Parents' and Practitioners' Perspectives on How an Open Listening Climate in Early Years Settings Can Facilitate Child Voice

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Acknowledgments

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Abstract

This research explores the concept of how an open listening climate in early years settings can facilitate child voice. Driving the study was a commitment to make a change to children's lived experiences and those of the parents to make a lasting impact on children's wellbeing.

A previously under-researched area, the study was carried out in two Children's Centres in a large city in the West Midlands in England which provides multi-professional support to children and their parents. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development ([Bronfenbrenner, 1979) provides a theoretical framework acknowledging the interrelatedness of a child's environment, the relationships and their impact on the child's development.

My central research questions were: *'What are parents' and practitioners' perspectives on child voice within Children's Centres?* and *How might early years practice be transformed to create a more open listening climate within multi-professional early years settings?*

The rights model of child participation, developed by Lundy (2007:932) provides a theoretical and practical understanding of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN,1989) by conceptualising Article 12 and providing an accessible interpretation when applying a rights framework. Lundy's model asks us to consider the four interrelated elements of: *Space; Voice; Audience and Influence* when considering child participation.

Using a qualitative case study, I adapted the Lundy Model (2007), and accompanying participation checklist (2015) as 'tools' to inform both the data collection and data analysis by applying them with adults. Connecting with the most significant adult in a child's life (in the main, the parent) is essential when applying a holistic lens to view the lived experiences of a child and those of the practitioners who are invited into their world. A further level of analysis was applied, informed by Braun and Clarke's (2013) use of thematic analysis, when conducting qualitative research.

The concept of an open listening climate was explored with five parents (all mothers) whose narratives, collected using portraiture in order to gain deep insights into their lived experiences, are presented in the thesis as portraits to *'tell their stories'* (Lawrence Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis, 1997). Four senior managers were interviewed, and nineteen practitioners [who were working in early years and family support] took part in focus groups to explore the perspectives and understanding of their practice in relation to child voice. This innovative use of Lundy's Model creates a shared dialogue with adults in order to *'increase children's voice and efficacy' and* which Swadener (2020:393) considers *'is a powerful new area of research'*.

The data revealed a rich picture of what life was like for the child and parent at home, outlining positive examples of how the Children's Centres had been able to influence change and make a difference to the life of the child and parent. However, the research revealed a disconnect between the roles undertaken by early years whose work primarily focused on meeting the needs of the child, and the emphasis of the work of family support which was directed at supporting the parent with indirect impact on the child's wellbeing. The findings suggest that issues relating to significant changes, which drive the policy and political priorities of Children's Centres and the early years sector had, at times, influenced the misdirection of focus away from the child. The findings further suggest there is a need to reconsider redefining the roles of practitioners to place the emphasis on offering holistic support to children and parents through an early years and rights-based lens.

The research makes contributions to knowledge by suggesting applying a rights' theoretical model in early years settings will support practitioners to create a more open listening climate focused on child voice. It opens the dialogue between practitioners and parents to view the child through a holistic lens when considering how best to support children and parents to enhance their wellbeing.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In chapter one I Introduce the study and the start of my doctoral journey. The study looks at the Parents' and Practitioners' Perspectives on Child Voice in the context of Children's Centres in the West Midlands, in England. It examines the potential for transforming practice to inform and create a strategy for embedding a more open listening climate within multi-professional early years settings. I develop a set of five sub- research questions that help to define the parameters of the research and I discuss these in this chapter (section 1.5). I set out my positionality as an early career researcher and share my personal account and motivation for undertaking the PhD journey. The chapter concludes with the overall structure of the chapters, within the thesis.

My main motivation for this study was to ensure that the child is central to all our work within early years, and children are given a 'voice' and their 'voice' is valued, positioning the study within a child rights agenda (UNCRC) (UN,1989). I acknowledge that the child cannot be seen in isolation from the family and wider environment and draw on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner,1979) for one of my theoretical frameworks. Drawing on an ecological perspective helps to illustrate the intrinsic connection between quality practice, childhood experiences and the overlap of areas that influence and impact on the life of the child. I believe that if we are to develop our pedagogical practice and provide a culture and environment that places the child at the heart of our work, we must examine and reflect on current practice in context. I feel it is important to state at the start of this thesis that my study does not include children as direct participants in the research but captures both the parents' and practitioners' perspective on how an open listening climate can facilitate listening to children to transform practice and influence policy and in the context of multi-professional early years settings. I discuss this in more depth later in the thesis by exploring my positionality in the research (chapter four, section 4.2), and when I consider ethical practice (section 4.10) and reflect on the articles within the United National Convention of the Rights of the Child (hereafter referred to as the UNCRC) in relation to applying a child rights based approach to practice (the UNCRC is available in full in Appendix 1).

I start this journey identifying with my ontological and epistemological beliefs, and my study is set within an interpretivist paradigm, and I believe my methodological choices, adopting a praxeological approach to the research, reflect my own beliefs and ethical principles which

value the multiple voices of all those who contributed to the study. This is a view shared by Lyndon et al., (2019:363) who put forward the view that ''*Researching within a praxeological paradigm brings ethical considerations to the fore and this reflects the researchers deep rooted axiological beliefs around participation and rights''. In* this chapter I will set out my rationale for undertaking the study exploring my professional, personal, and political journey that led me onto the doctoral research and I set the context of the research by introducing the study sites.

1.2 Rationale - My Professional Leadership Journey

I began my doctoral journey with over 40 years in the field of early years, from a value base that places child voice at the centre of our practice. Having taken inspiration from a visit to Reggio Emilia in April 2012, in one of my earliest journal entries on the visit I recorded:

> *"The process of discovery and learning is reflected through pictures, drawings, observations and video that can be re-experienced by children and adults time and time again. The children are clearly 'heard' and their views are respected and adults respond. I want to enter into dialogue with other colleagues, to hear what they are seeing, through their different 'lenses'. I'm taking a journey of discovery into a child's world".*
>
> (AM Professional Reflective Journal Entry, 15.04.12)

This study is intended to contribute to new knowledge in the field and to take the audience on the journey of discovery and transformation with me. This shared journey started as my thoughts and reflections took shape and I shared and eventually presented my proposal to work colleagues, the Learning Circle at the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC), my supervisory team at University and the Institutional Ethics Committee, where I had my proposal approved (23rd January 2013) (Appendix 3).

Intrinsically linked to my practical experience is the leadership journey that I have undertaken to date which has had and continues to have great influence in forming the principles of leadership that I hold today. Whalley et al., (1990:15) states that:

> *"…each of us has powerful stories to tell of our learning experiences… These stories, which are particularly rich for early years practitioners, are important".*

This is supported by Waniganayake (2001:4) who believes:

> *"…one becomes a leader through one's life experiences... Leadership is something that comes out of experience, it is something that is evolving".*

I was inspired by my experience at Reggio Emilia (April 2012) and encouraged by the views of Roberts-Holmes (2005:20) who suggests reflecting on your personal and professional story and motivations to identify a topic that ''*you ideally have a deep personal and passionate interest* [in]''. My initial interest had been ignited from my professional positioning, as I discuss in chapter four (section 4.2), and what I was experiencing at that time, managing a large multi-professional team across a group of Children's Centres. Acknowledged as an outstanding Children's Centre (Ofsted, 2011, 2014) this reflects the commitment and passion of the organisation and staff teams, who want to create the best environment in the community for children and families. In research conducted at Pen Green (Arnold, et al., 2012:1) we are reminded that practitioners working in Children's Centres ''*are working at the 'cutting edge' of practice in the Early Years field…engaged in weaving good practice with children and families each day…reflecting on their own work and studying and writing about what constitutes good practice*''.

