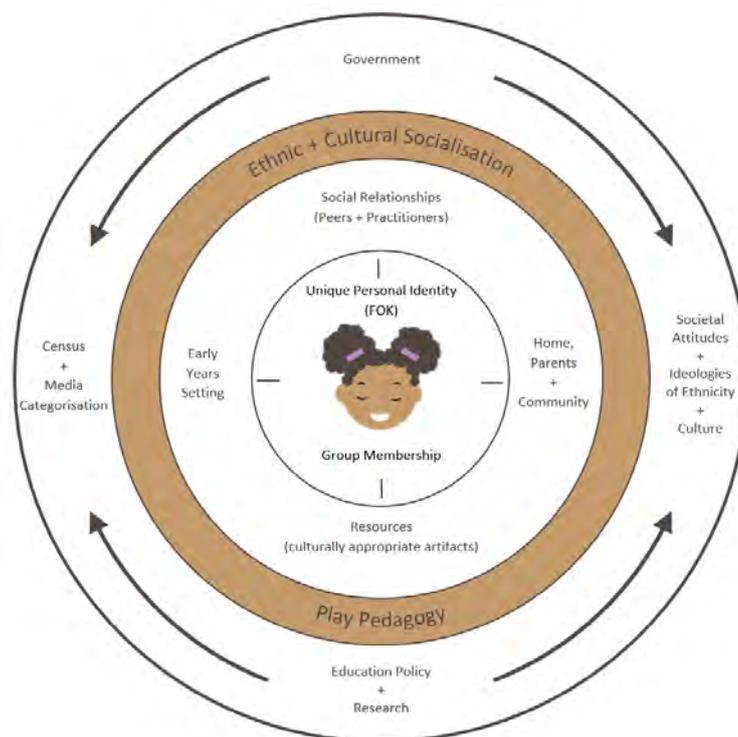


Figure 2 Theoretic model of ethnic identity formation

This theoretic model has been adapted from Rodriguez, Cauce and Wilson’s (2002) work that developed a model for identity formation. Although I acknowledge insights are based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems of influence, I felt Rodriguez, et al. (2002) offered a model by which to develop a more integrated theorisation to demonstrate the

influences that affect a child's sense of ethnic identity. Demonstrating the interplay between mediation, participation and identity formation this model incorporates Rodriguez, Cauce and Wilson's (2000) existing model, but also incorporates historic contexts from Tajfel (1979) who placed an emphasis on group membership; recognition of children's funds of knowledge (Barron, 2014); play as a cultural bridge between home and 'school' (Broadhead and Burt, 2012); and play pedagogy (Butler and Markman, 2016) theorisations to extend ideas associated with socialisation and the development of an ethnic identity.

My model focuses on contexts within the child's situated environment (in an early years setting) that serve to influence conceptions of self. Recognising existing ideologies that through interaction the child will learn and develop in complex multiple environments, Figure 1 illuminates the proposed sociocultural development of ethnic identity formation in a society of multiple complex cultures. Presented is a theoretic model of ethnic identity that synthesises established education theory, research in child development, ethnic identity development and socialisation processes. Based on findings from this research study the paradoxical process of developing a sense of self that is informed by group membership and involves external influences is shown.

Viewing learning and development as being embedded in systems of contextual influence, the central circle identifies the dynamic influences of ethnic socialisation upon the child. Shown in this microsystemic level are the significant others that interact with the child, where the 'proximal' process of ethnic socialisation can be "direct or indirect, tacit and explicit" (Rodriguez, Cauce and Wilson, 2002: 301), but do come to affect self-concept and the ways in which children interact in society.

Pertinent to this study are examples in which these influences serve to shape the mixed ethnic's child interaction in the early years setting. Examples such as the significant influence of peer relationships and friendship (explained in section 8.3.2 and 8.8) are specifically relatable here. Other examples include the important influence of culturally appropriate resources when developing contexts that support learning about inclusion with young children. Culturally appropriate resources act as 'socialising agents' as well as a 'social toolkit' that children can access to identify with their own diversity, and the diversity of others if situated in the physical environment.

The outermost circle reflects macro level systems such as Government policy and reform (DfE, 2015), early childhood curriculum (EYFS, 2008a; 2014; 2017) census and media stereotypes (ONS, 2011), and prevalent societal values and beliefs that interact and impact on micro-level systems and ultimately the child's sense of self.

Regarding the shaded circle, Waller et al. (2011) reasoned to understand the social relations in which any particular individual exists the researcher needs to consider external social influences and their impact in shaping children's identity. This model offers a visual context in which to better understand the significant systems that mixed ethnic children will negotiate meaning in whilst mediating their competence and capacity for understanding and acting upon definitions pertaining to ethnic categorisation. Discussion and examples provided in earlier sections of this chapter (to respond to the research questions) provide explanations about interrelated processes associated within and between the microsystem, represented as *ethnic and cultural socialisation processes* and *play pedagogy* that serve to influence the child's *unique personal identity* system representative of ethnic identity formation.

Reiterated again here, it is recognised that challenge and complexity exist beyond simplistic notions that pedagogic action and culturally appropriate resources have the potential for engaging young children in explorations about how they choose to co-construct and categorise meaning about their mixed ethnicity. Turning to studies undertaken by Chesworth (2016) are contentions that policy structures create challenges for practitioners in understanding diverse sociocultural practices that children will bring to their play activities. Chesworth (2016: 305) also argues interpretations of play are governed by curriculum frameworks that "privilege universal, individualised learning intentions over every day lived experiences of children".

Making use of these deliberations, I contend that what is missing are interpretations of play pedagogy that incorporate children's ethnic and cultural funds of knowledge. It is important to recognise that these rich sources have the potential of offering an alternative lens in which practitioners can interpret children's externally encountered experiences with family and community. In this way the mixed ethnic child's play repertoires provide opportunities to reflect on practice and transform pedagogical approaches rather than delivering provision that serves to privilege certain interests over others.

### **8.10 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has brought together perspectives from the participants engaged in this study to consider their contribution to the research questions. Set within the parameters of this inquiry my evaluations positioned interpretivism to consider the merits of this body of work. A sociocultural lens has been used to present the narratives that inform new ways of knowing to contribute towards transformation of principle models of pedagogical understanding surrounding mixed ethnic identity formation within early years curricula.

Funds of knowledge theory is recognised throughout, to present the complex ways in which young mixed ethnic children choose to, as well as choose not to express ideas associated with their own sense of self in terms of their ethnic origin. Explanations also situate contexts about how this group of children expressed perspectives about 'others'. Which included the peers, the researcher, family members and external encounters with individuals in the local community. Interestingly there is no evidence in the evaluated data to indicate the children's perspectives about the ethnic origins of the practitioners.

Opportunities to explore precisely what makes mixed ethnicity identity unique has been extremely challenging to pinpoint, because the processes of how children internalised adult knowledge about ethnic categorisation are not explicitly evidenced in the learning experiences of this study. However, what is significant is the children's ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs, where a strong preference for using the terms *black, white, brown, light brown and whiteish* is observed. All the focus children demonstrate that they can express views that show a strong sense of cultural understanding aligned with skin colour differentials, where they also evidence a demonstrable ability to use ethnic identity terminology interchangeably.

When referring to this group of focus children, I have adapted a phrase used by Palaiologou (2016) to offer those individuals working with young children in the context of developing an ethnic identity should move towards helping children to develop a '*unique personal identity*'. Adding value to existing epistemologies, I contend this term can be used to transform a pedagogy of play that forefronts contexts associated with ethnic origin and embraces other aspects of diversity that make a child distinctly unique.

Wood's (2014: 9) contention that children's agency can be a "testing ground for whose freedom, power and control can be exercised" has informed contributions about the complexities between the children's and practitioners' agentic power. My findings confirm the children are for the most part in control and are enabled to make choices about their learning. I make claim to this view because of the settings ethos for following children's natural curiosities is at the forefront of all practice. It is only on one occasion where an example of adult directed pedagogy prescribes the purpose and direction of play (section 8.4.3), and so it could be reasonably perceived that the learning is being contrived toward the desired outcome of the adult, rather than the child's own free choice. On the other hand, findings confirm approaches used by the practitioners provided inadequate indication about how co-construction of ethnic identity is being facilitated in the play activities beyond what the children already know. Instead, pedagogic approaches are centred on embedded familial practice about similarity and difference in ethnicity from known societal groupings,

rather than information gathered from the day-to-day observations of the cultural funds of knowledge that children bring into the setting.

Central to my theorisation are findings that evidence the agentic and complex ways in which participatory peer relationships facilitated the children expressed perceptions about their own ethnicity, and the ethnicities of the other children in the group. It is important to note these perspectives will be expressed in the predictable and safe reoccurrence of the activities; belonging to familial group memberships; and from a positive sense of self formed in secure friendships with peers.

Moving forward contribution to bodies of research reason play-based pedagogical approaches need to generate space for using *culturally appropriate resources* (CAR) to create an equitable standpoint in the interactions between practitioners and children, so that co-construction of ethnic identity can be explored. This study has provided rich evidence to demonstrate that CAR act as 'socialising agents' as well as a 'social toolkit' (Park, 2011: 406) that children can access to identify with their own diversity, and the diversity of others if situated in the physical environment.

In drawing this chapter to a close, I reiterate earlier expressed contentions that challenge complexity exists beyond simplistic notions that pedagogic action and culturally appropriate resources have the potential for engaging young children in explorations about how they choose to co-construct and categorise meaning about their mixed ethnic identity. The complexities and limitations associated with engaging in sensitivities surrounding ethnicity, a raced identity and play-based pedagogic approaches have been made explicit throughout the chapter. I have remained true to giving status to the children participating in this study. Affordance was also given to methodologies of listening to and respecting rights to participate (and withdraw) so that the children's perspectives and experiences pertaining to a mixed ethnic identity was centrally positioned in the presented findings (Pascal and Bertram, 2012). A sociocultural lens offered situated contexts so that this group of children were afforded opportunities to co-construct categorisations with practitioners to offer better understanding about how they choose to ascribe meaning to a mixed ethnic identity with peers, practitioners and the researcher.

Chapter 9 will bring this study to a close by summarising the contribution of this knowledge to the wider bodies of research. Implications of the research will be addressed, as will final recommendations for future studies. The chapter will culminate with a personal reflection about my learning and growth from undertaking this study.



## **Chapter 9: Final Recommendations**

### **9.1 How the chapter is organised**

This chapter commences by summarising the key findings, as well as presenting an account of my contributions to new knowledge and originality. Recommendations for policy and early years practice is detailed in full in Chapter 8, so this chapter will outline areas for future research, dissemination and practice. I conclude this chapter with a personal reflection of my learning and growth as a researcher, a few key messages that I would like the reader to remember and an important perspective about mixed ethnic identity.

It is important to reiterate the key findings and subsequent conclusions of this inquiry need to be located in the context of a small-scale case study in an early years nursery setting. It is also important to mention this study was deeply committed to the adoption of a rights based pedagogic approach, as well as a desire to create an authentic space with young children and early years practitioners to critically think about 'real world' experiences from the perspective of the focus children. It was therefore imperative that the supporting methods used in the inquiry made use of action (praxis) combined with reflection (phronesis). The support of my directors of study and their depth of understanding surrounding praxeological methods was critical to informing the principled approaches adopted in my research design. Recommendations that I undertake a pilot study to test out my methods certainly contributed to my scholarly development as a researcher.

The aim of my inquiry was to use participatory approaches that engaged with the interactions and dialogic conversations between the children and practitioners. Participation started out in child initiated sociodramatic play, but then moved into adult directed learning experiences using culturally appropriate resources. The purpose of which was to demonstrate how children's contributions may serve to inform new categorisations that they ascribe to similarities and differences in mixed ethnic origin. Which would move beyond existing epistemologies that suggest children's social development is dependent on internalisation of knowledge shared by adults.

In this way the study's methodological approach served to capture the complex and varied ways in which children share perspectives about their mixed ethnic identity in their social 'world'. Growing confidence to critically analyse theoretical approaches in existing research literature led me to a position where I was confident of the appropriate theoretic lens to use to problematise ethnic identity formation. The use of an interpretive reproduction paradigm (Corsaro, 2015) and funds of knowledge (FOK) theorisation acted as the main lens to

facilitate detailed consideration of the thick narrative descriptions identified with the children and practitioners in this private day nursery.

Chapter 5 provides the full rationale behind the choice of sample children, which in this study comprised of three focus children, two children from Black Caribbean/White origin and one child from Black African/White origin. Respecting research design principles surrounding confirmability and trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004) the sample participants were decided by the practitioners who had detailed knowledge about the maturation and stage of development of the selected children. The purpose here was to ensure that as far as possible the study's findings were the result of the experiences and perspectives of the children and the practitioners.

Considering the methodological decisions explained in Chapter 5, it is important to mention that the choice of sample was purposive (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). It is also important to reiterate the transcribed dialogic conversations were selected by the children and practitioners, and therefore decided what constituted the emergent findings within this inquiry. Recognising that I am deeply self-aware it is highly significant to acknowledge my own influencing position in the research process. I make use of reflection and reflexivity (Schön, 1983) to consider the merits and limitations of my skills as a researcher. Looking back at the depth of thought put into my thesis, I recognise that one of my strengths is being highly reflective.

Consideration of my identity as a black researcher and its influence on the interpretation of the finding has been carefully acknowledged in the process of my research. There were incidents in the research process where I perceive my ethnic origin prompted behaviours amongst a senior practitioner and the owners of the setting that I did not anticipate when starting out on my PhD journey. I believe attributes within my character, such as a respectful acceptance about inaccurate judgments of myself have contributed towards my continuing professional development. I note these highly significant factors here because they will have influenced interpretation of the key findings, but more notably these factors provided me with a persistence to continue with my study so that I could share the important perspectives of this group of children.

### **9.2.1 Praxeology - methodology of listening and participation**

The use of praxeological principles have been valuable for demonstrating trustworthiness in my research, as well as creating a situated context in which to explore rights based participatory approaches with the focus children. Concurring with Pascal and Bertram (2012) that listening is an essential element for understanding what young children are

experiencing and feeling in the here and now, a praxeological approach was highly significant for giving status to children's voices in my research. Listening was therefore considered as a fundamental component of ensuring participation and for tuning into and giving power to the status of the children.

This research provides strong evidence that levels of confidence and wellbeing is a determining factor for signifying how and when children will articulate their understanding about contexts associated with ethnicity. A positive sense of self, as well as positive sense of belonging (group membership) is another contributing factor that will influence levels of participation when using this approach. Comparably, another key finding in this inquiry is children's desire to interact can be swayed by dominant norms created in community groups. Children's modes of communication in participation can switch between vocal forms of expression to challenge practitioner and peer comments made about ethnicity, to non-verbal forms of expression to express frustration; exercise rights to privacy, as well as rights to withdraw from further participation.

Moving forward defining what praxeology means, Pascal and Bertram (2012: 481) describes it as the "situated context in which power and ethics are fundamentally realised and explored in an attempt to engage in participatory practice to better understand human actions...and to transform them".

With this helpful thought in mind, the aim of this study was to position democracy at the heart of a 'pedagogy in participation', which was much harder to achieve than anticipated. An indication of the challenges associated with implementing a praxeological approach was experienced during the negotiating access and observation phases. Pascal and Bertram (2009) alert individuals contemplating using this methodological approach to carefully consider contexts associated with the redistribution of power; exploration of play-based pedagogic approaches, and children's rights to participate. Taking forward this advice I can endorse that using this approach will situate unexpected contexts, which can be expressed in various ways: from a refusal to complete documentation (such as completion of reflective learning journals) needed to evidence rigour in research processes; self-protective responses from practitioners in retaliation to perceived criticism about aspects of their pedagogic practice; to associated behaviours resulting from an awareness of limitations within their own pedagogic practice and cultural knowledge of the children. I summarise this section with a reflection about praxeology in this research process.

When reflecting on ethical participatory methods for authentically and ethically acknowledging children as 'active partners' it was extremely difficult to ascertain precisely where the focus children's internalised constructs about a mixed ethnic identity stemmed

from. Thought was always given to evidencing explanations about how the children's knowledge crossed the cultural divide between home and the setting, (Lam and Pollard, 2006). However, recognising my own limitations as a researcher, it was very difficult to explicitly say how and where the children come to operationalise the co-construction of their ethnic identities in the learning experiences with practitioners.

Informing pedagogy my contribution espouses that although practitioners are able to co-construct meaning where both research participants (children and practitioners) have similar conceptions about skin colour differentials, it would not be developmentally appropriate to use more verbally sophisticated terminology with children of this age to explore distinguishing how approaches that are learnt in dialogic conversations in one context (home and community) are flexibly adapted and shared in other dialogic contexts (nursery setting). Key findings indicate that the practitioners own cultural knowledge is limited to the contexts already known by the children. Emergent findings also indicate that practitioner cultural knowledge about the children they work with is underdeveloped. So, it is plausible to suggest that the terminology shared by the children has been learnt in externally encountered experiences of participation with parents, family and community.

### **9.2.2 Funds of knowledge theory: a tool for facilitating inclusive practice for the diverse learner**

I previously expressed uncertainty in young children's ability to engage in complex ideas about a mixed ethnic identity, particularly where explorations challenge complex embedded and fixed conceptualisations of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' that may have become hidden in the language of those in positions to influence and shape meaning surrounding ethnic categorisation with young children. Guiding understanding, sources in research literature argue funds of knowledge (FOK) theorisation is about cultural traits which may include language; values; beliefs; prevailing and accepted perceptions acquired in social relationships; and performance of tasks (Riojas-Cortez, 2001; Moll et al., 2001; Barron 2014).

Recognising that culture goes beyond the material artefacts or resources seen in early years classrooms, I made use of FOK theorisation to suggest children will be entering educational settings rich in cultural knowledge from their home and community (Lam and Pollard, 2006). Funds of knowledge theory was therefore well-suited to make sense of the complex ways in which young mixed ethnic children choose to (or not) express their thoughts about their own sense of self in terms of their ethnic origin. Positioned in the context of this study was a suggestion that early childhood educators tend to determine

what knowledge harmonises best with existing pre-planned learning experiences (Karabon, 2017), often ignoring the rich cultural knowledge that children bring into the setting.

Concurring with studies from Riojas-Cortez, (2001); Moll, et al., (2001); Barron, (2014) this research provides strong evidence that mixed ethnic children not only demonstrate that they can express views that show a strong sense of cultural understanding aligned with skin colour differentials, they also show a demonstrable ability to use ethnic identity terminology interchangeably. Findings also situate this group of children can evolve beyond the strong emotional bonds established in interaction with parents, where through a process of social interaction they do participate in cultural routines outside of their family (Corsaro, 2015).

There is also robust evidence that play-based pedagogic approaches using careful questioning alongside culturally appropriate resources acts as a stimulus for encouraging dialogue and maintenance of sustained thinking about ethnicity. My theorisation contends culturally appropriate resources act as 'socialising agents', as well as a 'socialising toolkit' that has the potential for engaging young children in explorations about how they choose to co-construct and categorise meaning about their mixed ethnicity. Particularly if they are situated as part of continuous provision in the physical environment. Confirmed in the findings is terminology that not only elicits details about how the children perceive their own ethnic identity, but also seen are expressed perspectives about how they perceive the ethnic identity of their family members and peers. For the most part these children have a strong sense of control and self-efficacy in routines and play activities, as well as possessing the agency to make choices about their learning in most contexts.

Taking the key findings together there is compelling evidence to position FOK theory is an appropriate tool for facilitating inclusive practice for the diverse learner. The vignettes of play indicate the children are interacting with terminology to make sense of the funds of knowledge that they already possess from previous externally encountered experiences.

Implications of skin colour preferences in supporting biracial children to better recognise social features associated with 'race' and culture allowed them to identity more flexibly in racial categorisation and identification experiences. However, conceptions beyond skin tone differential were difficult to ascertain within the study's findings. Acknowledging weaknesses in my research, the findings contain evidence to indicate priming mechanisms used to explore preferences amongst the children are somewhat limited. It was not feasible to explore these contexts within the scope of the research. An alternative interpretation might argue that the children's descriptions are appropriate given their age and stage of development, and the use of complex vocabularies to extend learning further would be unethical and highly inappropriate.

To summarise, key findings presented in Chapter 8 demonstrate FOK theory is a useful theoretical framework in which to facilitate wider comprehension about how young diverse learners choose to make meaning and express thoughts about their own sense of self, as well as a sense of 'others' in terms of their ethnic origin. However, confirmed in my research is a view that practitioners need to move beyond known societal categorisations seen in the census (Home-Office for National Statistics, 2020) towards play-based pedagogic approaches that make use of terminology used by the children themselves. Only then can children's understanding be utilised in play-based pedagogic approaches to extend and co-construct new terminology from their perspectives.

### **9.2.3 Mixed ethnic identity formation as a sociocultural activity**

Notions shared in Chapter 2 explained social practices that shape and determine cultural knowledge and sense of identity are useful for developing understanding about diverse children's race and ethnic identity. Explanations in research literature, English educational policy or curriculum frameworks that describe how young biracial children engage in and maintain categorisations associated with their ethnic identity still seemed to be somewhat incomplete. Comparably, there also appeared to be incomplete accounts for describing the socialisation processes used in play pedagogies associated with ethnic identity formation.

In the review of literature, I expressed concern that tensions exist in early childhood education contexts for providing culturally appropriate socio-dramatic play experiences to facilitate co-construction about mixed ethnic identity with children. In part because of external influences from outcome driven inspection frameworks amongst many other influential external factors. I also perceived there could be a potential tension or a mismatch between culturally situated play-based pedagogic contexts and the dialogic conversations between the children and practitioners.

Grounding ethnic identity formation in sociocultural and psychosocial approaches (Flum and Kaplan, 2012) this inquiry endeavoured to move away from essentialist understandings about internal developmental processes towards investigating how children's experience of a mixed ethnic identity and the relationships with peers (as well as practitioners) is constructed through culturally and socially determined discourses, operating in sociodramatic play experiences. Hence moving away from internal accounts offered by developmental psychology research.

Flum and Kaplan (2012: 240) describe the process of identity formation in early childhood as being "anchored in a web of relationships, group solidarity and communal culture". Comparably Gaither and Chen et al. (2014: 2311) describe the malleable nature of

identification by mixed ethnic children as having a “fluid racial identity”. Within the context of my research these definitions served to demonstrate complexity in establishing decisive narrative explanations about mixed ethnic identity formation as a sociocultural activity. But did provide a lens for understanding the problematic nature with which issues relating to a mixed ethnic identity are engaged with in early years education.

Key findings in this study confirm that child development and learning does occur as a social process emphasised by an interdependence in respectful relationships with others. Relating to existing epistemologies my contributions to research concur with Gaither and Chen et al. (2014) theorisation that the malleable nature of identification by mixed ethnic children and their ability to ‘shift’ between in-groups to others is dependent on the contexts in which they find themselves. Findings also confirm the focus children naturally categorise information received from individuals similar to as well as different to themselves (in-group or out-group respectively) interchangeably to make predictable their own experiences. Through socialisation processes of interaction with peers there is an indication that mixed ethnic children’s sense of identity is the consequence of their membership in a particular group. This small group of children are genuinely motivated to evaluate themselves positively and therefore do appraise their in-group positively.

Postmodernist’s ideologies that explain individuals are not necessarily restricted by their backgrounds but are free to construct their own identities, have informed ideas associated with socialisation processes in this inquiry (Waller et al., 2011). As have philosophies that emphasise choice is also an important influencing factor in socialisation processes. Acknowledging construction of identity is embodied in an individual’s capacity to make choices and to act independently, as well as being embodied in dispositions to learn have also informed ideas associated with socialisation processes.

It is recognised that the process of constructing identities and the ability to act can constrain or similarly enable an individual’s agency (Bourdieu, 1993; Waller, et al., 2011). Furthermore, the influence of Bourdieu (1984) concept of habitus supported exploration about ideas associated the individual’s ability to engage in educational structures that influence values and beliefs of particular groups. Whilst pioneering work associated with Foucault (1991) writings was reflected on to support comprehension about the potential of the dynamics between power and agency and its influence on practitioners’ dispositions to shape learner identity. Similarly, Foucault’s (1991) defining ideas about power and control laid the foundation for understanding the possibilities of an individual’s choice and ability to act and exercise one’s power.

This research has deliberated over the complex relationship between professional and learner identity to demonstrate how successive neoliberal ideologies and revisions in the implementation of the early years foundation stage have influenced the complex nature of dispositions for practitioners and young children. Discourse in Chapter 3 illuminated how policies on assessment have potentially come to influence practitioner agency. Offered for consideration was a view that practitioners may feel pressured to assess children in ways to meet curricula outcomes, rather than basing their judgements on knowledge of children's learning and development from their interests and engagement (or not) in learning experiences Bradbury (2014).

My contribution to research confirms the children's space, agency and power in developing a culturally and ethnically appropriate sense of belonging in this educational setting has been observed throughout the process of research. Key findings confirm the children are in control in most of the situated contexts and are enabled to make choices about their learning. There is only one occasion where an example of adult directed pedagogy prescribes the purpose and direction of play, where it could be reasonably perceived that the children's own free choice is inhibited.

Findings here align with Bourdieu's (1993) judgements that the process of constructing identities and the ability to act can constrain or similarly enable young children's agency and choice. The findings highlight the practitioners accompanying dialogue and cues for extending knowledge about sameness/difference is seen to impede extensive active discussion and co-construction of knowledge beyond the children's already understood categorisations.

It must be acknowledged that the self-portrait learning experience did evidence the children's richest descriptions about their own and others ethnic identity. Whilst pedagogic action using questioning techniques did act as prompts to elicit these responses, the practitioners' knowledge about cultures differing to their own was somewhat limited. Which in turn exposed the underdeveloped nature of the practitioners own cultural knowledge about the children.

To summarise, emphasised is the potentially important role that pedagogical contexts have in shaping the biracial child's learning outcomes. I recognise weaknesses exist in my research, insomuch as my findings indicate that the mechanisms in which practitioners leverage children's knowledge in co-constructing their perceptions about ethnic identity are extremely difficult to navigate in the socialisation process of this research.

### 9.3 Contributions to knowledge

This inquiry started out by contending research literature and policy contexts surrounding mixed ethnic identity formation overlooked contributions that gave ‘voice’ to children from these groupings. As a result of conducting this research and presenting the summarised key findings above, there are five important contributions to knowledge that add to existing epistemologies in sociocultural debate about development of mixed ethnic identity formation in early childhood education: 1) the significance of friendship and peer interaction; 2) making use of praxeological methods to give status to children’s voices; 3) contexts associated with power and agency in play-based pedagogical approaches; 4) the value of developing space in curriculum frameworks to explore ethnic identity formation; and 5) play as a mediation tool for connecting ideas and co-constructing knowledge about ethnic identity.

Recognised in early childhood research are interpretations that all individuals have an ethnicity, belong to an ethnic group, and have distinctive cultural features that serve to unite them (Knowles and Holstróm, 2013). Supporting comprehension about cultural features and practices, the authors also suggest practices that unite groups are the unique customs associated with the particular group that make them distinct from one another (Knowles and Holstróm, 2013). Cultural customs associated with what clothes are worn and preparation and cooking of foods for example are practices associated with social aspects of people’s lives. It is acknowledged that reproduction of these cultural practices will be observed in children’s play repertoires, so exploration that incorporated and extended understanding about how children choose to categorise their cultural and ethnic beliefs was carefully considered to add to these current educational debates.

Focusing on the formation of an ethnic identity in the early years are thoughts that convey children can only learn tolerance, inclusiveness and how to challenge generalised negative narratives, if they observe adults doing the same (Siraj-Blatchford and Clark, 2000). Corsaro (2015: 41) also contributed to debate in literature by arguing “children creatively appropriate or take information from the adult world to produce their own unique peer cultures”.

Notions in this body of research then proposed information appropriated from adults is then used to creatively extend and transform concerns children may have in their peer worlds. This study moved beyond generalised ideas about the dependency of adults’ modelling behaviours such as tolerance and appropriation of information, to focus on the influence of play-based pedagogic approaches, and contexts in which children are supported to engage in learning experiences that facilitate co-construction of mixed ethnic identity.

Another central purpose of this study was to move beyond pluralistic beliefs of provision that is inclusive to all, to provision where listening to children's wider experiences are valued by giving them 'voice' in educational knowledge. Historic pioneers such as Aboud (1988) proposed that children as young as three are frequently aware that people come from culturally different communities. Similarly, messages convey acquisition of cultural identities is not an automatic development proceeding in passive children but includes children's active attempts to understand and interpret their own and others' identity, gradually constructing this concept over time, and eventually incorporating it as one of the main filters of social cognition (Sanders, 2004).

The use of FOK theorisation as a lens for exploring mixed ethnic identity formation enabled me to make explicit the influences that impact on this group of children's ability to express ideas about their ethnic identity. The first contribution to knowledge evidence that the children participating in this study actively engaged in play-based experiences, but rather than being solely dependent on the 'knowledgeable adult' rich descriptions surrounding perspectives about their cultural and raced identity were formed in the shared thoughts with peers.

New understanding includes an appreciation of significant factors such as friendship and peer interaction. Mixed ethnic young children in peer friendships demonstrate not only a strong sense of self and insightful knowledge about their own and differing ethnicities, but also confirmed are indications that children from 'out-groups' through their friendships show demonstrable skills of instilling confidence in mixed ethnic children to express their developing judgements about their own ethnicity. My contributions therefore remind those individuals working with diverse learners not to forget about the enduring influence that peer membership and friendships will have in developing a positive sense of self.

Moving forward my early theorisations in the study contended what was missing in conversations about mixed ethnic children's sense of identity is the child's own understanding about how they make sense of and categorise their mixed ethnicity. Researchers such as Goodyer and Okitikpi (2007: 85) supported this notion when they maintained "the views of the children...themselves have often been ignored".

My second contribution to existing bodies of knowledge in early childhood education gives status to children's voices in my research by making use of praxeology. Where listening was considered a fundamental component for ensuring participation and tuning into this group of children's perspectives. Allowing them to identify more flexibly in racial categorisation and identification experiences, the findings provided strong evidence that biracial children predominantly use social features associated with skin tone similarities and

differences to categorise their own mixed ethnic identity and the ethnic identity of others. Incorporated into their play repertoires the terminology used by this group of children is *brown*, *light brown* and *whiteish*. More significantly it is important to note the biracial learner will use societal categorisations of *black* and *white* along with these new terms interchangeably. This evidence supports notions that the mixed ethnic child has a “fluid racial identity” (Gaither and Chen et al., 2014: 2311).

The third contribution to knowledge relates to research contexts associated with power and agency in relation to early childhood policy and practice, which have been carefully considered in the process of research. Firstly, concurring with Waller et al. (2011), who advocated children are not only capable of asserting their agency and preferences through expression of ideas and negotiation of their desires, they are able to cause change in these interactions within their learning environments.

My contribution to knowledge indicates children’s desire to interact can be swayed by dominant norms created in community groups. What I did find is children’s modes of communication switched between vocal forms of expression to share ideas or challenge comments made about their ethnicity by peers and the practitioners to non-verbal forms of expression to display frustration; exercise rights to privacy; and withdrawal from further participation. In this sense it is recognised that even if practitioners provide lots of focused attention, it is extremely difficult to keep up with children’s expressed responses (particularly when providing one-to-one support in group activities) and manage nuanced behaviours of peers who may directly challenge and manipulate pedagogical intentions. It must be emphasised that it is problematic to maintain pedagogic control in these situations.

In summary, in this third contribution to knowledge, my findings provide strong evidence that the children are highly capable of asserting their agency and perspectives about ethnic identity through expression and negotiation of ideas. However, complexity in the research process existed in precisely determining whose agency and power dominated when the children’s verbal and nonverbal modes of communication moved on so quickly.

Another context associated with power and agency relates to the inevitable shifts in focus of the practitioner when facilitating learning experiences. Evidence indicated that shifts in focus occurred particularly when behaviour management strategies needed to be undertaken with the children. My claims therefore argue that care must be taken to observe pedagogic actions because they can shift the focus and emphasis of an activity almost instantaneously. Which in relation to existing epistemologies (Rodriguez, 2013) about ethnic identity development evidence how adult agency and power can contrive and change the purpose of playful learning experiences, and therefore the intended learning outcome.

Unless the play is revisited, and the purpose of the experience is explored and extended at a later date.

The fourth contribution to knowledge relates to factors that can meaningfully enhance a play-based pedagogic approach when exploring the concept of ethnic identity. Contended is a theorisation that the early years practitioner needs to generate a space in which to incorporate the use of culturally appropriate resources (CAR). Informing pedagogy, use of these resources create an equitable standpoint in which interaction and co-construction of ethnic identity can be explored. These types of resources act as a socialising agent in which the diverse learner can actively use as part of their “social toolkit” (Park, 2011: 406) for exploring their existing understanding about ethnic diversity. Ultimately in summarising the contributions above, practitioners who interact with diverse children informed funds of knowledge will need to take care to observe children’s verbal and more significantly nonverbal modes of communication in response to explorations about their ethnic identity.

The value of developing space in curriculum frameworks through play-based pedagogic approaches is a complex context that indicated paradoxical influences on ethnic identity formation. Examples include the influence of policy structures that create challenges for practitioners to develop understanding about the diverse sociocultural practices that children will bring to their play activities. Another example is play pedagogy that omits children’s ethnic and cultural funds of knowledge, which in turn prevents reflection on inclusive practice and transformation of pedagogic approaches. What has been observed in the findings in this study is the permanence of pedagogic approaches that are centred on embedded familial practice about similarity and difference from known societal groupings. Which means these rich sources of information outside of the context of this study are potentially omitted from planned play experiences, practitioner judgments and assessment of children’s learning.

Moving forward, bodies of research that focused on the promotion of the socio emotional and cognitive benefits of play in education and child development was highly pertinent for giving voice to the children’s perspectives in this study. Interest in play related to and focused on processes that involve internal representation that is specific to cultural and individual (ethnic) contexts. Described as a period in which children learn the language of their culture, Vygotskian theorisation suggests that between the ages of two to eight years this learning can be seen in children’s play. Contributing to this concept, Broadhead and Burt (2012) proffer Vygotsky’s (1978) works provide a lens for understanding that play is a process in which children mediate and develop new forms of thinking, where they combine internal ideas with external realities. Adding to these contexts and used as a mediation tool in this study, Broadhead and Burt (2012) proposed play has the potential to act as a

powerful 'bridge' between children's home and 'school' communities. In relation to this study, play was used to explore how it acted as a mediation tool for connecting ideas about how mixed ethnic children choose to share and co-construct knowledge about their ethnic identity learned in the home and community with knowledge shared in the setting.

Evidence in the findings clearly indicate the intentional play experiences acted as a useful mediation tool for dialogic conversations that garnered the children's perspectives about ethnicity. Rich descriptions in the findings evidence children's capacities for sharing previously constructed discourse from externally encountered experiences in their play experiences. Notwithstanding the challenges experienced in making use of play-based pedagogic approaches (detailed in full in Chapter 8), findings confirm that play in this inquiry acted as an accommodating tool for mediation in interactions between the focus children, peers and practitioners.