As someone leading such outstanding practice, I wanted to ensure, that through my research, we would continue to reflect on and in practice to continue to make improvements and adapt to the needs of the children and families over time. I was truly humbled when I was acknowledged by Ofsted (2014:1) as '' *an inspirational leader* [whose] *energy and vision for excellence enthuse others to have high aspirations for all children and families*''. It was affirming to hear that they considered that ''*Staff and partners are thoroughly committed to doing whatever it takes to continually improve the health, wellbeing and safety of all children and families, particularly of those families in most need''.* It is from this position that I share my leadership experience.

My leadership learning journey to date has been varied and extensive and in September 2006 I embarked on the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL). The NPQICL programme had been specifically developed by Pen Green and the National College School Leadership (NCSL), as a direct response to the roll-out of the Sure Start Children's Centre initiative, acknowledging the need for Children's Centre leaders to ''*examine and explore the leadership dimensions of their roles and to place these within the wider context of developments in integrated service* (Whalley, et al., Book 1, 2004:12).

The programme focused on what it is like being a leader in an integrated Children's Centre, encouraging reflection on experiences of leadership and forging the relationship between theory and practice. It was designed at a time of significant change, being politically driven which highlighted the importance of multi-professional teams and quality leadership to develop support services for the most vulnerable children and families in communities. The

key challenge of developing and leading integrated services was explored in depth as described by Whalley et al., (2008:7) *'through discussion and reflection …'* exploring *'pedagogical participation' and* offered me the opportunity to undertake practitioner research. This involved me working closely with colleagues and partners and investigating issues of shared interest and importance to our work, which gave me the opportunity to influence pedagogical practice.

Whalley et al. (Book 4,2004:33) describe the purpose of the NPQICL as *"improving leadership in integrated early year's settings so that children and families can receive the highest quality services possible".* The principles of praxeology and co-construction of knowledge was at the heart of the programme and as the first cohort of students to undertake the training following the pilot cohort, I truly felt I contributed to the design and successful roll out of the programme.

The subsequent master's in education that followed in 2009 gave me the opportunity to consolidate my knowledge with practice further. It is this, alongside the leadership position I held as a Children's Centre Leader at the start of the doctoral journey, that is and continues to be one of the main motivators and drivers for undertaking this study. This study, therefore, builds upon a strong academic foundation and pedagogical practice, allowing for further exploration through praxeological methodology, the perspective on practice and strategies for impacting on and transforming practice. The overall research questions reflect research undertaken from an ethical stance to gain the perspectives of parents' and practitioners' using a multi-method approach through praxeological research (Formosinho and Oliveira Formosinho, 2012; Pascal and Bertram, 2012).

1.2.1 My Personal Journey

Reflection on and in practice, the art of '*Praxis'* (Freire, 1970) was a key aspect of the NPQICL and one of the first activities undertaken on the programme was to reflect on and draw our life journey, referred to as '*autobiography of professional identity… the links between personal learning and understanding with professional learning, understanding and practice'* (Trodd, 2012:801). We were asked to identify significant events in our lives as well as considering who had inspired us and why. I found this activity a little difficult at first asking myself, where would I start my journey? I was also being asked to reflect on my life experiences, some of which I knew would evoke painful memories and I agonised over what to share of my personal life, and the significance it had on my professional life and identity as a Children's Centre Leader. I believe this activity and on-going use of reflection on my life experiences alongside my

professional journey, have played a significant part in shaping my beliefs and values and therefore the choice of focus of the study. I expand on my perspective as the researcher in chapter four (section 4.5) and my positionality within the research in (section 4.2), which I consider has significantly influenced the rationale for the research. Reflexivity has played a key role throughout my life and continued to do so throughout the study, and it has facilitated me listening to others as well as giving me a voice in the research. Reflecting on my own life experiences in this way had significant influence on my research design and choosing to undertake research through a praxeological lens.

I can recall a conversation I had with my director of studies, Professor Chris Pascal, who encouraged me to consider my earliest personal and professional experiences and if there were significant events or experiences that had influenced my choice of research topic. As with the experience I had on the NPQICL, I knew reflecting on past experiences had the potential to re-open painful memories. I have come to realise the importance of being able to relate your personal experience to your research. As Roberts-Holmes (2005) suggests, whilst this may be an emotional journey, it supports you to identify a research topic that is truly relevant and significant personally.

On reflection, I have looked back to my earliest experiences of working with families in a social work context supporting young mothers living within the care system with their babies. The young mothers, still children themselves and in turn their babies, appeared, at times, to be invisible in practice. Ferguson (2016:1007) refers to the phenomenon known as '*invisible child'*, within practice or policy and in this example the child and parent's voice had been replaced by that of the foster carers, early years practitioners and social workers. As a newly qualified Nursery Nurse (NNEB) in 1981, aged eighteen, from what I considered to be a stable and secure upbringing up to that point, I found this to be personally challenging. The practice and policy within settings, referred to as family centres, appeared on the surface to be an empowering model, yet judgements about parenting capacity were being passed and therefore decisions made that would have impact on the future of the parent and child. A 'done to' and not a 'working with' approach to family support appeared to be in place. I was left asking where was the voice of the child and the parent in this process? As a leader of a group of Children's Centres, I was able to relate my earliest experience to current practice and consider what experiences families were having through our support services. Was our support through a multi-professional approach of early years and family support providing quality experiences to meet the needs of children and parents?

My research considers why and how child voice is facilitated in early years practice by opening a space for dialogue with parents and practitioners by applying a praxeological research design to the study (Formoshinho and Oliveria Formosinho, 2012; Pascal and Bertram, 2012). At the core of praxeological research lies the use of reflection on and in action through reflection and dialogue that values the views of others through research that can impact on and transform practice and one that Brooker's (2010) considers creates an equal and reciprocal relationship built on respect. The participatory approach in my study, as discussed in chapter four (section 4.6) as part of my research design, facilitates reflecting on current practice in relation to how an open listening climate in early years settings can facilitate child voice. My central research questions and sub-questions in this chapter (section 1.5) were developed to address this fundamental issue.

When revisiting my earliest encounters discussed above, there did not appear to be a listening climate that valued the views of children or parents and a key strength in my research is the value placed on listening to parents' and practitioners' perspectives of what is ''*real world practice…* [applying] *an ethical and values transparent stance''* (Pascal and Bertram, 2016:59). My study explores the concept of an open listening climate that examines the relationships created between practitioners, children and parents and considers the quality of the environment and encounters that promote a listening culture (McLarnon, 2011). Valuing the contribution parents make is key to practitioners understanding children's needs and knowing how best to support the family. I drew inspiration from research conducted by the National Children's Bureau (McLarnon, 2011), whose series of publications developed by The Young Children's Voices Network made explicit links between developing good practice in setting, when listening to children and the need to support parents and carers to listen to their children. McLarnon (2011:2) argues that:

> *"Practitioners within the very broad field of children's services, which spans education, health and social care, are uniquely placed to support parents and carers to enhance the way they listen to their children, and to champion the voice of the child so that it is heard both at home and in services outside of the home."*

Her view that: *"Before practitioners can begin to support parents to listen more effectively, they need to create a culture of listening within the setting in which they work"* resonated with my own beliefs and gave support to my research question, aim of the study and methodical choice. I revisited my rationale and purpose and made, what Bradbury-Jones (2014:93) refers to as a *"balanced judgement"*, in choosing not to include children as participants in the

research. At the time the study took place I was not in the position to be able to immerse myself fully into the setting, as a researcher, and therefore had to refocus my research, and I discuss this in more detail in chapter four (section 4.6.2).