Weaknesses do exist in the findings, because it was not possible to elicit findings from the analysis of data to explain precisely how play acts as a cultural bridge between the home and the early years setting. Emergent findings indicate the children's perspectives about ethnicity were shared from internalised knowledge learnt in externally encountered experiences of participation with parents, family and community. This does not of course preclude social media influences. This claim is offered because there is little evidence to demonstrate how the practitioner's own cultural and raced knowledge about the children has been utilised in the learning experiences to develop the children's understanding and attitudes towards culture, race and ethnicity beyond what they already know.

Progressing contributions to knowledge, conversations surrounding play often focus on quality and quantity of play that should be afforded in young children's learning experiences. However, taking all the contributions made above into account, the fifth and final contribution to knowledge contends how play is recognised and interpreted in government policy and educational research should be open to much wider debate. When play is conceptualised as being "universal, culturally neutral and colour-blind" (Adair and Doucet, 2014: 361) negates its potential as being a useful cultural bridge between the home and educational setting. Particularly for research studies focusing on children's cultural and raced funds of knowledge. Play without consideration of cultural and racial references limits discussion about the many ways in which children from diverse groupings will define similarities and differences to self and others.

### **9.3.1 Summary of contributions**

This thesis has framed play-based pedagogy and mixed ethnic identity formation within the insider perspectives of young mixed ethnic children and practitioners. Located within sociocultural theory, the research's methodological approach, analysis of data and presentation of findings are informed by a proposition that young children's ethnic identity can be studied within the ethnic and cultural socialisation processes and play pedagogy contexts within which it is situated. Ethnic identity formation as a localised sociocultural activity has implications for inclusion within early childhood education both in terms of academic research, early years curricula and in terms of a pedagogy of play. Bringing all the presented contributions to knowledge together what has emerged from these findings is recognition of a nuanced understanding about the complexities and tensions that exist for incorporating play-based pedagogic approaches to explore and co-construct new meanings from the perspectives of the mixed ethnic learner.

### **9.4 Recommendations for future research and dissemination**

This study has the potential to inform a number of research avenues for publication and conference dissemination. Starting with research, audiences interested in findings relating to young children's ethnic identity formation, using funds of knowledge theorisation would be beneficial for developing studies related to diverse children's capacities for sharing knowledge about their own and 'others' ethnic origin. Although it could be argued that the group of mixed ethnic children used skin colour preferences predominantly to demonstrate understanding about social features associated with 'race' and ethnicity. These findings could be considered as the starting point for supporting further research that allows diverse children to identify more flexibly in racial categorisation and identification experiences. Whilst my findings indicate that this group of children's sense of cultural understanding aligned with skin colour differentials pertaining to self, they were also able to decode the value attributed to skin colour terminology used in larger societal contexts (Mac Naughton, 2005) to describe individuals in the wider community.

Of particular interest, therefore, would be studies that use funds of knowledge theorisation to focus on and connect the social process for internalising children's externally encountered constructions of ethnicity. In other words, how these groupings co-construct and make sense of the funds of knowledge within their family and community structures. These findings are therefore of value to studies interested in extending existing epistemologies about children's racial attitude development, (Baldock, 2010).

The next recommendation relates to the 'voices' of the participants. A key strength of this inquiry is the children's voices are central to the methods, analysis, findings and the narrative contributions. Therefore, sociocultural oriented research journals or early childhood conferences who have an interest in the application of a theoretic framework that allows children's cultural and raced perceptions to emerge (from structures such as everyday family traditions, behaviours, and communication styles) in their play would benefit from the findings in this research. Building on the methodologies used in this study is an opportunity to garner better understanding about the cultural contexts learned in the home and wider community contexts (Kabaron, 2017). Caveats do exist in using a funds of knowledge theoretical framework, because in this inquiry it was extremely difficult to clearly demarcate whether contexts for co-constructing ethnic identity was enabled or marginalised by socialisation processes and play pedagogy. What is clear for interested parties however is, if children are afforded opportunities to flexibly expand their discourse in their play repertoires across the cultural contexts of home and the early years setting, the social features that young children ascribe to preferences about their ethnic identity are shared in their interactions with practitioners and peers. This contribution is highly relevant for supporting children to skilfully participate in distinct cultural contexts when researching children's lived experiences.

A strength of this study has been exploration of ideas surrounding an individual's ability to engage or act in educational structures. Concepts surrounding the processes of socialisation; the individuals' ability to engage in educational structures; and dynamics between power and agency and its influence on dispositions for shaping learner identity have been central for supporting comprehension about the complex nature of dispositions between the focus children and practitioners participating in this inquiry. The power dynamic between practitioner/learner dispositions in the symbolic interactions of sharing knowledge could be of significant interest for dissemination in research articles.

Finally, for scholars interested in connecting meaningful social research to the social practices of young children. A praxeological approach promotes participatory methods so that individuals who may have been silenced via other qualitative methods are empowered to develop their own self-efficacy. Future research projects could use praxeology therefore to enable individuals to name their worlds by viewing *praxis* as a reflection on, and in human action.

In the case of this inquiry, praxeological methods provided a situated context in which to engage in participatory research with young mixed ethnic children, where thick narrative descriptions of localised actions emerged to indicate how this group of children perceived similarities and differences in their ethnic identity. More significantly the responses are the

children's own narratives. Highly pertinent for informing research therefore these findings shed light on how the principled approaches within praxeology positions democracy at the heart of a pedagogy in participation (Formosinho and Pascal, 2016). Furthermore, use of this principled approach provides an opportunity for transformation in play-based pedagogic approaches because there is a 'shift' from the adult sharing knowledge with the 'novice' child, to practice that gives status to the child's voice. In this way the child's own cultural and raced funds of knowledge can be utilised in the co-construction of new meanings and understandings, and an equitable standpoint is afforded.

### 9.5 Recommendations for future practice

Chapter 8 presented a full and detailed explanation that informed the implications of the study's findings on early childhood education policy and curricula, however summarised here are four key recommendations for future practice:

1. Children's cultural and raced funds of knowledge need to inform not just the judgements that are made about their learning and development, but this knowledge also needs to become an integral part of pedagogic knowledge.
2. Assessment of children's level of development should be addressed against early learning goals with '*knowledge*' of what constitutes, shapes, and defines the issues surrounding children's identities so that this learning can occur.
3. Play-based pedagogical approaches need to generate space for using *culturally appropriate resources* (CAR) to create an equitable standpoint in the interactions between practitioners and children. So that co-construction of contexts such as ethnic identity can be explored.
4. Opportunities for transformation in practice should be addressed so that children's 'voices' are given equitable status in play-based pedagogic approaches. A fundamental component of ensuring participation is listening to young children's *unique individual* perspectives so that democracy is positioned at the heart of a pedagogy in participation (Pascal and Bertram, 2012). I make a call here for transformative processes that encourage and empower children's participation in practice development.

Taken together, these summarised recommendations for practice development maintain attention needs to be given to the diversity of the children attending the setting; the impact that planned interventions could have on children's racial and ethnic identity development; raising practitioner awareness about their own cultural competence. Having summarised

recommendations for practice, which should be read alongside the detailed commendations in Chapter 8, I now progress to my closing account for this thesis.

## **9.6 Final words**

This doctoral research set out to create a space for deliberation about the socialisation processes in which a play-based pedagogic approach facilitates the co-construction of an ethnic identity. Specific to this inquiry the central focus was on the categorisations that mixed ethnic children ascribe to their own ethnic origin, as well as drawing on their perspectives about 'others'. Of particular interest was seeking understanding about how this group of children make use of knowledge learnt from external experiences with family and community, that are then shared in play activities in the early years setting.

Experience as an early years professional positioned inclusive education programmes in curricula frameworks such as the Early Years Foundation Stage tended to couch positive attitudes towards diversity in practices predominantly facilitated by cultural celebrations. Drawing on my experiences as a parent of mixed ethnic children my perceived reality positioned practitioners whilst engaging parents in their children's learning and development outcomes appeared to lack confidence and knowledge surrounding differing cultures to their own.

Considering suggestions from scholars such as Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007) and James and Prout (1997) that ethnographies in qualitative studies (applied in early childhood education) offer new voices to be heard. The primary aim was to make visible a wider range of expression. In this research this took the form of the children's rich descriptions from video-cued ethnographic accounts with peers and practitioners; drawings and paintings; and their dialogic conversations. I hope the findings do justice to the children's unique perspectives. Acknowledging the importance of the practitioners' role in facilitating the dialogic conversations emerging from the play experiences, I also hope the findings do justice to their contributory perceptions about this special group of children.

Among the wonderful categorisations that this group of children shared as research participants, one declaration has stayed with me ever since. It was in a moment of a sincerely deep and meaningful conversation with the children, that Jake came up to me and said (waving his pencil), "Sharon I can tell you, you are categorically black". If there was a moment of a deep sense of pride in my courage to persist with my study, this was it! As was a moment captured in the recordings when, in my absence, Jake asked if I would be attending that day and announced, "I love Sharon". It is in these moments that I recognise that I had captured the deep trust of this group of children. As a researcher, these regular

and sustained visits into the children's learning environment, and sustained observations with the children (and practitioners) affirm my ability to build trust into research methods (Shenton, 2004). I believe acquisition of the children's trust is a testament to the genuine belief I have in their capacities and capabilities. Which is an attribute that children are highly attuned to recognising in the individuals who work with them.

When it comes to addressing trustworthiness with the practitioners, this was established in how I prepared the groundwork for negotiating access and gaining consent to undertake this study. From developing and sharing detailed documentation about the research aims and methods; making myself available to answer questions surrounding the ethics and logistical arrangements before and during the study; maintaining regular and sustained visits into the children's learning environment to build rapport with not just the children but also all the nursery team; respecting the participants rights to discard data; to respecting rights to withdraw at any given time.

Recognising that my doctoral journey was not totally plain sailing over the past six years, the next section presents a reflection of my intellectual and personal development as a researcher.

### **9.6.1 Intellectual development as a researcher**

Intellectual development is indicated in the research design that has applied rigour in the methodological processes used throughout this study. Additionally, influences in the design process have been informed by the extensive review of theoretical literature that supported the adopted concepts throughout the inquiry. Interviewing practitioners; observation of the focus children using video-cued recordings of their play experiences in interaction with practitioners; and focus group interviews with parents and practitioners are considered as significant strengths in this thesis.

Not forgetting ethical considerations, although formal ethical approval was received in 2016, the importance of negotiation, member checking with gatekeepers in permitting continuous access, as well as the ongoing significance of checking assent with the children and consent with the practitioners is where rigour is also afforded within my study. Chapter 4 acknowledged ethical concerns (Flewitt, 2005) in researching children's conceptions, however dedication to developing methodologies that continually positioned the children's voice of the at the heart of the findings evidence how ethics of encounter were continually managed. When reflecting on ethical concerns with the practitioners, Siraj-Blatchford (2010: 277) advises "in ethnography access becomes a process of continuously establishing and developing relationships with the research participants".

Achieving democratic participation and maintaining positive relationships in the research process was due to my ability to make the practitioners feel included and their perspectives valued. Every meeting and dialogic conversation was scheduled (see Appendix 10) with the practitioners and rigour is shown in the resultant outcome minutes that were shared after checking the accuracy of my interpretations. Although there were moments of tension where my enquiries presented perceived threats to pedagogic practice, concerns were always respectfully and systematically addressed.

Moving forward, many ethnographic studies have utilised methods of data generation using interviews and participant observation in everyday learning experiences (Riojas-Cortez, 2001; Barron, 2013; Chesworth, 2016). Taking forward the principled approaches adopted by these researchers another strength in my study is the use of triangulation. To build a robust picture of the emergent themes and interpretations in this case study I have made use of Denzin's (1978) 'methodological triangulation', where I demonstrate strong skills of providing detailed documentation. My ability to document rich ethnographic field notes enabled me to develop supplementary notes that corroborate with the analysed emergent findings throughout stages of the research process.

Being highly organised in my approach, and systematic in my explorations, I made use of triangulation to effectively scrutinise and check all the collected data, which consisted of interviews, observations using video-cued recordings, focus group interviews, researcher field diaries, reflective practitioner journals and the setting's policy and procedures documentation. A quality recognised in this research is the time taken to triangulate the collected data systematically and methodologically. The main purpose of diligently scrutinising all the collected sources of data was to reduce researcher bias, and address confirmability by making explicit any shortcomings in the research methods and techniques. Ultimately triangulation of the applied methods provided as clear as possible understanding about ethnicity from the perspectives of the children rather than the 'assumptions' of the researcher.

Next, intellectual growth can be seen in my ability to 'drive' the research methodologies in the fieldwork. I recognised that my research would be reliant on the voluntary participation of the practitioners, as well as also being dependent on the development of a collective process of reflection between myself (researcher) and the practitioners (Formosinho and Pascal, 2016). Understanding that practitioner knowledge about praxeological research would be dependent on researcher clarifications. Skills of reflexivity to support development of practitioner knowledge about praxeological approaches is evidenced in many of the chapters in this thesis.

Throughout many chapters of this thesis I have presented explanations about my positionality by making explicit my background in terms of my personal interest in this topic and the cultural experiences in my work with young children and practitioners. The aim of which was to demonstrate how these experiences informed interpretations within my study. I also used a reflexive approach to minimise and monitor the effects of my presence (as a researcher) on the social interactions under investigation (Cutter-Mackenzie, Edwards and Quinton, 2015). It is hoped that these explanations support the readers understanding about what prompted my interests in the study, what I stand to gain from the inquiry, but more significantly it is hoped that it is made explicitly clear who the emergent findings from the inquiry are for (Wolcott, 2010).

Shenton (2004) contends that the ability of the researcher to relate his/her findings to existing bodies of knowledge is a key criterion for evaluating workings in qualitative studies. A willingness to take the time to learn from others, my supervisory team is another context in which I evidence growth to become a considered researcher. The supervisory team's support to develop my growth in higher order thinking is indicated in the depth of my analytical skill development.

Use of existing theoretical arguments from social science researchers such as Hardy and Bryman (2009) for discourse analysis, and Charmaz (2014) for constructing grounded theorisations have been extremely instrumental in supporting my ability to demonstrate rigour in the analysis of my research. I believe Chapter 5 evidence thorough skills of analysis, in which carefully considered systematic analysis of the data supported the development of an integrated set of theoretical concepts to emerge from the synthesised and interpreted empirical sources. As opposed to an emergence of concepts adopted from pre-existing hypothesis, a grounded theory approach provided the tools for exploration beyond reporting. The adopted techniques lent themselves to the analysis of the relationship between human agency and social structure. The adopted techniques also provided me with opportunities to explore the unexploited potential for interrogating power and inequality in those relationships.

Chapter 5 therefore presents the constant comparative methods used to create analytical distinctions, and thus comparisons at each level of the analysis of the data. Viewed as a training process for building rigour into my research, my competency to initially learn these techniques with the support of my director of study, and then to move on to demonstrate an ability to examine, code, categorise, tabulate and recombine my evidence to produces empirically based findings shows undoubtable strength in my learning and development at doctoral level.

The iterative processes of analysis seen in Chapter 5 is considered as one of the hardest aspects of my growth and learning in undertaking my research. However, my persistence to 'dig deep' yielded systems that defined my data management so that a rapid systematic, coherent process of storage and retrieval was provided (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Hardy and Bryman, 2009). Adoption of iterative processes of analysis led to the development of a thematic framework that centred the perspectives (voice) of the focus children. It is considered appropriate assessment methodologies were adopted to evaluate the children's capacities and unique contributions to existing knowledge seen in research studies of this type.

A final aspect of my intellectual growth relates to consideration about my identity as a black researcher, and its influence on the methods used in the context of this project. Being very self-aware, I was conscious that addressing contexts surrounding 'race' and ethnicity' would potentially present sensitivity when challenging play pedagogy. Being perceptive, I also recognised that automatic assumptions may exist about undertaking a study of this type. My intellectual growth is evidenced in the positive management of relationships. Which was never more significant than when my ethical integrity surrounding my approaches for countering the reflexive nature of one practitioner actions was questioned. Skills of diplomacy, tact and respect of insider perspectives were adopted to protect the contributions of the children and the other practitioner participating in the research. I also used these attributes to protect the integrity of my study, particularly when I was accused of having a 'raced' agenda despite three months ensuring deep understanding about the purpose of my study in the negotiation stage. Being a highly reflective as well as reflexive (Schön, 1983) individual, I managed the tensions that existed when access was disrupted at very short notice. I used negotiation skills with the management team to explore alternative methods to complete my field work. In which I adapted the research design to incorporate focus group interviews. I present this section to illustrate just one of the complex ways in which I consider my identity as a black researcher has influenced the methods used in the context of this project. More importantly it is another example that demonstrates my growth in the process of research which is central to the narrative being told. The examples presented above demonstrate key areas of intellectual growth, confidence and competence as a researcher. The next section will reflect on my personal growth before bringing the chapter to a close.

### **9.6.2 Personal reflection on learning**

Understanding that a sense of self thinking is considered as academic and critical to building confidence and competence as a researcher. I turn to Formosinho and Pascal (2016) explanation about one of Freire's (1970) contribution towards the development of

participatory pedagogies, where education is viewed as a political act because it develops critical consciousness. I have embraced the authors view that pedagogy-in-participation exercises consciousness. Also embraced is Formosinho and Pascal's (2016: 30) argument about the concept of democracy "democracy develops in a context of respect for human rights...and of identity development for children and professionals which is also and educative process of self-identity development of themselves and others as learners".

Throughout this study I have raised consciousness about centring children's rights to name their perceptions about mixed ethnic identity in their learning processes. Similarly, consciousness has been raised to position cultural and ethnic socialisation processes in play-based pedagogy to bring about transformation of practice. Essentially my findings have respected identity through the capabilities and dispositions of the focus children to realise their self-realisation and self-actualisation. Within that process of consciousness raising, I have developed my own identity as a researcher, and therefore I apply the same conventions that I did to research to my own personal self-development and learning.

I commenced my doctoral journey with confidence gained from achieving a distinction in masters level study. However, over a period of three years I became disempowered and was lacking in confidence because of the silencing of my own voice through institutionally oppressive structures. At the beginning of my journey with Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) I presented a defensive stance about the approach I wished my study to take. On reflection, I realise now that I have excellent social and emotional intelligence, in which I was courageous enough to seek out a change of direction with new Directors of study, who not only recognised my resilience and determination, but also enabled me to take control to drive forward the real purpose of my study.

Scholarship considered a precise grasp of knowledge, developed from my growing confidence about children's capacities and dispositions to engage as research participants, but in this process, I recognise that I have developed my own knowledge and awareness about participatory research design and methods which I have explained in the section above. I have developed competency to apply academic conventions to my study from extensive wider reading (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Tobin, 2005; Ortlipp, 2008; Dilshad and Latif, 2013; Bertram and Pascal, 2009, 2012; Charmaz, 2014; and Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). It is hoped this thesis evidence development of my competency to undertake the different processes in my research project.

Reflecting on my doctoral journey, whilst I recognise that I have strong interpersonal skills, where I have demonstrated that I can creatively engage with the individuals. I also acknowledge that I have developed my own intra-personal skills to be able to position my

growing sense of self and self-awareness as a researcher. In Chapter 4 I positioned a view taken from Ladson Billing (1998) research that naming one's reality involves paying attention to incidents or events that affect the researcher. Comparably I made use of Rodriguez (2006) research to contend 'unmasking' experiences is necessary in healing the feelings of hurt encountered in the process of research.

In the process of this research, I have taken opportunities to give voice to what is often experienced, internalised, and goes unsaid for 'black' women researchers. As a woman of colour, (which is a term I prefer to use, rather than a 'black woman') I am pleased that I was confident to explain my own reality about incidents that occurred in the observation phase, that I believe served to devalue and undermine researcher confidence. It is hoped that the explanations offered in Chapter 7 relating to positionality are presented in a way that develops reader understanding about some of the tensions that affected the research process. More importantly whether conscious or unconscious bias existed in the pedagogic actions, offered are reflective thoughts that shed light on how misinformation continues to shape practice in early childhood.

I now close this chapter with a few key messages that I would like the reader to remember. Listening to the categories ascribed by children about their ethnic identity, without adding adult learnt categorisations into these conversations, offers new and meaningful ways to implement their contributions in early childhood education discourse. Ethnic identity (what makes them unique) is something that young children will be thinking about. This study has demonstrated that mixed ethnic children can share their ideas about their *unique personal identity* with family first, and with their peers and practitioners. As early years advocates, we have a unique opportunity to give 'voice' to these important contexts in early childhood education. Moll's (2010: 456) suggestion that "when children see themselves in their schooling, they combine their home or community identities within an academic identity" resonate here.

I end with a thought-provoking perspective about ways of being. Listening to the perspective of a young mixed ethnic teenager resounded with me, and I leave the reader with her thoughts about a mixed ethnic identity:

It's hard being mixed race  
You're not black  
You're not white  
You must find a new identity based on the middle!

Anonymous



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## Images

*And Tango makes three* (n.d) Online image.

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<[https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/And\\_Tango\\_Makes\\_Three.html?id=CGPUPsQQm24C&printsec=frontcover](https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/And_Tango_Makes_Three.html?id=CGPUPsQQm24C&printsec=frontcover)> [Accessed April 2019].

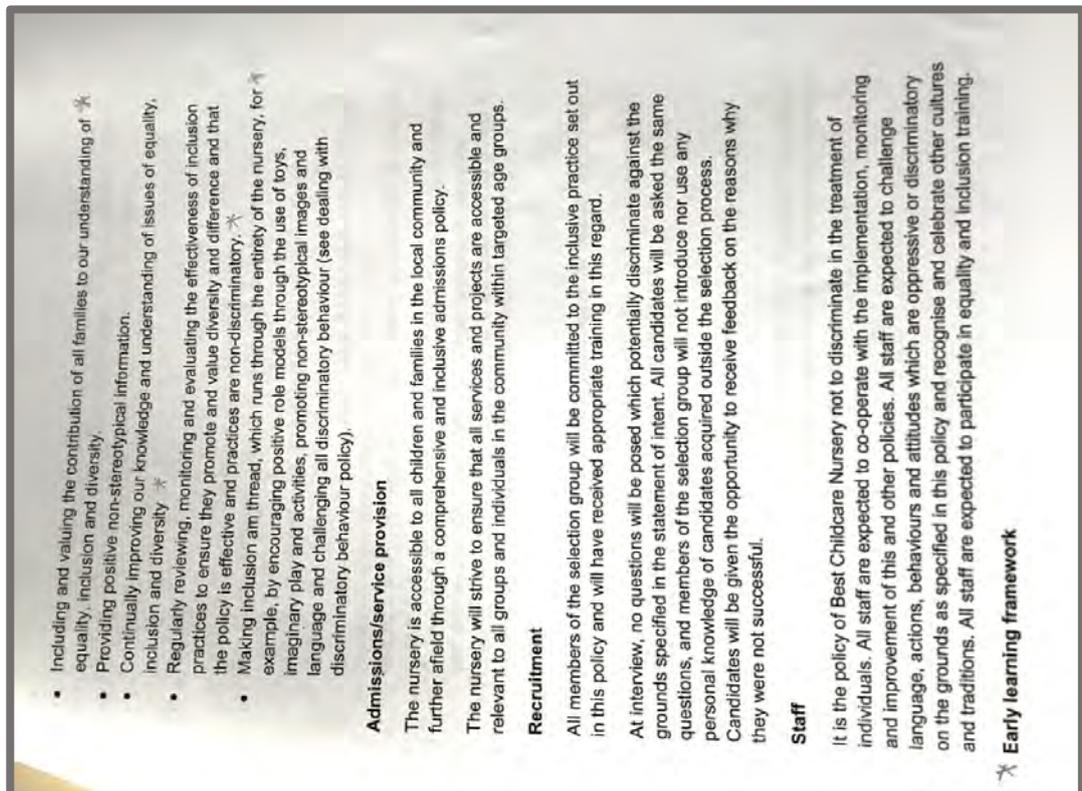
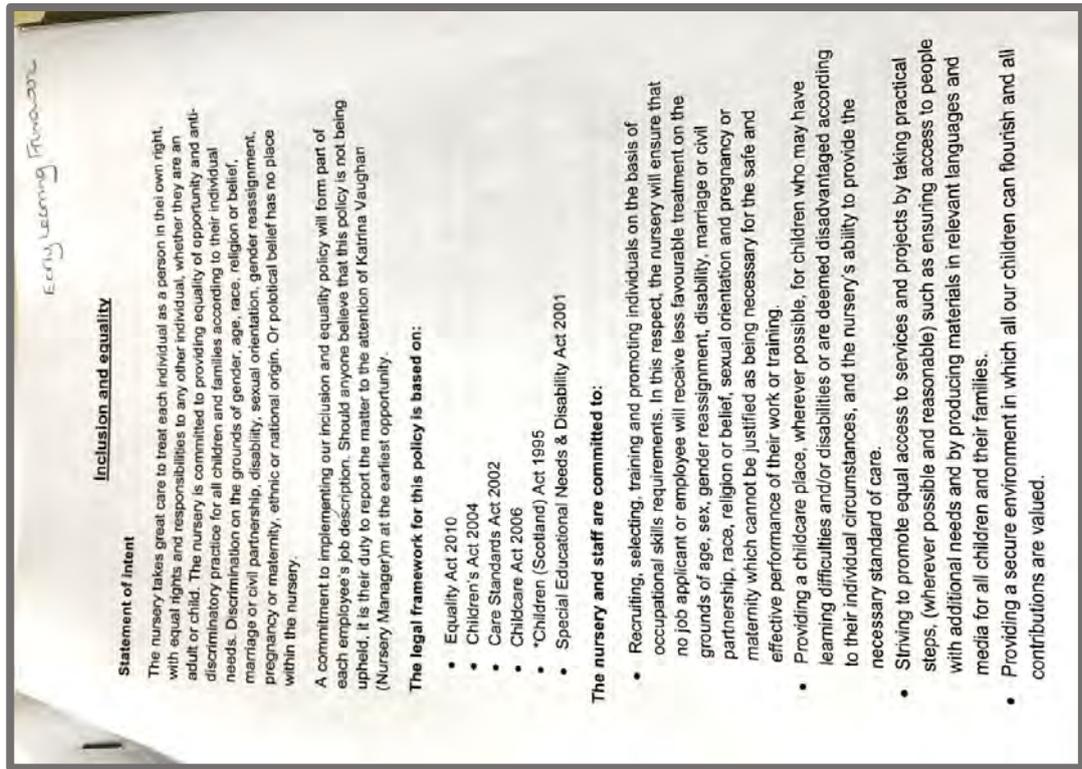


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## Appendix 1: Brooke Childcare key policy documentation



## Fascination Planning: Three Little Words, Thrill, Will and Skill

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) states that "All children, irrespective of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, learning difficulties or disabilities, gender or ability should have the opportunity to experience a challenging and enjoyable programme of learning and development."  
(EYFS Statutory Guidance)

Early Years is arguably the most valuable and influential time in childhood, as children develop thinking and questioning skills; an increasing understanding about the physical world around them; build relationships with special people; learn how to communicate and express themselves; and manage feelings, emotions and behaviour. Of course what children learn is important, but how children learn is even more important if they are to become learners for life in today's society. Respect for babies, young children and their families is at the heart of our practice; together with the recognition that learning is about feelings and relationships as well as thoughts and actions. Our approach to learning is child-centred in that children are the active agents in their own learning supported by observations, plans and reflections to develop skills and further knowledge especially with regards to the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Effective support for learning through play requires a deep understanding of the processes, motivations, and nature of play and playfulness. Our approach to planning is through recognising and identifying 'Fascinations'; what is it that is really 'thrilling' a child? It is these Fascinations which are the starting points for children's learning and development and are developed on a weekly basis to form the next steps in partnership with Parents/ Carers. These planned experiences build neural connections in the brain and foster flexible, intelligent ways of approaching the world and others. It is our aim to support children in

LC13

Early learning opportunities offered in the nursery encourage children to develop positive attitudes to people who are different from them. It encourages children to empathise with others and to begin to develop the skills of critical thinking

We do this by:

- Making children feel valued and good about themselves
- Ensuring that all children have equal access to early learning and play opportunities#
- Reflecting the widest range of communities in the choice of resources
- Avoiding stereotypical or derogatory images in the selection of materials
- Acknowledging and celebrating a wide range of religions, beliefs and festivals
- Creating an environment of mutual respect and empathy
- Helping children to understand that discriminatory behaviour and remarks are unacceptable
- Ensuring that all early learning opportunities offered are inclusive of children with learning difficulties and children from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Ensuring that children whose first language is not English have full access to the early learning opportunities and are supported in their learning

### Food

- We work in partnership with parents to ensure that the medical, cultural and dietary needs of children are met
- We help children to learn about a range of food and cultural approaches to meal times and to respect the differences among them

### Meetings

- Meetings will be arranged to ensure that all families who wish to, may be consulted in the running of the nursery
- Information about meetings and activities will be communicated in a variety of ways according to individual needs (written, verbal and translated), to ensure that all parents have information about access

Written by:

Updated or

Signature:

## Appendix 2.1: The Researcher

**My Story:** As the eldest of two children to migrant Jamaican parents, I make a clear distinction between play experiences in the home, community and play at nursery. I lived near to the city centre of Bradford. Home was a two bedroomed maisonette with a balcony. My best friend lived on the top floor of the facing high raised flat. Play at home and in the community centred on lots of outdoor play experiences. My friendship group was small (one 'black child, one white child and one mixed ethnic child'). I remember lots of imaginary play, games of hide and seek, tag, skipping and lots of laughter, never do I recall any fall outs. We were all equal. What made us equal, looking back, was our social and economic class. It never occurred to me that our ethnic origin made us different in any way. Spontaneous play, with what I now understand as 'open ended resources' bound our friendship, we didn't fight over toys because there weren't any toys to fight over. What there was, was a strong sense of community belonging.

Similarly, in my memories of home, there were few toys. I did have a 'Tiny Tears' and 'Sindy' doll, a red and blue tea set and lots of teddies. Mum worked at the local soft toy factory as a sewing machinist. I do not recall playing, being read to or storytelling as a young child with my parents. My early memories were of loving care, dogged by rules of discipline and 'good' behaviour. Routines centred on small chores to support my parents. 'Working hard' was a key feature in my family; rather than play; I do, however, recall lots of music, there was lots of music. Or is it that, at my age, I simply cannot remember?

In 1960's Bradford, I was the only black child in my early years setting, so that made me very different. I have no memories of my play experiences, peers or the practitioners that would have supported my early care, learning and development. I do know (from my mother's accounts) that they were all 'white' and very loving towards me. What I felt made me different from a very early age wasn't my 'race', it was that I had a really big passion for reading books. My mother recognised the importance of books, instilling in both my brother and I that a good education was going to be the best route to economic sustainability and happiness: *'over Mother's dead body were we going into a trade!'*

I recognise now that play perhaps was not an important part of parenting. Each and every Saturday morning my brother and I were sent to Bradford Central Library to return our library books and to pick out six more; every Saturday, 52 weeks of the year. At that early age I got through a staggering six books a week and I loved it. I can't tell you which books I read now, but read I did. What my mother provided for me was what I consider to be the richest form of capital – the written word. I was allowed to go to the library on my own with the responsibility of my brother (aged seven and four) to get more books. It was a 'magical' time and maybe explains my ideal pastime of always seeking out a quiet spot to settle down with a good book!

Growing up, I do not recall being forced to confront what made me similar or different in matters of my ethnic identity. However personal interest in this area of research has increased since having mixed ethnic children of my own. Issues surrounding ethnic identity was brought to the fore, when upon returning home from work one day, my eldest child, at the age of four, confronted me with the challenge of 'getting rid of my black skin'. I observed a little girl wracked in tears because she wanted to please her friend. She was also confused about the challenge she had faced about her ethnic identity and the ethnic identity of her family. It certainly wasn't an aspect of early schooling that I had even considered, particularly as I had no recollection of experiencing this issue myself. My children are of Spanish-Jamaican ethnic origin, until this point finding the words to describe differences in skin colour for example, without causing confusion with the political terms of 'black' and 'white' presented many challenges. As parents we used terminology that described our skin tones in degrees of being 'brown'. This seemed to support understanding, until Farrah started reception class and her new friend explained that she found her colour acceptable, her dad's and sister's was ok too, but mine was not.

Similarly, a couple of years on, my youngest child, when starting in the same reception class, unknown to us as parents, put talcum powder on her face to, as she put it, '*be like her friends*'. That practice stopped when a little boy asked her why she was doing that. As a parent, I was forced to think about supporting my children's lived experience surrounding their ethnic identity. Not only that, I was forced to explore and provide understanding of what made my skin colour different to theirs, and why I couldn't change it to help their real world (lived) experiences to be easier.

Later, having had a career owning a private day nursery, I was more attuned to noticing that the children I had the privilege of working with appeared from a very early age to show a real interest in my different skin colour, hair and features. Upon entering the baby room of my business, babies would either cry or cling to their key workers. Older children in the pre-school room would show their interest in my difference by stroking my skin, or by looking at me very intently. One child that I worked with did express that she liked my brown skin.

The experiences with my own children, as well as work related experiences, where children displayed a natural and open curiosity towards exploring what made me different to them (my skin, hair, facial features) has led to an affiliation for acquiring awareness and understanding of what children have to say about ethnic identity. Policies for the promotion of inclusion, as well as having an awareness and knowledge of equality legislation also motivate my interest to explore how the formation of ethnic identity is supported and developed in the early years.

## Appendix 2.2: Children's Profiles

Presented below are the focus children's profiles. The aim is to provide the reader with contextual information about the children's preferred methods of engagement, as well as information about their and current learning/interests. This information was gathered from the practitioners.

### Introducing Jake



At the time of the study, Jake is 46 months old, an only child, who lives with his mum and dad. He is of White/ Black African ethnic origin. Jake's father (African) is a high school drama teacher, and his mother (White) is a University researcher. Nursery inform that the social and economic status of the family is described as middle class. Jake has grandparents on his mother's side of the family, who he meets on a regular basis. Dad's mother passed away just over a year ago. It is understood that photos of Jake's grandmother are positioned in the home environment, however memories related to her are not openly discussed, as this is still upsetting for dad. As a result, Jake has minimal awareness of the ethnicity of his father's background, as it is something that isn't discussed openly, shared in conversations or interactions in the home environment.

**Family location** Jake lives within the local community close to nursery. His grandparents (mums' parents) live within a 2-hour drive from his home. Since Jake's birth they spend time with Jake and his parents on a regular basis.

### Preferred method of engagement and current learning/interests

Jake has a strong sense of self and wellbeing. He is a confident learner, who is extremely aware of the world around him. He will skilfully question and interact with the environment and people around him to further extend his learning. Jake's preferred method of learning is centred in imaginative play. He is often observed acting out experiences in his play, where he makes active use of props to mirror activities engaged in in the home environment, such as cooking in the home corner or hoovering, which he likes to do at home. The nursery practitioners suggest Jake likes to use real objects within the home corner that are provided, such as leeks which he will peel and chop to share out with his peers. Again, this is related to home experiences. Jake thrives on spending time and experiences with others. He likes to help adults with 'tasks', such as tidying up, preparing resources etc. Jake demonstrates a deep understanding associated with empathy, where he will always support his friends, such as giving them a cuddle when they are sad. He is very attentive towards friends and adults who are special to him and can often be seen to check out if individuals are ok. Finally, Jake enjoys participating with his peers, he likes to help his peers when needed and enjoys conversations with them, taking in turns to share and listen.

## Introducing Fay



At the time of the study, Fay is 43 months old, an only child, who lives with her mum and dad in her grandmother's home. Fay has attended nursery from the age of three months. She is of White/ Black Caribbean ethnic origin. Fay's mother (White) is currently studying at university full time, and her father (Caribbean) is a shop worker. Nursery inform that the social and economic status of the family is described as working class. Fay can be shy and reserved, relying at times on significant adults that she has built relationships with to support her to have a positive sense of wellbeing. Despite this, Fay can self-regulate her emotions and will take herself to a quiet space if feeling sad or seek a cuddle from a special adult.

**Family location** Fay lives within the local community, close to nursery.

### **Preferred method of engagement and current learning/interests**

Fay particularly likes spending time with her best friend at nursery (Edie). They will share many play experiences together and will often spend a lot of their child-led learning exploring the home corner role playing families. These experiences will often link to home experiences of spending time together. Fay is creative and will share home experiences through her art work, such as creating mark makings of times spent at the park with nana. Fay will often paint pictures of herself to share with her mother at home time. Practitioners offer Fay can recognise her features such as her black curly hair, drawing swirls to represent this. Fay is fascinated with dolls and will use these through her 'family' role play. She will feed them their bottle and take them for walks in the pram. She is aware and will speak of some families not having a daddy in her play, as her best friend has two mums. At the time of the study, Fay has an interest in princesses and will often compare herself to Walt Disney's princess Tiana from a Princess and the Frog. Fay has understanding towards others and their needs. She will often support younger children by assisting them in their play. She can often be seen encouraging younger children's understanding to take turns.

## Introducing Freddy



At the time of the study, Freddy is 42 months old, who lives with his mum, dad and 12-month-old sister, who also attends nursery. Other significant adults in Freddy's family is his grandmother (mum's mum). who he often spends time with. He is of White/ Black African ethnic origin. Freddy's father (White) is an office worker, and his mother (African) is a social worker. Nursery inform that the social and economic status of the family is described as middle class. Freddy has a strong relationship with his grandmother (fathers mum), he will often spend time with her, and will speak of her with his peers. Freddy will often make comparisons of himself and his sister to his grandmother, such as their long black curly hair. In the nursery setting, Freddy respects and values the views, opinions and feelings of others. Having a disposition that shows empathy for others, he will often give a hug to a child who is crying or sad. Being extremely observant and having a strong sense of self, he is intrigued by others, often questioning differences and sharing similarities. For example, Freddy will highlight children who have hair like him, or he will often compare himself to other 'tall' children. He will describe himself as having 'fabulous black curly hair' to his peers, and that his hair is like his 'mummy and baby sister'. Freddy's awareness of self and others can often be seen in his mark making activities where he will draw pictures of himself, his mum and dad.

**Family location** Freddy lives within the local community, close to nursery. His Grandmother also lives within walking distance to Freddy's home.

### **Preferred method of engagement and current learning/interests**

Nursery staff advise that Freddy thrives in creative play, he can always be found immersed in the art studio space. He enjoys manipulating a range of materials to create his final piece. Freddy is currently interested in the moon, he will often question if people live on the moon. He will regularly create rockets and mark making of the moon and space. Freddy is confident in leading his own learning and will independently seek adult support when needed. Being extremely observant, Freddy particularly enjoys learning in the outdoor environment, he will often question and comment about his familiar world, such as the place where he lives, the type of house he lives in, and is aware that others may have different houses to him. Being a great story teller, he often shares stories about places and journeys that he has been on.

## Introducing Edie



At the time of the study, Edie is 40 months old, and lives at home with her two mums and younger sister (aged 9 months). She is of White ethnic origin. Observation of expression of self, demonstrate that Edie has a strong sense of her ethnicity. Edie's mother is a University lecturer; however, the profession of her other mother is unknown. Nursery inform that the social and economic status of the family is described as middle class. Edie has an extremely close relationship with both her mums. They are both very open and honest regarding the fact that Edie has no father, and that there are many different types of family structure. Edie is supported to express herself at home by her mums where her uniqueness is always celebrated, such as her unique red hair, which she will show off with pride. Edie is also very close to her younger sibling and is very proud that her sister is with her at nursery. Edie also has a great love for her cat. She will often speak about her cat with her friends and adults at nursery, saying he makes her smile.

**Family location** Edie and her family live in the local community.

### **Preferred method of engagement and current learning/interests**

Edie's current fascination is superheroes. Incorporated into her role play, she will often express to her male friends that anyone can be a superhero and it doesn't matter if you are a boy or a girl. Edie has a best friend at nursery (Fay) and enjoys sharing home experiences with her in the home corner. They will role play mummies and daddies, where Edie can be observed looking after her 'babies' by feeding them breast milk like her mother does at home. Finally, Edie enjoys spending time out in the local community, on trips and outings with nursery and will often share memories of the places she visits from her time with her mums and baby sister.

### **Summary**

The above information provides contextual understanding about this group of children. The aim being to support comprehension not only about the children and their backgrounds, but to also convey as accurately as possible what has informed my interpretation of the children's differing verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. It is hoped the profiles enhance reader understanding about the rich, distinct modes of response the children chose to use in the recorded learning experiences.

## **Appendix 2.3: Practitioner Profiles**

### **Practitioners**

Presented below is information pertaining to the professional career backgrounds of each practitioner. The purpose of which is to outline their key roles in the setting, as well as providing information about their level of qualification, experience to date, and an outline of which groups of children the predominantly work with.

### **Introducing Amanda**

At the time of the research study, Amanda is the assistant manager and special educational need lead. Amanda is also the early years teacher in nursery alongside Katie, the Nursery Manager. They both manage the day-to-day running of the setting.

### **Qualifications**

Studied at Sheffield Hallam University undertaking a three-year BA Hons degree course in children and play work.

### **Previous Experience**

Amanda previously managed the out of school club for two years within the same company. From there time was spend on occasional days working within the nursery. Prior to that Amanda worked in a community Centre where she was a play leader.

### **Engagement with the children**

Amanda advises that her current role is helping with everyday experiences of capturing the children's fascinations, where she takes the lead in making sure staff are supporting those, looking at those environments. Observation within the setting involves seeing what the children are really thrilled with and fascinated in. Once understood the ethos of the setting is to look at how practitioners can engage the children to develop new skills surrounding what the child is fascinated in. Essentially that is how practitioners support the children in nursery.

Amanda emphasises that the setting has an inclusion and equality policy, but the business goes further than that with other supporting policies, for example British Values and Preventive Duty, which Amanda states underpins the inclusion and equality policy and therefore the ethos of practice in the setting. Listening to the children's voices, respecting their community, and getting involved in the local community important to the inclusion and equality policy of the setting.

### **Introducing Leah**

Leah is from Alicante, Spain, where she studied to become a primary education teacher. Her qualification is not recognised in the UK and so she has taken a position as a nursery nurse. She has worked at the setting for four months.

## **Qualifications**

Leah studied at university for 4 years where her degree course covered child psychology, maths English language and special needs.

## **Previous Experience**

At the time of the study, Leah predominantly works in the 2 to 5's room. However she can be asked to provide cover in the baby room. Leah has not provided information about previous roles in early childhood education.

## **Engagement with the children**

Leah advises she engages in lots of activities about other cultures. Because she is Spanish Leah tries to explain to the children many things from her own culture, because she believes every culture is different, but it is also possible to find similarities. She believes it is important to teach other important things, not just the curriculum but contexts such as the importance of sharing, the importance of respect to each other.

## **Introducing Linda**

At the time of the study Linda is a nursery practitioner who has worked in the setting for six months. Shortly after this interview Linda left the setting and so did not partake in the remainder of the study.

## **Qualifications**

Linda has achieved degree in early childhood and recently successfully completed a master's degree specialising in English as an additional language (EAL) and language and communication.

## **Previous Experience**

She has completed previous placement experiences whilst undertaking her studies. This role is her first main job.

## **Engagement with the children**

Linda advises that her role involves working closely with children, talking with them and meeting what they specifically like to do. She advises she works out what their interests are, and then "*moulds' activities around them 'to meet their needs and what do they want to get out of it'*". Linda particularly enjoys listening to the children's stories and encouraging them to speak about their families. She attends regular training to meet the equality needs and specific policies, but then implements training into her practice by listening to every child, and their families rather than copying from each practitioner. As the researcher I interpret this to mean Linda implements what she has learnt in training about equality by listening to the children and their families.

## **Summary**

The purpose of presenting information about the practitioners' backgrounds is to provide a degree of contextual understanding about their professional experience for working with young children. It is also intended to provide some indication about their practice with young children, as well as their

understanding about and implementation of inclusion policy within the EYFS (DfE,2017). Although fuller understanding about each practitioner is provided in the interview transcripts in Appendix 5. It is hoped the profiles enhance reader understanding about the emergent perspectives of each of the practitioners as they engage in cultural activities associated with not just their own but the ethnic identities of the children.



### **Appendix 3: Theoretical perspectives surrounding children's racial awareness, identity, and formation of mixed ethnic identity**

The explanations below have been drawn from historic and current epistemologies in research. Presented are exemplifications that support ideologies relating to young children's attitude development, as well as existing debate that facilitate understanding about children's identity formation. Incorporated are research positions that offer thoughts about young children's understanding of mixed ethnicity in educational settings. These deliberations contribute towards reader wider theoretical understanding (alongside those foregrounded in Chapter 2) about the sociocultural standpoints that have informed the theoretical framework of this doctoral study.

#### **Children's racial awareness and attitude development**

Historic sociocultural studies identify in a multi-racial society from around the age of three children will be aware of simple racial differences (Milner, 1983). As they grow children will show feelings about differing groups, usually in simple evaluations of a preference for identifying with the in-group and showing some dislike or rejection of other racial groups picked up from significant others. Definitions surrounding racial identification and attitude development are emphasised by ideas that parents intentionally or unintentionally transmit behaviours from their own world view. These views can possibly be attributed to explanations that claim from birth children are surrounded by a naturally restricted social world, in which they learn not only what to do, but also how things are as seen by the significant adults surrounding them. These deliberations suggest that at the same time as learning about being in a culture, children are learning meanings of cultures. Reasoned in Milner's studies (1983) are thoughts that attitudes do not stem from genetic configurations, nor are they transmitted genetically from one human being to another. Instead there is a suggestion that all the ways of doing things practised in the immediate group or the wider culture are passed on to children either with or without their realisation through "*socialising processes*". In the development of racial attitudes this notable research contends

*"rules of behaviour establish patterns of responding to other racial groups, whether or not children have developed those attitudes for themselves" Milner (1983:73).*

When considering comparable studies relating specifically to mixed ethnic children, Gaither, Chen et al (2014) suggest by the age of four biracial children have an enhanced cognitive ability in racial identification. Where they are able to identify with their two racial in-groups flexibly. To what degree this flexibility impacts on learning about social preferences is debatable, because the priming mechanisms used to explore preferences in this study was obtained from three groups of mono-racial children. Other contributions however surrounding racial attitude development can be seen in Mac Naughton (2001, 2005) work in Australia, where her pioneering research examined the impact of social ideas of race, class and gender, as well as teaching approaches. Here young children not only recognised skin colour, they were able to decode the value attributed to skin colour in larger society.

Aligning with the aims of this inquiry, these studies are helpful for understanding the implications of skin colour preferences in supporting biracial children to better recognise the social features associated with 'race' or skin tone differences. Which in turn allows them to identify more flexibly in racial categorisation and identification tasks. From explanations seen in these pioneering studies I assert children will enter early educational settings with a myriad of perceptions learnt from family, community, peers and media in the representations of their own identities (Glover, 1991). What is difficult to ignore in these findings are the socially derived influences which can contribute towards children's understanding and attitudes towards culture, race and ethnicity. Particularly where contributions in existing epistemologies contend children are sensitive to social group information where they are attentive towards and will adapt their learning and social preferences towards that

familial shared group (Gaither et al 2014). What appears to be lesser known is how children who can identify with more than one in-group (for example biracial children) make their preferences known.

Views that specifically focus on the experiences of biracial children and their sense of self identity (Katz, 1996, Tizaard & Phoenix, 1993), still appear to objectify and deny the agency of this group of children. I believe that conversations in the research often fail to incorporate the unique contributions of both the children's circumstances and the relationships encountered in their social environment outside of the early years setting; thoughts that could reasonably be perceived as rendering them to be somewhat incomplete. The incomplete nature of some of these deliberations could be because the 'voice' of these children or the descriptions from their conversations do not appear to have been made explicit within these studies. Relating to this study, adopting a sociocultural approach to focus on the conversations of 'mixed ethnic' children, particularly their explanations surrounding how they categorise self and others from their existing funds of knowledge seems relevant for supporting understanding about this particular group of children. How this group of children engage in and share their thoughts with peers and practitioners in their play experiences also relates to this inquiry.

### **Categorisation associated with children's active attempts to learn new vocabularies**

How children make use of terminology associated with ethnic categorisations in their play interactions with peers and practitioners is particularly important within this study, particularly where conversations may carry assumptions and misinformation aligned with prejudicial thoughts. Contrasting thoughts taken from Wertsch's (1998) theorising suggest the dialogical nature of language is not neutral, because spoken words are always responding to another utterance. Ideas here concur with Vygotskian notions about children's internalisation of language learnt in interaction with others. Contributing to debates about children's learning about ethnicity are also thoughts that discussions aligned with thinking about 'race' will always carry the historic and political conversations that have come before (Park, 2011). This includes children's 'raced talk' as well as the talk of adults.

When considering children's active attempts to explore new vocabularies about their ethnic identity in conversations with adults, Bakhtin (1981) highlights that children will enter agentic tensions about the appropriate terminology to use. Recognising the terminology used in linguistic practices of the home, how they are uttered and responded to in the educational environment, is significant for not only facilitating understanding about how children may have internalised and gone on to replicate these terms in their play but are also significant for contributing towards development and transformation of pedagogical practice in early years settings. Lee et al. (2003) concur with these thoughts when they show an appreciation of cultural ecologies in understanding the responses offered by children from 'minority groups' to schooling in their research. Similarly, Lee et al. (2003) thoughtfully acknowledge the crossing between cultural contexts that children from minority ethnic groups must make daily; and how these can be risk factors in terms of educational success. Lee (2006) suggests this is because where children are unable to effectively exchange cultural experiences there is a risk that limited opportunities of participation result in limited opportunities to learn.

The significance of culturally informed pedagogy for enabling children to participate in and experience educational success therefore should not be underestimated. Cultural knowledge about children allows the practitioner to decipher and integrate the shared knowledge engaged in and learnt in the home and community into the learning experiences, behaviour and language used by the setting. Moll (2010:456) contributes to these thoughts by offering:

*"when students witness the validation of their culture and language, hence themselves, within the educational process, when they "see themselves" in their schooling, they combine their home or community identities with an academic identity".*

The usefulness of contributions that influence views associated with children's ethnic awareness and attitude development (Katz, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978; Park, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2010; Moll, 2010) provide rigour in theoretical debates about identity formation. However, concern still exists with the ways in which young children's experiences in developing their sense of self or form their identity often appear to emerge only from social practice of "*what is done to children*" (Barron, 2014:253). Recognising that from an early age a child is sensitive to social group information, there still appears to be very little understanding about the ways in which children respond to or take up positions in relation to the social practices that they experience in play. It is to contributions surrounding problematic epistemologies for conceptualising culture, race ethnicity, as well as debates in literature for defining ethnic identity formation and its influence in early childhood education that I now turn.

### **Research defining culture, race ethnicity and ethnic identity formation**

In contrast to theories of child development that focused on the individual and social or cultural context as separate entities, the work of Vygotsky (1978) has continued to be instrumental in laying the foundation for integrating individual development in social, cultural and historical contexts. Vygotsky's work about human higher social functioning and internalization processes have continued to trigger scholastic debate and extend core explanatory constructs which guide contemporary epistemological research enquiries to date.

Later sections of this chapter show how some of the defining features of Vygotsky's constructs have lent themselves to continual re-examination, re-interpretation and relatable constructions in early childhood. Contended here is a tentative thought that complexity still exists in the diversity of re-interpretation surrounding the integrated nature of individual development in providing clear definitions from accounts in research literature. The problematic nature of defining culture in educational frameworks is helpfully addressed by Ang (2010:42) who proffers that culture is "*the lived practices and values of particular groups of individuals and communities*".

Discourse defining culture in relation to children and childhood can be found in a many research studies, but pertinent to discussion in this study, Sanders (2004:56), defines culture as being "*learned*" and "*shared*." Thoughts within this body of work suggest that in the process of learning and sharing children become "*encultured*", in that they join in cultural events and acquire their cultures by learning how to live and participate in their community groups.

Rogoff's work also provides significant contributions in facilitating understanding about the relationship between the individual, culture and community. Proposed is a view that by engaging with 'others' in complex cultural tools of thought, children are able to transform these cultural ways of thinking and will go on to independently make use of them for their own purposes (Rogoff, 2003). Deliberation surrounding theories associated with 'other' are discussed later in this chapter. For now, ideas that children can absorb and to some extent construct for themselves a description of self and others in cultural and ethnic terms provides news ways of knowing and are worthy of serious consideration within this research study.

Comparatively, understanding aspects of other cultural communities and their practices, (for young children this includes their play practices) has for many years contributed to the types of planned activities and experiences seen in early years settings. These experiences have been very much influenced by understandings of the ways in which children develop in the communities in which they are active participants. Lave and Wenger's research facilitates the ideas presented here by offering what could be considered as an enduring perspective that children will "*learn to recognise the signs and symbols of their communities to reproduce and sometimes to transform them*" (1991:48).

Taken together an example of the concepts seen in Lave and Wenger (1991) and Rogoff's, (2003) research can also be seen in studies undertaken by Kurban and Tobin (2009). Detailed is an example

of how children explore, interpret and reproduced socially constructed cultural contexts in their play repertoires. Documented through videos, children of Turkish immigrants were seen to assert significant features of their home lives (praying before they ate and cooking halal meat), where explanations suggest that the girls play could be seen as acting out how they felt alienated by the other children and the teachers by means of a 'performance' of their Turkish identity experienced in the home environment.

Kurban and Tobin (2009) offer a significant contribution that correlates with the theoretical debate in this review of literature, as suggested is an idea that children can internalise cultural experiences of the home environment and use play to replicate these lived experiences for their own purposes. A significant aspect of Rogoff's research is also relatable here, and extends understanding surrounding the complexity and fluidity of contexts appertaining culture. Supporting comprehension Rogoff helpfully argues

*"culture is not static; it is formed from the efforts of people working together, using and adapting material and symbolic tools provided...in the process of creating new ones" (2003:50).*

Use in ideas about social practices that shape and determine cultural knowledge and sense of identity are useful for developing understanding, historic findings of the ways in which children's experiences of ethnic identities still seem somewhat incomplete. Similarly, there appears to be little explanation in research literature, English educational policy or curriculum frameworks that plainly describe how young biracial children engage in and maintain categorisations associated with their ethnic identity. Similarly, there appears to be incomplete accounts for describing the influences and approaches used in play pedagogies in the processes associated with ethnic identity formation. Conversation that does provide an explanation about the process of identity formation in early childhood describe it as being

*"anchored in a web of relationships, group solidarity and communal culture"*  
*Flum and Kaplan (2012:240).*

This definition serves to demonstrate the difficulty in establishing decisive terminology but does offer a lens into understanding the problematic nature with which issues are engaged with in early years educational contexts.

## **Identity formation in early childhood**

Erikson's (1963) work has been highly instrumental in supporting conceptual understanding surrounding identity. Grounding identity formation in sociocultural and psychosocial approaches (Flum and Kaplan, 2012), Erikson's contended identity encompasses both individual and social meaning, where contexts surrounding identity should be considered in relation to the fluid interplay between the individual and society. Interpretations in Erikson's studies regarded identity formation as an individual's quest throughout developmental stages and life to obtain an understanding of self.

Perspectives which were in stark contrast to the historic categorisation explained above, viewed identity in two distinct parts, one of personal identity and the other of social identity. Interestingly, work undertaken by Tajfel (1978) regarding intergroup relationships provided contrasting contexts about how individuals can furnish a sense of identity, by setting out a social theory to explain the implications that group membership has on an individual's sense of identity.

Essentially positioned is a view that human beings will naturally categorise information received from people and the environment similar to, as well as different from themselves (in-group or out-group respectively) to make predictable their own experiences. Also positioned is the opinion that a considerable part of an individuals' sense of identity is the consequence of their membership in

particular group/s. It is considered that people are generally motivated to evaluate themselves positively and will therefore appraise their in-groups positively.

This evaluation is achieved by drawing comparisons with groups to which the individual does not belong (out-groups) who are in turn evaluated negatively or at least less positively than the in-group. Significant for supporting comprehension of perceived differences between in- and out-groups, and worthy of further deliberation is the explanation that categorisations can be frequently exaggerated and may result in stereotyping, discrimination and even overt conflict.

Limitations in social identity theory do exist, in part because theorisation in these studies focused mainly on adult populations. Little can be gleaned from these studies about how young children come to categorise information received from people and the environment that are similar to as well as different from themselves, other than deliberation that the process occurs naturally. There is however research evidence that provides descriptions of the preconceptions that young children may display. For example, preferences within their social groupings, or awareness and positioning of status and hierarchies within peer group relationships (Nesdale and Flesser, 2001 and Milner, 1983).

The pioneering bodies of work discussed above provide useful insight into thoughts about the influences on young children's sense of belonging. However pertinent for informing understanding within this inquiry is research literature that raises awareness about how a positive sense of ones' ethnic identity can contribute towards feelings of worthiness and wellbeing within group membership.

Studies have highlighted that identity formation is a complex process where the effects of gender, class and other formative groupings overlap and add to the complexity of the process. Seen in literature so far are views that all individuals have an ethnicity, belong to an ethnic group, and have distinctive cultural features that serve to unite them (Knowles and Holström, 2013). Comprehension about cultural features and practices that unite groups are the unique customs associated with the group that make them distinct from one another (Knowles and Holström, 2013). When thinking about culture and cultural practices, what appears to be generally accepted are views about practices associated with social aspects of people's lives. For example, customs associated with what clothes are worn, preparation and cooking of foods, not to mention the roles of men and women within groups.

### **Mixed ethnic identity formation**

Interpretation about how young children come to engage in and learn about contexts associated with the formation of a mixed ethnic identity are particularly relevant to this study. Although there is a fixedness in notions of categorisation, I understand the ways in which mixed ethnic children operate is *fluid* and *shifting* (Ladson Billings, 2010). Particularly relevant to this inquiry are conversations that examine the fluidity or fixedness of ethnic categorisations ascribed by 'mixed ethnic' children, when applied to 'real life' play experiences. In the context of this study reflection on the studies guides thinking about the categorisations that this group of children will ascribe to themselves and others in their interactions with practitioners.

The thoughts shared in the previous section are buoyed by conversations in the published historic literature which evidences that children's ability to recognise self and others occurs at an early age. Pioneers such as Aboud (1988) proposed that children as young as three are frequently aware that people come from culturally different communities. Similarly, messages convey acquisition of cultural identities is not an automatic development proceeding in passive children but includes children's active attempts to understand and interpret their own and others' identity, gradually constructing this concept over a period of time, and eventually incorporating it as one of the main filters of social cognition (Sanders, 2004).

Therefore, I believe that seeking to understand the definitions and meanings children give to their own lives (sense of self), as well as recognising children's competence and capacity to understand, respond and act upon their world offers a critical lens into understanding the formation of ethnic identity.

Understanding the external influences that impact upon children in their formative years is extremely complex. I recognise that limitations exist where there are ongoing debates about power in relation to the role adults play in the social construction of childhood learning and development, and the agency and choice children have in their own learning. Research contexts associated with power and agency in relation to early childhood policy and practice is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. However, Waller et al. (2011) advocate that children are not only capable of asserting their agency and preferences through expression of ideas and negotiation of their desires, they are able to cause change in these interactions within their learning environments. Reinforced by this proposition, I cautiously offer if space is given to the agentic ability of young children, they can interact and negotiate in contexts surrounding ethnic identity. This belief is drawn in part from knowledge derived from external experiences within their home and community, that demonstrate children are capable of reproducing and expressing internalised ideas about in their play repertoires with their peers and practitioners.

Chapter 1 elaborated on growing bodies of research surrounding the mixed ethnic child that provided the rationale for the focus on this group of children. When considering this group of children's lived experiences, emphasised are thoughts that early childhood educational studies to date do not appear to have fully considered the results of people living, working and socialising in differing social groupings. This is particularly evident where inevitably there would be children born from those, trans-racial relationships that were formed.

Increased efforts in research studies have endeavoured to confront views surrounding how mixed ethnic children should be defined, but what often appears to be missing from many conversations about these children's sense of identity is the child's own understanding about how they make sense of and categorise their mixed ethnicity; Goodyer and Okitikpi (2007:85) support these views when they argue "*the views of the children...themselves have often been ignored*". Interest in this inquiry centres on how these preferences apply to children who can identify with more than one racial group, as well as the preferences these children choose to identify self and others.

In summary, what does appear to be accepted as a consensus of opinion in research studies is that the formation of identities is fluid and multifaceted, where nineteenth century sociological conceptions witnessed the emergence in thinking surrounding development in individual identity. This thinking is signified by concepts in which identities are largely linked to relationships between the individual and traditional structures such as family roles, economic and social class and in terms of race movements, defined by rights.

In summary this inquiry will make use of the consensus of opinion in these presented perspectives to frame what influences shape young mixed ethnic children knowledge or sense of self and others in relation to their ethnic origin. Contributions to new knowledge intend to offer new understandings from the viewpoint of the children themselves.

## **Appendix 4: The Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum & Early Years Foundation Stage Profile: 2020 handbook**

### **The Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum**

This curricula framework provides reassurance of the quality to expect in early years education by providing what is considered as clear and consistent guidance for all practitioners in early learning and childcare. Review of the EYFS (2017) places responsibility on practitioners to facilitate learning and development in three *prime areas*: personal social and emotional development; language and communication and physical development, and four *specific areas*: literacy; mathematics, understanding the world and expressive arts and design. It is the prime area of personal social and emotional development that will form the context and focus for this study. This prime area is relevant to my study because it is where practitioners are mandated to support children's understanding of similarities and difference, as well as being the area in which opportunities to explore and offer deeper insight into complexities for facilitating inclusive practice are afforded. Personal social and emotional development is also considered as the area of learning that is important because it "*impact(s) on all aspects of life, shaping how children respond to every situation*" Hutchin, (2013: 48). Created is a statutory framework based on a clear statement of what principles should underpin both learning and teaching in relation to equality of opportunity, inclusivity and meeting the diverse needs of children.

Additionally, overarching principles within the framework sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure young children learn, develop and achieve. Articulated in the curriculum are four guiding principles or themes that should shape practice. The four themes are: *theme 1*: the individual child as a learner; *theme 2*: a recognition of the relationship with significant adults and the environment to support children's learning so that they develop; *theme 3*: an appreciation of the environment as a vehicle for all children's learning and development; and *theme 4*: recognition of children's individual ways of developing.

Whilst these four main principled themes have remained the same, this study perceives revisions to the framework have changed the legal definitions of early childhood education over time, as well as establishing in law rights and responsibilities that may differ with socially or culturally understood models of childhood (Ang, 2010). What is clear in policy is evidence that diversity is embedded in the ideologies and discourse of the curriculum. Research offers the explicit purpose of the EYFS curricula framework is to: "ensure that all children, regardless of their culture or socioeconomic context, have equal right to a quality curriculum that supports and affirms their individual backgrounds" (Ang, 2010: 45).

In the context of this inquiry scope exists to consider how cultural diversity is addressed in terms of professional practice and play-based pedagogical approaches.

### **Early Years Foundation Stage Profile: 2020 handbook**

Welcomed in the emerging early years policy update is guidance that will develop practitioner knowledge and understanding about matters associated with assessment of children from differing cultural backgrounds. Although the handbook will be used to summarise and describe children's attainment at the end of the EYFS, by capturing a wide range of children's learning and development outcomes, it also endeavours to directly address sociocultural contexts such as ethnicity and diversity in groupings. Brought up-to-date through the handbook are directives pertaining to ethnicity and cultural awareness that appeared to be omitted in previous revisions of this educational framework.

Emphasised in the handbook is the importance of practitioners listening to and responding in ways that show understanding of children's cultural conventions and governing behaviours. As well as an appreciation that "*cultural backgrounds will also determine how early education is perceived*" (STA, 2020: 19). However with little informed categorised information relating to the ethnic identities of the groups of children they work; what might constitute similarities and differences in these groupings; as well as a lack of guidance examples in the EYFS exemplification materials, it is reasonable to assume that practitioner awareness, knowledge and understanding of sociocultural groups of children and their practices would be limited. My perspective is that limitations exist for the early years practitioners' pedagogic ability to facilitate understanding surrounding self-identity with young children due to the disassociation of sociocultural practices between home and school. Particularly when policy documentation (EYFS, 2017, STA, 2020) and its profile exemplification documents appear to be dependent on the agency of the practitioner to interpret and implement goal driven programmes. Endeavours are therefore positioned to examine issues relating to possible hidden assumptions about groups that may exist in early years settings. What cannot be ignored in multicultural or diverse societies is the variety of family values and traditions that exist where children will balance differences in cultural ways of being in the home and the community with the cultural ways of being in educational settings. It would be plausible to assume limitations may exist in practice due to poor cultural understanding. It is perceived inequality and poor understanding in implementation of inclusive practices may be due to the ambiguous nature of EYFS curriculum guidance.

Comparably expectation that practitioners should be able to plan and implement effective early childhood programmes that provide children with first hand experiences for the construction of knowledge about valuing cultural similarities and difference; and reflect on their own cultural values and attitudes (STA, 2020) present a complex and problematic concept for implementation of practice. Exacerbating problems further is what could be perceived as a lack of appropriate training to equip practitioners with the knowledge and skills to undertake these responsibilities. Especially when adult's interpretations and conceptions of cultural identities may differ due to variations of staffing in the early years workforce. Without more detailed guidance and appropriate training problems may feasibly exist in implementation if policy guidance such as the Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017) falls short of addressing what an inclusive pedagogical approach would entail for diverse learners.

## Summary

In summarising the above section, relevant for supporting the purpose of this inquiry is a concern for children developing in educational environments that may differ with the cultural contexts of the home environment. Concerns undoubtedly bring into question the critical role of the practitioner, because practitioner beliefs, knowledge and practice regarding culture and ethnicity have the potential to extend or limit the experiences of young children. It is recognised that complexity exists in issues associated with principles of the EYFS (2017) surrounding what learning and teaching in relation to equality of opportunity, inclusivity and meeting the diverse needs of children should look like.

What does not appear to have been addressed within the curriculum framework is an understanding of and 'response' to the changing cultural needs in society. Notably research suggest the key purpose of curriculum design and strategic interventions in educational policy has focused on:

- intervention programmes during the foundation stage aimed at early identification of potential problems before children start primary school – a widely known term coined by school readiness throughout practice
- the quality of the children's workforce in terms of qualifications of individuals working in pre-school education and care settings

- impacts on the changes on early years pedagogy and the content of the early years curriculum (Faulkner and Coates, 2010).

Endeavouring to understand the challenges faced by practitioners in implementing the principles and goals of changing curriculum aims, it is important to explore changing government thinking and ideology that may have impacted on pedagogy. Chapter 3 therefore presents literary perspectives that considers a number of perceived problems within the EYFS (2017). The purpose of which is to demonstrate gaps between mandated government policy and the lack of appropriate training and guidance may have impacted on pedagogy of inclusive practice for those working with young children.

When considering the diverse nature of children's experiences that are relevant to this inquiry, what appear to have been overlooked in strategic policy guidance is development of a framework that addresses the needs of individuals who may belong to differing social groupings. I appreciate challenge will exist in meeting the needs of groups where inevitably there would be children born from those transracial relationships that were formed. However, I contend dilemmas will also exist where underpinning the principles of EYFS (2017) are professional attitudes that may reflect differently on the values society places on children and childhood.