1.2.2 My Political Journey - Setting the Context

Throughout my career in early years childcare and education, spanning over 40 years, there has been a changing landscape across the sector in relation to the social, political, and economic stance and the accompanying developments of legislative policy and practice guidance. During this period, I have come to realise that government policy has had both a negative and positive impact on early years and service provision for children and parents. My research study does not set out to document this in a historical context; it is my intention to draw and expand on policies and significant changes that have some direct and current relevance to the topic and that adds to the body of knowledge, with reference to theoretical perspectives as well as informing practice. I examine, through the research, the 'why' and the 'how' the child's voice is facilitated in practice within early years and the connection this has to policy, in the hope that it will provide a framework for better understanding and will contribute to the development of the work in this field. A historical and chronological timeline highlighting the core policies and the impact of their implementation is shown in the timeline in table1a. This timeline sets out some of the principal dates in the development of early years in the UK over the last half-century, starting in 1962 and up to the start of this study beginning in 2012, to give an overview and to help put events in their historical context. Only those general elections that led to a change of government are included.

On reflection I can recall situations from my childhood that I have now come to realise helped formulate the values and principles I hold today and that have influenced my practice over that time. I grew up in a diverse political household and it was only in later years that I understood the impact this had on my own political viewpoint. I spent most of my formative years before the age of 5 with my mother throughout the day and holidays having not attended any form of early education until compulsory school age and whilst I cannot recall specific conversations about politics, I can recall incidents and events that I believe shaped me and influenced my values and beliefs that I bring to this study. I now understand that what my mother was demonstrating and stood for in its simplest form was social justice, fairness and equality and helping others who were less fortunate or simply needed support and as a Shop Steward in her workplace, she was a true advocate for others. Reflecting on these experiences has evoked fond memories of spending evenings with my mother visiting several elderly

women who resided in Warden Controlled housing opposite our house. These memories are ignited to this day when I sit in front of an open fire and eat garibaldi or fig biscuits and reflect on the importance of relationships and offering support to others when most needed. My research reflects the influence these formative experiences have had in shaping me as a person and the qualities I bring to the study.

My own political awareness increased when I began work in the early years sector. As shown in table 1a, there have been significant developments and changes in political direction that have had an impact on policy and practice in early years. I recall one specific period of change that had a significant impact on early years services at the time when, in the early 1980s, a reform of day nurseries took place. The daycare provided both subsidised fee paying places for working parents as well as providing support to families in need who were referred to the service through Social Care. A re-structure and re-focus of daycare provision in the local authority where I worked at the time took place resulting in a significant reduction in the numbers of facilities available to families to access locally. A reduction in subsided places also meant working parents had to find alternative private or voluntary provision, including childminders, at increased rates. A 're-branding' of daycare provision to family centres changed the focus to more targeted support which introduced 'thresholds' by which families' needs were measured and support services allocated accordingly. These reforms not only had impact on children and families but, as facilities reduced, so did the numbers of posts for practitioners who had to re-apply and re-interview for posts resulting in job losses and low moral for those who remained. I can recall the feeling of dèjà vu when considering the changes experienced from the development of Children's Centres from local Sure Start programmes and significant changes experienced at the time of the study. The findings in chapter six reflect that, at the time of the study, changes in policy over time at both national and local levels had impacted on design and delivery of services to children and parents. I therefore considered the research to be timely and of relevance in the context of early years reforms and Children's Centres.

The research findings showed there was a disconnect between the roles within early years and family support in multi-professional teams which had been influenced by policy and budgetary requirements and I discuss these in chapters six and seven. Based on the findings, the recommendations put forward in chapter seven (section 7.6) provide a way of informing and transforming practice.

I started this study from a firm foundation built on extensive experience in the field, as well as a leadership position which facilitated me to undertake in-depth research. The historical

context of Sure Start Children's Centre development which follows will help increase the understanding of the positioning of the study sites at the time of the study.

2000's

- Significant changes take place in this period such as: launch of The National Day Nurseries Association; publication of Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage; The Children Act comes into force.
- A single Sure Start Unit is established
- The Laming Report on Victoria Climbie is produced.
- A Children's Centre programme is announced

1990's

- The Rumbold Report is published by government.
- The UL formally adopts the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The Schools Act establishes Ofsted.
- Part X of the 1989 Children Act is implemented
- The Labour Party wins the general election.
- The National Childcare Strategy is launched

1980's

- Conservative Party in power under Margaret Thatcher
- The Day-care Trust is launched, and the Clark Report addresses the need for greater coordination of early childhood services.
- The Children Act is extended
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is published
- The Labour Party presents its 'Charter' for under 5s.

1970's

- Continual change in govt, from Conservative Party winning the general election, then Labour party and Conservative Party again
- The White Paper Education is published
- The Children Act is passed in response to child abuse scandals
- The DES/DHSS report Low Cost Day Care for the Under-Fives is produced

1960's

- The Nursery Schools Campaign becomes the National Association of Pre-School Playgroups
- The Labour Party wins the general election.
- The Plowden Report is published

Table 1a: Key Dates in the Development of Early Years Policy in the UK (1962- 2012)

Adapted from: Understanding Early Years Policy (3rd ed) Baldock,P. Fitzgerald,D. & Kay,J. (2013)

1.3 An Introduction to Sure Start

The vision of Sure Start, then later Children's Centres, was to build on 'what works' in early intervention strategies with children and families by learning from evidenced-based practice and research. They had a responsibility for improving children's ability to learn and develop ensuring positive outcomes for children and *"giving them a flying start to school"* (Anning & Ball, 2008:94)

A major part of the policy review at the early stage of the Sure Start development was to examine those initiatives and research, both nationally and internationally, which seemed to be making a difference to the outcomes for children and parents. The two sites participating in the study had already developed and embedded evidenced -based community services and, as part of their strategies for growth and as charity-based organisations, they were well-placed to apply to be lead agencies within neighbourhoods in the city to manage the new Sure Start Initiatives.

1.3.1 Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP)

The development of Flagship Sure Start programmes in 1998 by the then Labour Government set out the vision that the Sure Start Programmes would be essential in improving outcomes for young children and would provide Early Years Education and Childcare which reduced the outcome inequalities between children growing up in disadvantage. Gordon Brown, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, tasked Norman Glass, one of his senior economists and a leading figurehead in the conception of the programme, to consider new ways of developing and delivering policies around early intervention, child poverty and social exclusion, that would support the government's commitment to children and tackling disadvantage. Key elements to these policies were that they covered both the needs of children and parents by providing an anti-poverty offer through a National Childcare Strategy. There was also a strong emphasis placed on services to be built from a strong evidence -based practice and from findings of previous interventions from the UK and abroad.   Glass reported at the time that:

> "*The Sure Start programme represents a new way of doing things both in the development of the policy and in its delivery. It is an attempt to put into practice 'joined-up thinking' but it is also an outstanding example of evidence-based policy and open, consultative government* (1999:264)

These developments in wider policy agendas reflect that developments within early years policies are not developed in isolation but are usually part of much bigger strategies.

The SSLPs were to be established in the most deprived areas of the country, initially in the 20% most deprived areas, although services were accessible to all families who had a child under 5, in a defined catchment area.

The concept of developing joined-up services such as education, care, family support and health services made up the main Core Offer for Local Sure Start Programmes. These key areas for focus came from the final recommendations presented to the Cabinet Committee following the cross-departmental review.

The fact that the review crossed a number of departments, as opposed to what up until then had been the responsibility of individual departments, was a significant development at the time, acknowledging that such major reforms were not the responsibility of one sector alone. This meant that a range of organisations, both at a national and local level, were able to have an influence on decision making and shaping policy which ensured that the needs of young children were prioritised and that exemplars of good practice could be identified and rolled out.

The Government pledged extensive funding into the roll out of the initiative with an ambitious schedule for the development of Sure Start Programmes, over a ten-year period, as well as providing subsidised early education. This saw the introduction of the 12.5 hours a week of free early education entitlement for all three- and four-year olds. The final wave of the programme however did not receive approval till 2002 by which time reports from the early National Evaluation Sure Start Unit (NESS) of the initiative, showed apparent failures in meeting some of the outcomes they set out to do. A change in government policy and governance at central government level in 2003 saw the government's change in agenda and priorities into the development of Children's Centres.

1.3.2 Children's Centre Development

The developments of Children's Centres were greatly influenced by the change in the fundamental responsibilities being moved from the Department for Education Skills (DfES) along with the Department for Health (DoH) to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Naomi Eisenstadt, the Director of the Sure Start Unit, that had been established in 1998, and a leading figure in the Sure Start developments, campaigned for the government and local authorities to build on and embed the good practice models that had already been established in communities through the Sure

Start Local Programmes (SSLP). Eisenstadt spoke of the need for Local Authorities to embed SSLPs into their strategic vision for the delivery of children's services.

The new focus and the government's ambitious target to get 70% of lone mothers into work, alongside other political and strategic developments in funding streams, childcare policies and lines of accountability, placed much more emphasis on childcare and education. This supported the government's policy to "eradicate child poverty by 2020" (DfE,2004:9). Children's Centres were tasked with increasing full-time childcare provision, 8am – 6pm, at least 48 weeks of the year, increasing access to high quality, accessible, affordable and flexible childcare and to become more aligned with Job Centre Plus. There was an emphasis placed on adult employment and workless households. The new policies would enable parents to return to work, as the introduction of Working Tax Credit as part of reforming the financial support given to cover childcare costs would provide up to 80% subsidy. Several SSLPs, including those in this study, were able to evolve into Children's Centres while others were added onto schools and to existing early years provision such as neighbourhood nurseries and early excellence centres, and some to primary health care trust buildings and community centres. This period of ten years had heralded not only huge controversy and debates about the changes in focus of Children's Centres at parliamentary, local authority and community levels but we also saw a change in government in May 2010 to the newly elected Coalition Government. The review and reform of Children's Centres commissioned by the Coalition reflect a significant change in how the centres were expected to provide Early Intervention to the most vulnerable of children and parents while offering Universal Services to those deemed less in need within their reach areas. The Government suggested that there would be a period of reform and a re-focus for Centres for them to identify those families most in need of support and to focus on what we know works. It is questionable if the focus on adult agendas, within the new policies and initiatives laid out for Children's Centres at this time, truly had the child in focus. It has been suggested by the then Children's Minister, Beverley Hughes, that the devolution of accountability down to Local Authority Level, including the loss of ring-fenced allocation of funding, played a significant part in the loss of '*the spirt of Children's Centres'* (Eisenstadt,2011:114).

1.3.3 Political positioning

In 2013, a political shift at government level of priorities and budgetary review of children's services at local authority level, resulted in a remodelling of Children's Centre provision across the UK (Local Government Association (LGA) 2013). Previous studies and reports reflect mixed

findings of how Children's Centres evidenced positive outcomes for children and families (National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS), 2010; Munro, 2011; Eisenstadt, 2011: Evaluation of Children's Centres in England (ECCE) 2013), however, decisions on the future design and delivery of Children's Centres and the wider children's service provision were dissolved down to a local authority level. The local authority, where the study sites were situated, refigured their centres into a '*hub and satellite model... across 16 localities in the city'* (LGA, 2013:10), to meet the demands of reduced budgets as well as to prioritise the delivery of effective *Early* Intervention Services (Ofsted 2012, 2014,2016 ; Marmot 2010; Allen, 2010; Munro, 2011; The First Troubled Families Programme, 2012 – 2015;). This remodelling of Children's Centre services, at a local level, therefore required a significant re-think of practice to meet the increased demands of funding cuts and revision of the core purpose (DFE 2012) and shift in government priorities. However, concerns were raised in a report commissioned by the education committee (December 2013) that suggested the revised core purpose for Children's Centres had moved away from prioritising children at the centre and was more targeted towards parenting support. These concerns were shared by Sylva et al., (DfE,2013: xxvii) who considered *''There was a shift from services consistent with universal provision to services that have a more narrowly targeted and focused approach for the most vulnerable families''*.

The local authority where the research was conducted led a series of policy to practice workshops to consult with the Children's Centres and reflect on the need to reconsider the service provision, considering the need for the remodelling of services with a reduced budget. These changes in policy and funding to front line services for families were significant and organisations that had well-established Children's Centre Services, running alongside a range of community-based provision such as those who participated in the study, had to consider the implications of these reforms.

1.3.4 The study sites in context

At the start of the doctoral journey both study sites participating in the research were charity-led organisations and had a long history of over 40 years delivering services in the community. I expand on the context of the study sites in chapter four (section 4.8.1). Their values and beliefs grew out of a desire to help others and to contribute to the transformation of the lives of individuals, families and the wider community. Their ethos of supporting others though an empowering model was evident, and at the start of the research, both sites had been rated as Outstanding by Ofsted and acknowledged by the Local Authority as exemplar Children's Centres. This, I believe, reflects a strong commitment and leadership, grown out of a set of

deep-rooted principles, good practice models and research that placed the child at the centre of the work. While the child was the focus of the work within the centres, neither centre had explicitly framed their work through the lens of child's rights. Supporting children within the wider context of the family and the community through family support and wellbeing initiatives and providing access to early years education through their early year's services, was evident. The belief that children should be 'listened to' and to some extent were 'listened to' was a key principle of the practice. However, how this was achieved and how successful their approach was in achieving this was less in evidence across both sites. Listening to child's voice and making children's voices visible, (Malaguzzi, 1998), within the work in the centres appeared a good focus point on which to begin a shared dialogue. This gave the study a key focus and relevance to current policy developments and a strong platform from which to investigate, and it was from this point that I developed the title of my research:

Parents' and Practitioners' perspectives on how an open listening climate in early years settings can facilitate child voice.

I believe that this was particularly pertinent and a worthy area of further in-depth research at a time of significant change for the early years sector and Children's Centres, impacting on children and families. Having clearly defined the aim of the study and positioned it within a social research context, identifying the research design was key to ensuring it was 'fit for purpose'. Cohen et al (2007: 78) consider that the '*purpose of the research determines the methodology and design of the research'.*

1.4 The Literature: Looking Through Multiple Lens

I started my study in a period of uncertainty for local authorities and the future positioning of Children's Centres within the Early Year's Sector, across England (Camps and Long, 2012; Smith et al., 2018; Action for Children, 2019). There is both historical and more recent research supporting the need for providing early intervention in a child's life that reflects that Children's Centres have a significant part to play in this period of a child's life (Sylva,2004; Anning and Ball,2008; Allen, 2011; Eisenstadt, 2011, Williams,2014; Conkbayir,2017). There remains limited empirical research on listening to the voice of under 5s in the context of Children's Centres, viewed through a child's right's lens and Swadener (2020:393) suggests that *"applying a child participation model to primary caregivers and early education, particularly in support of increasing children's voice, and efficacy, is a powerful new area of research".* The research set out to listen to the perspectives of parents and practitioners to identify how a more open listening climate can be created, where child voice is central and leading to

transformation of practice. The literature review in chapter three, reflects on relevant literature through multiple lenses and assists with the understanding of how theory informs key areas of practice. I considered the four lenses of: child protection and safeguarding; quality provision and practice; child rights and child wellbeing as key aspects of early years practice and has relevance in the context of the Children's Centre Core offer.

My rationale for conducting the research described in the Introduction in this chapter and in methods and methodology (chapter four), reflects a strong belief in listening to and hearing child voice from a child protection and safeguarding perspective. This stems from my earliest training and professional experience in the field of early years, care and education and the subsequent positions I have held throughout my career which have only served to reinforce this crucial area of early intervention and supporting children and families.