## Appendix 5: Summary of the emergent themes and annotations across the interview transcripts

|  | Interview 1  | Interview 2  | Interview 3   | Summarised Themes and examples   |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| <p><b>RQ 1</b></p> <p>Key influences On the voice of the child</p> | <p>listening/sharing children's experiences (x4)</p> <p><b>Evidence</b></p> <p>Recognising that actually there are difference sort to needs within children and trying to support that the best we can following sort of national guidelines or research Pg.2</p> <p><b>Philosophy</b></p> <p>Notes:</p> <p>Draws on the policy framework/guidance and National approaches (Prevent, Hygge) - twice to define pedagogy and practice and the Inclusion agenda for the setting.</p> <p><b>Evidence</b></p> <p>British values and preventive duty I feel that that sort of underpins our inclusion and equality policy. With that we are looking at mutual respect and tolerance, we are looking at individual liberty for these children so basically these sorts of underlying areas of are we listening to the children's voices, are we respecting their community, are we getting</p>  | <p>listening/sharing children's experiences (x10)</p> <p>importance of following the children's interests</p> <p><b>Evidence</b></p> <p>Sharing stories – child with a new sister. Boy recognised mummy is black and daddy is white, but my sister is the same as me. Talking about skin colours. He was proud and confident about his culture</p> <p><b>Artefacts</b> – Child wearing an African bracelet shared with her mother Pg.5</p> <p>Sharing what is important to children (x4)</p> <p><b>Evidence</b></p> <p>The carnival? They loved the colours. They were saying it was so colourful and so loud and the music and they were saying about the drums that they were dancing. They love dancing to it. They came in and were showing us the dance moves and doing</p>   | <p>listening/sharing children's experiences.</p> <p><b>Evidence. (x14)</b></p> <p>Sharing cultural experiences</p> <p>For example, we have the parents' partnership. I connect and we are connected. the Jamaican Carnival we celebrated at nursery and we asked the parents how they lived it at home. what do you do at home relating to that?</p> <p><b>Pg.4</b></p> <p>they are sharing things they love to do at home or things they have done at the weekend for example. We went to the aquarium because she or he loves fish right or the seaside, things like that so through that I try to do activities related to that. And I ask them like what does your child love to do at home. Are you doing something interesting right now so they</p>  | <p><b>Interaction</b></p> <p>listening/sharing children's experiences.</p> <p><b>Practitioner Influence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o conversations</li> <li>o Stories (Int.2&amp;3)</li> <li>o Home visits (Int.1)</li> <li>o Carnival (Int.2&amp;3)</li> <li>o Home visits</li> <li>o Care plans (Int.1)</li> <li>o Parent station (1)</li> <li>o Following national guidelines or research (All)</li> </ul> <p><b>Parental influence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Stay &amp; Play (Int.1)</li> <li>o Sharing traditions/cultural practices – (All).</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>Sharing what is important to children</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Looking at what they celebrate. (Int.1)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
|  | <p>involved in their community, the local community. Things like that I feel are really important to our inclusion and equality policy.</p> <p><b>Pg.1 Philosophy</b></p> <p>Sharing what is important to parents/children/practitioners (x2)</p> <p><b>Evidence</b></p> <p>In this sort of nursery all of our families were very aware of what was going on, why it was important to them, why it was important to others and actually respecting that, not everybody is celebrating and that is okay. <b>Pg. 1 Interaction</b></p> <p><b>Further Evidence</b></p> <p>Developing individual care plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Once they start at our nursery, I go out to their homes and I carry out a personal care plan <b>Pg.2</b></li> <li>o Undertaking home visits – look at what religions are going on.</li> <li>o Look at what they celebrate,</li> <li>o What foods they eat.</li> <li>o Children talk about where they are from.</li> <li>o Conversations from home visits then shared with nursery staff.</li> </ul> | <p>it... they were bringing it back into the nursery and we were celebrating all at the nursery so we were doing it like your paints and big feathers and we were making headdresses.</p> <p><b>Activities, Interaction &amp; Pedagogical Practice</b></p> <p>One of them said the man in the red big dress and he was a dark man, a dark man in a dress and he was in a silver dress he had a big pink head dress. I did say what do you mean dark and they were saying well not like me cos she was a white girl. She was saying that she was not like me Mum has kind of guided her definitely.</p> <p><b>Interaction &amp; Pedagogical Practice</b></p> <p>Parental Influence</p> <p><b>Evidence</b></p> <p>Definitely family influences and parents as far as their traditions and what they do at home and what they push forward whether it is purposely Traditions and customs like sitting to the table, reflect home practices.</p> <p><b>Pg.2 Interaction</b></p> | <p>can tell me something that I can use through the play?</p> <p><b>Pg.7</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuning in at the right moment</li> <li>• <b>Practitioner</b> Influence on children's ability to connect with constructs about ethnic identity (x2)</li> </ul> <p><b>Evidence</b></p> <p>they are learning colours so this is black for them so if you have dark skin then you are brown but when they refer to in the ethnicity yes they say I am black.</p> <p><b>Pg.6 Practitioner influence</b></p> <p>Through many things as you said for drawing they maybe can do some drawing and I can see nothing but they will see mum and dad and grandpa for example. <b>Pg.7 Practitioner Influence</b></p> <p>But not all the people have the understanding. I think maybe I think it is because I am a foreigner that I understand that every person is different and it has a lot to do with where are you from and how</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Learning about colours through paint, celebrations(All)</li> <li>o Children share where they are from – (All).</li> </ul> <p><b>Pedagogy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Tuning in at the right moment (Int.2)</li> <li>o Adapt and facilitate learning (Int.2)</li> <li>o Finding out what their interests are and then moulding activities around them and meeting their needs (Int.2).</li> <li>o We can only do so much because we only have our influences (Int.2).</li> <li>o Practitioners make use of the local community. Thinking about how experiences can be extended further – (All)</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>RQ 2</b></p>   | <p>Draws on the policy framework/guidance and National approaches –</p>  | <p>Links cultural experiences in the home to planned experiences in</p>  | <p>Draws on Policy Ideology/Guidance</p> <p><b>Evidence</b></p>   | <p><b>Interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listening/sharing conversations</li> </ul>  |

|   |   |  |   |   |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| <p>Opportunities for children to reproduce cultural experience in their education</p> | <p><b>Examples include</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EYFS &amp; following national guidelines. – Pg.2&amp;5</li> </ul> <p>Absolutely so I think that EYFS does require us to recognise different families, different children things like that but it is how you go about that so you know we are looking at these fascinations. Something that we really pride ourselves in at nursery is our key worker system.</p> <p><b>Practice</b></p> <p>Hygge - Curiosity Approach used by the setting as a pedagogic approach for supporting wellbeing (happiness) we have sort of made this up we have key Hygge moments essentially where we are wanting to have that one to one time with children to talk about them, to talk about what they have enjoyed that day to talk about what is special to them things like that and we are capturing that every single week. So it might be something that they are really proud of doing and we will share that with the parents, so we are capturing those children's voices at specific moments</p> | <p>the setting (x4) – <b>Activities</b></p> <p><b>Evidence</b></p> <p>so they can come into nursery and talk about it and all their cultures and like celebrations</p> <p><b>Pg.1 Gives Diwali as an example</b></p> <p>Definitely family influences and parents as far as their traditions and what they do at home and what they push forward whether it is purposely Traditions and customs like sitting to the table, reflect home practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explains <b>observation and Interaction</b> between adults/children (x4)</li> </ul> <p><b>Evidence</b></p> <p>Yes, just talking why did you use those colours? Well daddy is different. Well how is daddy different and that sort of. It wasn't used negatively it was just recognition that daddy is different from mummy and baby. Yes he drew that. I took on as far as talking about the family and talking about how do you feel as far as having a new baby and how is daddy being brought into looking after the</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness and understanding of the setting Inclusion policy</li> <li>Explains <b>observation and Interaction</b> between adults/children</li> </ul> <p><b>Evidence</b></p> <p>Exactly they are going to tell me what I need to know.</p> <p><b>Pg.10 Voice of the Child</b></p> <p>They express themselves and talk about the world through that or for example with songs. Normally they do dancing with all the songs and Spanish songs so they can learn a bit not only the language but also the culture and I am trying also what kind of songs for example in the parent's partnership what kind of songs does your child enjoy the most or what kind of music do you hear at home so I can bring it to nursery and we all can share it so if you want to dance like this it is perfectly fine but I want to do it as well.</p> <p><b>So we try to teach the children about their cultures and</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stories from home</li> <li>family pictures being uploaded into children's journals.</li> <li>Hygge 1-2-1 moments shared with children, as a way of focusing them, checking on wellbeing.</li> <li>Practitioner support of well being</li> </ul> <p><b>Activities &amp; Play Approaches</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role Play/Home Corner</li> <li>Community Visits</li> <li>Sticks ribbons to capture significant moments (approach)</li> </ul> <p><b>Resources</b></p> |
| <p>RQ 3<br/>Pedagogical approaches</p>  | <p>Medinas is, they know where the local cafes are where mum and dad or mum for instance might go and get</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pedagogic play based approaches explained</li> </ul> <p><b>Evidence</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflects on Pedagogic approaches that support children's needs (x12)</li> </ul> <p><b>Evidence</b></p>   | <p><b>Pedagogic Approaches Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>different types of music are built into</li> </ul>   |

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| <p>that provide a space for the development of an ethnic identity</p> | <p>her cakes from, so they can map out their communities. Pg.3</p> <p><b>Activities/Resources</b></p> <p>we come together at that point and we have a consultation time, so the children will come together and will look at photographs of the day. We will look at what we have been doing, we will talk about what we have been doing. We might even go back to a play that we had been doing and I say it is about a quarter to 6 it really varies but those reflections are happening throughout nursery. We are using things like puppets, music, story books. Dance with the children they absolutely love it so you know it might be something about we have all been a dinosaur today and we will be stomping around and we do a lot of reflections through all these different kinds of expressional experiences Pg. 3&amp;4 Interaction, Activities, Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discusses own views on equality and listening to children</li> </ul> <p><b>Evidence</b></p> | <p>I would see how far they have got in an activity and if they are starting to drift off if they are starting to let's say if it is painting a pot for argument sake, and they were starting to drift off, and go off on to the paper or go off and start to paint their hands, this activity needs to be pushed on further. They need to be pushed further and then change the activity to right they are going to be doing hand prints or we are going to be doing putting paint on our hands and see what marks we can make.</p> <p><b>Pg.2</b></p> <p>I usually use open ended activities, so as far as the other day I got a fairy box and got a little box and said right we have got fairies in the garden and we need to look after them. They haven't got a home so we need to collect some things, you choose what you want to collect to give to the fairies. They chose all the different special objects and things all in the nursery</p> | <p>For example, we have lot of books and when there is people and animals but when there are people who are mixed race like it is not only like white people or just black people we have many books that speak about other cultures. That is really nice so you can be telling them a story from a different culture and they embrace it as theirs.</p> <p><b>Pg.2</b></p> <p>Not dress up but with their materials with the clothes and all of that. They do their own costumes and we help them to do them so they can use their imagination and wear what they want.</p> <p><b>Pg.2 Resources</b></p> <p>what do you want to do and then if they are not feeling confident yes you can do it I am here to support you if you cannot do it I will help you but you try first because I know</p> | <p>the children's fascinations and explored. (Int.1).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conversations about differing skin colour.</li> <li>Talking to parents.</li> <li>Playing with the children's hair.</li> <li>Pushing activities further if children drift off (Int.2.)</li> <li>Children are asked what they want to do and are supported.</li> <li>Children are given the opportunity to explore.</li> <li>Fixed role play area.</li> <li>Looking at prints.</li> <li>Makes links with theoretical viewpoints.</li> <li>Differences in pedagogical approach exist (Int.3).</li> </ul> |
| <p>Emergent thinking across the Interviews</p>                        | <p><b>Research Question 1</b> - Using the 'voice' of the child, what are the key influences on 'mixed heritage' children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their racial identity in the early years setting?</p> <p><b>Interaction</b></p> <p><b>Listening/sharing children's experiences.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All interviewees recognise sharing and listening children's experiences. Mentioned in total 28 times. More so with practitioners than the deputy manager. Amanda (Transcript 1) Discusses own views on equality and listening to children (twice) Comments on own</li> </ul>  |  |  |  |

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|  | <p>ability to influence children’s understanding of ethnicity reflects her own culture does not influence children’s learning about ethnicity – coming more from a <i>philosophical</i> stance, than practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>All</b> make reference to <b>practitioner influences</b> as a key influence in children’s ability to share external information surrounding their ethnic identity. Examples include conversations</li> <li>o Stories (Int.2&amp;3), Home visits (Int.1), Carnival (Int.2&amp;3), Home visits Care plans (Int.1), Parent station (1), and Following national guidelines or research (All)</li> <li>o <b>All</b> make reference to <b>parental influences</b> via conversations and stay and play sessions, where cultural practices are shared between practitioners and parents. Examples</li> </ul> <p><b>Sharing what is important to children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o By Looking at what they celebrate. (Int.1), Learning about colours through paint, celebrations(All)Children share where they are from – (All).</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o All interviewees express that children’ expression surrounding their ethnic identity is seen in Dancing, Open ended play, Painting, Artefacts, looking at prints, Preparing food together - cooking.</li> </ul> <p><b>Researcher comments</b> - Not visible in visits to the setting apart from multicultural children’s books.</p> <p><b>Children’s responses (Voice)</b> – terminology heard amongst All practitioners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>Black, White, Dark, Same as me</b></li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Resources</b></p> <p>Families bringing in artefacts (Int.2), Artefacts, Paints/materials, Comb, African Bracelet (Int.1), Wooden whistle (Int.2), Food</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Pedagogy</b></p> <p>In terms of the <b>pedagogical influences</b> on ‘mixed heritage’ children’s ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their racial identity in the early years setting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Tuning in at the right moment (Int.2)</li> <li>o Adapt and facilitate learning (Int.2)</li> <li>o Finding out what their interests are and then moulding activities around them and meeting their needs (Int.2).</li> <li>o We can only do so much because we only have our influences (Int.2).</li> <li>o Practitioners make use of the local community. Thinking about how experiences can be extended further – (All)</li> <li>o Shape experiences so children can take it in their way.</li> <li>o Work and talk closely with children.</li> <li>o Practitioners continually explore children’s ideas and developing identities (Int.1).</li> <li>o things that you might see at home, these wonderful curious objects that children can explore (Int.1).</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Philosophy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Importance of child voice (All).</li> <li>o Children have awareness of similarity and difference – (All)</li> <li>o Children share knowledge about difference and similarity. – (All)</li> <li>o Families do not have a fixed answer about ethnic identity (Int.1).</li> </ul> |
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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Family influence through traditions (Int.2)</li> <li>o Own cultural influences do not hinder a child’s cultural influences (int.1).</li> <li>o Children are confident about culture (All)</li> <li>o Activities link home/community with practice (All).</li> <li>o children develop their ideas and develop their identities (All).</li> <li>o it is left to the practitioner <b>solely</b> as far as to be clever in meeting the outcomes and meeting with the needs of the children (int.2).</li> </ul> <p><b>Researcher Note:</b><br/>All practitioner’s separate <b>Pedagogy</b> away from personal <b>Philosophy</b>. In interview the speak about practice using ‘we’ ‘team’, but personal thoughts surrounding identity development is spoken about from a philosophical stance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversations about differing skin colour.</li> <li>• Talking to parents.</li> <li>• Playing with the children’s hair.</li> <li>• Pushing activities further if children drift off (Int.2.)</li> </ul> <p><b>Summarised thoughts</b><br/>As the researcher I anticipated the practitioners would have a strong adherence to EYFS (2017) principles and a pedagogy that focused predominately on attainment of expected learning/curriculum outcomes – this is not evident across the interviews. Instead principles centre on the holistic learning with strong connections to parent partnership in the children’s learning and development. Cultural not evident in interviewee 3. demonstrated a strong ethos towards the holistic development of the child drawn for cultural ways of belonging and knowing. Particularly practices that are shared through traditions for oral storying and cultural experiences shared through foods and cooking.</p> |
|  | <p><b>Emergent Patterns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>All</b> refer to books as a foundational <b>resource</b> for starting exploration into children’s thinking about their ethnic identity.</li> <li>• Resources are developed through the approach of using artefacts to trigger <b>curiosity</b>.</li> <li>• Parents are actively encouraged to bring artefacts that link to ethnic heritage.</li> <li>• <b>All</b> practitioners reflect on <b>Observation</b> as a tool for undertaking peer review of children’s learning</li> <li>• <b>Philosophical</b> standpoints are evident in <b>ALL</b> interviewees.</li> <li>• All practitioner’s separate <b>Pedagogy</b> from personal <b>Philosophy</b>. In interview the speak about practice using ‘we’ ‘team’, but personal thoughts surrounding identity development is spoken about from a philosophical stance.</li> </ul>   |
|  | <p><b>Coding and Sub-themes to be used for analysis in the Observation phase</b></p> <p><b>Interaction, Activity, Resource</b></p> <p><b>Sub Themes/Coding:</b></p> <p><b>Practitioner Influence</b></p> <p><b>Parental Influence</b></p>  |



## Appendix 6: Incidents that impacted on the research process

The incidents presented below signify the degree of flexibility I had to exercise in the judgments being made from observation of practitioner actions that impacted on my identity as a black female researcher, as well as the in the pedagogic actions that served to disrupt the data collection phase of my study.

### **Incident One: - Completion of reflective practitioner journal**

Although due diligence was provided in practitioner meetings and observation preambles whilst mediating access to the field, Amanda exercised her right not to complete any of the templates discussed/agreed for reflection on practice and perceived learning with the children from the activities. Instead a 'report' was produced that provided the researcher with ideas from research literature. Field notes capture the follow up conversations about Amanda's views on the research process and its impact on children:

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| Meeting Main Study: Meeting with Amy/Lucia- 9.2.18 at 2pm about ongoing observations.   |  |
| Dictaphone File D No 14,15  |  |
| Excerpt from field Notes: Conversation about Amanda's written report:   | Actions/Thoughts/Decision  |
| <p><b>A:</b> Basically what I am trying to say god what have I written and why have I written that. Researcher provides reassurance.</p> <p><b>S:</b> can you link the learning to your pedagogy. The children were relaxed and fine with the activity so can you link to how uncomfortable this made you feel using that pedagogical approach?</p> <p><b>A:</b> We are very reflective, so this is my reflection.</p> <p><b>Agency:</b></p> <p>Amanda provided a transcript about her own personal thoughts surrounding play and what children do and do not learn. There are lots of direct quotes without wider clarification that relate to the shared experiences with the focus children.</p> | <p><b>Action</b></p> <p>Arrange a review meeting with Amanda so that she has an opportunity to expand on her transcript. Check if it's the collective view of the nursery or her own personal beliefs.</p> |

Receiving the written report and subsequent comments in the follow up conversation caused reevaluation and questioning of the research design, research questions and methods being used in the observation phase of data collection. As a researcher I inevitably began to question ethical considerations that had been carefully deliberated before and during the data collection phase. Detailed field notes highlight the constant member checking that was undertaken as well as meetings arranged to ensure understanding of the research methods the participants were engaged in. Interpretation of the report (see Appendix 1) suggests a misconception or misunderstanding of the research aims. The report would suggest that Amanda ignored the agreed research requests to reflect on practice and the children's learning. Instead what is offered is her own knowledge and understanding about 'child centredness' in the setting. Interpretation of the report propose attempts are made here to invalidate the knowledge of the researcher.

## Incident Two - Adult directed self-portrait learning experience (Activity 4)

The second incident is intended to enhance understanding about practitioner actions that served to limit agreed actions in the observation schedules throughout the research process. Believing the setting does not really embrace differences in the children's cultures in the nursery, as a senior practitioner, Amanda makes the decision to undertake the self-portrait activity with the focus children and Edie. Not being present with the recording equipment, the learning experience is captured on the setting's Kindles. The example below presents an excerpt from the dialogic conversation (see Appendix 8 for the full field note) following the activity where Amanda provides useful insight and explanation about her pedagogic actions and decisions outside of the agreed research parameters.

| Main Study: Follow up conversation with Amanda 16.3.18 (self-portrait activity)<br>File D - 20 Duration: 30 minutes  |  |
|--|--|
| Excerpt from field Notes   | Actions/Thoughts/Decision  |
| <p><b>A:</b> I do believe there is a place for it. However, I would have tried to spend less time. I would have maybe done it in stages. Maybe only two children and not four. They were getting distracted. It's a lot for a three-year-old child to be sat for 20 minutes.</p> <p><b>A:</b> I do, especially the one I did. <b>The goal was to make sure that the children were recognising their skin colours</b> and were able to use them to show that. There was a goal in that activity.</p> <p><b>S:</b> I know you wanted to do this for the purpose of the research but what was the provocation for doing that. We did not discuss or agree this activity. What information has come from it is brilliant. Why did you feel the need to do this activity?</p> <p><b>A:</b> Because the children have created these portraits before, but not with skin coloured paints. <b>I know how skilled these children are.</b> Not necessarily using a 'black' paint or a pencil but they will use a pen or a crayon. They might draw themselves as green or blue. I guess that's a safe exploration. I knew that they had used the paints before but I did want to try and extend their learning. Because I knew they had the skills</p> <p><b>S:</b> adds and <b>the 'knowledge'</b></p> <p><b>A:</b> Form the language for they use</p> <p><b>A:</b> <b>That's a very damning statement to make. I was clearly having a rant.</b></p> <p><b>S:</b> I wasn't present, I would like to make sense of the pedagogical thinking here.</p> <p><b>R:</b> do you feel you extended the experience then? From the child's perspective do you think that would be a space you would provide in practice</p> <p><b>A:</b> we do it, but we don't sit children around a table for 20 minutes. We don't have tables in a room. We don't have that table and chair approach (Pedagogy).</p> <p><b>R:</b> Is that something you would have thought of before.</p> <p><b>A:</b> I'd like to say yes but not necessarily no. anything we develop downstairs it comes from the children...</p> <p><b>R:</b> Do you think the idea of children knowing about their race identity adds value to the curricula.</p> <p><b>A:</b> <b>Yes of course for the children. It has nothing to do with the EYFS! We've been playful with this exploration.</b> The children loved different modes of expression. They love tea parties. It's been interesting to provide a different line of thought</p> | <p>I am surprised that there is a suggestion that the agenda/pedagogy is being engineered towards a goal.</p> <p><b>Action</b></p> <p>Go back to the research questions and check underlying issues about my research.</p> |
| <p>Summary of Amanda's dialogic account:</p> <p>In contrast conversation expressed are thoughts that that activity was purposely adult directed. Amanda deemed the children had already explored playful experience of self-portrait drawing with Leah, 'so that was their safety net'. Interestingly field notes highlight thoughts "I saw what they talked about as well as Leah response. <b>She didn't take control of that play, which I think is so important and key.</b> The children weren't comfortable in making circular shapes. <b>I then felt confident to go in and think this is how I want to direct it.</b></p>  |  |

Interestingly, Amanda advises that her pedagogic actions stem from views that “it has become increasingly clear that the children needed to feel safe with their friends to be able to speak about their personal unique thoughts about themselves as the research has unfolded”. However constant member checking did not reveal issues associated with wellbeing concerns of the focus children. Going against ideas concerning the ethos of carrying out totally child-initiated play experiences in the setting, where it was argued the fascinations of the children are followed at all times (see transcription of Amanda interview in Appendix 5), Amanda makes the pedagogic decision to undertake an adult-directed activity with the children. The excerpt from the field notes of the meeting following this activity reveal the provocation for undertaking the activity. Examination of the field notes also evidences that Amanda expressed views that she ‘*knows the skill of the children*’, and in reviewing the previous self-portrait activity undertaken by her colleague Leah she states, ‘*she did not control that play*’ provided the rationale for stepping in and ‘*directing the play experience*’.

Pedagogic action is seen to undermine both research and ‘junior’ practitioner confidence in the children’s capacity for reflecting on constructs associated with ethnicity. Similarly questioned are the agreed research methods between all participants, where Amanda positions her own practice above that of equally experienced and qualified practitioners. Contended here are thoughts that seriously question the ethical considerations (of the practitioner) that were thought through by sitting children down for twenty minutes under adult directed play of this kind. What is thought-provoking is the adopted pedagogical approach yielded rich sources of data that have significantly informed the findings in this study.

Following the challenging meeting on 16th March 2018, Amanda explains that she ‘*can’t undertake further dialogic conversations with me, as she is the cook for the remainder of the week*’. Analysis of the children’s learning is handed over to Leah, who is now considered to have the expertise to tease out what the children shared in that morning’s activities. Interestingly, after the dialogic conversation surrounding activity four, it was the last time that I was allowed access to the children or Leah. Anticipating that this would be the case, research field notes indicate the mitigation action taken following consultation with directors of study. The pedagogic actions discussed above helpfully position the final incident offered for consideration.

### ***Incident Three - Cancellation of agreed observations of play and dialogic conversations***

The final incident discusses the incident leading up to termination of the field work. Disruption in the operational running of the nursery due to significant changes in staffing is cited as the rationale for preventing access into the setting. Detailed below is just one email that evidences the notice provided for cancelling agreed meeting. Other emails provide the subsequent cancellation of agreed observations dates, reflective conversations with the children and dialogic review meetings.

|  |   |
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| Meeting Main Study: Observation 7.3.18 with Amanda/Lucy  |   |
| Excerpt from field Notes   |   |
| <p>The next scheduled Observation was cancelled on 6.3.18</p> <p><i>Hello Sharon<br/>I hope that this message finds you well. We were sorry to have missed you last week and unfortunately we will not be available to meet this Wednesday (tomorrow). So sorry for the late notice- I am out of Nursery and Lucy is not in either. I am however free this Friday 9th March at 2pm if that is helpful? Sorry again for any inconvenience.</i></p> <p><i>Best Wishes</i></p> <p><i>Amanda</i></p> | <p><b>Action:</b></p> <p>Anticipating that this would happen, I have revisited the research questions and design, together with the data gathered to date. There is evidence to support the research questions from the children's responses to their learning. However there is limited feedback from the practitioner perspectives.</p> |

These three incidents, taken from field note entries, are intended to reveal for the reader evidence the actions that occurred in the research process. The purpose here is to also present the reflexive actions I had to take as a researcher.

## Appendix 7: Sample of the research design document

### Exploring how play-based pedagogies support mixed ethnic identity formation

| Question/Issues  | Decisions   | Feedback Loops   |
|--|---|--|
| <p><b>Purpose of the research</b></p>                                    | <p>My research aims to gain knowledge and understanding of young mixed ethnic learner's perspectives of their raced identity formation in an early years setting. Working with practitioners and children as research participants, I will use the 'voice' of the child, to explore what the key influences are on mixed ethnic children's ability to relate to, connect with, and to make meaning of their racial identity in their play experiences.</p> <p>Also explored are the complexities that may exist for the early years practitioner in ensuring an inclusive curriculum for diverse learners, whilst at the same time meeting the learning and development requirements of personal social and emotional development (PSED) and Understanding the World (UW) within the Early Years Foundations Stage (2014) curriculum framework. Thus, I situated the study within a <b>xx postmodernist</b> paradigm and used a theoretical conceptual framework that drew on <b>xx (poststructuralist)</b> constructs to guide the analysis of the data</p> <p>The specific research questions are detailed below.</p> <p>Ang (2010)<br/>Barron (2014)</p>   | <p>DoS and BCU Supervisor feedback<br/>Setting A – practitioners, parents, children dialogues.<br/>Setting B – practitioners, parents, children dialogues.</p>   |
| <p><b>How will the purpose be operationalised into specific RQs?</b></p> | <p>The main research purpose has been translated into concrete questions by dealing with <i>planned possibilities</i> (Morrison, 1993:3). In other words, by opening up the research to interpretation by practitioners, parents and children. The purpose of the inquiry is not to come to a common understanding about the <i>phenomena of mixed ethnic identity</i>, rather its purpose is to provide insight through a process of enquiry about how these children choose to (or not) identify their raced identity and the identity of others. To undertake this qualitative study, the choice of what will be studied will be by way of a case study.</p> <p><b>Specifying the case:</b> to explore how mixed ethnic children identify self and others in their play experiences a case study provides what Stake (1995) defines as <i>some form of conceptual structure</i> p448 to the research study and the questions being explored. Credibility is afforded by optimising understanding through making the issue being explored specific, attention to specific play activities, triangulation experiential knowledge and interpretations of participants</p> <p><b>Foreshadowed problems:</b> -<br/>Acknowledging my own limitations as a researcher in my technique for making meaning out of interviews/observations. I need to develop strategies and techniques for interpreting collaborative construction of the meaning from the answers given to the semi-structured interview questions. In other words, I need to ask iterative questions to check the utterances made in the interviews. I will need to develop my response to ensure I am:</p> <p>1. Using the 'voice' of the child, what are the key influences on 'mixed heritage' children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their racial identity in the early years setting?</p> | <p><b>Pilot Study</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emails</li> <li>• Research diaries/journals</li> <li>• DoS and BCU Supervisor feedback</li> <li>• practitioners, parents, children feedback journals</li> </ul> <p><b>Main Study</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emails</li> <li>• Research diaries/journals</li> <li>• DoS and BCU Supervisor feedback</li> <li>• practitioners, parents, children feedback journals</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>What are the specific research questions?</b></p>                  |   | <p>Building an in-depth picture from: interview questions,</p>   |

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|   | <p>2. What opportunities exist in the EYFS (2017) policy framework that allow 'mixed ethnic' children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences in their education?</p> <p>3. How does the implementation of a play based pedagogical approach provide space for mixed ethnic children to explore their ethnicity?</p> <p>Complexity immediately exist between the organisation and operational planning of the learning experiences in the early years setting and the methods that will be used in the observational techniques. The room supports children in the 2-5 age range, the inquiry will focus on star children in the 3-5 age range. The organisational procedures for observation, the environment in which the intentional learning experiences take place, and the sample of children engaged in the play experiences will be a key undertaking in the participatory research methods. Particularly for eliciting the views of the children who it may be assumed (from the review of literature – About 1998, Rogoff 2003, Cosaro 2005) are more cognitively and socially competent at expressing views that foreground cultural experiences, are capable of cultural transmission surrounding their own identity as well as the identity of others. Key will be examining how differentiation of the learning experiences is facilitated in self-regulated learning.</p>  | <p>Observations of play experiences (naturalistic (now planned 14.10.17) and intentional), Dialogic conversations from audio visual recordings with children and practitioners, Documentation (Ofsted Reports, Inclusion Policies, Planning/Observation records) in the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot study</li> <li>• Main study</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>What is the focus to answer the research questions?</b></p> | <p>Issues that seek out compelling uniqueness is to obtain in-depth understanding of how the mixed ethnic learner makes meaning of their 'mixed ethnic' identity in their play experiences. Focus of the inquiry will be on observations of intentional play episodes in an early years setting.</p> <p><b>Issues that reveal merit</b> – the children on the setting's roll come from diverse ethnic backgrounds</p> <p>Children as active participants in research</p> <p><b>Issues which facilitate planning?</b> The manager has advised that the setting operates total child initiated and self-regulated learning experiences, where the children actively engage in experiences regarding their ethnicity. There is no planning, instead staff follow the learning journey of the unique child.</p> <p><b>Constrictions</b> – <i>Pilot Study</i> - nursery routine, unforeseen circumstances that prevent entry to the setting. Time slippage (cancellation of scheduled observations due to operational issues within the setting. Identification of the appropriate sample of children (ethnicity Afro-Caribbean/African – other mix). Children/Parents do not give ascent/consent to participate/film/record their play.</p> <p>In the main study site the environment for learning has children aged 2-5 years in it. Therefore, organisation of the learning environment will be key for differentiating the learning experience for the 'star children and their peers in the 3-5 age range.</p> | <p>Main study interview questions.</p>   |

| <p><b>Methodology</b></p> <p><b>How will the data be gathered? (instrumentation)</b></p> | <p><b>Paradigm:</b> Qualitative</p> <p><b>Method:</b> Participatory research that makes use of a single instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) for exploring the three research questions in an early years setting. Based on the adoption of a rights based, pedagogic practice approach, that offers meaningful, situated and culturally responsive methods for research (Bertram and Pascal). This method also provides opportunities for the 'democratic, co-construction of evidence from child and practitioner perspectives' Bertram and Pascal, 2013, p.).</p> <p>A Praxeological research approach is used in the data collection process to 'reflect' on and develop documentation through open dialogue. The methodological process documents the relationship between teaching and learning. It provides children with opportunities to 'name their worlds', whilst enhancing skills of active listening, supporting open dialogue and engaging in critical reflection of assessment and evaluation of practice for practitioners and the researcher.</p> <p><b>Research Tools:</b> Interviews, Observation (using intentional teaching resources), Focus Group Interview, Audio-visual materials, documentation, reflective dialogues, research diary.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="5">Planning matrix for research</th> </tr> <tr> <th></th> <th>Oct 2017<br/>Stage 1</th> <th>Nov 2017<br/>Stage 2</th> <th>Dec 2017<br/>Stage 2</th> <th>Jan 2018<br/>Stage 3</th> <th>Feb 2018<br/>Stage 4</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><b>Question 1</b></td> <td>Semi structured interviews manager, practitioners (3)</td> <td>Observations – Filming</td> <td>Observations - Filming</td> <td>Editing</td> <td>Reflective Dialogues</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Question 2</b></td> <td>Semi structured interviews</td> <td>Observations - Filming</td> <td>Observations - Filming</td> <td>Editing</td> <td>Reflective Dialogues</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Question 3</b></td> <td>Semi structured interviews Transcribing/Documentary analysis</td> <td>Observations – Filming Reflective Dialogues</td> <td>Observations – Filming Reflective Dialogues</td> <td>Editing</td> <td>Reflective Dialogues</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><b>DN:</b> See below table: <b>Ensuring Transparency</b> – move examples below from critical reflective journal into the methodology chapter</p> <p><b>Research Context</b> – Resident population data</p> <p>Brooke Childcare is positioned in a residential suburb of North East Leeds. The settings catchment area includes a wide range of housing (both rented and privately owned) whose inhabitants predominantly come from the Black Caribbean community. 2001 census records shown in historic studies offer the resident population for this area was 8,411 where the ethnic makeup of the families living in the area showed 80% of the population belonged to minority ethnic groupings compared with 20% of White British ethnic origin. When comparing ethnic groupings across the whole of Leeds the data showed approximately 85% of the population was White British and 15% were from minority ethnic groupings (Stillwell and Phillips, 2006). Stillwell and Phillips (2006) also described the characteristic composition of the Black Caribbean population at that time as 6,700. More pertinent to informing this research, data provided from the 2011 census showed the total population of children in the 0-5 age range was 6,976. Where the composition of Black Caribbean/White and Black African/White children represent 2.1% of the population (Nomis, 2020).</p> | Planning matrix for research                |   |                     |                      |  |  | Oct 2017<br>Stage 1 | Nov 2017<br>Stage 2 | Dec 2017<br>Stage 2 | Jan 2018<br>Stage 3 | Feb 2018<br>Stage 4 | <b>Question 1</b> | Semi structured interviews manager, practitioners (3) | Observations – Filming | Observations - Filming | Editing | Reflective Dialogues | <b>Question 2</b> | Semi structured interviews | Observations - Filming | Observations - Filming | Editing | Reflective Dialogues | <b>Question 3</b> | Semi structured interviews Transcribing/Documentary analysis | Observations – Filming Reflective Dialogues | Observations – Filming Reflective Dialogues | Editing | Reflective Dialogues |
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| Planning matrix for research   |   |   |   |                     |                      |  |  |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                   |   |                        |                        |         |                      |                   |                            |                        |                        |         |                      |                   |  |   |   |         |                      |
|  | Oct 2017<br>Stage 1   | Nov 2017<br>Stage 2                         | Dec 2017<br>Stage 2                         | Jan 2018<br>Stage 3 | Feb 2018<br>Stage 4  |  |  |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                   |   |                        |                        |         |                      |                   |                            |                        |                        |         |                      |                   |  |   |   |         |                      |
| <b>Question 1</b>  | Semi structured interviews manager, practitioners (3)   | Observations – Filming                      | Observations - Filming                      | Editing             | Reflective Dialogues |  |  |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                   |   |                        |                        |         |                      |                   |                            |                        |                        |         |                      |                   |  |   |   |         |                      |
| <b>Question 2</b>  | Semi structured interviews  | Observations - Filming                      | Observations - Filming                      | Editing             | Reflective Dialogues |  |  |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                   |   |                        |                        |         |                      |                   |                            |                        |                        |         |                      |                   |  |   |   |         |                      |
| <b>Question 3</b>  | Semi structured interviews Transcribing/Documentary analysis  | Observations – Filming Reflective Dialogues | Observations – Filming Reflective Dialogues | Editing             | Reflective Dialogues |  |  |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                   |   |                        |                        |         |                      |                   |                            |                        |                        |         |                      |                   |  |   |   |         |                      |
| <p><b>Addressing Trustworthiness</b> (Shenton, 2004)</p>                                 | <p>1. Gain an understanding of the setting being researched (organisational vision and mission)</p> <p>2. Establishing a relationship of trust by setting out the groundwork for the study:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular and sustained visits before the research process begins</li> <li>Being available to answer questions surrounding ethics, logistical arrangements;</li> </ol> <p>Documentation – setting operational documentation, corporate documentation, inclusion policy, Preamble documents</p>   |   |   |                     |                      |  |  |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                   |   |                        |                        |         |                      |                   |                            |                        |                        |         |                      |                   |  |   |   |         |                      |