1.4.1 Personal Reflection

The earliest encounter and experience of hearing of child abuse and neglect was as I started my early years training and subsequently embarked on my first role within a family centre in 1981. The Colwell enquiry in 1974 related to the death of Marie Colwell who died 11 weeks before her eighth birthday at the hands of her stepfather. Marie was subject to a supervision order at the time of her death that was being monitored by a Local Authority but not the one that she resided in. The Colwell enquiry in 1974 was critical of a number of agencies who were in contact with Marie and the family at the time of her death. Reflections on the case referred to it as the ''*landmark case of Maria Colwell…*'' citing *'' … professional conflict and failure, as the primary focus of the inquiry'' (Crane, 2018).*

The Jasmine Beckford inquiry (1985) highlighted the significant failings of the Local Authority in the monitoring and safeguarding of the children. Stevenson (1986:501) suggests ''*there can be no defence of professional practice which loses sight of the primary focus of concern – child protection''.* Stevenson had been a member of the Marie Colwell inquiry and reports that there were '' *many similarities in the two stories''* and goes onto to reflect that ''*as in many of the inquiries, serious deficiencies in interprofessional communication was apparent''.*

Jasmine and her siblings had been made subjects of care proceedings yet, during these proceedings, the decision was made to return the family to their mother and stepfather, and, during this return home, Jasmine was killed. The report, following the inquiry, clearly showed that the primary agencies that were involved with the children at that time, and who would have been best placed to comment and report on the welfare of the children, were not involved in the key decision-making process. It was concluded that these tragic deaths were

preventable, suggesting there had not been effective communication between the agencies involved with the children who were best placed to 'hear' the child's 'voice'. Dale's report (1986:175) highlighted the criticisms aimed at the social workers involved in the case as having ''*an attitude (which regarded) the parents of the children in care as clients rather than the children in their own right''*.

Dale (1986:176) goes onto report that at the time concerns had been raised that social workers were

> '' *abusing their powers'',* stating that it was being suggested that '' *the rights*
>
> *of parents should be given priority over those of children'',* a point that Dale
>
> goes on to refute.

Yet at the start of my leadership journey in a local Sure Start programme, it appeared that lessons had not been learnt from these previous tragedies. In 2002, the death of Victoria Climbie (2000) and circumstances surrounding the case, were being reported. The subsequent serious case review and Lord Laming report (2003:3), evidenced a *"gross failure of the system…a lack of good practice… listing at least 12 key occasions when the relevant agencies had had the opportunity to successfully intervene in the life of Victoria"*.

Laming (2003:6) stated that:

> *"It is not possible to separate the protection of children from wider support to*
>
> *families…I am in no doubt that effective support for children and families*
>
> *cannot be achieved, by a single agency… It is a multi-disciplinary task."*

Laming (2003:6) concluded that: *'the gap (referring to policy and practice) is not a matter of law but in its implementation'.*

The prime driver for this study is in my firm belief that the voice of the child should be valued and 'heard', by those agencies and services that are there to provide early intervention, support and to keep children safe. However, serious case reviews into child deaths that followed Victoria's, such as; Peter Connolly (Baby P), 2007; Khyra Ishaq, 2008; Keanu Williams, 2011 and Daniel Pelka, 2012, continued to cite the lack of coordination and communication of support services. When reflecting on circumstances leading up to the death of Peter Connolly, I believe that historical experiences of his early life, and that of his mother, were clearly not considered when he was presented for several medical examinations for injuries he had sustained. The serious case review was critical of the practice of the agencies who had the opportunity to 'hear' Peter's 'voice' at numerous opportunities and stated that more could have and should have been done much earlier (Coventry Local Safeguarding Children Board, 2013).

It must be asked, in all these inquiries, where was the voice of the child? Who was listening? All these examples, and sadly those of the child deaths that followed, acknowledge significant failings by those agencies that were best placed to have heard their voice.

At the onset of my doctoral journey, I presented at local, national and international conferences that gave me the platform to gain support in my thinking and understanding around the research focus and to critically examine the research focus, questions and design, through peer-support.

My earlier master's degree, examining the issue of quality of early year's practice, and the impact and outcomes on under 5s, using the mosaic approach as a participatory methodology, gave me the foundation from which to begin the literature review for this study. I built on the four significant lenses through which to interrogate the literature that I first developed for my master's and expanded the literature search to address the new focus using the initial research questions to inform the literature review. At the start of this study, I applied the CREC Approach to conducting a literature review (2015a) and began by: building on my original database search in my M.A examined through the four lenses; identifying text and peer reviewed journal articles, published thesis and searching known authors and experts in this field who have influenced my thinking and practice, over many years, to form a firm foundation on which to add to the body of knowledge.

As I started the review of literature and continued dialogue and reflection with colleagues in the field, I began to expand and strengthen my knowledge and understanding of a child's rights discourse, in relation to the research and working with under 5s (UN, 1989; Lundy, 2007; Cole-Albäeck, 2012) and I began to appreciate the significance of framing and underpinning the research from a child's rights perspective. The child's rights discourse became a 'golden thread' alongside Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory that I used as my theoretical lens to frame the research.

1.5 Research Questions

Guided by the literature and extensive experience of the researcher in the field, the overarching research questions are:

1. What are parents' and practitioners' views and perspectives on child voice within Children's Centres in England? and

2. How might practice be transformed to create a more open listening climate in multi-professional early years settings?

To give clarity, purpose, and a clear focus these research questions are broken down into a set of research sub-questions that lend support in generating and critically analysing the findings (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012).

I developed five focused research sub-questions that guided the study.

1. **What is understood by the concept of an open listening climate in Children's Centres?**

   This question was a key Introductory question to help to ground the research, and to ensure it had focus and a direct link to the overarching research questions. As identified in chapter six (section 6.3), the need to create a culture of listening was one of the key components identified across all four-lenses explored in the literature review (chapter three)

2. **What are parents' lived experience of children's centres and their perspectives on child voice?**

   Following on from question one which introduces the focus of the research, question two set out to capture the parents' lived experience of children's centres and to explore their perspectives on child voice. Their stories are heard using portraitures (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997) as a methodology with a focus on understanding and not generalising, allowing for the researcher to '*listen for a story'* and not '*listen to a story'* (Welty, 1995 cited in Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005:9). Applying the Lundy Model (2007) of children's participation with adults (Moore,2020), was unique and the five parent portraits helped provide currency and contextualisation to the study as well as informing further sub-questions.

3. **What are practitioners' perspectives and understanding of their practice in relation to child voice?**

   This question allowed for the exploration of practitioner practice in relation to child voice. There have been limited studies that place the focus on practice specifically within a Children's Centre context and through a child's rights lens. Capturing practitioner perspectives of their practice, alongside parents' lived experience of Children's Centres, provides a more holistic approach and richness of data, facilitating a deeper exploration from multiple perspectives. The findings from this research question inform question 4.

4. **What changes might need to happen in order to create a more collaborative, open-listening climate in a multi-professional setting?**

   This question helps fuse together the relationship between the parents and the practitioners, exploring their perspectives and viewing the child through a holistic lens.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (1979;1993;2001;2005) underpins the approach taken in the thesis and helps make the explicit links between '*the early years learning environment, both the home and early years setting*' (Hayes et al., 2017:3). This question reflects their multi-perspective, praxiological and reciprocal approach applied to the study and acknowledges the opportunities for '*'creating shared dialogue and listening spaces and a way of addressing possible challenges to developing open and respectful relationships*'' (Freire, 1970:71). Freire's theoretical contributions were of interest and influence on my study however, I considered Bronfenbrenner' ecological theory as a conceptual tool more suited to research in the context of Children's Centres and supporting young children under 5 years of age and their families.