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|   | <p>c. Regular and sustained visits into the children’s learning environment to build rapport with all children and practitioners</p> <p>3. Welcoming the participant contributions in regular debriefing sessions. Also adopting different approaches at times of operational pressure for the setting (e.g. email correspondence).</p> <p>4. Respecting the participants rights to discard data as well as rights to withdraw at any time</p>   | Consent forms  |
| <p><b>How will credibility be addressed?</b></p> <p>Lincoln and Guba (1985)</p> <p>Shenton, 2004 – <i>strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research</i></p> | <p>1. The study is planned over a period of approximately eight months. Prolonged engagement in assessment and evaluation methods with key people (practitioners and parents) is seen as an important factor for building credibility into my study, rather than a ‘hit and run’ approach (Pascal and Bertram, 2012).</p> <p>2. Adopting well recognised research methods which are: Stake (Case Study research), Yin (case study design and methods), Shenton (strategies for ensuring trustworthiness). Employed will be methods for persistent and regular observation of practice within the setting. These methods will allow for frequent de-briefings sessions throughout the process. Open dialogue will allow for other perceptions and experiences to be captured and included in the evaluative process.</p> <p>3. Feedback from practitioners at all stages of the inquiry will provide effective scrutiny of the data that is being gathered, as well providing valuable responses for checking the interpretations of the gathered data.</p> <p>4. Using <b>Triangulation</b> (Denscombe) will act as a check of the different methods used (Transcripts from <i>interviews</i>, Reflective Dialogues from <i>observation of intentional play experiences, field memos, reflective diary, other documentation</i>) in the study. Triangulation is defined by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2004:112) “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of human behaviour”. By allowing for a more secure understanding of the issues under exploration (interpretations and behaviours of the participants) this strategy reduces the risk that my conclusions will reflect the biases of one method. Triangulation will help me to see if the strengths and limitations of the methods used in my inquiry support a single conclusion.</p> <p>5. Use of procedures for ensuring honesty, such a providing reassurance that there are no right or wrong answers in the interviews and dialogic conversations.</p> <p>6. Asking iterative questions throughout the data collection process (a process for arriving at a decision or a desired result by repeating rounds of <b>analysis</b> or a cycle of operations). The objective is to bring the desired decision or result closer to discovery with each repetition - <b>iteration</b>) evidence produced in field memos and my reflective diary.</p> <p>7. All data (even negative case analysis) will be included and accommodated in the evaluation.</p> | <p><u>Methodological Triangulation</u></p> <p>Using the same methods on different occasions in the pilot and main study settings. Although it is argued that no two theories will yield a sufficiently complete explanation of the phenomenon being researched (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2004:115)</p> <p><u>Investigator triangulation (more than one observer)</u></p> <p>Making use of more than one participant in both the observation phase will provide more valid and reliable data. I do recognise that it is erroneous to assume that all participants will corroborate mine or one another’s interpretations/ perceptions of what is being studied (Lincoln and Guba 1985:307).</p> <p>Participant reflective journals (Children, Practitioners and Parents)</p> |
| <p><b>How will Transferability be addressed?</b></p>  | <p>Positivist studies can be concerned with demonstrating that the results of research can be applied to wider applications (Shenton, 2004). Since the findings of my project will be specific to a small sample (five star children) it is acknowledged that it will be difficult to apply the findings from this research to other wider racial groupings and situations. What is important is to ensure that detailed contextual information about the fieldwork is provided to enable the reader to make such a transfer.</p>  | <p>Practitioner, Parent Preamble documentation<br/>Research report</p>   |

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|   | <p>Supporting these views Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer the researcher knows only the 'sending context' and therefore cannot make transferability inferences. Thick description within the research report will provide understanding of the context in which the work was undertaken, thus helping the reader to determine how far these contexts can be seen.</p> <p>Within the Research Design</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Providing background information for all participants will support ideas surrounding transferability. Information will consist of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. evidence of ethical approval;</li> <li>b. participant information form to outline the purpose of the inquiry;</li> <li>c. Parent research preamble and consent;</li> <li>d. Adult consent form (practitioners);</li> <li>e. Child Information Sheet - Assent;</li> <li>f. Interview, Observation preamble</li> </ol> </li> </ol> <p>Ultimately the results of the qualitative research findings, and therefore the level of transferability will be determined by the characteristics of the selected nursery setting and perhaps more broadly by the geographical location in which the research was carried out. To assess the extent to which this set of findings may apply to other mixed ethnic children in other settings, will be dependent on the deployment of the same methods, other similar studies conducted in different early years environments may have some value of gradually adding to existing epistemology.</p> | <p>Participant reflective journals<br/>(Children, Practitioners and Parents)</p>   |
| <p><b>How will Dependability be addressed?</b></p>  | <p>Lincoln and Guba, (1985 cited in Shenton, 2004) suggest that there are close ties between credibility and dependability, offering that observations in practice demonstration of credibility goes some distance towards assuring dependability. However, to address dependability directly the research process will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reported in in-depth detail, to allow for the process to act as a prototype that could be repeated by others;</li> <li>2. Employ 'overlapping methods' to ensure demonstration of dependability, Guba, (1985 cited in Shenton, 2004:71).</li> </ol> <p>Recognised as well as being acknowledged in the research design is the subjectivity of the assessment of the gathered data.</p> <p>Also acknowledged is the researchers position in the study. Transparency will be seen by making clear how the evaluation and interpretation process progressed, and how this in turn influenced the judgments made.</p>  | <p>Research Report with chapters dedicated to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research design and its implementation</li> <li>• Operational detail of data gathering</li> <li>• Reflective appraisal of the project in the conclusion chapter.</li> </ul> <p>Audits showing links to the data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field memos, reflective diary</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>How will Confirmability be addressed?</b></p> | <p>To ensure as far as possible that the study's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the children and practitioners, rather than being formed from my preferences and characteristics as a researcher, I will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. detail the step-by-step process of how and from whom the data was obtained. Key thoughts and decisions will be logged in the reflective diary/memo's maintained throughout the whole of the research process, in an attempt to demonstrate objectivity in the design.</li> </ol>   | <p>Research Report acknowledges and details my beliefs, underpinning decisions made and methods adopted.</p>   |

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|   | <p>2. make use of Triangulation – to attempt to reduce researcher bias positioning; admit my existing beliefs and assumptions; recognise my limitations as an early career researcher; admit the weaknesses in the techniques employed. Confirmability will also be addressed by recognising the shortcomings in the research methods being deployed and their potential effects. I will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide in-depth methodological description to allow the integrity of the research findings to be scrutinised. Included in the methodological description will be my reasoning for adopted a particular approach when others could have been taken.</li> <li>use a reflexive approach to minimise and monitor the effects of my presence (as a researcher) on the social interactions under investigation (Cutter-Mackenzie, Edwards and Quinton, 2015)</li> <li>discuss preliminary theories that were not borne out.</li> </ol>  | <p>Audit trail of the evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview transcripts</li> <li>Clip logs of observations</li> <li>Field memos</li> <li>Researchers reflective diary</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>How will validity and reliability be addressed?</b></p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Messick 1989 cited in Denzin &amp; Lincoln 2005 p.453 offers that researchers have the responsibility for ensuring validity of the reader's interpretations. To reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation of the procedures adopted in my research triangulation is deployed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify meaning; and</li> <li>Verify repeatability of observations – acknowledging that no observation or interpretation are perfectly repeatable, triangulation serves to make clear meaning by identifying different ways the case is being seen (Silverman 1993 cited in Denzin &amp; Lincoln, 2005).</li> <li>Denzin &amp; Lincoln, 2005 argue triangulation helps to identify different realities</li> </ul> </li> <li>Remembering in the data gathering process that children (and parents) are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>experts in their own lives' (Langsted, 1994)</li> <li>Active co-constructors of meaning</li> </ul> <p>Part of the process will entail carrying out 'spot checks' of the data as it gathered, what Guba and Lincoln define as the single most important provision for bolstering the study's credibility. Similarly, as themes emerge, I will seek verification of <b>my</b> emerging theories inferred from the conversations with the participants</p> </li> <li>To achieve democratic participation, the child's voice must be 'centred' when considering appropriate assessment methodologies for evaluating their capacities and unique approaches/contributions to the world. Validity may be addressed by framing children in the here and now, as active citizens, not what they may become in the future as adults.</li> <li>Strive for open and honest observations, the aim of which is to offer effective means for developing the quality of the settings practice.</li> <li>This action research will be reliant on the voluntary participation of the practitioners. It is also dependent on the development of a collective process of reflection between myself (researcher) and the practitioners/parents (Formosinho and Pascal, 2016). Practitioner understanding of praxeological research may be dependent on further training, which will be ascertained in the negotiating access phase of the research design.</li> </ol> | <p>Ongoing reflective commentaries.</p> <p><b>Threats to validity</b></p> <p><b>Strategies for dealing with validity threats</b></p>  |

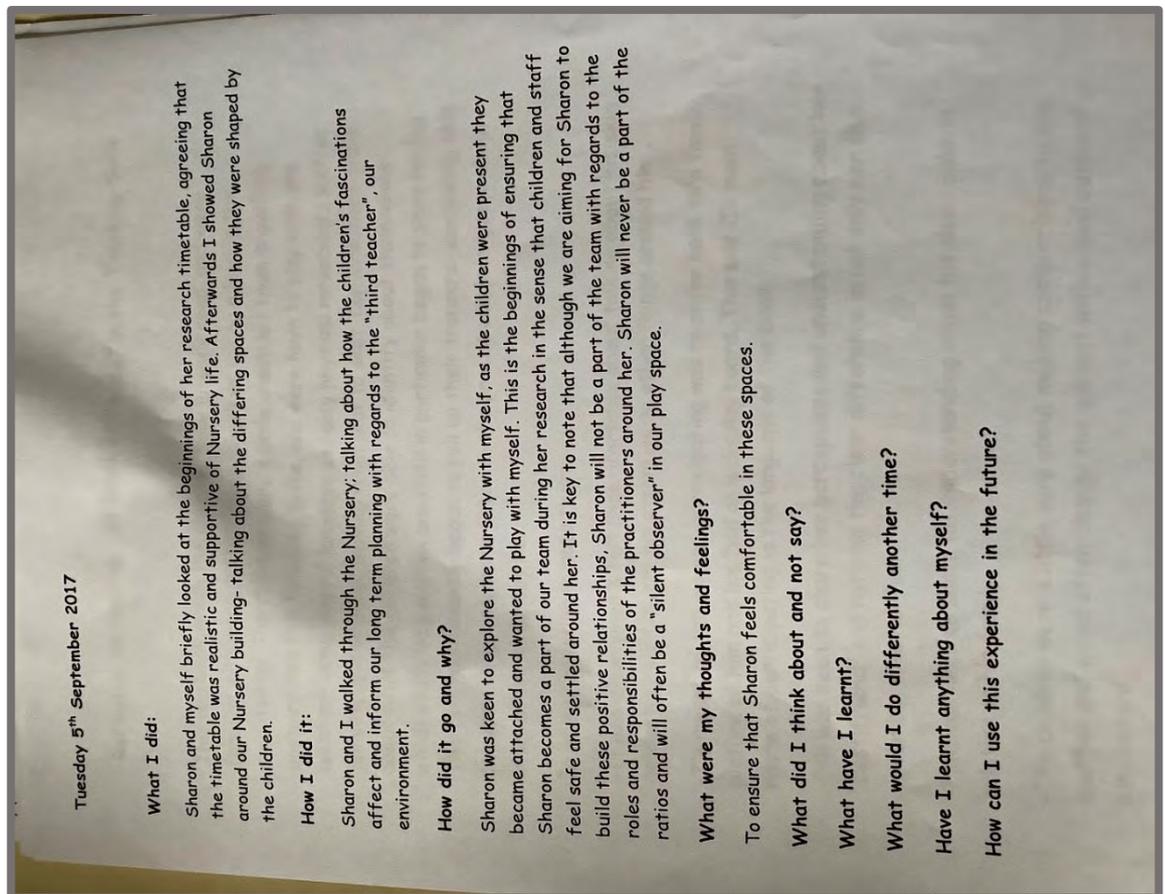
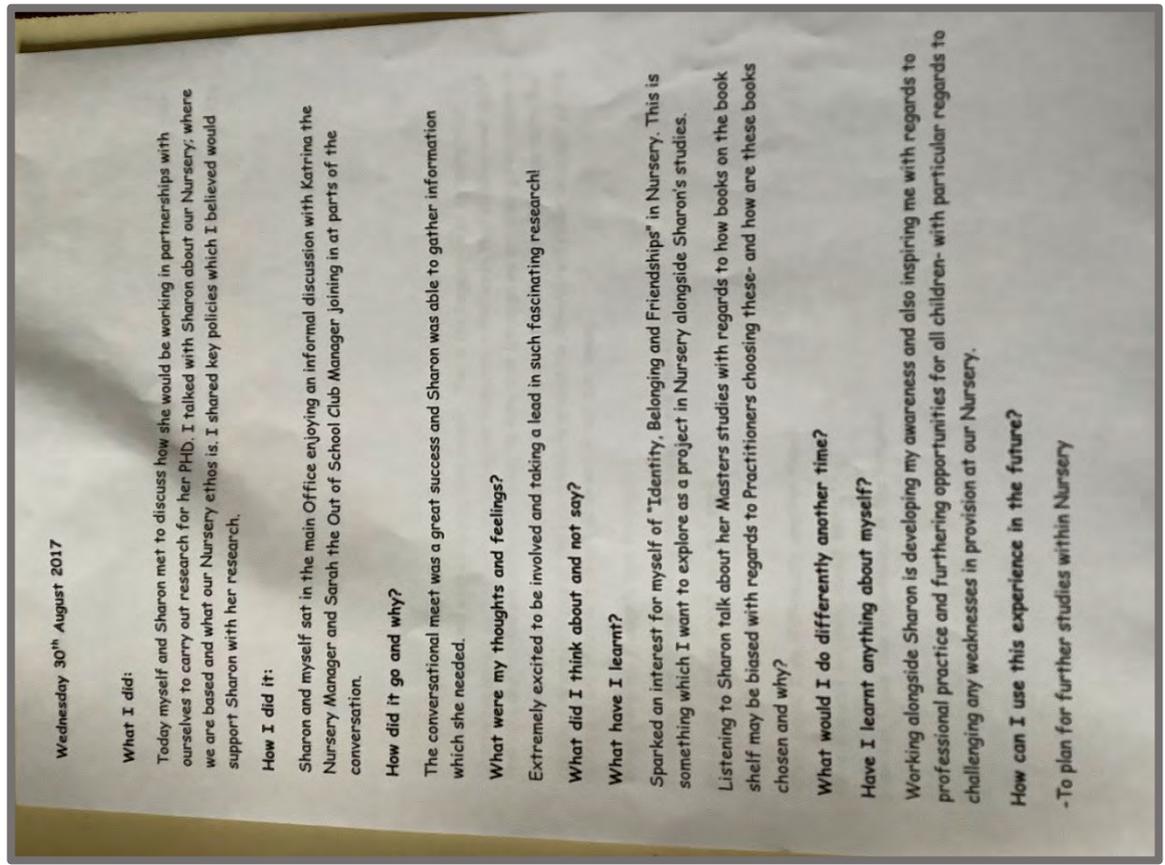
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|  | <p>6. Assisting validation of explanations from my natural engagement in observation termed as 'naturalistic generalisation' (Stake &amp; Trumbull, 1982), I will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accounts that readers of my research are familiar with, so they can gauge the accuracy, completeness and bias within my reports;</li> <li>• Adequate raw data to interpretations so that the reader can consider their own alternate interpretations;</li> <li>• Describe clearly case research methods, as well as how triangulation was carried out. Particularly efforts to disconfirm major assertions;</li> <li>• Make available directly and indirectly information about myself as well as other sources of input;</li> <li>• Provide reactions to my presented accounts (<i>conference presentations</i>) from potential users of my research, especially those expected to make use my study (<i>critical friends - colleagues</i>).</li> <li>• Provide validity by emphasising whether or not the reported instances could have/could not have been seen, Stake, (1995:87).</li> </ul>   |  |
| <p><b>How will reflexivity be addressed?</b></p> | <p>Reflexivity will be addressed by conveying my position in the research process as clearly as possible. I will include in the methodology (as well as the introduction) sections, my background in terms of personal interest, work experience and cultural experiences, demonstrating how these experiences inform the interpretation of data within my study. In other words, the aim is to make explicit what prompts my interests in the study, what I stand to gain from the inquiry, but more significantly also making clear who the emergent themes from the inquiry are for (Wolcott, 2010).<br/>The framework for the design in this inquiry responds initially from my own practice of working with young children and practitioners within the curriculum framework of the EYFS; that from an early age children show an interest in difference. Aboud (1988) supports these notions by suggesting that children as young as three are frequently aware that people come from culturally different communities.<br/>Additional influences in the design process have been formed by the review of theoretical literature that support notions that young children are highly competent learners, not only cognitively but also socially and emotionally.</p> | <p>A reflective journal will be maintained throughout the whole research process. It will document:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergent themes</li> <li>• Issues arising</li> <li>• Possible interpretations</li> <li>• Experiences that prompted changes to the research design</li> </ul>          |
| <p><b>What kinds of data are required?</b></p>   | <p>Participatory methods for evidence for information gathering (assessment) to enable critical reflection and appraisal (evaluation) of <i>what works, how it works and its impacts</i>. Bertram and Pascal (2004, in Formosinho and Pascal 2016 p.74)<br/><b>Interviews:</b><br/>Semi-structured interviews will be undertaken to attempt to uncover and understand participant (manager and practitioners) 'lived worlds' (Creswell &amp; Poth, 2017) in the early years setting. The aim being to elicit practitioner perspectives about the curriculum framework for supporting children to understand similarity/difference, their understanding of the ways children will express their perspectives about a raced identity in their play; the strategies they use to facilitate these experiences, whether there is a space in planning, routines that allow children to explore this phenomenon.<br/>Transcribed interview notes (practitioners)<br/>Field notes (conversations with parents)</p>   | <p>Interview Questions seek clarification of the experience and skill level of the practitioners.<br/>Question whether the setting undertakes peer reviewed observation practices.<br/><br/>Review of the practitioner generic observation skills – <i>Look, Listen, Record, think (reflect), Question (EYFS)</i>.</p> |

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|  | <p>Research memos from key meetings, visits with the children (in the negotiating access stage) that document my developing thinking and decision making in the research process.<br/>Keeping a reflective research journal</p> <p><b>Observations using audio records, digital images</b> (a specific identity related observation sheet has been developed but I will also review the observation records used by the setting):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I will conduct observation shifting position from participant to observer (and vice versa).</li> <li>• Keeping a reflective research journal and research memos</li> </ul> <p><b>Focus Group Interview - Practitioners</b></p> <p>To obtain the collective view of inclusive practice for the setting, and to explore inner the feelings of the practitioners more consideration has been given to undertaking a focus group interview. Another reason for this approach is via observation of the dialogic conversations there is a perception that Lucia will defer to the views of the manager (doubting her own pedagogy) Amy. To yield shared understanding from the learning experiences I have drawn on research by Dilshad and Latif (2013) Using research from xx is used to explore practitioner inner feelings in relation to how they help children to develop pride and confidence in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>some things that make them unique</b></li> <li>• <b>who they are, their family and culture?</b></li> <li>• <b>their ability to talk about some of the similarities and differences in relation to practitioners</b></li> <li>• <b>their ability to talk about some of the similarities and differences in relation to family</b></li> <li>• <b>relation to how children are helped to see the ways in which their identity and cultures are similar and different</b></li> <li>• <b>their strengths and abilities</b></li> <li>• <b>themselves as learners</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Practitioners:</b> Katrina, Amy Lucia, Nicky.</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very helpful where the researcher lacks substantial information about participants</li> <li>• FG provides "a rich and detailed set of data about perceptions, thoughts and feelings and impressions of people in their own worlds" Stewart &amp; Shamdasani (1990:140)</li> <li>• Helps me to find out individual understanding and experiences about the research study and the reasons behind the thoughts of individuals. It is particularly helpful with the 'sensitivities surrounding a topic such as race'.</li> <li>• Helps to explore issues/topics that would not be readily/easily discussed in the setting. Dialogic discussions about children's 'raced identity is providing evidence that a 'disequilibrium' has been created, causing tensions for the participants, who may perceive their professional practice is being challenged.</li> <li>• Effectively support the other approaches used in the collection of data – Triangulation</li> </ul> | <p>Filmed recordings from the intentional play experiences – storytelling, drawings, clay, painting.</p> <p>Critical reflective dialogue accounts</p> |
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|  | <p>Although authors such as (Anderson, 1990, Denscombe, 2007) advocate that groups should consist of no less than six participants. I am able to justify my rationale for doing so, because the evaluation of children's learning and development is kept within the management team. Practitioners undertake the learning experiences with children. These experiences are captured and linked to the EYFS outcomes via xx software on Kindles. However evaluation of that learning and next steps remains within the management team.</p> <p><b>Group:</b> Purposive sample would include Manager, Deputy, Lucia, senior practitioners x 3.</p> <p><b>Timing of the Focus Group Interview:</b> One two-hour discussion to gather collective thoughts.</p> <p><b>Method:</b><br/>Recording Dictaphone/iPad<br/>PowerPoint (include clips of children's learning experiences, and key questions<br/>Note taking – Researcher (me).</p> <p><b>Advantages:</b><br/>Immediate feedback and clarification of practitioner perspectives rather than individualised perspectives that do not yield a collective view.<br/>Contributions of other practitioners gathered that a reflective because they did not undertake the activities.<br/>Captures gestures, facial expression and other forms of non-verbal communication.</p> <p><b>Disadvantages:</b><br/>Might be difficult to organise. One view may dominate and some participants may conform to the dominant viewpoint.</p> <p><b>Focus Group Interview – Parents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To yield shared understanding about the children's learning experiences I have drawn on research by Dilshad and Latif (2013) to garner collective views about the children's perspectives about their sense of self and others, their understanding of similarity and difference in relation to family, peers, and practitioners.</li> <li>• The aim of the focus group with parents also aims gather parental views of how practitioners can extend/develop pedagogy and practice to <b>develop pride and confidence in:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• some things that make them unique</li> <li>• who they are, their family and culture</li> <li>• their ability to talk about some of the similarities and differences in relation to family</li> <li>• their strengths and abilities</li> <li>• themselves as learners</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Rationale:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very helpful where the researcher lacks understanding/information about the children's perceptions of their identity</li> <li>• Supports understanding of research <b>question 2 - What opportunities exist in the EYFS (2017) policy framework that allow 'mixed ethnic' children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences in their education?</b> Focus group provides parental perspectives of the recorded learning experiences.</li> </ul> |
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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helps me to find out parental views about their children understandings and experiences about the research study and the reasons behind the thoughts of the children.</li> <li>Effectively support the other approaches used in the collection of data – Triangulation.</li> </ul> <p><b>Method:</b><br/>Recording Dictaphone/iPad<br/>PowerPoint (include clips of children's learning experiences, and key questions<br/>Note taking – Researcher (me).</p> <p><b>Advantages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Immediate feedback and clarification of star children perspectives. Also provides a collective viewpoint from the parents rather than individualised perspectives of the practitioners only.</li> <li>Contributions of parents invaluable (first and foremost educator) because they know the children best and they did not undertake the activities.</li> <li>Captures gestures, facial expression and other forms of non-verbal communication.</li> </ul> <p><b>Disadvantages:</b><br/>Views of particular parents may dominate within the parent group, which may make quieter parent conform to the dominant viewpoint.</p> |   |
| <p><b>Who will undertake the research?</b><br/><b>From whom will data be acquired?</b><br/><b>(Sampling)</b></p> | <p>To purposefully inform understanding of the research problem I have selected:<br/><i>Children, Parents, Manager/Practitioners/Myself</i></p> <p>The cases selected are purposeful samples to elicit different perspectives of the 'problem'.</p> <p>Purposeful sampling of only five 'star' children will be the focus of the study, to assist with the collection of extensive detail beyond generalised information.</p> <p>A 'Random' sample of five mixed ethnic children will be selected by the manager/practitioners, ensuring that the sample respects the heterogeneity of the population of Leeds. As well as representing the wider features of the mixed ethnic population of black origin/other mix.</p>   | <p>Informal reflective semi structured dialogues, as well as extended critical conversations with:<br/>Children, Manager, Practitioners &amp; strengthened with Parent observation in the home/community environment.</p> |
| <p><b>Where else will data be available?</b></p>   | <p><b>Documentary Evidence:</b> analysis of individual children's learning journeys, reviewing the informed judgements that are made from teaching and learning experiences (Quality Assessments). Other documentary evidence may include – latest Ofsted inspection report, policy documents (behaviour management, inclusion, Parent information sheets, analysing organisational documents – SED, Strategic Plans, Setting Development/Improvement Plan, Curriculum Outlines/ Framework of Effective Practice plans, Welcome booklets, newsletters, notice board information etc.</p> <p><b>Focusing on the interactions in the Learning Community</b> (Pascal and Bertram, 2012; Wenger, 1998)</p> <p>Focus on<br/><i>Sensitivity, Stimulation, and Autonomy.</i></p>  | <p>Reflection on the learning environment, its organisation, structure for supporting child, practitioner and parent learning</p>   |

## Appendix 8: Example of practitioner reflective journals



### My opinion about pedagogy approaches

As a Primary School teacher, my pedagogy was quite adult lead. Since I started working in the nursery I've learnt to leave the children lead their own play and learning.

I really believe in the importance of the children learning through play, so the learning can be effective and meaningful to them. Nevertheless, I also think that sometimes is necessary to lead the activities as a teacher, so the children can learn and reach the learning "goals" that they are meant to.

Every child learns in a different way, that's why is so important to follow their interests in order to make the learning process something meaningful and for a long life term.

Friday 2/2/18. Following conversation.

Knowing more about the children's families and culture, I will be more able to "teach" them or get more inf. about them.

31.1.18

### Parents' Journal

### Activity

What I did: We watched a video about when we saw the pictures about the children's families. After that we made a picnic, where I was telling the children my grandpa's favourite food, so the could talk about their families. The we saw their families' pictures again.

How I did it: I asked the children about the video we were watching, trying them to remember what they said. After that in the "picnic", I was trying to tell them things about my culture, so they could talk about theirs.

How did it go and why? The children did not tell much about their families or themselves, they just said that they could not remember.

What were my thoughts and feelings? I felt that it was a bit pointless keeping asking them, as they were not very focused on the activity.

What did I think about and not say? N/A

What have I learnt? I've learnt that sometimes an adult-led activity is better in order to "get information" from the children.

What would I do differently another time? Maybe I will "structure" a bit more the activity, so the children can be a bit more focused.

Have I learnt anything about myself?

How can I use the experience in the future? Performing the activity in a different way.

Adapted from: Pascal, C., and Bertram, T. (2012) Participatory Methods for Assessment and Evaluation. In: Formosinho, J., and Pascal, C. (2016) Assessment and Evaluation for Transformation in Early Childhood. London: Routledge, p.84.

## **Appendix 9: The Pilot Study**

### **Piloting the audio-visual research tools**

The centre where I piloted the research tools supports families from diverse faiths and cultures and provides learning experiences using the EYFS (2017) curriculum framework for children in the two-five age range. It therefore provided an opportunity for working with practitioners to identify the potential 'focus children'; as well an appropriate environment for testing the tools within my research design. Provided next is an account of the challenges, limitations and lessons learnt that provided insight which in turn informed the main study.

Central to the focus of my study are ideas that children are active participants in the communities they inhabit, and as such have a right to participate and contribute their perspectives in research (Pascal and Bertram 2009, Woodhead and Faulkner 2008). Although research studies warn of the challenges (Fleer, 2008), and ethical concerns (Flewitt, 2005) in researching children's conceptions, the decision to use video in my research was informed by the desire to develop a methodology that sought at its heart to provide opportunities for empowering the voice of young children.

The decision was also influenced by the desire to work with practitioners to observe interactions in play experiences and to listen and respond to young children's perspectives in the transformation of practice (Pascal and Bertram 2009). Having undertaken reviews of literature in previous research projects, I was acutely aware of my inexperience in using video-based research methodologies with young children.

The primary aim of the pilot study therefore was to test out the methodological tools that would be used for data collection in the main study site. Piloting the approaches served two purposes: one, support for my skill development in the use of technology, and two, to garner the 'lessons learnt' from the process that would define the main study data collection process.

Ethical approval was received in late 2016 for my proposed research study. Acting on an existing working relationship, approaches were made at a setting where I was able to negotiate consent to facilitate a small pilot study. Approaches for the data collection methods using child framed videos in the pilot study can be seen in my research design (Appendix 7) and research matrix (Appendix 11) documents. Drawing on the advice and expertise of the supervisory team, the nature of the pilot primarily involved developing my skills in using technology, but testing the proposed sampling frame, as well as reviewing the availability of culturally appropriate play materials that may be used to support/negate a sense of self-identity helped to inform my future thoughts and decisions in the choice of recording equipment used in preparing the ground for the future design process of the main study.

The subsequent sections detail my approach for talking about and negotiating participation in the pilot study; lessons learned from piloting the use of technology in the interview and observation data collection process; challenges/weaknesses with using video-based technologies in these processes; and the decisions/influences that informed the main study data collection. I start with an outline about the pilot setting.

### **Background to the setting**

Situated in the North of England, the chosen childcare centre is registered with Ofsted to accommodate up to 168 children between the ages of three months and five years. The Ofsted report describes the children using the centre as being predominantly the children of staff and students accessing the local university. Families using the centre come from a variety of cultures, backgrounds

and beliefs, which the centre believes is reflected in its respect for each individual child, their family and the way in which the organisation is managed.

Three rooms can accommodate 112 children between the ages of three to five years, where activities are planned to meet the curriculum outcomes of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Employing a total of 47 staff, activities and play experiences are planned by key people to ensure individual child development, which is then tracked and monitored by area supervisors, the EYFS coordinator and the centre's quality and practice manager. The learning environment is described by Ofsted as being 'exceptional', where there is an abundance of resources so that children can make independent choices. The children are confident and demonstrate a sensitive awareness towards difference and the needs of their peers. Practitioners are respectful of the needs of the children (as well as parents). Observation show that the nursery team are effective in creating and implementing interventions to support identified gaps in learning. Children therefore appear to have a strong sense of belonging as well as distinct identity with the culture and ethos of the nursery.

At a macro-level, there is evidence (via displays) of a strong influence from educational policy in the units' environment. Assessment of children's play is matched to individual learning needs relating to the early learning goals of the EYFS (2017). There is a good balance between adult directed and extended periods of child initiated free play, where children are able to explore role play, sand, water, small world, creative, mark making, ICT, books in both the inside and outside areas.

### **Talking about my research and negotiating participation**

The pilot study took place over a period of three months. Time was initially spent in meetings, communications via email and drop in visits to gain an understanding of the setting, its practices and to attempt to build rapport with both practitioners and children.

In the first month of the pilot, the primary focus was on developing rapport and a relationship of trust (Shenton, 2004) between me and the quality practice manager. In weekly meetings of one-hour duration, attention was devoted to carefully explaining the purpose, rationale and the intended processes of data collection for the study. Principally because of what could be perceived as the sensitive nature of exploring issues associated with 'race' with young children. It was important that clarity was provided regarding my interest in the topic, and who the emergent themes from the inquiry would be for (Wolcott, 2010).

An example of a pivotal conversation that took place in this period was centred on identification of the appropriate sample of focus children. Questions asked about which group of children I perceived as 'mixed ethnic' prompted deeper thinking about the children that would be research participants. Informing the decision that the categorisation of the sample focus children would be from the mixed ethnicity of Black Caribbean and Black African and White/Other descent proved instrumental in defining which group of children would drive the focus of the study.

Prolonged engagement in considering these types of complexities as well as assessing and evaluating between the operational planning of the learning experiences of the children; reviewing staff availability for participation and accommodating the methods that would be used in the interview and observation phases helped to build credibility into the pilot study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Sustained engagement in assessing and evaluating methods with key people is advocated as being an important factor for building credibility into research studies (Pascal and Bertram, 2012).

Throughout the period of the pilot participant contributions, particularly the contributions from the quality practice manager proved to be invaluable for shaping the design of the research. Contributions took many forms, from regular briefing/debriefing meetings, emails comments on interview/observation schedules to feedback on my interview technique as a researcher and my use

of video technology in observations. To track agreed dates, timings, actions and decisions surrounding the process of testing the interview and observation methods, an interview/observation schedule was devised (See Appendix 10).

### **How I piloted the methods**

Primary actions of the pilot set out to test the developed interview questions. The aim being to check two factors: the timing of the interviews did run over one hour as planned; and to test if the responses to the research questions did elicit perspectives that would provide deeper meaning in the observed interactions in phase two.

### **The use of recording equipment in the Interviews**

The decision to hold the interviews at the centre was based on the need to ensure that those individuals participating in the pilot felt as comfortable as possible. Basing interviews in a known environment to the staff facilitated this aim. The provision also boasts plenty of meeting rooms, making it a conducive environment for interviewing. From an agreed schedule of dates (see Appendix 15) the interviews took place in a room with comfortable seating to create a relaxed atmosphere for the interviewee.

Originally three practitioners were selected, however one practitioner left the organisation before the agreed interviews could take place. Piloting the interview questions and use of the Dictaphone did not present a particular challenge, because I have made use of this equipment in both my teaching practice and doctoral supervisions. What was significant was feedback on my persona as a researcher.

Both interviewees described by persona as 'friendly and warm', one which instantly put an individual at ease. They also reflected that my delivery provided support by way of rephrasing questions if understanding was not clear. In terms of feedback on the developed interview questions, both interviewees felt the questions flowed well. The interviewees also reporting that the interview time passed quickly. Although detailed the pilot interviews lasted one hour as scheduled.

### **Piloting the use of video recording equipment for observation**

Twice a week I attended drop-in sessions with the children. The purpose of which was to build rapport, observe children's emergent interests through their play, and to take the video equipment into the room. The aim of taking the equipment into the room was to observe the children's reactions to the equipment, and to test how long interest in the equipment would last and then be ignored. It was immediately apparent that the children were used to being recorded, because their interest in the equipment faded after the initial visit.

Caution with this assumption is needed here, assuming that children quickly ignore or are unaffected by recording equipment would be a serious error on the part of the researcher. Lomax and Casey (1998) advise that participants appearing to ignore the camera should not be perceived as an indicator that they are unaffected by the presence of the researcher. Seen below is a reflection from my journal entry, which highlights children's perceptions of the researcher:

Reflective journal entry on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2017

... after all of the children came to say hello, only four children (two boys and two girls) wanted me to engage in what they were doing. One little boy wanted me to smell mint and another little boy talked about his new school, believing that I was his new teacher. The remainder of the children happily went back to their play interests.

While I write here that the remainder of the children appeared to ignore the video camera, further reflection of the recordings and the associated journal entries show that children are not unaffected by either the presence of the camera, or of me as the researcher. I share a moment from the data that challenged, shaped and redefined the future decisions I would make surrounding the framing of the data as being totally focused on the children's play, as well as my positionality as a researcher.

This episode involved three little girls participating in play with their babies in the home corner (pseudonyms are used for their names). In recording their play, one could assume that the girls are absorbed in the play experiences and totally ignoring the fact that they are being recorded. However, presented here is an interaction that outlines the child's perspective of my presence in her play space.

*Summary of the interaction taken from field notes:*

Aysha, Talia and Beth are still Playing with their babies in the home corner. Aysha has managed to enter into the play in the small play space. After Talia says something to Aysha (unable to hear what she said) Aysha comes over to me with the doll. Observing that she is trying to put a cardigan on her doll, I offer to help. I observe Aysha has a cup in her hand, so I ask, is your baby thirsty? Talia and Beth come over to see what is going on. Then return to the role play area. Aysha watches them. I ask do you want to go play, (handing over the doll). Aysha is looking over towards Talia and Beth, so I ask do you want to have a drink with the other little girls? Aysha turns to the girls then back at me shrugging her shoulders to her ears.

Reflection of the episode of play and interaction evidenced how Aysha looked to the researcher, as she would any other adult in the room, to help her with negotiating access to play with peers. Although unintentional, by intervening I immediately changed the data collected in this episode of play. Methodologically, data was meant to explore the children's experiences surrounding similarity and differences of ethnic identities now contained data surrounding adult child interaction in the mediation of play with peers.

The process of observing and recording the play activities and then being interrupted and responding to a child's need for assistance raised many questions about the framing of the videoing of the children's play experiences. Questions that constantly influenced the decision-making process throughout the pilot included: enquiring whether the data had any relevance if it did not focus on or relate to children's understandings about identity. I found it difficult to decide what to record from the children's natural exploratory interests. This aspect was particularly challenging because I had no previous understanding about their cultural or raced experiences in or outside of the nursery setting.

Along with the challenge of developing skills of recording children's learning experiences to explore the research questions, other significant challenges presented in the pilot involved ensuring practitioner understanding about the nature of participatory research, and how it could potentially lead to creative solutions for pedagogical development and transformative practice. Challenged with issues associated with staffing due to sickness absences, annual leave arrangements and the complexities of reallocation of staffing to rooms, made it difficult to facilitate any meaningful conversations with practitioners. The practitioners that had engaged in the interview stage did not participate in the observation phase. It was therefore implausible to expect understanding surrounding the development of practice derived from children's play activities.

What the experience of navigating these complex issues did was provide deep consideration for inclusion in the main study about the need for reflexivity in my interactions, particularly where issues are not necessarily supported by methodological structures (Cutter-Mackenzie et al, 2015).

### **Questions probing thoughts for defining the choice of child participants**

Probing questions from the setting manager about the sample of children required for the pilot observation phase immediately focused thoughts about clearly defining which mixed ethnic groups of children would be invited to participate in the inquiry. Once defined as mixed White/Black-Caribbean, or mixed White/African ethnic mix, it became apparent that no children met the criteria in the age and stage of development for participation in the pilot. As the main purpose of the pilot was testing and developing my skill as a researcher in using video recording equipment, the sample of 'focus children' needed for participating was less of an imperative.

Conversations with Faye led to a mutual agreement that the focus of the observation phase would centre on practicing techniques for videoing children in their everyday child-initiated play activities, then moving on to practicing recording the same children in intentional adult directed play experiences. The purpose and the phases in which the technology would be used was reiterated in a meeting with a practitioner called Ellen. Ellen was particularly helpful in providing information surrounding the setting's planned intentional experiences. Experiences in which culture and identity would be explored with the children were defined. The complexity and challenges experienced, together with the lessons learned in trialling techniques for data collection in these play activities is summarised in the next section.

### **Challenges/limitations with using video-based technologies in the interview**

#### **process**

There were few challenges in using and retrieving data from the Dictaphone in the interview phase. Probably associated with familiarisation and use of this particular piece of equipment in my everyday working practice. The challenge that did exist, was not in the use of the Dictaphone in the interviews, but in issues associated with access to practitioners to carry out the interviews on mutually scheduled dates. As detailed earlier the problematic nature of staff cover because of attrition, annual leave and sick absence dictated when access to the setting and staff could be facilitated.

In a similar vein, flexibility in attending the setting around my own work schedule made matters more challenging. Ethical decision-making surrounding approaches for countering the reflexive nature of research (Cutter-Mackenzie et al, 2015) can be seen in the extract of my reflective thoughts from my journal entries (see an example journal entry in Appendix 12). Factors associated with accessibility and my own workload led to the decision to abruptly halt the pilot study throughout the month of August.

### **Challenges/limitations with using video-based technologies in the observation**

#### **process**

From the outset my nervousness in using camera equipment was very apparent. I found it difficult to operate the camera equipment even though I had read and re-read the manuals. Knowing where the play would go, which children to record, and keeping to the forefront of my mind that I was trying to capture children's knowledge shared from the home seemed impossible. Particularly because I didn't have detailed cultural knowledge about the children in the room.

When undertaking training to use the video equipment with colleagues on campus, it was suggested that I make use of a tripod to capture the children's play, so that I could focus on maintaining written

notes. Anyone working with children is only too aware of how fluid the nature of children's play interests can be. Children's play interest can involve ideas that are transported to different areas of in the play environment in an instant. Thoughts that children would play in one area, for a fixed amount of time to allow me to record and make notes of their play now seem ridiculous on reflection. Needless to say abandoning the use of the tripod was an easy early decision for influencing the techniques that I would use in the main study. Extracts taken from my research journal entries further evidence the thoughts and decisions that helped to redefine how I would go on to use the video recording equipment in the main study:

*Extract from journal entries on 14.8.17*

**Note:** When filming commences, I find it easier to hold the camera to track the movement of the children as they move from zone to zone in their play, rather than leaving it in one zone.

**Thought:**

I need to decide if I am filming:

- the focus children, i.e. following them as they negotiate the learning environment;
- zones of the learning environment and wait for the focus children to play in those chosen zones for example the role play area, book corner;
- observations in the indoor or outdoor environment.

**Decision about filming:**

- To record in the indoor environment (following the visit on 16.8.17. I realised it is much more challenging to track the focus children as they make use of the larger scale and space of the outdoors).
- Filming to focus on the focus children in their free play experiences, but in the
  - Role play area
  - Book corner

**Rationale:** I have greater control to explore the many forms of expression the children may use to communicate their raced identity in these chosen zones.

Focus children must be chosen to enable effective observation in naturalistic play experiences. Random sampling does not elicit data to explore research question 1. However, I will follow them if the play moves to another zone and is providing rich data.

I realised early into the observation phase that recording children's play-based learning experiences alone presented significant shortcomings. Whilst the recorded play experiences elicited 'rich' data surrounding the interactive nature of play between the practitioners and children, these exchanges did not capture the reflective dialogic exchanges of knowledge surrounding perceptions of ethnic identity. In other words, the recorded activities did not appear to be responding to the research questions.

A plausible explanation for this could have been that interactions, resources and routines did not allow for the meaningful exchange of ideas surrounding ethnic identities between the children, their peers and the practitioners. Work with Emma highlights such restrictions in practice. This practitioner was not involved in earlier conversations surrounding the purpose of the study, nor was she involved in the Interview phase that provided detailed explanations about the purpose of the study and its design. As a consequence, the planned learning experience and the allocated resources did not fit the purpose of the activity. Instead of using mirrors Emma thought it would be helpful to use CD's to distort the children's features. As a result, the children couldn't see themselves clearly and therefore quickly discarded the resource.

Chapter 2 positions arguments from Corsaro, (2015) that contend children's place in cultural reproduction is concerned with active attempts to share routines, artefacts and values, which in turn allow them to identify with and exchange thoughts about culture and identity in their play repertoires. Influenced by these early observations and reflecting on the use of resources and their influence on

learning, it was vitally important that in the main studies ways for exploring the exchange of ideas about ethnicity and culture were identified early on to enhance and significantly enrich the data collection process. Similarly, careful identification and use of appropriate artefacts would facilitate children's active and sustained engagement in the exchange of opinions about culture and identity in their play repertoires.

### **Conclusion from the pilot study**

The primary purpose of the pilot study was to test my ability in recording and videoing techniques in the interview and observation phase. I experienced minor challenges in using and retrieving data from the Dictaphone in the interview phase. As explained in an earlier section, this was probably because of familiarisation with this piece of equipment in my everyday working practice. Lessons learned was timing of the interviews lasted an hour as planned in the research design, and the interview questions allowed for exploration of the research questions. I was also able to test out my documentation, such as interview/observation preamble that introduces myself as the researcher; the child assent and consent forms as well as the research information sheets and interview/observation schedules. All of which were fit for purpose for use in the main study.

Within the observation phase I was also mindful of the need to test if the collected data allowed for exploration of the research questions. Pascal and Bertram (2012) provide useful insight for the researcher when thinking about the legitimacy of collected data. Contended are useful views that professional critique of action (praxis) alone is not enough. To ensure authenticity in participatory research there needs to be a call to put phonesis (reflections), praxis (action), ethics and agency (power) at the heart of 'praxeological' studies (Pascal and Bertram, 2012). Recognising that recordings of learning activities (praxis using ethical and agentic ways of engagement) have the potential to offer deeper understanding when enhanced with additional dialogic conversations (phonesis) from the perspectives of children and practitioners respectively, lead me to respond to Pascal and Bertram appeal for authenticity in research. These helpful insights endorsed my decision to purposefully redefine my approach for the observation phase to facilitate a more 'authentically democratic process' (see Appendix 2 – research design document).

Reflections throughout the pilot study process detail the challenges in selecting the appropriate categories of children that would be adopted in the main study. Moving beyond the issues that at the time of the pilot there were no children that met the criteria, the sessional nature of attendance of the children meant that it was not possible to determine which children would be in attendance to ensure any legitimate amount of consistency in the recording of play experiences with 'target' children. Furthermore, it became apparent that the children were unaware of the purpose of the play activities, particularly when the environment was not setup for the intended learning experience. These issues greatly informed the need for detailed planning and preparation with practitioners and the children before agreed access to observe and record the learning experiences.

Researcher reflective journals (See Appendix 10) also detail the challenges in undertaking observations with practitioners. Although there was a genuine commitment to supporting the pilot study, realities in the operational running of the setting meant that priority was one of managing staff ratios in a period of significant staff absences. From the outset of the videoing sessions it wasn't recording the children that caused concern, it was the fluidity and change of the staff working with the children. Lessons learned involved the inability to test if what practitioners said they did in interview was the case in observation of their practice. Negotiating access to the main study site included (as reasonably could be expected) an assurance that practitioners agreeing to participate in the study were senior practitioners that had been employed with the organisation for a prolonged period.

## **Reflective thoughts relating to the researcher**

The overriding lesson learned from undertaking the pilot study was that the researcher must maintain control of the design process of the study. Engaging in a pilot highlighted how easy it is to comply with agendas associated with the operational running of a nursery setting, rather than following process for engaging in empirical research. I recognise now that this is easily done because of my empathetic nature. That said I also recognise that flexibility and an understanding of the organisation needs is required when undertaking research (Shenton, 2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness entail prolonged engagement in research methods with key people (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), therefore scheduling dates for regular observations of practice is needed.

Open dialogue in the pilot afforded the opportunity to reflect on and develop the research design, for example following feedback from Faye (the quality practice manager) I strengthened documents for negotiating access, the interview observation preamble, and the interview questions. The open nature of these discussions with Faye also helped with clearly defining the sample group of children that I would ask to participate in the main research. Reflective conversations also probed thoughts surrounding the challenges of observing child initiated and intentional play experiences in the settings. Particularly pertinent for bridging the needs of research and the settings requirement for ongoing planned experiences based on children's individual needs. Ultimately undertaking a pilot study significantly enhanced researcher understanding surrounding the characteristics for undertaking qualitative research.

## Appendix 10: Sample Interview/Observation Schedule

| Date & Time                |  | Action  | Note:   |
|----------------------------|--|---|---|
| Meet with Parents          | 11/10 at 4.30pm  | Complete  | Due to time constraints, staff changes proposal sent via email (7/3/18) that the study moves to stage 4 - Focus Group of practitioners to evaluate what and how the children are learning (Collective response).<br><br>Parents Focus Group – collate parent perspective of their children’s learning. Proposed date for the meeting <b>9<sup>th</sup> April 2018.</b>  |
| Semi structured interviews |  |   |   |
| Practitioner 1             | 20.10.17 at 8am  | Complete  |   |
| Practitioner 2             | 20.10.17 at 9am  | Complete  |   |
| Practitioner 3             | 20.10.17 at 2pm  | Complete  | <b>Amy Agreed Actions:</b>  |
| Observations               | <b>Revised Observation dates:</b><br>Wednesday:<br>24.1.18<br>31.1.18<br>14.2.18 (cancelled)<br>7.3.18 (cancelled)<br>21.3.18 (cancelled)      | <b>Filming</b><br><br><b>Stage One:</b><br>Recording of the experiences between practitioners and children in ‘planned intentional’ play experiences takes place.<br><br>(Camera)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amy and Lucia to complete a participant journal following activities.</li> <li>• To set up a folder for each star child’s drawings, artefacts that explore their identity.</li> <li>• Amy to record where the study is influencing the practice of the setting from a management perspective.</li> <li>• Amy to invite me to be in when there is a Key Family Tree moment in nursery to solidify my understanding of how it works.</li> <li>• Lucia to record where the study is influencing practice with colleagues in her room.</li> <li>• Parental comments to be gathered (<b>using the parent journal</b>) regarding how knowledge about a <b>raced (mixed) identity</b> is shared in the home and community with children - <b>Ongoing</b>.</li> <li>• Children’s drawings/experiences (raced identity) from the home to be shared with Sharon, to inform the research study - <b>Ongoing</b>.</li> <li>• To review the observations and dialogic conversations - <b>Ongoing</b>.</li> <li>• Dates for the Amy/Lucia/Sharon to watch and review the video recordings to inform <b>Dialogic Conversations TBC</b>. Also to discuss the nature of questioning for the Reflective Dialogues - <b>Ongoing</b>.</li> </ul> |
| Star Children              |  | <b>Stage Two:</b><br>Practitioners are encouraged to record their reactions, interpretations and learning in their practitioner journals.<br><br>(Projector/Camera)   |   |
| Frank<br>Joshua<br>Faith   | <b>Reflective conversations with the children</b><br>Wednesday<br>14.2.18 - 2pm<br>(4pm - photos)<br>7.3.18 (cancelled)<br>21.3.18 (cancelled) | <b>Stage Three:</b><br><b>Reflective Dialogues</b><br>Practitioners are invited to view the video footage of stages 2 and 3 to identify how and what they believe the children are learning/sharing perspectives.<br><br>(Projector/Camera)                                     |   |
| Friendship Group Member    | <b>Dialogic Review meetings</b><br>Friday<br>26.1.18<br>2.2.18<br>9.2.18<br>2.3.18 (cancelled – Snow)<br>9.3.18 (cancelled)                    | <b>Stage Four:</b><br><b>Reflective Dialogues</b><br>The children are invited to view the video footage, where they are encouraged to share their conceptual learning. Practitioners make use of the observations notes and journal reflections notes.<br><br>(iPad/Dictaphone) |   |
| Edith                      |  |   | <b>Sharon Actions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To devise a parent feedback journal to contribute to the children’s responses to the intentional play activities. <b>Complete</b></li> <li>• To send the articles that are informing my reading and therefore the study. <b>Complete</b></li> </ul>   |



## Appendix 11: Research Matrix – Main Study

### Exploring how play-based pedagogies support mixed ethnic identity formation

| Research Questions  | Who can support?   | Methodological Tools (How)   | Where can the evidence be found   | Data Analysis   | How will the data be analysed  |
|---|--|--|---|---|--|
| Using the 'voice' of the child, what are the key influences on mixed race (CRT, <b>hybridity theory</b> ) children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their racial identity in the early years setting? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deputy Manager</li> <li>1 Early Years Practitioner</li> </ul>   | <p><b>Semi-Structured Interviews</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysed Transcripts of the perspectives of:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deputy Manager</li> <li>1 Early Years Practitioner</li> <li>Field Notes (with reflections of the early years environment)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Videoed play experiences in                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group Play, Solitary, Parallel, o</li> </ul> </li> <li>Videoed &amp; recorded conversations with practitioners.</li> <li>Follow up dialogic conversations with Sharon, Practitioners &amp; Children</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audio Taping</li> <li>Transcription coding</li> <li>Coding of immediate Field notes</li> </ul>   | <p>Checks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore data packages that can assist with data analysis</li> <li>Ensure clarity of the methods used and that they serve the research purpose</li> <li>Consider data protection issues.</li> </ul> <p>Analysis from the recordings of the children's perspectives surrounding building a confident self-identity (how they identify)</p> <p>Analysis from the records of children's perspectives of difference to self.</p> <p>Analysis from the recordings of the Groups perspectives</p> |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Children aged 3-5 years – (3 Star Children - mixed race origin)</li> </ul>                                      | <p><b>Observations</b></p> <p><b>Intentional teaching</b></p> <p>examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Play activities: Story Books, Self-portrait with Paints &amp; Mirrors;</li> <li>Reflective dialogues from the videos</li> </ul> <p><b>Focus Group interview</b></p> <p>One two-hour discussion to gather collective thoughts</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysed Transcripts of the collective thoughts of the group:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recording Dictaphone/iPad</li> <li>Note taking – Researcher</li> <li>Follow up conversations with Sharon</li> </ul> </li> <li>Analysed Transcripts</li> <li>Field Notes</li> <li>Review of EYFS Policy Docs and Research literature</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Video</li> <li>Recordings</li> <li>Record of significant learning observed in the videos</li> <li>Ongoing coding</li> <li>Audio Taping</li> <li>Transcription coding</li> <li>Coding of immediate Field notes</li> </ul> | <p>Analysis of the transcribed Interviews.</p> <p>Analysis of Documentation – Inclusion Policy, Curriculum Policy, Ofsted Report</p>   |
| What opportunities exist in the EYFS (2017) policy framework that allow 'mixed race' children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences in their education?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 ME Children</li> <li>Deputy Manager</li> <li>1 Early Years Practitioner</li> <li>Sharon (Researcher)</li> </ul> | <p>Semi Structured Interviews</p> <p>Systematic documentary analysis</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysed Transcripts</li> <li>Field Notes of Observation of Play and Pedagogy in the Early Years Environment</li> <li>Practitioner reflective journals</li> <li>Field notes</li> <li>Review of EYFS Policy Docs, National Strategies and Research literature.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audio Taping</li> <li>Transcription coding</li> <li>Ongoing Coding of immediate Field notes</li> </ul>   | <p>Analysis of the transcribed Interviews.</p> <p>Analysis from the recordings of the children's perspectives surrounding building a confident self-identity (how they identify)</p> <p>Analysis from the records of children's perspectives of difference to self.</p> <p>Analysis of Practitioner perspectives – reflective journals</p>   |
| How does the implementation of a play based pedagogical approach provide space for mixed race children to explore their ethnicity?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deputy Manager</li> <li>1 Early Years Practitioner</li> </ul>   | <p>Semi Structured Interviews</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysed Transcripts</li> <li>Field Notes of Observation of Play and Pedagogy in the Early Years Environment</li> <li>Practitioner reflective journals</li> <li>Field notes</li> <li>Review of EYFS Policy Docs, National Strategies and Research literature.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audio Taping</li> <li>Transcription coding</li> <li>Ongoing Coding of immediate Field notes</li> </ul>   | <p>Analysis of the transcribed Interviews.</p> <p>Analysis from the recordings of the children's perspectives surrounding building a confident self-identity (how they identify)</p> <p>Analysis from the records of children's perspectives of difference to self.</p> <p>Analysis of Practitioner perspectives – reflective journals</p>   |



## Appendix 12: Example of a researcher field note/journal

| Main Study: Follow up conversation with Amanda 16.3.18 (self-portrait activity)<br>File D - 20 Duration: 30 minutes  |  |
|--|--|
| Notes  | Actions/Thoughts/Decision  |
| <p><i>Although the conversation is about Amanda's written response to the self-portrait activity. She requests that Leah stays with her.</i></p> <p>1. Explains as the research has unfolded it has become increasingly clear that the children have needed to feel safe with their friends to be able to speak about these personal unique thoughts about themselves.</p> <p>Adult – It was very direct in the play. It was successful because the children were able to reflect with their friends. I don't think that would have happened if we hadn't had those initial sessions. They had already explored that with Leah. They had that playful experience. so that was their safety net. I saw what they talked about as well as Leah response. She didn't take control of that play, which I think is so important and key. The children weren't comfortable in making circular shapes. I then felt confident to go in and think this is how I want to direct it.</p> <p>S: do you feel you extended the experience then?<br/>From the child's perspective do you think that would be a space you would provide in practice<br/>A: we do it, but we don't sit children around a table for 20 minutes. We don't have tables in a room. We don't have that table and chair approach.<br/>S: is that something that you think you would incorporate?<br/>A: this what this room is used for?<br/>S: did you use this room for the self-portrait?<br/>A: yes, it wouldn't have worked downstairs.<br/>S: thinking about inclusion policy and knowing about similarity and difference and the richness of what it told. Which has most agency; the children, pedagogy, policy,<br/>A: collaboration of all of them, we use them in the mini art studio (situated in the main play room). We've triggered the use of these resources.<br/>S: Is that something you would have thought of before.<br/>A: I'd like to say yes but not necessarily no. anything we develop downstairs it comes from the children...<br/>S: Do you think the idea of children knowing about their race identity adds value to the curricula.<br/>A: Yes of course for the children. It has nothing to do with the EYFS! We've been playful with this exploration. The children loved different modes pf expression. They love tea parties. It's been interesting to provide a different line of thought.<br/>S: Edie has a really strong sense of self, would you argue that's the parent's role?<br/>A: it's our role as practitioners how we support parents with that, we need to support you with phonics, we need to support you with maths, so actually where is that balance? Is that being reflected?</p> <p>2. S: Who agency dominates in that Vygotskian thinking – is it the child or the adult<br/>L: the children</p> | <p><b>Action:</b><br/>Anticipating that this would happen, I have revisited the research questions and design, together with the data gathered to date. There is evidence to support the research questions from the children's responses to their learning. However there is limited feedback from the practitioner perspectives. The research questions do not require input from parent perspectives. It was agreed that this would support practitioner understanding about the children's responses and then how to follow these interests/responses to their raced identity.</p> <p><b>Thought:</b><br/>What is needed is a collective response surrounding practitioner perspectives, the collective view from the setting about the learning that is occurring.<br/>Writing in my thesis document will need to reflect a strong rationale for not pursuing parent perspectives. Which I feel can be facilitated because of the actions/agency of the nursery to deny access.<br/>Other routes could be to add a focus group of mixed raced adults to garner their perspectives in response to the children's play experiences.</p> |

**A:** Agrees

In terms of the children's voices. Refers to different expression for example Freddy's yelps because it was too difficult for him. Children were fascinated but sometimes they weren't sure how to share it, their ideas.

3. Basically what I am trying to say god what have I written and why have I written that. Researcher provides reassurance.

**S:** can you link the learning to your pedagogy. The children were relaxed and fine with the activity so can you link to how uncomfortable this made you feel using that pedagogical approach?

**A:** I do believe there is a place for it. However, I would have tried to spend less time. I would have maybe done it in stages. Maybe only two children and not four. They were getting distracted. It's a lot for a three-year-old child to be sat for 20 minutes.

**S:** Did the children realise it was 20 minutes or is it because you knew it was 20 minutes

**A:** I felt they realised I'm sitting here; I'm getting a bit antsi. Using excuses to use the toilet etc.

**S:** Is that because that's the pedagogy downstairs?

**A:** Yes, its very much play based downstairs. If they want to go to the toilet they can go. I knew their agenda. I knew they didn't want to engage anymore.

**S:** it might be that when we have the FG you might be able to share other lines of thought towards pedagogy.

4. Unable to expand on this point. Researcher explains I wasn't able to link your thinking here but not a problem. Let's just move on.

5. **S:** Do you perceive that there was a pre-planned goal?

**A:** I do, especially the one I did. The goal was to make sure that the children were recognising their skin colours and were able to use them to show that. There was a goal in that activity.

**S:** I know you wanted to do this for the purpose of the research but what was the provocation for doing that. We did not discuss or agree this activity. What information has come from it is brilliant. Why did you feel the need to do this activity?

Because the children have created these portraits before, but not with skin coloured paints. **I know how skilled these children are**. Not necessarily using a 'black' paint or a pencil but they will use a pen or a crayon. They might draw themselves as green or blue. I guess that's a safe exploration. I knew that they had used the paints before but I did want to try and extend their learning. Because I knew they had the skills

Researcher add and the 'knowledge'

**A:** Form the language for they use

**S:** Do you not think we are trying to get to the knowledge they already have?

**S:** Is that they shared with you. Is it that you were concerned with that they would share with you?

**A:** I think so. I didn't want to put or to make them feel pressured.

**S:** The children appeared relaxed, so looking back now after writing this. What is your view now?

**A:** erm

**S:** *can the exploration of your raced identity, what makes you belong be tailored to their fascinations.*

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><i>A: Of course it can. You haven't looked back at the recordings, nor have you reflected on the activity with the children (because you had to see to the poorly baby). Leah was left to do it. Which she struggled with because she didn't facilitate the session in the first instance.</i></p> <p>Now apparent that Amanda didn't want to reflect on her activity with the children.....</p> <p>A: I do see the value, and I do see the success, I still very much feel that I would do it in a different way.</p> <p>6. S: Recognising A uncomfortableness I say 'this next point will help us to move on here.</p> <p>A: That's a very damning statement to make. I was clearly having a rant.</p> <p>S: I wasn't present, I would like to make sense of the pedagogical thinking here.</p> <p>A: I don't think we needed to encourage the children to do a self-portrait to talk about their identity, but sitting at a table. Freddy wasn't the most comfortable. I don't have the answer. There are more playful approaches we could do. Maybe working more with parents having those conversations. Those sorts of things. Rather than the more direct approach. I'm not saying that what I did was necessarily wrong or that it wasn't supportive or that the children weren't interested.</p> <p>S: From the start of the research, it was always going with the fascinations. The pedagogy went off but it wasn't something that was agreed or pre-planned. I'm just trying to get a sense of where you were in that period. It is strong so I just wanted to get it back in the context for the pedagogy.</p> <p>Finishing on a positive what I was trying to do is say these are my thoughts this is my opinion. I wanted to explain why I was uncomfortable. This is about your pedagogy and not your personal thought. I want to ensure you are ok with the contribution.</p> <p>A: We are very reflective, so this is my reflection.</p> <p>S: I would say let's not do anymore experiences taking into account ethical considerations.</p> <p>S: For me it's not about the activity it's about the knowledge they have shared..</p> <p>Researcher<br/>Let's end on notion that we do not have the answers there are no right and wrong. Close the conversation</p> |  |
| <p><b>Summary</b></p> <p><b>What I'm Learning:</b></p> <p><b>Trustworthiness</b><br/>I have no evidence where the issue of trust broke down, but I do believe it has. I believe it stems from Amanda's actions which she believes went against her pedagogy.</p> <p><b>Agency</b><br/>Amanda provided a transcript about her own personal thoughts surrounding play and what children do and do not learn. There are lots of direct quotes without wider clarification that relate to the shared experiences with the star children.</p>   | <p><b>Action</b></p> <p>Arrange a review meeting with Amanda so that she has an opportunity to expand on her transcript. Check if it's the collective view of the nursery or her own personal beliefs.</p> <p>Arrange a meeting with Katrina with a proposal to set up a 'focus group' to look at some of the recording and to get a</p> |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>I am surprised that there is a suggestion that the agenda/pedagogy is being engineered towards a goal.</p> <p>I haven't suggested the activities or the environment in which the play experiences should be undertaken. The decision to undertake an activity without be being there was Amanda's.</p> <p>Despite sharing research articles there seems to be a suggestion that I am enforcing adult directed activities.</p> <p><b>Action</b></p> <p>Go back to the research questions and check underlying issues about my research.</p> <p><b>Friday 16.3.18</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinct contrast in pedagogical approach used downstairs and in the room where intentional play activities took place.</li> </ul> | <p>collective response about what the children are learning.</p> <p>Agree feedback loops as I go into the analysis phase of my research Amanda/Leah/Katrina.</p> |
|--|--|

## **Appendix 13: Parent Research Preamble**

My name is Sharon Colilles and I am a Course Director at Leeds Beckett University, where I teach across a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Early Childhood. My professional background is an Early Years Teacher, where for a period of ten years I owned a private day nursery. I have also undertaken the role of an EYP Assessor for the University of Huddersfield.

I am undertaking a Doctor of Philosophy; my doctoral research topic is:

*Playful Pedagogy: mixed ethnic identity formation in the early years.*

The study will focus on and explore what the key influences are on mixed ethnic children's perspectives about their racial identity in an early years setting. By mixed ethnic I mean English speaking children who have parents who have different racial backgrounds. Academic terminology tends to refer to someone being mixed ethnic when she or he is a descendent of two or more distinct racial groups. For the purpose of my inquiry I will be referring to White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African origin.

I would like to work with the children and practitioners to explore what the key influences are on the children's ability to relate to, connect with and make meaning of their racial identity in their play experiences. My research also aims to explore what complexities exist for the early years practitioner in ensuring an inclusive curriculum for diverse learners, whilst at the same time meeting the learning and development requirement of personal social and emotional development (PSED) in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2017).

I am particularly interested in children as research participants. In other words, ensuring that children's 'voices' are actively positioned as being highly significant in their play, learning and development. Thoughts about children's capacities for engaging in complex ideas surrounding identity and understandings about similarity and difference to their peers is also of interest to me.

The nursery has kindly offered support for undertaking my research study, which will involve recordings of the children in their natural play environment. With the children's key people, I will also make use of an iPad to record and discuss with your children, their perspectives on activities such as reading a storybook about 'all kinds of people', drawing and play with clay and painting. Respect of the children's wishes to participate or not will be totally respected.

Working with the practitioners, we will reflect on, assess and evaluate learning and teaching within the EYFS, the purpose of which seeks to explore new ways of understanding, informed by the children's perspectives and capacities for leading their learning and development.

Your thoughts about this research study are welcomed, I would like to extend the offer to speak to me when I'm in the setting. I would also like to make you aware that this project has the full ethical

approval of Birmingham City University, nevertheless it is very important that I obtain your consent and the children's ongoing assent to undertake the observations of play.

For the duration of this research inquiry, the collected data will be stored at Leeds Beckett University campus in a locked cabinet and locked office. Information relating to the research inquiry will only be shared with the research participants i.e. Nursery Manager, the Room Supervisor, Practitioners and my Directors of Study. All of the data will be deleted when the research is complete.

Thank You.

✂.....

Please delete as appropriate:

Sharon will be on site today filming with a video recorder/iPad

I am happy for my child to participate with ongoing assent in the study

I do not wish my child to participate in the pilot study.

Print Name:

Signature:

Date:

## Appendix 14: Practitioner Interview/Observation Preamble

My name is Sharon Colilles and I am a Principal Lecturer at Leeds Beckett University, where I teach across a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for Early Childhood. My professional background is an Early Years Teacher, where for a period of ten years I owned a private day nursery. I have also undertaken the role of an EYP Assessor for the University of Huddersfield.

I am undertaking a Doctor of Philosophy (Known as the PhD). My doctoral research topic is:

*Playful Pedagogy: mixed race identity formation in the early years.*

The study will focus on and explore what the key influences are on mixed race children's perspectives about their racial identity in an early years setting. By mixed race I mean English speaking children who have parents who have different racial backgrounds. Academic terminology tends to refer to someone being mixed race when she or he is a descendent of two or more distinct racial groups. For the purpose of my inquiry I will be referring to White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African origin.

I would like to work with the children and practitioners to explore what the key influences are on the children's ability to relate to, connect with and make meaning of their racial identity in their play experiences.

My research also aims to explore what complexities exist for the early years practitioner in ensuring an inclusive curriculum for diverse learners, whilst at the same time meeting the learning and development requirement of personal social and emotional development (PSED) in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2017). By reflecting on, assessing and evaluating practice the purpose of this inquiry seeks to explore new ways of knowing how the principle models of early years pedagogy and practice within the EYFS facilitate the mixed ethnic learners understanding of their 'mixed' identity.

I am particularly interested in your thoughts about children as research participants. In other words your thoughts about ensuring that children's 'voices' are actively positioned as being highly significant in their play, learning and development. Your thoughts about children's capacities for engaging in complex ideas surrounding identity and understandings about similarity and difference to their peers is also of interest to me.

This research project has the full ethical approval of the University. I have produced a participant information sheet and consent form, which provides details of:

- What I will do to ensure your anonymity
- That any sensitive or personal information you may disclose will be kept confidential, and
- that I will keep the information you give me safe.

If you are happy to take part in my research project (Interview and observations of play with the children) please sign and complete the consent form. I will retain this form, but you can keep the information sheet. My contact details can be found at the end of the information sheet should you need to contact me.

## **Interview:**

When the interview starts I may say your name as you speak. Can I therefore ask you to write on the card that I provide for you please? It is simply to act as a reminder for me to help identify who is on the recording.

It is very important that I make you aware that there are no right or wrong answers in the interview. I am genuinely interested in your thoughts about the questions I have prepared to ask you. I will ensure that you are aware of when I put the recorder on. I will also take notes. I hope that this will not put you off, as I will be trying to capture as much as I can from our discussion.

## **Observations of Children's Play and Playful Pedagogy:**

Following the interviews and a period of time getting to know you and the children (including the sample of mixed ethnic children) in the learning environment, with your consent and the assent of the children, I will make use of photographs, review of assessment and evaluation documents and video recording equipment to observe

- child initiated play experiences; and
- planned play experiences and the interactions between mixed race children, peers and practitioners.

I would also like to reflect on these play experiences with you, and to document these dialogues about the teaching and learning that has taken place relating to young children 'raced' identity. To obtain the children's perspectives (giving voice) the recorded activities will be downloaded to a laptop for the children, yourselves and myself to review and document.

The principal aim of videoing play episodes is to gather the children's perspectives and to elicit their interpretations and understandings about their identity and the identity of others. As well as gaining an insight into the play practices that facilitate interaction and understanding about identity between you and the children.

It is very important to provide you with an assurance that if any child wishes to withdraw or not take part in play activities, they can do so immediately. Similarly, if any child becomes distressed the research process will be halted immediately. With this in mind I would like to discuss with you (before observations start) a code or symbol that the children can use to withdraw or refuse to participate or if they do not wish me to record their play (thumbs up or thumbs down for example).

Thank you for your support.

## Appendix 15: Observation Preamble



Research topic is:

*Playful Pedagogy: mixed race identity formation in the early years.*

In support of the explored research questions for this study, observations of children's planned play experiences will be recorded to examine what concepts practitioners believe they have embedded in play experiences to facilitate mixed heritage learners' understandings and meaning making about their race identity. Intentional play experiences will also be implemented with these children to enhance pedagogical understanding and practice of how the 'star' children engage with, explore and share 'their' knowledge about a 'mixed ethnic' identity learnt from the home and community.

It is hoped that the recording of the interactions between the children and practitioners will focus on and explore what the key influences are on the 'star' children's ability to share their insights of their racial identity. Forming a key component of the data collection, further exploration via videoed techniques aim to extrapolate what complexities exist for the early years practitioner in ensuring an inclusive curriculum for diverse learners, whilst at the same time meeting the learning and development requirement of personal social and emotional development (PSED) and understanding the world (UW) in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2017).

Adapted from research studies undertaken by Cutter-Mackenzie, Edwards and Widdop Quinton (2015) the observation process will incorporate four key stages:

### *Stage 1:*

Practitioners are asked to facilitate planned and play experiences with the 'star' children, which they believe support children's shared knowledge and understandings surrounding similarity and difference to themselves. Practitioners will also be invited to facilitate intentional play experiences. Both sets of experiential activities are intended to provide children with opportunities to 'name their worlds', whilst at the same time enhancing skills of active listening, supporting open dialogue and engaging in critical reflection of assessment and evaluation practice for practitioners and the researcher. Prior to recording these experiences, practitioners are encouraged to record (in their practitioner journals) their conceptual knowledge associated with the experiences and the strategies they believed the children would use to access their existing knowledge.

### *Stage 2:*

The star children are invited to participate in the experiences while the practitioners engage in the usual pedagogical activity. The practitioner and children interactions will be video recorded. Practitioners will be again encouraged to record their reactions, interpretations and learning of the

activities in their practitioner journals. These notes may include thoughts about how the 'star' children demonstrate a strong sense of belonging and how they show sensitivity to cultural difference.