5. **What strategies might be adopted to improve the listening climate and pedagogical practice across teams in Children's Centres?**

Building on question 4, the final sub-research question 5 seeks to provide space to begin to explore potential strategies to inform practice. The multiple perspectives and voices gathered through the research may offer practitioners an alternative lens through which to reflect in and on practice that is firmly grounded from a child's rights perspective that places the child at the heart of the work in children's centres.

1.6 Overview of Thesis Chapters

I have structured the thesis as:

Chapter 1 - Introduction

In my introduction I set out the rationale for undertaking the research, acknowledging my professional, personal and political journey and how these have influenced and affirmed my approach to the research design and choice of methodology, supported by an overview of the theoretical principles adopted. I set out my research questions, developed from the literature review, and experience of the researcher in the field that make the connections and shows the relevance of the doctoral study.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Lens

In this chapter I present the two theoretical lens I have applied to my research. The first theoretical lens that frames the research, a ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) reflects that while the child is at the centre of the research the theory goes beyond the individual child and acknowledges the existence of the wider factors outside of the home environment that influences the child's development. This system theory helps to contextualise the research within early years, reflecting the importance of examining

relationships and connections to the child. My second theoretical lens is a child's rights lens using the Lundy Model (2007) of child participation that I also adopt and adapt for the data collection across the four data sets discussed in chapter four (section 4.8) as well as means of analysing and interpreting the data as shown in chapter five and six. Framing the research using a child's rights approach provides a link between theory and practice, that acknowledges that a child has rights (UNCRC) (UN,1989) and the Lundy Model (2007) of child participation considers how child rights can be realised in practice. In my research I have adapted the use of the model and have applied it with adults (the parents' and practitioners' participating in the research) and I have considered additional articles that I feel requires consideration in relation to my research.

Chapter 3 – Review of Literature

In chapter three I review the relevant literature through the multiple lens of: child protection and safeguarding; quality provision and practice; child's rights and child well-being. I feel these four lenses reflect the interrelatedness of the articles examined through the Lundy Model (2007) as well as incorporating the additional articles I have included for consideration and that I feel have relevance to my study.

Chapter 4 - Methodology and Methods

This chapter introduces the methodology I have adopted and the methods I applied to my study. I offer a reflective account of my choice of methods and tools that I applied for data collection and analysis. I reflect on the ethics within research, including my researcher positionality when researching with children, parents, and practitioners.

Chapter 5 – Parents' Portraits

In this chapter, I present the profiles of the five parents' stories as portraits having applied the method of portraiture in my research. Each portrait is divided into seven distinct themes: Parent Story; Family Tree; Aspirations; Key Challenges; Services and Support; Feelings of Support and Services and Impact. An artist's interpretation of each individual portrait has been included as a '' *visual reading, using drawing as a visual interpretation of the transcribed meaning'' (Lyons, 2017:126).* I present the organising, coding and analysis of data set that I use to generate the parent portraits. Within this chapter I also present the findings from the data generated using portraiture.

Chapter 6 – Practitioners' Profiles

In this chapter I introduce the profiles of the two study sites taking part in the research and the profiles of the nineteen practitioners who took part in the focus group interviews, across the two study sites, which I present in a series of tables that reflect the team the practitioner

works in. I also present the profiles of the four senior managers, who were holding positions of strategic management and leadership at the time of the study and who participated in semi-structured interviews and these are also reflected in a table. I adopt and adapt the Lundy Model (2007) as a framework and the participation check list (DCYA,2015) to create an interview schedule for the interviews with senior managers and the focus group interviews with the practitioners. I discuss the use of a themed analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2013) to analysis and interpret the findings and present the findings from the data generated in this chapter.

Chapter 7 – Discussion

In this chapter I reflect on the findings having conducted the research and re-visit the overarching research questions and five sub-research questions. I provide a discussion in relation to the findings which leads into the final chapter of my thesis.

Chapter 8 – Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Following the discussion chapter, I draw conclusions from the findings and provide a summary and make my final recommendations to take forward. In this final chapter of my thesis I also present my contribution to new knowledge and consider any future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Lens

2.1 Introduction

In chapter one, I introduced the study by providing the background and rationale that led up to the start of my doctoral journey and the focus of my thesis, including my professional, personal, and political leadership journey. I affirm my approach to the research design and choice of methodology, supported by an overview of the theoretical principles adopted. I set out my research questions, developed from the Literature Review, my positionality as a researcher in the field and make the connections to my doctoral study. In this chapter, I will consider and present the two theoretical frameworks that I applied to my research to help answer the research questions:

1. What are parents' and practitioners' perspectives on child voice within Children's Centres in England? and
2. How might practice be transformed to create a more open listening climate within multi-professional early years settings?

This chapter is divided into two sections with section 2.2 examining the literature relating to the first of my theoretical lenses which frames the research, applying a bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;1998;2001;2005) and section 2.3 where I introduce the concept of applying a child rights approach to the research and specifically adopting the Lundy Model (2007) of child participation in my methodology with adults (Moore, 2020:447-471).

Inspired by the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, Te Whãriki, (Ministry for Education,1996:11; Carr and Lee,2012), my research reflects the '*Whãriki or woven mat*', as an illustration of how my theoretical frameworks are interwoven together. The Te Whãriki curriculum reflects the bicultural of New Zealand and Mãori community which places the child at the core of early childhood practice. The Whãrkil symbolises how the principles, strands and goals are interrelated and essential to each other. The bioecological system theory and child rights principles that I have applied in my research are interwoven throughout the research (Appendix 2).

The Lundy Model of child participation (2007) which I introduce in more detail in section 2.3 of this chapter, provides a rights-based lens to my theoretical framework. Lundy's paper ''Voice'' is not enough is considered to be ''*one of the most adopted academic papers on*

children's rights'' (Büker, 2020:526). Discovering Lundy's Model of child participation gave me the framework I was searching for i.e., to place the child at the centre, when developing an open listening climate. I truly came to grasp its significance as a key contributor to understanding and implementing the UNCRC and specifically conceptualising Article 12 during a summer school in June 2016 at Queen's University Belfast. Lundy developed the claim that:

> *"Article 12 can only be understood fully when it is considered in the light of other relevant UNCRC provisions; in particular: Article 2 (non-discrimination); Article 3 (best interests); Article 5 (right to guidance); Article 13 (right to seek, receive and impart information); and Article 19 (protection from abuse)."*

The summer school, hosted by Professor Lundy, gave me the platform to present my research and gain encouragement and confirmation that it would be an effective model to take forward, firstly as a theoretical framework and secondly, as a tool for data collection and analysis of findings. Lundy's Model as such served as the catalysts for the study design, methodology and data collection I discuss in chapter four. It was during subsequent research events and discussions with Professor Lundy that I began to consider the relevance of a further two articles from the UNCRC that did not appear in the Lundy's Model (2007) and that I subsequently added to my research (Appendix 1). This I believe strengthens the rationale for the study, which I discuss in chapter one, and the context in which the study took place. Article 6 refers to a child's right to life, survival, and development which I have considered in the context of Children's Centres and supporting children and families at the pre-birth stage. When reviewing the literature, the notion of providing early intervention is explored in depth in chapter three   and is a key component of the multi-professional context when supporting children and parents which I explore in this research. It directly links to my rationale when considering giving 'voice' and listening to children to '*secure* [the] *visibility of infants and young children and ensure their voices are heard'* (Lumsden, 2020:109).

Article 18 relates to parental responsibilities and ensuring that parents or legal guardians consider what is in '*the best interests' of a child*' UNCRC (UN,1989:1) and it holds the government to account to create support services for children, giving parents the help they need to raise their children including childcare services and support which they are eligible to access. This article I believe has relevance to my research and to the context in which the study took place. I discuss this in more detail in chapter four (section 4.6.2) when I reflect on my pedagogical decision to not include children as participants in my research.

2.1.1 Literature Viewed Through Multiple Lenses

The focus of the research for this study considers how we can best facilitate child voice in the context of multi-professional early years settings. The study, conducted in two Children's Centres in England, relates to children under 5, parents and practitioners, working across early years and family support, with a focus on current practice at the time the study took place, and how, by creating a more open listening climate across multi-professional teams, practice might be transformed. My rationale for conducting the research is set out in chapter one and has been influenced by my earliest experience of working in a social work context as an early year's practitioner providing family support to children and parents. Reflecting on this experience made me question the practice and whether we truly facilitated child or parent voice in matters that affected them and that it appeared decisions were often made in isolation by those seen as professionals. I can recall the environment that we created which, from an early year's perspective, was in design a traditional pre-school and was supportive of the children's early care and education for babies and children up to 5. In the context of the service, considered from a family support perspective, I can see now that the approach could have been considered more surveillance than supportive, viewed from a family-deficit lens and not a family-strengths perspective. I can also see that, at the time, a range of theories were being applied to family support through a social work model which had to consider the multi-professional facets of a family centre. On reflection, I can see that there was conflict and a disconnection at times when viewing the child from an early years or family support perspective .When reflecting on the earliest developments of the Pen Green Centre, in Corby, Whalley et al., (2013:12) suggest that what they set out to achieve '' *was not an entirely new concept''*, reflecting on examples of service provision that had combined services from health, education and social care perspectives. However, ''*what was new was how* [they] *chose to work with families… ''.* Their service design reflects a systems model that reflects services that are ''*relevant and responsive…working with* [families] *and not imposing things on* [families]. The notions of collaboration and working with families based on working in partnership with parents, and developing trusting relationships were key aspects of the work and resonate with my own study.

Anning and Ball (2008:11) reflect that Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model was ''*the underpinning theoretical model''* for the development of the Sure Start initiative having been heavily influenced from the Head Start Programmes in the US. Ashiabli and O'Neal (2015) suggest that an ecological theory can be applied to research when considering aspects of

childhood and parenting and the wider influences. Their rationale for applying this theory to their research is based on the level of dependency that children have on their parents and therefore ''*contextual and family factors are more likely to have a greater influence on* [a child's] *development of outcomes''* (Ashiabi and O'Neal, 2015:3).

Applying both a ecological theory alongside a child rights-based theory, as my theoretical frameworks, has enabled me to explore parents' and practitioners' perspectives of practice in a Children's Centre context. A key aspect of my research is the connectiveness to parents to facilitate listening to the life experiences of their children, as well as their own experiences as reflected in the Parent Portraits (chapter five). In the following section, I explore the bioecological perspectives of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and consider the relevance to my research.

2.2 Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory

The study was framed within a 'bioecological perspective' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998, 2006), providing a holistic view of the complex lived experiences of children and families focusing on the impact the environment has on an individual's development from the immediate family and parent, the micro system, the interconnectedness of the relationships between the child, family and the early years setting, the mesosystem and significant life events and transition periods which can influence and impact the child's life, as seen within the chronosystem. This section introduces the bioecological perspective in relation to the research and practice.

Integral to this study was listening to the perspectives of both parents and practitioners, in relation to listening to child voice in Children's Centres, ensuring the focus was on the child by framing the research within a child right's perspective (UN,1989; CRAE,2009,2014; Lundy,2007,2014). Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed his ecological model of childhood to describe how, when referring to a child and child development, you cannot do so in isolation or only from the perspective of their immediate environment. The basic premise of his theory refers to the principles of layers of relationships that the child relates to or has contact with throughout their childhood and beyond. Bronfenbrenner initially put forward four layers or systems, i.e The Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and then later went onto develop a fifth - The Chronosystem- as shown in figure 2.1. The fifth layer, the Chronosystem, was developed when Bronfenbrenner acknowledged the factor of 'time' and transitions or significant events within the systems theory which influence or have impact at any given time in a child's life.

Microsystem: This refers to a child's immediate environment, for example, their family, playgroup, neighbourhood, and peer group

Meosystem: This refers to the connections children make between their immediate environments, for example, their home and their playgroup

Exosystem: This refers to the external settings in the child's environment that impact indirectly on their development, for example, their father and mother's workplaces

Macrosystem: This refers to the child's wider cultural context, for example, the economy and changes in government

Chronosystem: The patterns of events and transitions in the child's life

Figure 2.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of individual development (Reproduced from Parenta, 2018)

The significance of his theory in relation to my study is the importance placed on the child being the central focus, as well as the multiple perspectives that are put forward in the systems theory and that are being examined through the methods and research design of my research. It offers a conceptual framework through which to conduct the research acknowledging bi-directional influences on relationships (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci,1994). In his initial phase of his theory, Bronfenbrenner identified that any conflict in either of the layers has an impact on other layers, a viewpoint that I considered worth reflecting on throughout my study and which will be considered in the findings (chapter five and chapter six). He examined the interactions amongst and between the layers in relation to the child and their immediate and wider environments, which he likened to a set of '*Russian Dolls'* illustrating the interconnectivity and interrelatedness between the layers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:3). Placing the theory in a context of time is a significant factor in relation to undertaking the research within an ever-changing political context. Applying an ecological systems model to the research acknowledges that while the child may not have direct contact with the wider layers of the system such as those influenced by policy change at a local and governmental level, these changes will inevitably have an impact or certainly have influence on the child's and parent's immediate life circumstances and environment. It is worth noting here that

there has been some criticism of Bronfenbrenner's image of a 'nested system'. Neal and Neal (2013:722) suggest the concept of a:

> "'networked' model of overlapping arrangement of structures, each directly and indirectly connected to the other by the direct and indirect social indications of their participants".

They put forward the argument that a nested system, such as that often depicted as concentric circles implying each is a sub-section of the other, does not suggest a fluidity between relationships, whereas they believe a 'networked' model reflects a less rigid or static interpretation of the connections and relationships the child has. I would suggest the later critique and developments that Bronfenbrenner made of his own earlier work acknowledged the limitations of the model. His bioecological model reflects that, *"'process is emphasized more than the 'context'"* (Hayes et al., 2017:146), stressing the importance of the need for strong connectivity across the 'layers' as suggested in a 'networking model'.

The Microsystem and the Mesosystem

In the first layer, the 'Microsystem', Bronfenbrenner places the child as the central focus, the microsystem being *"where the earliest child's experiences take place…for the majority of children, the immediate family, parents or carers and siblings"*. (McDowell Clark and Murray, 2013:12). McDowell Clark and Murray (2013) refer to children as experiencing more than one microsystem, as a result of spending a considerable amount of their time in education and daycare, including Children's Centres.

Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) considered the systems and relationships within them as being "bi-directional" with the parents/carers having the most influence in shaping the development of the child and the child *"actively shaping and influencing their environments"*, (Paquette & Ryan,2001:2). The findings of Galindo and Sheldon (2011) would suggest that parents have a pivotal role to play but that their views have not been 'heard' and do not feature extensively in research.

Bronfenbrenner's theory has relevance to my research, placing the child at the centre of our work and illustrates the importance of the practitioner/child relationship, as well as the need for a nurturing and quality environment that the setting provides (Hayes et al., 2017). In the later developments of the theory, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) placed a greater emphasis on the nurturing environment created by the practitioners in the setting and the skills that are required to ensure good quality interactions and practice (Hayes et al., 2017), making the link to the lens of quality provision and practice discussed later in chapter three

(section 3.5). Considering the next layer, the mesosystem, the importance of developing positive relationships with the parents and families of the children is key to be able to fully understand and support the child. I believe applying an ecological lens to my research reflects the Sure Start Children's Centre model of support to children and families, which is the context of this research, and the four lenses of child protection and safeguarding, quality provision and practice, child rights and child wellbeing illustrate key aspects of the work developed by practitioners which can also be viewed through a bioecological system lens.