### Stage3:

The star children will be invited to view the video footage of their participation in the play experiences. During the viewing, the children are encouraged to describe conceptual learning about some of the:

- things that make them unique (pride and confidence in who they are, building a confident self-identity);
- similarities and differences in relation to family (including pride in their family and culture);
- similarities and differences in relation to practitioners and peers (including pride and confidence in themselves as learners, their strengths and abilities); and
- ways in which their identity and cultures are similar and different.

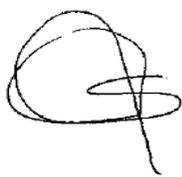
### Stage 4:

Practitioners are invited to view the video footage of Stages 2 and 3. During the viewing the practitioners will be asked to identify what and how they believe the children are learning/sharing perspectives about identity through their play.

The decision to video play experiences (stage 2), and then to have the children participate in small groups in video-simulated recall discussions (stage 3) has been made because the main purpose of my study is to not only hear what mixed heritage children have to say about their developing identity in relation to their 'race', but to also see how they respond to pedagogical play episodes that facilitate this learning. It is hoped that the children will 'point' to particular episodes in their play, and interact with the video footage by pausing, rewinding and fast forwarding the video via a portable DVD device. I am hopeful that this method will support child participation in my research by more readily allowing them to engage in discussions about their play and learning.

Following the observation period, I will reflect on, assess, compare and evaluate the children's perceptions with the pedagogical perceptions (in the practitioner journals and recordings), the purpose of which seeks to explore new ways of knowing how the principle models of early years pedagogy and practice within the EYFS facilitate the mixed heritage children's understanding of their 'mixed' identity.

Thank You.



Reference: Cutter-Mackenzie, A., Edwards, S., and Widdop Quinton, H. (2015) child-framed video research methodologies: issues, possibilities and challenges for researching with children. *Children's Geographies*. Vol.13, (3): 343-356.

# Appendix 16: Example of a Transcribed Vignette of Play

Vignette: 16

Adult directed play activity with Freddy

Activity 4: Freddy paints a self-portrait with Amanda

Star Children: J, Fr and E

Age: 3

Practitioner: Amanda

0 = Other    1 = Discard    2 = Relevant but Ordinary    3 = Relevant and Good    4 = Rich

| Clip position | EYFS   | Category  | Themes  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---------------|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|               | <p><b>People and Communities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know things that make them unique</li> <li>- Can talk about similarity and difference in relation to family</li> <li>- Can talk about similarity and difference in relation to peers and practitioners</li> <li>- Are helped to see the ways in which their identity and cultures are similar and different</li> </ul> | <p><b>Knowledge</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beliefs</li> <li>- Values</li> </ul> | <p><b>Ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs</b></p> <p>J: You're not black<br/>Fr: Yes, am are</p> <p>No its stammers I'm just, no I'm<br/>Fa: black like me?<br/>Fr: its, I'm just, I'm just....<br/>J: White<br/>Fr: No I'm not white I'm, I'm just... Fr looks down at his picture. His expression is sad.<br/>J: What colour</p> <p><b>Responses of children - terminology heard</b></p> <p>Fr: Because I'm black<br/>J: It's purple<br/>E: I think its white<br/>Fa: I think it black<br/>Fa: black like me?<br/>Fr: its, I'm just, I'm just....<br/>J: White<br/>Fr: No I'm not white I'm, I'm just...<br/>J: What colour<br/>Fr: I'm light brown</p> <p><b>Identifies with familial individuals</b></p> <p>Fr: Look that's we, when I meet that lady – points to the picture of a black lady on the wall</p> |   |   |   |   | x |
|               |  |   |   |   |   |   |   | x |
|               |  |   |   |   |   |   |   | x |
|               |  |   |   |   |   |   |   | x |

Operationalising the construction of mixed ethnicity identity

|   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|   |  |   | <p>Amanda: can you remember her name?<br/>Fr: No<br/>Amanda: Her name was Alison when we went to the care home. We saw some of our friends<br/>J: He's not, He's not Alison<br/>Amanda: It's Alison, and she's holding a big gold plate Fr is smiling, his arms are more relaxed as he recalls his visit to the care home<br/>Observational note: Fr seems more relaxed because he has managed to move the focus away from himself. He has managed to deflect the conversation away from himself. Self-efficacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shares knowledge about similarity and difference in ethnicity</li> <li>- Use Play as a tool for thinking about similarity/difference - Shares understanding</li> </ul>  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | <p><b>Making relationships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Show sensitivity to others needs and feelings</li> <li>- Form positive relationships</li> <li>- Confident to speak in a familiar group</li> <li>- Express their ideas</li> </ul> | <p><b>Social Skills</b></p>   | <p><b>Relationships</b></p> <p>RN: Freddy's stammer becomes more prevalent as his peers press him to name his ethnic identity (skin colour). Freddy looks directly at Amanda for support<br/>Evidence<br/>Amanda: it's ok, Fr just trying to get his words, have a think, while he talks about it. J starts to speak again. One-minute J, Let's just Freddy a bit of time Fr looks at Amanda.<br/>Although Freddy is an articulate and confident learner, his confidence in his sense of self and his sense of belonging within his group of peers appears to be waning as the group question him, and offer their views about his ethnic identity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Importance of Friendship</li> </ul> |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-confidence and Self-awareness</li> <li>- Emotional</li> <li>- Confident self-identity</li> <li>- Pride in who they are</li> <li>- Pride in their family and culture</li> </ul>                                 | <p><b>Attributes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expression/Sense of Self</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capacity for theorising about ethnic identity</li> <li>- Interest and developing expertise using an artefact</li> </ul>   |  |  |  |  |  |

Operationalising the construction of mixed ethnicity identity

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|   | - Confidence in themselves as learners |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |        |
| 4 |  | <p><b>Interaction</b><br/>What is the child doing?<br/>- Activity</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activity is developed by dialogue</li> </ul> <p>Amanda: there you go, oh you've got your black on. Why are you putting your black down there?<br/>Fr: Because I'm black<br/>Amanda: Ah ok, that's really good<br/>J: You're not black<br/>Fr: Yes, am are<br/>Amanda: So Fr describes himself as black but he has talked about how his skin as brown<br/>J: It's not brown<br/>Amanda: Oh what do you think it is?<br/>J: It's purple<br/>Amanda: What! purple<br/>E: I think its white<br/>Fa: I think it black<br/>Amanda: I think so too. Now<br/>Fr: Well Fr has an angry expression on his face. He is looking directly at the group. His body is leaning forward and he has his hands by his side<br/>Fr: No its stammers I'm just, no I'm<br/>Fa: black like me?<br/>Fr: its, I'm just, I'm just....<br/>J: White<br/>Fr: No I'm not white I'm, I'm just... Fr looks down at his picture. His expression is sad.<br/>J: What colour<br/>Amanda: it's ok, Fr just trying to get his words, have a think, while he talks about it. J starts to speak again. One minute J, Let's just FR a bit of time Fr looks at Amanda<br/>J: I remembering that!<br/>Amanda: OK, Let's just give Fr a little bit of time. He's trying to say it Fr is looking at the group. He still has his hands by his side.<br/>Fr: Looking directly at the camera - I'm light brown his body rocks forward as he expresses his view.<br/>Amanda: There we go <li>Habits of attention</li> </p> |  |  |  |  |  | X<br>X |

Operationalising the construction of mixed ethnicity identity

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|   |  |                            | <p>Fr has his picture upside down and so is drawing the black for his hair closest to his body.<br/>Fr smiles at J, and wipes his finger with the tissue.<br/>Fr has an angry expression on his face. He is looking directly at the group. His body is leaning forward and he has his hands by his side<br/>Fr looks down at his picture. His expression is sad.<br/>Fr looks at Amanda<br/>Fr is looking at the group. He still has his hands by his side.<br/>Fr points to the picture of a black lady on the wall<br/>Fr is smiling, his arms are more relaxed as he recalls his visit to the care home<br/>Frank now looks straight forward <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interest sparked and sustained</li> <li>Limited interest in the learning experience</li> </ul> </p> |  |  |  |  |  | X |
| 5 |  | <b>Resources</b>           | <p>Children explore artefacts and discuss them with the practitioner/peers<br/>Skin coloured paints, paper, tissues. Resources (pictures on the wall) in the room are used to reflect on externally encountered experiences with community groups.<br/>Resources do/do not support developing understanding about ethnic identity</p>  |  |  |  |  |  | X |
| 6 |  | <b>Pedagogical Actions</b> | <p>What pedagogic actions/influences can be seen i.e. dialogue, activities, resources<br/>Children do/do not understand the purpose of the activity<br/>Children are asked what they want to do<br/>listening sharing children's experiences from home/setting<br/>Pedagogical action reinforces societal categorisations of hegemonies associated with blackness<br/>Evidence<br/>Amanda: So Fr describes himself as black but he has talked about how his skin as brown<br/>J: It's not brown<br/>Amanda: Oh what do you think it is?<br/>J: It's purple<br/>Amanda: What! purple</p>  |  |  |  |  |  | X |

Operationalising the construction of mixed ethnicity identity

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|  |  |  | <p>E: <i>I think its white</i><br/> Fa: <i>I think it black</i><br/> Amanda: <i>I think so too. Now</i></p> <p>Discusses information shared/gathered from parents<br/> Tuning in at the right moment</p> <p>Amanda: <i>OK, Let's just give Fr a little bit of time. He's trying to say it Fr is looking at the group. He still has his hands by his side.</i></p> <p>Adapt and facilitate learning to meet the needs of the children<br/> Pedagogic questioning types used</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- there you go, oh you've got your black on. Why are you putting your black down there? (probing)</li> <li>- Ah ok, that really good (praise)</li> <li>- So Fr describes himself as black but he has talked about how his skin as brown (paraphrasing)</li> <li>- Oh what do you think it is? (Open)</li> <li>- What! Purple (probing)</li> <li>- I think so too. Now (Affirming thought)</li> <li>- OK, Let's just give Fr a little bit of time. He's trying to say it</li> <li>- There we go (praise)</li> <li>- it's ok, Freddy's just trying to get his words, have a think, while he talks about it. (implicit/interpretive) J starts to speak again. One minute Jake, Let's just give Freddy a bit of time (direct)</li> <li>- can you remember her name? (probing)</li> <li>- Her name was Alison when we went to the care home. We saw some of our friends (recall)</li> <li>- It's Alison, and she's holding a big gold plate (recall)</li> </ul> |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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Operationalising the construction of mixed ethnicity identity

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| <p><b>Finding Children's funds of knowledge</b></p> <p><b>Emergent Themes</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Knowledge</p> <p><b>Ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs (8)</b><br/> The star children demonstrate a confident and strong preference for the terms: <b>V16.1</b><br/> Fr: <i>Because I'm black</i><br/> Fr: <i>I'm light brown</i><br/> J: <i>White</i><br/> Fa: <i>black like me</i></p> <p>Notably the children are now using ethnic identity constructs (terminology) interchangeably, possibly because they have learnt and internalised the terms 'black' and 'white' in previous everyday encounters with family and community. It is difficult to establish whether the term 'light brown' is a new construct established in the process of learning in this experience. There is <u>no indication of deeper questioning Pedagogic action</u> to establish where and how the children learnt such terms, so an assumption is made that when Freddy uses the term 'light brown' he has recalled previously known expressions. Also notable, is Jake choice to align with the ethnic identity construct of 'white' where he previously likened his skin tone to a 'whitish colour'. Similarly, Fay now aligns her skin tone with the colour 'black', where she previously defined her skin tone as 'light brown'.</p> <p><b>Responses of children - terminology heard (7)</b></p> <p>Whilst undertaking this learning experience, conversation reveals a rich exchange of dialogue between the star children about how they perceive ethnic identities. They are able to express views that show a strong sense of cultural understanding about skin colour difference. Internalisation of constructs associated with the appropriation of skin colour in particular, could have been learnt in experiences of participation with parents, family and community.</p> <p>Although the activity is focused on the development of Freddy's self-portrait, conversation between the children now provokes views/beliefs about each other's ethnicity. Using their <u>FoK</u> each child questions the others ideas about ethnic identity, where previously they were in agreement (status).</p> <p><b>Evidence V16.2</b><br/> Fr: <i>Because I'm black</i><br/> Amanda: <i>Ah ok, that really good</i><br/> J: <i>You're not black</i><br/> Fr: <i>Yes, am are</i></p> <p>Fr <i>No its stammers I'm just, no I'm</i><br/> Fa: <i>black like me?</i><br/> Fr: <i>its, I'm just, I'm just...</i><br/> J: <i>White</i><br/> Fr: <i>No I'm not white I'm, I'm just... Fr looks down at his picture. His expression is sad.</i></p> |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Operationalising the construction of mixed ethnicity identity

J: What colour  
Fr: I'm light brown

Another plausible emergent theme, children will position their own perceived ethnicity in an attempt to validate their own sense of self. Jake displays strong signs of leading dialogue about ethnic identity. Perhaps because he is the most confident of the star children.

Fa: black like me?  
J: White  
E: I think its white  
Fa: I think it black

J: It's not brown

Amanda: Oh what do you think it is?

J: It's purple (purple is Jake's favourite colour) possibly used as a deflection strategy.

Amanda: What! purple

Using a pedagogy that makes use of skills of questioning, Amanda makes use of the children's interaction to explore their thoughts further. Her questions act as a stimulus to encourage dialogue and to maintain sustained thinking amongst all of the children. Discussion to explore how, where and why the children have formulated these notions is not apparent on observation of the recorded vignette.

#### Social Skills

##### Relationships (7)

Having formed sound foundations in positive relationships, the children use membership within the group to challenge each other's perspectives. V16.9

Freddy's stammer becomes more prevalent as his peers press him to name his ethnic identity (skin colour).

##### Peer challenge:

Fr: Well Fr has an angry expression on his face. He is looking directly at the group. His body is leaning forward and he has his hands by his side

Fr No its stammers I'm just, no I'm

Fa: black like me?

Fr: its, I'm just, I'm just...

J: White

Fr: No I'm not white I'm, I'm just... Fr looks down at his picture. His expression is sad.

J: What colour

Fr: I'm light brown

##### Practitioner support:

Looking directly at Amanda for support

##### Evidence

Amanda: it's ok, Fr just trying to get his words, have a think, while he talks about it. J starts to speak again. One-minute J, Let's just Freddy a bit of time Fr looks at Amanda.

Operationalising the construction of mixed ethnicity identity

Although Freddy is an articulate and confident learner, his confidence in his sense of self and his sense of belonging within his group of peers appears to be waning as the group question him. To help Freddy they are seen to offer their views about his ethnic identity. He does use strategies of deflection to manage the challenges that are directed towards him. See resources below for narrative interpretation.

#### Interaction

##### Activity is developed by dialogue (7)

Dialogue between Amanda and all of the star children acts as a strong mediating tool for exploring the children's perceptions V16.17 about themselves and each other.

Her skills ensure that Freddy is encouraged to name his ethnic identity by positively acknowledging his thoughts e.g. Amanda: Ah ok, that's really good. However, Jake being the major actor in the play, interjects with an immediate direct challenge to Freddy's opinions about himself J: You're not black and J: It's not brown (in response to Freddy's skin colour). Interestingly Amanda makes use of this challenge to open up the conversation with Freddy (and perhaps the other children) by paraphrasing

Amanda: So Fr describes himself as black but he has talked about how his skin as brown. Rather than allowing Freddy to answer, Jake uses his dominant position (membership)

V16.18 in the group to again challenge notions surrounding identity. His response in this moment denies Freddy the option to reflect on his existing perspectives about how he would choose to define himself. In an attempt to get the children to draw on their FoK from previous external experiences associated with ethnic identity

formation, Amanda helpfully asks Jake to think about how he would define Freddy's identity. V16.30 Ascribing a colour that is non-threatening to racial constructs, but nevertheless denies meaning making and the co-construction of new ways of knowing V16.19 about how the mixed ethnicity child would choose to identify. Particularly

when Jake uses; It's purple. RN: Something here about the child's ability to present views (at such a young age) that could trivialise an individual's position and status in

the group 'othering'! also something about the child's ability to unintentionally/intentionally reduce confidence in another child in peer interactions (seen in Freddy's

observed behaviour). Interaction by Amanda, other than directly questioning Jake interpretation does not probe why he chose 'purple' in that moment (Amanda: What!

Purple). Instead Fay and Edie, seize upon the dominance of presented ideas to offer self-actualised ideas V16.20 about Freddy's identity, where perspectives appear to

align with perceptions of themselves e.g. Edie: I think its white and Fay: I think it black.

- Discourse between the children provide salient aspects of the children's sense of self, as well as a saliency for challenging difference to self.

- Analysis of interaction between children demonstrates the saliency of hierarchies in play, and how the power hierarchy can serve to silence the voice of child.

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Operationalising the construction of mixed ethnicity identity

Observed are strategies of deflection away from self. V16.26 The skill of being able to use resources in the environment (picture on the wall) to shift the focus away from himself allows Freddy to feel more relaxed in this situation.

Fr points to the picture of a black lady on the wall

Fr is smiling, his arms are more relaxed as he recalls his visit to the care home

Although in the course of conversation Freddy considers likeness and differences aligned to perceptions of his own skin colour, it is not clear if he views these characteristics as being aligned with or opposite to a mixed ethnicity. In other words, terminology does not provide children's descriptions of what a mixed ethnicity is.

#### Resources

Children explore artefacts and discuss them with the practitioner/peers (8)

Freddy's father (who is white) in the negotiation phase of the study, expressed concerns about how Freddy will go on to identify his ethnicity in the future. In our conversation dad expressed concerns about the 'choice' Freddy will need to make. Dad believed that Freddy would have to choose the ethnic categorisation of 'black'. Assumptions are made here that these conversations have been expressed either with or around Freddy, thus informing internalised **FoK** from the home environment. Analysis of how Freddy makes use of resources available to him appear to be informed by the initial encounters with his father, as well as those conversations with practitioners about his dispositions and attitudes towards learning about ethnic similarities and difference. Observation of the learning experience show that Freddy recognises that his views are being challenged. It is interesting therefore to observe that Freddy makes use of deflection strategies to shift attention away from his self-portrait and himself to the picture on the wall.

#### Evidence

Fr: Look that's we, when I meet that lady – points to the picture of a black lady on the wall. In doing so Freddy becomes visibly more relaxed (Fr is smiling, his arms are more relaxed as he recalls his visit to the care home) because he has momentarily managed to move the focus and conversation away from himself - **Self-efficacy**. Even so Jake still intervenes with undermining views to try to put the 'spotlight' directly back on Freddy by saying J: He's not, He's not Alison. The skill of the practitioner assists Freddy's to ignore the interjection, she uses **agentic skills (using resources)** to follow Freddy's interest, refocusing attention back to what is important to him.

Amanda: can you remember her name?

Fr: No

Amanda: Her name was Alison when we went to the care home. We saw some of our friends V16.5\*

Amanda: It's Alison, and she's holding a big gold plate

**Resources** (skin coloured paints) do have the potential for **supporting** children's possible exploration about how they perceive mixed ethnicity identity. Understanding the social constructs of how ethnic identity formation is developed is not evident, observed are **mitigating circumstances that undermine the children's ability to negotiate and mediate new understandings about what mixed ethnicity means to them. V16.6\*** Cautiously offered are interpretations that pedagogical actions (dialogue, skills, knowledge) do not provide prompts to elicit or challenge co-construction of deeper meaning making that may serve as a source of provocation for determining the influences on Freddy's responses. Or for that matter the responses of the other children. Considerations of the children's views/beliefs can be seen in the influence of peer pressure alone.

Freddy provides clear answers, however his views are challenged, and at times negated by other dominant 'voices' in the group (particularly Jake). Anticipation in the planning of play episodes, that the children may exhibit such behaviour, as well as more authentic resources in the immediate environment (culturally appropriate

#### Operationalising the construction of mixed ethnicity identity

artefacts, images from the home) would benefit learning considerably. Such resources have the potential to offer empowerment for children to persist with their perspectives. Similarly, appropriate resource could be utilised to extend understanding in the process of learning ethnic identity.

#### Pedagogical Actions

Listening sharing children's experiences in the setting

Adapt and facilitate learning to meet the needs of the children (11)

Adult directed pedagogy is evident throughout the learning experience. Observed throughout the vignette is pedagogic actions to ensure that the purpose of the play experience facilitates and focuses support for Freddy to express views surrounding his ethnicity? **Interaction** with the children does explore beliefs and value about ethnic identity cultural understanding of self at a surface level. The primary focus of Amanda's actions is one of providing a space for Freddy to be able to fully articulate his situated views regarding a mixed ethnicity.

Questions act as a stimulus to encourage dialogic conversation, which maintains sustained thinking amongst the children about perceptions of ethnic identity (see examples below). Discussion to explore how, where and why the children have formulated these notions is not apparent on observation of the recorded vignette. There is limited evidence to show how the practitioner expand their thinking beyond the limits of their own known understanding categorisations of challenging deeper. Instead pedagogical action is seen to reinforce societal categorisations of hegemonies associated with 'blackness' and 'whiteness'

#### Evidence

Amanda: So Fr describes himself as black but he has talked about how his skin as brown V16.15

J: It's not brown

Amanda: Oh what do you think it is?

Different **question types** are, however used to challenge/probe the children's perspectives and affirm shared thoughts.

#### Pedagogic questioning types used

- there you go, oh you've got your black on. Why are you putting your black down there? (**probing**)
- Ah ok, that really good (**praise**)
- So Fr describes himself as black but he has talked about how his skin as brown (**paraphrasing**)
- Oh what do you think it is? (**Open**)
- What! Purple (**probing**)
- **I think so too.** Now (**Affirming thought**)
- OK, Let's just give Fr a little bit of time. He's trying to say it
- There we go (**praise**)
- it's ok, Freddy's just trying to get his words, have a think, while he talks about it. (**implicit/interpretive**) J starts to speak again. One minute Jake, Let's just give Freddy a bit of time (**direct**)
- can you remember her name? (**probing**)

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Her name was Alison when we went to the care home. We saw some of our friends (<b>recall</b>)</li> <li>- It's Alison, and she's holding a big gold plate (<b>recall</b>)</li> </ul> <p>The star children are enabled through pedagogic action to express views/beliefs about their skin colour. However, their ability to negotiate and mediate new understandings about what mixed ethnicity means to them appears to be undermined by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pedagogic action to scaffold ideas that would support the 'star' children to fully articulate their position regarding a mixed ethnicity;</li> <li>- the skill of the practitioner ability to expand their thinking beyond the limits of their own understanding to co-construct new ways of thinking about a mixed ethnic identity.</li> <li>- limited possibilities for exploring new repertoires in play; and</li> <li>- limit of the resources used. There appears to be a dependence on the paints only. The stimulus of mirrors or cultural artefacts in the environment could offer further resources for the children to reflect on themselves visually.</li> </ul> <p>The space in which Freddy and the other star children can either reaffirm understanding between existing societal classifications (constructs associated with 'black' and 'white' skin colour) is not explored in any depth in the language used with Amanda. Freddy's latitude to make sense of, refine, or extend ideas about the interchangeable use of the terms used in relation to his own thoughts is not explored in any depth.</p>  |
| <p><b>Field Notes</b></p> <p>Journal Notes from dialogic conversation Practitioners:</p> <p><b>Researchers Note:</b> It is very important to note here, that I do not possess reflective field notes of observation of this learning experience, as I was not present. Analysis is based on the review of the recording, taking into account field notes from the dialogic conversations held on 16.3.18.</p> <p><u>Follow up conversation with Amanda on 16.3.18 (self-portrait activity)</u></p> <p><i>S: thinking about inclusion policy and knowing about similarity and difference and the richness of what it told. Which has most agency; the children, pedagogy, policy, A: collaboration of all of them, we use them in the mini art studio (situated in the main play room). We've triggered the use of these resources.</i></p> <p><i>S: Is that something you would have thought of before.</i></p> <p><i>A: I'd like to say yes but not necessarily no. anything we develop downstairs it comes from the children...</i></p> <p><i>S: Do you think the idea of children knowing about their race identity adds value to the curricula.</i></p> <p><i>A: Yes of course for the children. It has nothing to do with the EYFS! We've been playful with this exploration. The children loved different modes of expression. They love tea parties. It's been interesting to provide a different line of thought.</i></p> <p><i>S: Edie has a really strong sense of self; would you argue that's the parents' role?</i></p> <p><i>A: it's our role as practitioners how we support parents with that, we need to support you with phonics, we need to support you with maths, so actually where is that balance? Is that being reflected?</i></p> |
| <p><b>Practitioner Journal entry:</b></p> <p><b>Important Note:</b></p>  |

Operationalising the construction of mixed ethnicity identity

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| <p>Amanda exercised her right not to complete any of the templates discussed/agreed for reflection on pedagogic actions within the activities. Instead she produced a 'report' that provided the researcher with ideas from research literature. Field notes capture detailed conversations about Amanda's views on the research process and its impact on children (see above). These notes will be reviewed to inform the discussion chapter. Focus within this and the following four vignettes centre solely on analysing the responses or perspectives of the star children, as well pedagogic actions that influence/shape their responses. Telling the narrative surrounding pedagogy and its power/resistance/impact on the research process will be captured separately.</p> <p>Further review of the field notes from the dialogic conversations with the practitioners provide useful descriptive data and deeper explanation surrounding the pedagogic action in this learning experience. Here Leah reflects on her thoughts about the conversation she had with the children on reflection of developing their self-portraits.</p> <p><b>Leah's reflection: paper journal entry (Identity related to EYFS) entitled 'children's reflection on watching self-portrait videos (Fr, Fa, E)</b></p> <p><b>Know something about things that make them unique</b></p> <p><i>Fr when he talks about his hair</i></p> <p><b>Can talk about some of the similarities and differences in relation to family</b></p> <p><i>Comparing facial actions to mum's and dad's lips, eyes etc.</i></p> <p><b>Can talk about some of the similarities and differences in relation to practitioners and peers</b></p> <p><i>They compare to each other after looking at how they look like</i></p> <p><b>Aware of cultural differences in attitudes and expectations</b></p> <p><i>Is more an exploration of those notions, they starting to understand it now. In this setting they are beginning to notice the different cultures.</i></p> <p><b>A sense of belonging</b></p> <p><i>They can talk about home, routines, but they can talk about anything specific</i></p> <p><b>Pride and confidence in who they are, their family</b></p> <p><i>They have the concept of who they are and their family, but they don't have acquired the sense of culture yet.</i></p> <p><b>Confidence in themselves as learners</b></p> <p><i>They think their immediate environment is their whole world, so they need to explore other cultures in order to discover what makes their culture unique e.g. music food folklore</i></p> |
| <p><b>Researcher Interpretation of emergent themes:</b></p> <p><b>Research Question 1</b></p> <p>The star children demonstrate a confident ability to relate to ethnic identity constructs, where strong preference for the terms <i>black</i>, <i>white</i>, <i>light brown</i> is observed. They also show a demonstrable ability to use ethnic identity constructs (terminology) interchangeably. All of the star children are capable of expressing views that show a strong sense of cultural understanding about skin colour difference. It is difficult however to establish whether the term <i>light brown</i> is a new construct established in the process of learning in the setting. Examples of the interchangeable nature of preferences in terminology to ascribe skin colour choices are observed when Jake aligns his ethnicity with the ethnic identity of 'white', where he previously likened his skin tone to a 'whiteish colour'. Similarly, Fay is seen to align her skin tone with 'black',</p>  |

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where she previously defined her skin tone as 'light brown'. Although the activity was focused on the development of Freddy's self-portrait, conversation between the children provoked views/beliefs about each other's ethnicity.

Internalisation of constructs associated with the appropriation of skin colour in particular lend to expressed views by the children. It is plausible that these expressed terms could have been learnt in experiences of participation with parents, family and community. Observation showed that children make use of these internalised views to share understanding in the learning environment.

Using their FOK each child questions the others ideas about ethnic identity, where previously they were in agreement. Tentatively offered are views that (**emergent theory**) children will position their own perceived ethnicity in an attempt to validate their own sense of self. Perhaps because he is the most confident of the star children, Jake displays strong signs of leading dialogue about ethnic identity.

Levels of confidence to articulate views can be a determining influence on how and when children will share perspectives on matters associated with ethnicity. Positive sense of self, as well as positive sense of belonging (membership) within the group can be a contributing factor towards levels of engagement. Particularly when the mixed ethnicity child is challenged or 'put on the spot' by peers to articulate how they choose to identify.

Notwithstanding challenge, social interaction with peers and practitioners in dialogic conversation is observed to influence the mixed ethnicity child's ability to connect with and name preference about ethnic identity. Falling into:

**Interaction with Peers**

- Discourse between the children provide salient aspects of the children's sense of self, as well as a saliency for challenging difference to self.
- Children will offer their views about ethnic identity in an attempt to support each other in play.
- When challenged and if confidence levels are waning the mixed ethnicity child will use strategies of deflection to manage challenges that are directed towards them.
- Analysis of interaction between children demonstrates the saliency of hierarchies in play, and how the power hierarchy can serve to silence the voice of child.
- Children present ideas that offer self-actualised ideas about a peer's identity, where perspectives appear to align with perceptions of themselves *Example* Fay and Edie, seized upon the dominance of presented ideas to offer self-actualised ideas about Freddy's identity: *Edie: I think its white* and *Fay: I think it black*.
- Observation illustrates how children can ascribe colour that is non-threatening to racial constructs, but nevertheless denies meaning making and the co-construction of new ways of knowing about how the mixed ethnicity child would choose to identify. when Jake uses; *it's purple*. **RN: offer theorisation about the child's ability to present views (at such a young age) that could trivialise an individual's position and status in the group 'othering'! also something about the child's ability to unintentionally/intentionally reduce confidence in another child in peer interactions.**

**Interaction with Practitioners**

Dialogue between practitioners and children can act as a strong mediating tool for exploring children's perceptions about themselves and each other. In this vignette pedagogical skills in using different questioning types significantly contributes towards facilitating the responses provided by the children. However, the influence of pedagogical actions can also impede expression or 'voice of the child. There is limited evidence within this vignette to show how the practitioner extends thinking beyond the limits of the child's known understanding. Instead pedagogical action is seen to reinforce societal categorisations of hegemonies associated with 'blackness' and 'whiteness'.

**Culturally rich play experience/resources**

Thoughtfully planned play experiences that make use of rich culturally appropriate resources can act as helpful provocations for supporting young children to 'name' their preferences. Purposeful resources may also offer the potential to co-construct new meanings, as well as influencing the mixed ethnic child ability to share deeper

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understanding with peers/practitioner. Which in turn may serve to extend the awareness for practitioners to develop play experiences that extend learning beyond what the child already knows.

**The saliency of non-verbal communication**

It is important to note the salience of non-verbal cues that can be seen to influence a child's wellbeing. In this play experience Freddy's behaviour indicates that he is trying to make sense of the perspectives that's are being shared with him. On many occasions he looks to the 'adult' for support. His body language displays his distress and frustration in being able to express his views within the group. Observable cues are Freddy's stammer delays his ability to respond as quickly as he would like. Other behaviours that indicate the stress that can be caused in interaction with his peers include:

**Angry facial expression; rocking motions when questioned; body language that shows withdrawal from the activity i.e. hands by the side.**

**Research Question 2**

EYFS (2014) guides the early years' practitioner to assess children's ability to demonstrate an understanding about people and communities; make relationships and to have self-confidence and self-awareness through co-operative play experiences. The vignette demonstrates how the children meet the expected learning outcomes, they are all capable of expressing their thoughts. Freddy is able to make use of strategies that recall community visits to meet friends at the care home. Follow up conversations with the practitioners confirm that these children meet expected learning outcomes in this area (PSED). For example, Leah confirms that the children 'compare to each other after looking at how they look like'. She explains they are able to talk about their families and makes comparisons to themselves, in terms their ability to talk about similarity and differences of hair, lips eyes. However, curricula guidance is very much open to the practitioners own interpretation and implementation via planned learning experiences. Field notes from the conversation with Amanda and Leah show the complexity and contradictory nature of interpreting and understanding policy guidance. Leah reflects awareness of cultural differences in attitudes and expectations 'is more an exploration of those notions, they starting to understand it now. In this setting they are beginning to notice the different cultures. Whereas Amanda's explanations offer inclusion policies are achieved in the joint collaboration of the children, pedagogy, policy. She then goes on to describe that collaboration of the three elements is implemented in the setting in particular spaces. Further into the conversation contradictory thoughts express that development comes from the children.

**Evidence**

**S:** thinking about inclusion policy and knowing about similarity and difference and the richness of what it told. Which has most agency; the children, pedagogy, policy,  
**A:** collaboration of all of them, we use them in the mini art studio (situated in the main play room). We've triggered the use of these resources.  
**S:** Is that something you would have thought of before.  
**A:** I'd like to say yes but not necessarily no. anything we develop downstairs it comes from the children...

What is noteworthy about the practitioner accounts is the lack of guidance that practitioners are able to draw on within the EYFS (2014) policy framework to help them to navigate the complexity of sociocultural and ethnic awareness to be able to explore additional explanations from externally encountered experiences in this educational experience.

Space for consideration about how play (via the use of purposeful artefacts) can facilitate understanding amongst children about similarity and differences in ethnicity to self and others on a deeper level is underdeveloped. Expressed previously are observations that the physical environment does not represent multiculturalism to facilitate spontaneous conversation with the children. Artefacts that are representational of the diversity of the children attending the setting are absent in the environment, making it challenging for the children to see themselves in the educational space.

In the case of this vignette of play, there are very little artefacts/images present that Freddy can see that are representational of himself, apart from the picture of Alison at the care home.

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Interestingly until the start of the study skin tone paints were not available in the setting. They act as a new stimulus for the children, which goes some way towards explaining how the children initially make use of them (mixing them together and filling the whole age with the colour brown).

**Researcher Note:**

**Resources** do have the potential for supporting children's possible exploration about how children may perceive a mixed ethnic identity however:

Practitioners need time to research, plan and implement multicultural learning experiences, appropriate to the diversity of the children they are working with.

Time is required for thorough explanation of the planned experience with the children, before the **resources** (paints, mirrors/books) are used.

**Research Question 3**

Observed are extenuating circumstances that undermine the children's ability to negotiate and mediate new understandings about what mixed ethnicity means to them. Adult directed pedagogy is evident throughout the learning experience. Quite rightly, observed throughout the vignette is pedagogic actions that ensure that the purpose of the play experience facilitates and focuses support for Freddy to express views surrounding his ethnicity. **Interaction** with the children does explore beliefs and value about ethnic identity cultural understanding of self at a surface level. The primary focus of Amanda's actions is one of providing a space for Freddy to be able to fully articulate his situated views regarding a mixed ethnicity.

Questions act as a stimulus to encourage dialogic conversation, which maintains sustained thinking amongst the children about perceptions of ethnic identity. Conversely, discussion to explore how, where and why the children have formulated these notions is not apparent on observation of the recorded vignette. There is limited evidence to show how the practitioner expand their thinking beyond the limits of their own known understanding categorisations of challenging deeper. Instead pedagogical action is seen to reinforce societal categorisations of hegemonies associated with 'blackness' and 'whiteness'

The star children are enabled through pedagogic action to express views/beliefs about their skin colour. However, their ability to negotiate and mediate new understandings about what mixed ethnicity means to them appears to be undermined by:

- pedagogic action to scaffold ideas that would support the 'star' children to fully articulate their position regarding a mixed ethnicity;
- the skill of the practitioner ability to expand their thinking beyond the limits of their own understanding to co-construct new ways of thinking about a mixed ethnic identity.
- limited possibilities for exploring new repertoires in play; and
- limit of the resources used. There appears to be a dependence on the paints only. The stimulus of mirrors or cultural artefacts in the environment could offer further resources for the children to reflect on themselves visually.

The space in which Freddy and the other star children can either reaffirm understanding between existing societal classifications (constructs associated with 'black' and 'white' skin colour) is not explored in any depth in the language used with Amanda. Freddy's latitude to make sense of, refine, or extend ideas about the interchangeable use of the terms used in relation to his own thoughts is not explored in any depth.

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## Appendix 17: Summarised activity data sources from the observed play recordings

0 = Other    1 = Discard    2 = Relevant but Ordinary    3 = Relevant and Good    4 = Rich    \*Denotes rich data observed in the vignettes

| Data Source   | Research Question 1 | Research Question 2 (EYFS) | Research Question 3 |
|---|---------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Vignette 1  | X                   |                            | X                   |
| Activity 7 (part 1): Camera Case & Photos   |                     |                            |                     |
| Vignette 2  |                     |                            | X                   |
| Activity 7 (part 2): Dialogic Conversation about Tango (book)                           |                     |                            |                     |
| Vignette 3  |                     |                            | X                   |
| Activity 7 (part 3): Dialogic conversation about the self-portrait activity with Amanda |                     |                            |                     |
| Vignette 4  | X                   | X                          | X                   |
| Activity 6: conversation about the foods we like to eat at home                         |                     |                            |                     |
| Vignette 6 *  | X                   | X                          | X                   |
| Activity 2 (part 1): Drawing self and family  |                     |                            |                     |
| Vignette 8*   | X                   | X                          | X                   |
| Activity 2 (part 3): Painting each other cont'd.  |                     |                            |                     |
| Vignette 12   | X                   | X                          | X                   |
| Activity 4: Jake painting a self-portrait with Amanda                                   |                     |                            |                     |
| Vignette 13   | X                   | X                          | X                   |
| Activity 4: Fay painting a self-portrait with Amanda                                    |                     |                            |                     |
| Vignette 14   | X                   | X                          | X                   |
| Activity 4: Fay painting a self-portrait with Amanda                                    |                     |                            |                     |
| Vignette 15**   | X                   | X                          | X                   |
| Activity 4: Freddy paints a self-portrait with Amanda                                   |                     |                            |                     |
| Vignette 16***  | X                   | X                          | X                   |
| Activity 4: Freddy paints a self-portrait with Amanda                                   |                     |                            |                     |
| <b>Discarded Data Sources</b>   |                     |                            |                     |
| Vignette 5  | X                   |                            |                     |
| Activity 8: Tea Party (what we eat at home)   |                     |                            |                     |
| Vignette 11   | X                   |                            |                     |
| Activity 4: J painting a self-portrait with Amanda                                      |                     |                            |                     |



## **Appendix 18: Focus group interviews with practitioners and parents: Stage Three**

Practitioners:

Following a supportive discussion with directors of study regarding disruption to data collection, I adapted the research design to incorporate two focus group interviews. To date data collection methods contained understandings about inclusive practice from the perspectives of three practitioners, one of which had left the organisation. Therefore obtaining a collective view about inclusive practice within the setting was one reason for undertaking a focus group interview. Another reason for adopting this approach was focus groups have the potential for creating a space where practitioners feel comfortable to share their inner feelings. Justification for wanting to 'gauge the mood' of practitioners stemmed from observation in the dialogic conversations, where there was a 'feeling' that Leah was deferring to the views of the assistant manager and doubting her own pedagogical knowledge and skill.

To yield richer data and a shared understanding about the learning experiences I drew on Dilshad and Latif (2013) research that examined the rationale and purpose of various forms of focus group approaches. Advising that focus groups work well where multi method approaches have been used, another reason for its inclusion was to explore in more depth practitioners collective thoughts (inner feelings) about how the intentional activities had helped children to develop and share thoughts surrounding their ethnic identity, rather than the dominance of one particular voice.

Although historic scholars such as (Anderson, 1990, Denscombe, 2007) advocate that groups should consist of no less than six participants, I was able to justify my reasons for still meeting with a small group of individuals because evaluation of policy and curriculum outcomes is undertaken within the management team. Whilst practitioners do participate in the children's learning experiences, these experiences are captured and linked to the EYFS (2017) learning outcomes via a software programme on Kindles. Evaluation of that learning and next steps is undertaken by the management team alone, which consists of three individuals. Two of which were key participants in the study. The other justification for a small parent focus group was the final sample of focus children consisted of three participants.

The purposive sample therefore was envisioned to include Katy (operations manager), Amanda (assistant manager), Leah (research participant practitioner) and three other practitioners. The final group however consisted of Katy and Leah, where methods involved using a Dictaphone to record the discussion. Presentation of a PowerPoint (Appendix 19) included clips of children's learning experiences from the vignettes of play, whilst written fieldnotes of the conversation was maintained by the researcher. The duration of the whole interview lasted two hours. Key questions used to act as prompts for the conversation can also be viewed in Appendix 19.

Interestingly, Katy requested that the interview take place in my office at the University. Researcher discretion in the research process prevented further questioning for this request. The interview informed individual understanding and experiences about the research study. It also yielded honest and open deliberation where Katy and Leah shared thoughts about sensitivities associated with a topic such as 'race'. Both participants explained these contexts could not be readily/easily discussed in the setting. A significant view that emerged in the discussion was the process of dialogic conversation about the focus children's raced identity created 'disequilibrium' and tension for one participant in particular, who perceived that their professional practice was being challenged. Chapters 2 and 7 expand further upon tensions that emerge in studies that have a focus on pedagogic practice.

Parents:

Similar to the purpose of the focus group interview with practitioners, the rationale for meeting with parents was to garner their perspectives about the children's emergent responses surrounding their sense of self; their understanding about similarity and difference in ethnicity in relation to family, peers, and practitioners; as well as identifying or seeking understanding whether parents recognised the children's responses as being previously learned and shared in the home or wider community. The other purpose of the discussion was to obtain parental perspectives about the: recorded learning experiences; their children's experience as participants in research; reasons behind the children's shared thoughts; and how they perceived information about their children's ethnicity could extend/develop pedagogy and practice.

Methods involved using a Dictaphone to record the discussion amongst the parents, following the presentation of a PowerPoint (Appendix 14), which included clips of children's learning experiences from the vignettes of play. Written fieldnotes of the conversations was again maintained by the researcher. Key questions acted as cues for the discussion amongst the parents (Appendix 14). Amanda sent out invitations to the parents of all of the children taking part in the study. However one parent from the three focus children attended, together with Edie's parent and Katy (operations manager). The focus group discussion took place in the training room of the setting and lasted one hour in duration.

### **Summarising approaches of using focus group interviews**

Dilshad and Latif (2013) suggest limitations exist in undertaking focus group interviews. Whilst they accommodate shared responses about matters pertinent to the study and do serve to enhance triangulation of emergent data from the interviews and observation phase, they are challenging to organise, because it was difficult to get the appropriate individuals to attend. As seen in the attendance of both practitioner and parent focus group interviews, less than fifty percent of the group attended.

Relating to the practitioner focus group interview, it was apparent that conformity with the responses of the operations manager existed, which made it challenging to generate significant information to enhance data already emerging from the interview and observation phase. It did however confirm the underlying nature of 'feelings' and sensitivities in undertaking research surrounding 'race' and pedagogical practice, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

When it came to the parent focus group discussion, one participant dominated the conversation, which is another constraint in interviews of this type. It made it difficult to gather responses relevant to the study because whilst being deeply interested in the research activities and management of ethical practices with the children, this individual was not a parent of the focus children. It therefore prevented views to emerge to support understanding about the focus children ability to talk about contexts associated with ethnic similarities and differences in relation to family. Contributions of parents was invaluable for informing cultural traditions shared in the home, for example when watching the recorded footage Michael (Jake's dad) clarified why Jake said he did not know his grandparents was because his mother had recently passed away, and he found it difficult to talk about her. In discussion Michael also clarified that '*daddy's rice*', described by Jake related to 'rice and peas', a typical Caribbean dish, which Jake had never tried.

As the note taker it was not possible to capture everything that was discussed within the practitioner and parent focus groups. Instead the aim was to attempt to draw on the tacit knowledge of these individuals to focus on particular themes (explained above) in a concentrated manner. Unobtrusive recording of these conversations when added to the researcher notes provided another rich source of data for triangulation with emergent perspectives from the interview and observation phases.

## Appendix 19: Interview Questions

### Individual Interviews with Practitioners:

#### Your background:

1. Can you begin by saying something about your current position, can you describe your key role with children in the pre-school room?
2. Can you tell me about your previous professional roles in the early years sector and experiences that have brought you to this current role?

#### Diversity & Inclusion in the Nursery:

3. Does the setting have an inclusion policy to support understanding of PSED and KUW (awareness)? Yes/No
4. Can you tell me a little bit about the settings Inclusion policy?
5. What does equality and diversity mean to you? (equality and diversity awareness)
6. How do you see the relationship between your individual role and that of your employer in respect of working with children's differing cultural backgrounds?
7. How do you implement inclusive practice in relation to supporting young children learning and development about their identity?
  - o How would you define ethnicity?
  - o What term do you use to define children of mixed ethnicity?
  - o Which needs do you consider to be most important for mixed race learners?

#### EYFS Policy and Policy Guidance:

##### *Research Question 2:*

*What opportunities exist in the EYFS (2017) policy framework that allow 'mixed race' children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences in their education?*

**Read:** Thinking about the research questions that will be explored in my study and the policy context in England mandates through the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) practitioners support children to

*"know about similarities and differences between themselves and others, and among families, communities and traditions" (DfE, 2017: 12).*

8. Thinking about your current role for supporting young children to know about *similarities and differences between themselves and others*:
  - o How do you plan activities to support children to understand about 'similarities and differences' between themselves and others?
  - o Can you recall what some of their diverse needs are?
  - o What learning experiences/activities do the children engage in to facilitate understanding about similarity and difference?
9. Focusing on PSED and KUW, can you tell me what you understand about these areas of development in the EYFS policy framework?
10. What opportunities exist in the EYFS (2017) that allow you and 'mixed race' children to explore their thoughts about they have learnt at home and in the communities about their raced identity?

11. What do you think are the influences that support/negate children to know about their race identity at home and the community?
12. How do you incorporate what children learn at home into your planning, to enable mixed race children to discuss their identity and the identity of others?
  - in Adult directed play activities; and
  - In the resources to support child-initiated play experiences.

I'd like to move onto talk a little some more about implementing policy into practice. I would like to explore your views about the play activities, experiences, and strategies you use to support young children's identity formation in the classroom (by classroom I mean the 3-5 room)

### **Putting Policies into Practice:**

*Research Question 1.*

*Using the 'voice' of the child, what are the key influences on mixed race children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their racial identity in the early years classroom?*

13. What do you think are the key influences that support children to learn about their race identity in the setting?
14. Have you observed how mixed race children connect with ideas about their raced identity?
  - What language do these children use to self-identify (*black, brown, mixed*) with peers?
  - What language do they use with yourself to describe their ethnicity?
15. What does their self-directed (spontaneous) play look like with peers?
16. What do their play interactions look like with yourself?
17. In what other ways do these children show understanding about their identity (songs, poems, drawings, etc).

### **Monitoring through Observation and Assessment:**

*Research Question 3*

*How does the implementation of a play-based pedagogical approach provide space for mixed race children to explore their ethnicity?*

**Read:** Observation and assessment of learning and development are key requirements for understanding and documenting children's learning and development. What are your thoughts about?

### **Pedagogy**

18. What pedagogical strategies do you use/implement to support children to understand their own identity and that of the other children/families?
  - Are there any barriers to helping mixed race children to learn about their raced identity in the classroom?
19. the play approaches used in the setting, do they provide space for mixed race children to explore and reflect on their ethnicity?
20. observation and assessment of mixed ethnic children's understanding about their 'race' ethnicity and gender?

**Practice:**

21. Can you tell me how observations and assessments (monitoring/data) regarding 'race', ethnicity and gender of children are carried out in the setting/room?
22. Can you tell me how the nursery team share understanding about learning and development for the mixed ethnic learners? PSED and KUW
23. What do you consider are the strengths and barriers in practice for supporting mixed race children to learn about the raced identity in the classroom?
24. How do you work with parents/carers to gain an understanding of how they support ideas about identity (particularly mixed ethnic identity)?
25. What activities/experiences do you plan for children to help them explore learning and development about identity/mixed race ethnicity?
26. What artefacts/resources are used to encourage children's reproduction of knowledge about their bio/cultural identity?
27. What do you think are the challenges you face in implementing play experiences that facilitate children's understanding about their raced identity (resources)?

To finish, are there any other comments you would like to make?



## Appendix 20: Interview Transcript Example – Amanda

- Sharon Morning Amanda, thank you for taking the time to speak to me.
- Amanda That's Okay.
- Sharon I am going to start off by asking you to say something just about your current position in the nursery.
- Amanda So my name is Amanda Baker and I am the assistant manager in the nursery. I am also the senco lead. I help manage the nursery on a day-to-day basis. I am also the early years teacher in nursery alongside Catrina, the nursery manager. And so yes I help with everyday experiences of capturing children's' fascinations, taking lead in making sure staff are supporting those, looking at those environments so yes the overall sort of day-to-day running of the nursery.
- Sharon Brilliant, thank you for that. Just picked upon you said their fascinations, tell me what that means for the children, their fascinations?
- Amanda Of course, yes. So, at nursery our ethos is looking at the child and it is looking at every single child is unique essentially. We are looking at the child holistically, all their different needs and we are respecting that. We are talking to parents, we are trying to engage parents with what children are thrilled with at home. So, for us it is really looking at play. We have very skilled practitioners who will take all of these needs into account. In our nursery setting in our environments we will observe the children and see what they are really thrilled with so fascinated, with essentially. From there we might see that a child is particularly thrilled with circles and balls for instance. From that we will look at how we can engage them to develop new skills, so it might be a case if we want to support them in turn taking, in sharing, things like that, so we will look at developing those skills with what their fascinated in and that is really how we support the children in my nursery.
- Sharon That is brilliant thank you for that. So still staying with yourself and the role that you have, can you just give me a little bit of a background about your journey to this point so the other roles that you may have had.
- Amanda So before I became the assistant manager, I studied at Sheffield Hallam University and I did a degree in children and play work so that was a 3-year course BA Hons. Once I completed that came back to Leeds and I was fortunate enough to get a role at an Out of School club and I managed that club for a couple of years with the same company with Best. From there I would spend sort of occasional days working within the nursery. My passion was working with older children, I was really thrilled with working with older children, but as years went by and I was sort of spending more time in the nursery I found that actually the early years was where my passions were.
- Sharon Its special isn't it there is something about the 0 to 5.
- Amanda So yes I have also worked with the Community Centre in Burley where I was a play leader and we would run street play sessions in south Leeds trying to get the whole of the neighbourhoods to come together. We would shut off streets so cars could not come down and you know these were people who were quite vulnerable in society and these children would not necessarily have those resources and things and I am really passionate about play. So I have done all of that and I came into nursery as an early years teacher. I did my training before I came into nursery. I then was leading the two-

plus room downstairs and then the role of deputy came up so I went for the deputy and from there my role has sort of developed into the assistant manager position where I am working in sort of great partnership with the nursery manager.

Sharon What a fantastic journey. What I am picking up there is that you have worked with really diverse duties, families and children which is essentially a fundamental part of my research actually because that brings me nicely onto diversity and inclusion in the nursery. So does the nursery have an inclusion policy system and I am focussing particularly on a particular section of EYFS which is personal, social, emotional development and understanding the world, so does the nursery have an inclusion policy?

Amanda: It does. We have an inclusion and equality policy, but I would go further than that we have a lot of other supporting policies, so we have things like I don't know if you have heard of British values and preventive duty I feel that that sort of underpins our inclusion and equality policy. With that we are looking at mutual respect and tolerance, we are looking at individual liberty for these children so basically these sorts of underlying areas of are we listening to the children's voices, are we respecting their community, are we getting involved in their community, the local community. Things like that I feel are really important to our inclusion and equality policy.

Sharon You started to tell me what that means for you and it is resonating through, how do you see that what does it look like for you?

Amanda So day today it looks like I mean yesterday for instance we were celebrating Diwali but we had to be really careful with that because we had spoken to parents and this is something that we do every single day. I am on the shop floor as you like every single day and I am having these conversations and something which I learnt from a parent was that they had recently had somebody die in their family and when somebody dies in a family, they don't celebrate anything for 6 months so for them actually Diwali they weren't celebrating, so we had to be really careful and we could only do that through the conversations with parents. We would not have known otherwise. So we were quite careful in what we did. Some children of course and their families are celebrating and we have got to respect that so yesterday for instance we had some children that went on a little forest school outing to the park, we collected some leaves and we wrote some messages on the leaves and we are going to today with another group of children and our nursery chef to the local Sikh Temple and we are going to take these messages of Happy Diwali to the temple. Something that really was important to the children, something that fascinates them and something that they have created that is special and we are taking it up to the temple.

Sharon Will all children be involved in this?

Amanda Absolutely, absolutely and so it is not just those who might be celebrating at home with their families, we had children talking about how they were going round to neighbours' houses who don't necessarily follow a particular religion that celebrate Diwali. We had children who were going to the back gardens to go and watch the fireworks around them. In this sort of nursery all of our families were very aware of what was going on, why it was important to them, why it was important to others and actually respecting that, not everybody is celebrating and that is okay.

Sharon That is really good, what you have answered there is probably my next three questions!

Amanda Sorry.

- Sharon Don't apologise, because what you are talking about is how you see those relationships between yourself and the owner, and the policies that you have mentioned and then what I was going to ask you is how do you implement that practice to support the children and what I am getting at there is identifying how do you see identity with the children, what is it that you pick up with those children.
- Amanda That is the big question. So identity for the children that is something I think that our children are still learning. I don't think they have a fixed answer. Maybe some of our parents might have that. Some parents are still working it out but you know for our children in particular they are still trying to find their identity and that is what we are here for. So you know exploring Diwali that is something that it might not be important to their family but actually they might be interested they are fascinated so it is mainly about supporting those children and exploring that road of discovery and relating to others, understanding the differences but also having that respect that yes there might be differences but overall we are one person and not one person essentially, but we love each other and things like that. It might sound cheesy and corny but in this nursery, we really value love and I think the children to safely explore identity and feel secure they need to feel as if they have a safe secure base and they are loved by those adults that are around them.
- Sharon I know you have picked up on a particular culture but it is the culture of the nursery that is coming through now and when we talk about our identity in particular to my study where I am looking at black Caribbean, black African and mixed with a white ethnicity, I would like to ask you how you would define that idea around ethnicity in terms of the children. So you are working with all these lovely different children is it something that you have recognised before?
- Amanda Absolutely. So you want me to sort of talk about ethnicity in the children.
- Sharon How you define it.
- Amanda Okay so my sort of role in nursery is, I talk to the parents before they even sign up at our nursery so the parents that come in our gate and come and look around at our nursery, I am already talking to them about where they are from, where they live who they are, their family relationships and getting that sort of idea of how we could support them already and how our nursery would support them and I am already having those conversations. Once they start at our nursery, I go out to their homes and I carry out a personal care plan so I am looking at what they celebrate what they might not celebrate what religions are going on at home, what foods they eat at home, where the children eat, and what relationships they have with those around them, what they do on a day to day basis and gathering all that information to feed back to the team and I think those things really build up definitely certain parts of ethnicity.
- Sharon And does that become part of the children's journals at the beginning of their journey here.
- Amanda Absolutely, so that is shared with the whole staff team then. I will come back, and I will have those conversations with the staff. It is shared on the children's journals, so the parents have access to it as well. We also encourage the parents to upload photos, it might be of the child's bedroom or the child's house things like that so we are already getting an idea of who this child is and where they are from.
- Sharon That is a really good answer, thank you for that. And also I am looking at this child of a mixed heritage so what are your thoughts around children how would you define

children of mixed heritage or ethnicity or identity because you have got a really diverse setting where they come from really mixed backgrounds aren't they.

Amanda Absolutely we have children from all sorts of families, children with two mums, two dads, one dad, one mum and these children come from like you say very diverse backgrounds and we see that across from 0 to 5 years old.

Sharon That is fine. That leads me on if we are talking about the mixed heritage learner and their reference to TNL that is formed within this setting, which needs do you consider to be the most important for them when they are in this setting? Because you talk following their fascinations, are they learning differently what do they bring to the culture of the setting have you noticed.

Amanda I think you are absolutely right. We recognise that every child has very different learning strengths and needs and things like this and something that is well known and I am sure it will form part of your research is that black boys especially are not doing as well at school so this is something that we are very aware of at nursery. I myself have been on some training to look at how we can engage boys in learning and so I have brought that back into nursery and it was called something like brave boys and we are looking at actually there is all these biological different factors that make up children and for boys especially they can find engaging in if you like teaching and that sort of thing and they can find it quite difficult so we have looked at different ways that we can engage boys especially and you know it is through these things of having those conversations with children. We know that we are all female staff team and we recognise that. We do have quite a diverse staff team which we are proud of but we do try and get dads to come in quite a lot that is something that is really keen for us so we will have dads stay and play things like that. Uncles, granddads things like that. We have also been having recently grandparents stay and plays because grandparents can give so much. They are integral to some of these families and the children are thrilled to be around these grandparents. We have had some children that have adopted their own grandparents in these stay-and-plays, they have gone and sat on these grandparents' knees, so it is about getting those family members in. Recognising that actually there are difference sort to needs within children and trying to support that the best we can following sort of national guidelines or research I am wanting to say and data and things like that.

Amanda Thank you

Sharon Thank you so much for your time.

[End of recording]

## Appendix 21: Sample - Transcribed narrative account from the video-recorded play activities

### Vignette 6

#### Activity 2 (part 1): Drawing self and family

**Date:**

**Duration:** 7 minutes 36 seconds

**Clip position:** 7.14 onwards

**Participants:** J, Fr and Fa.

**Resources:** coloured pencils and paper (later in the activity skin-coloured paint are added).

Sat at the circular table in the training room, this activity commences with pencil drawing, where the children are encouraged by Leah to draw themselves and their family. Leah talks about her own family, where the children show interest in the fact that her dad has one hand. Leah explains about his accident at work. As she is drawing she explains the distinct features her family have. [The children are looking at Leah drawing her picture as well as quietly drawing with their own pencils. Fr like to finish first he holds his picture up very early into the activity.](#)

**Leah:** *He doesn't have hair, so I'm just going to draw his face, he has brown eyes*

**Fr:** *I have brown eyes too.* (He is looking directly at Leah and pointing his pencil and index finger towards her.

**Leah:** *You have brown eyes too, like your mummy, does your mummy have brown eyes too?*

**Fr:** nods in response.

Changing the play (insert the play type Hughes, A ) J interjects by saying

**J:** *My mummy has pink eyes*

**Leah:** *scrunches her face pink eyes are you sure?*

**Fa:** *My mummy's got yellow eyes.*

**Leah:** *yellow eyes are you sure? I think your mums' hair is yellow. She's blond.*

**Fa:** *yeah.*

All participants are still drawing with their pencils whilst holding this conversation. To refocus the activity.

**Leah:** *look this is my dad and look my dad only has one hand (pedagogy).* All of the children look up with deep interest in Leah drawing. She has suggested a difference to what the children know and understand about the anatomy of humans. Inherently Fr is the first to question Leah.

**Fr:** *Your dad only has one hand?* (He leans his whole body forward, elbow on the table, soft voice; suggesting awareness of other people's feelings, he does not want to upset Leah)

**J:** *does he have two hands?* Raised tone

**Leah:** *No he only has one*

**J:** *what!* Expressing disbelief

**Leah:** *no because he cut his hand a long, long time ago, we are all different aren't we?* (pedagogy)

**Fr:** *we've got two hands* (holds out both of his hands)

**Leah:** *Yeah I've two as well.*

The children continue drawing all exclaiming that they have finished, but then continuing to draw with different colours. Leah focuses her attention on Fr. She asks him who he is drawing. Fr explains his picture is of himself and his daddy. Leah asks if his sister is in the drawing too. She then asks how his baby sister is. What is she like, does she look like you? J holds up his picture and speaks over the top of Fr, preventing him from responding (hijacking the play). As all the children start to explain their pictures. Jake holds his picture up to me. I am sat outside of the play, making notes. I stop note taking to give J my full attention. I join the play kneeling at the table. Leah asks J if that's j mummy.

**Fr:** *where's your mummy?*

**J:** *this is my mummy*, looking at me and pointing to his drawing he says she's brown.

**S:** *I'm not sure she's brown.*

**J:** *she is* (very sure of his answer).

**S:** *is your daddy brown?*

**J:** This is my daddy, (J pauses and corrects his response. Pointing at me and to the same figure on his paper, he says *It's my daddy*).

**S:** *is your daddy brown?*

**J:** you're brown, looks at me, and touches my face.

**Fr:** *my daddy eyes are blue*

The boys pick up the mirror to look at their faces. Using Fr expressed interest, I ask what colour their eyes are.

**Fr:** *brown*

**J:** *mine are a 'greeny' colour* – (looking really close into the mirror)

I ask if I can have a go. J holds the mirror to my face. I ask him if my eyes are the same colour as his. He does not respond. I offer my eyes are brown.

**Fa:** *'my eyes are brown too'.*

Because Fr is talking about his baby sister (he tells me about his sister being in mummy tummy and now she's out at is at nursery). J seeks my attention by holding his picture in front of my face. Leah continues the conversation, as I turn to J. She asks Fr if his sister looks like him. He does not respond. Jake holds the mirror close and points to our hair type. I ask him what colour his hair is?

*J uses the mirror to look at his hair again. He turns my face towards him and moves his face close s that we can both compare our faces in the small square mirror. He takes his time to concentrate on his hair. We both look at each other and then back into the mirror to check. Looking intently at me. I gently tap his Afro.*

**J:** *My hair is curly*

**S:** *I like your hair.* I ask if he has included himself in the picture. He says no.

**J:** *this is my daddy.*

**S:** *is that your daddy, tell me what your daddy is like.*

**J:** *He's got black hair, like Fr's - Holds the mirror out towards Fr hair*

**S:** *I Like Fr hair*

**J:** *and like you - holds the mirror out to my hair.*

**J:** *is your hair black?* Pointing at my hair

**S:** *it is black J*

**J:** *it's black like Fa too, - points at Fa hair with the mirror*

**S:** *we're all similar.* I ask him if his hair is like his mummy's. *J shakes his head.* He holds the mirror closely to his face (clip position 5.55)

**J:** *it's a sort of a brownie colour*

**S:** *it is J, it's kind of a brownie colour. I love the colour of your hair. It's a sort of brownie colour*

**J:** *It's a light brown - He touches his hair and nods.*

**S:** *Yes it is a light brown. I like that description. J holds the mirror out towards me.*

**J:** *What colour is your hair?*

**S:** *I'd say it's black, like that cup. What do you think? I would say mine is black. J reaches forward and touches the cup.*

The children simultaneously burst into conversations about their pictures, describing what they are doing with their families. *Fr is sat quietly.* I ask him about his picture. Fr explains that in his picture, the family are on a steam train. He includes details about his baby sister being there. J says his picture is about his birthday party. He holds it up to show the group. E who has been sat quietly the whole time shows a very detailed

picture of her mummy's her sister. Advising that her mummy's hair is pink. It is totally drawn in pencil. Leah asks her if she would like to use the colour pencils. She is a little hesitant. But then colours her mummy hair in pink.

*End of Activity*

**Location:**

Folder: Data Collection-Main Study Data-Focus Group Interviews-Template 2: Video 7

**Researcher initial reflection of the recording:**

**Leah's reflection paper journal entry entitled 2<sup>nd</sup> session:**

***Have I learnt anything about myself?***

*That now I see things with other perspective, as where I live now there are so many cultures*

***How can I use the experience in the future?***

*I can use it in my daily practice, in the way I try to communicate*

**Vignette 16**

**Activity 4: Fr painting a self-portrait with Amanda**

**Date:** 23.1.18

**Duration:** 1 minute 45 seconds

**Clip position:** -

**Resources:** Skin-coloured paints, paper, tissues

**Amanda:** *there you go, oh you've got your black on. Why are you putting your black down there?*

*Fr has his picture upside down and so is drawing the black for his hair closest to his body.*

**Fr:** *Because I'm black*

**Amanda:** *Ah ok, that really good*

**J:** *You're not black*

**Fr:** *Yes am are*

**Amanda:** *So Fr describes himself as black but he has talked about how his skin as brown*

**J:** *It's not brown*

**Amanda:** *Oh what do you think it is?*

**J:** *It's purple* Fr smiles at J, and wipes his finger with the tissue.

**Amanda:** *What! purple*

**E:** *I think its white*

**Fa:** *I think it black*

**Amanda:** *I think so too. Now*

**Fr:** *Well* Fr has an angry expression on his face. He is looking directly at the group. His body is leaning forward and he has his hands by his side

**Fr:** *No its stammers I'm just, no I'm*

**Fa:** *black like me?*

**Fr:** *its, I'm just, I'm just....*

**J:** *White*

**Fr:** *No I'm not white I'm, I'm just... Fr looks down at his picture. His expression is sad.*

**J:** *What colour*

**Amanda:** *it's ok, Fr just trying to get his words, have a think, while he talks about it. J starts to speak again. One minute J, Let's just FR a bit of time Fr looks at Amanda*

**J:** *I remembering that!*

**Amanda:** *OK, Let's just give Fr a little bit of time. He's trying to say it Fr is looking at the group. He still has his hands by his side.*

**Fr:** Looking directly at the camera - *I'm light brown* his body rocks forward as he expresses his view.

**Amanda:** *There we go*

Frank now looks straight forward

**Fr:** *Look that's we, when I meet that lady – points to the picture of a black lady on the wall*

**Amanda:** *can you remember her name?*

**Fr:** *No*

**Amanda:** *Her name was Alison when we went to the care home. We saw some of our friends*

**J:** *He's not, He's not Alison*

**Amanda:** *It's Alison, and she's holding a big gold plate Fr is smiling, his arms are more relaxed as he recalls his visit to the care home*

**Observational note:** Fr seems more relaxed because he has managed to move the focus away from himself. He has managed to deflect the conversation away from himself. **Self-efficacy**

**Leah's reflection: paper journal entry (Identity related to EYFS) entitled 'children's reflection on watching self-portrait videos (Fr, Fa, E)**

**Know something about things that make them unique**

*Fr when he talks about his hair*

**Can talk about some of the similarities and differences in relation to family**

*Comparing facial actions to mum's and dad's lips, eyes etc.*

**Can talk about some of the similarities and differences in relation to practitioners and peers**

*They compare to each other after looking at how they look like*

**Aware of cultural differences in attitudes and expectations**

*Is more an exploration of those notions, they starting to understand it now. In this setting they are beginning to notice the different cultures.*

**A sense of belonging**

*They can talk about home, routines, but they can talk about anything specific*

**Pride and confidence in who they are, their family**

*They have the concept of who they are and their family, but they don't have acquired the sense of culture yet.*

**Confidence in themselves as learners**

*They think their immediate environment is their whole world, so they need to explore other cultures in order to discover what makes their culture unique e.g. music food folklore*

## Appendix 22: Parent focus group meeting 13.5.18

### Parent Focus Group 23.5.18

Sharon Collins



### Purpose of the Focus Group Meeting

- To share the experiences that the children have engaged in over the past eight months.
- To enable the data collection and analysis phase, I would like to offer you the opportunity to share your perspectives on:
  - The children's responses.
  - What knowledge the children are sharing about their heritage and where you perceive the influences on their thinking are coming from.
  - The significance of friendship in children's learning and development.
  - What the children are learning.

### Research Questions

**Title: Exploring how play based pedagogies support mixed ethnic identity formation**

- Using the 'voice' of the child, what are the key influences on 'mixed heritage' children's ability to relate to and connect with constructs about their racial identity in the early years setting?
- What opportunities exist in the EYF5 (2017) policy framework that allow 'mixed heritage' children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences in their education?
- How does the implementation of a play based pedagogical approach provide space for mixed heritage children to explore their ethnicity?

### The importance of friendship



### Aims of the Research

**Observation Phase:**

involved:

- work with the children and practitioners to explore how children relate to, connect with, respond to and make meaning of their racial identity in their play experiences.
- exploration of what the key influences are on the children's ability to make these connections regarding a sense of similarity and difference to self.
- Exploration of what complications exist for the early years practitioner in ensuring an inclusive curriculum for diverse learners, whilst at the same time meeting the learning and development requirement of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYF5, 2017).

### Method

- Research will recording of play and the qualitative prompts used by the children.
- It would be helpful if you can share your thoughts on:
  - children's perspectives (expressed) about some of the topics that raise unique issues of cultural identity.
  - What the children say about how they are their family activities.
  - the children's ability to talk about topics of the race and culture in their education to friends, their thoughts and ideas.
  - What the children are saying about themselves as learners.
- I will record your comments and support my understanding of your children's perspectives.
- As the researcher I will not pose any questions, but will endeavour to ask queries.

Family and Self

Activity 8: what makes me special



Activity 7: Family and Self



Reflections about self and others...

Activity 6: Tea party & foods we eat



Activity 2 – Children’s reflections on skin colour



## Activity 2



## Activity 4



## Activity 3 - Family



## Focus Group Questions

1. Are contexts about racial identity discussed/shared in the home environment and how do you respond?
  - Why are you brown/black?
  - Why are you white?
2. Is it important that children have knowledge and understanding about their mixed heritage identity – Why?

## Self Portraits with Amy

Pride and confidence in who we are

## Focus Group Questions

3. How do you believe your child associates cultural celebrations in the home and community in their play experiences?
4. How do you believe your child has developed a strong sense of self?
5. How do you believe your child has developed a strong sense of understanding about differences in ethnicity?
6. What do you believe the children are learning about their heritage in these play experiences?



## Appendix 23: Practitioner Focus Group Questions

1. Is it important that children have knowledge and understanding about their mixed ethnic identity?
2. Do you think the children have existing knowledge and understanding about differences in ethnicity (learnt in the home)?
3. Do you think the children have a sense of self (ethnic identity) in these play experiences?
4. Do you think the children have an understanding about differences in ethnicity?
5. What do you think the children are learning about their ethnicity and the ethnicity of others in these play experiences?
6. Does a play-based pedagogical approach provide space for mixed race children to explore their ethnicity?
7. Do the play approaches used in the setting provide opportunities for mixed ethnicity children to explore and reflect on their ethnicity?
8. Does the policy framework (EYFS) allow 'mixed ethnic' children to reproduce externally encountered cultural experiences in their play/education?
9. On reflection of the activities what do you think are the key influences on mixed race children's ability to relate to and connect with ideas about their ethnic identity in the setting?
10. What terms have you observed mixed ethnic children use to define themselves and others?
11. What have the research taught you about your inclusive practice and pedagogy? Are there any lessons learnt?