The Mesosystem refers to the relationships and interactions between the different microsystems which the child experiences, such as those between their peers, the family and the practitioners in the settings. Bronfenbrenner places an emphasis on the importance of these relationships and, as suggested by Penn (2005), these relationships cannot be viewed as one directional when it comes to the lifespan development of the child and that these relationships have a joint impact on the child's development. In relation to this study, the parents play an essential role as a key link between home and setting and listening to their stories and experiences was an essential part of the research (chapter five).

The Exosystem and the Macro system

These layers refer to the wider environment that goes beyond the first two layers and includes the child's wider community and environment and while Bronfenbrenner considers that the child as an individual is not able to shape the experiences within this layer, those aspects that appear here do have a direct impact on the child's experiences and potentially on the development. Examples given here would be those within the community such as employment, education, housing and wider social networks of the child's parents and extended family. These wider social and political domains which have significant influence on a child's life outcomes formed part of the delivery design and core purpose of Children's Centres (Anning's and Ball, 2008; Eisenstadt, 2011).

Relationships in this layer may also include those developed through cultural and religious influences, such as if the child attends church or a mosque. Bronfenbrenner (2004), considers that as the systems are so closely connected, any discourse or tension in one aspect of the system will have an adverse impact on the others. Paquette and Ryan (2001) validate this view, suggesting that any failure in this layer, such as increased isolation of families with less access to support services, has been shown to have a negative and harmful impact on long-term development. The relationships considered to reside within this layer and the others will be explored in more depth through the data collection and analysis phase of the study.

The Macro system within Bronfenbrenner's model of development is one *"influenced mainly by the wider political and ideological beliefs, social values and customs"* (McDowell Clarke and Murray, 2013:13). While the relationships and changes within this layer are moving further away from the lives of the Individual child, the impact that can be experienced from these changes can be significant. An example of this would be changes that take place at a national, international and even a global level, in relation to education and childcare policy, ie a Bill or an Act of Parliament which has a direct impact on how funding and resources are directed or allocated. The research was conducted at a time of significant change for Children's Centres, and the early years and education sector (Stewart et al., 2015:3), creating uncertainty around long-term funding and sustainability for services supporting children and families in England resulting in:

> *"the ringfence that had prevented Sure Start funding (and other centrally directed grants) being used for wider purposes was removed…More than previously, early childhood services found themselves competing for funding within local authorities with services for other age groups"*.

From this position, the thesis has significance in ensuring the needs of children under 5 remain the focus within a turbulent period of reform and begins to address a gap in knowledge and practice. The findings in chapter six and discussion in chapter seven reflect the tensions between the two roles of early years and family support, in the context of working across multi-professional teams and evidence suggests it was often the change in political priorities, at a national and local level, that increased these tensions. The role of early years and family support practitioners, as prescribed by job descriptions, was also identified as a potential area requiring review (chapter seven). I strongly believe that applying the Lundy Model (2007) of child participation with adults, as I introduced briefly earlier in this section, into the research design, alongside an ecological lens, provides a strong right's-based lens which advocates for child agency and affords children their rights in practice. This then gives justification for the recommendations discussed in chapter seven and I will expand more on this point when I present the right's model in section 2.3.

The Chronosystem

This layer of Bronfenbrenner's model refers to the socio-historical periods relating to time and transitions periods in a child's life and development and may include any critical changes that the child experiences. The parent stories illustrated in Chapter four reflect times of turbulent transitions for the children and parents which had an impact on the children's development

and parent-child relationship. The research set out to listen to the lived experience of parents, alongside the practitioner's voice in a Children's Centre context. The relevance of this layer, within Bronfenbrenner's theory and the study, will be reflected upon through the analysis of the findings (chapters five and six).

Bronfenbrenner's biological theory frames my research by providing a visual perspective of a child-centered and family-oriented approach to Early Intervention. My study captured the perspectives of parents and practitioners, reflecting the wider influences surrounding the child and acknowledging the importance of and the impact that these influences have on a child's life. The multi-professional aspect and the importance of bi-directional relationships, identified by Bronfenbrenner, were key features in my study, as I captured the perspectives of early years and family support practitioners within a Children's Centre context.

2.2.1 The Process-Person-Context - Time Model (PPCT)

The later evolutions of the bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006:996), the Process-Person, Context-Time model (PPCT), placed a greater emphasis on the "*proximal processes*" reflected in this study as the parent and child relationships with the practitioners in the Children's Centre over time. The importance was placed on the need for positive relationships and interactions in a child's life as they argued that *"to be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods pf time "*(Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006:797). While my research was not an ethnographic study conducted over time, I would suggest that the issue of time in relation to my study can be related to the evolution and changes to the core purpose for Children's Centres which took place during the research.

This theory informed the research as illustrated by the Parent Stories in chapter five, as they provide an insight into the lived experiences of the parents and children, before and after their encounters with the Children's Centre. The study set out to listen to the perspectives of the parents and practitioners in order to gain a greater understanding of these encounters. It is important to explore the practice, the environment and the relationships, acknowledging the wider influences that impact on and influence the child's experience, a view supported by Paquette and Ryan (2001) and Penn (2005) who emphasise the importance of quality in the context of the environment and the child's experience of the setting.

2.2.2 Ecological Systems Theory: A Short Summary

In considering the best theoretical frameworks to apply to my research, as I discuss in the section above, I have chosen to adopt an ecological systems lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as one of the frameworks and, in doing so, I believe I reflect a theoretical approach which underlines the Sure Start vision of applying a holistic lens when considering early intervention to children and families most in need of support. As reflected in the ecological model, Sure Start- later Children's Centres (2006)- were established in the heart of communities acknowledging that while the child is the central focus of service design, Bronfenbrenner ''*recognised that good practice in understanding child development, including early educational practice, required a deep understanding of the developing child in context*'' (Hayes et al., 2017:7). That is to say the child cannot be viewed in isolation and settings need to take into consideration the surrounding layers influencing a child's life experiences.

I further consider that an ecological lens is appropriate for my research, as it takes account of the importance of relationships, a pivotal aspect of my research which I evidence across the data generated through the fieldwork phase of my study (chapter five and six). In respect of early years, extensive research by others has evidenced the significance of developing positive relationships with children in the settings (Elfer et al., 2003; Sylva et al., 2003; Field, 2010; Page, 2016) and Bronfenbrenner's later iterations of the ecological systems theory draws more extensively on the concept of attachment and the need for nurturing relationships, which research by others suggests are important factors when supporting young children. Finally, in considering the use of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and relevance to my study, I considered the work of others in the field who have effectively applied the model to their research and in a similar context to my study, such as that undertaken by Jensen and Brandi (2018). Their research considered how professionals can be enabled, through programmes of professional development, to change practice to meet the needs of children impacted by social inequalities. In this research, Jensen and Brandi (2018:52) took inspiration from Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) to emphasise the importance of considering the child in context and the need to ''*view the child as an inseparable part of a wider system…*[and]…*accordingly, the child's context (i.e family, daycare, school and neighbourhood) is critical for understanding the child's learning and development''.* One key aspect of the findings from their research was the importance of understanding theory as the foundation for developing an understanding of child development in order to inform and improve practice. Jensen and Brandi (2018:59) consider that their research ''*provides concrete narrations on exactly how theory was used in co-constructing new pedegogies and ECEC*

practices''. I can draw on many similarities within my own study as I am researching with parents and practitioners in the context of early years settings, to explore parents' perspectives on child voice and considering the perspectives that practitioners have of their current practice (at the start of the study) and how they facilitate child voice in the setting. My research considers how practice can be transformed by creating an open listening climate by reflecting on the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners.

I drew inspiration from the systematic review undertaken by Eriksson et al., (2018) of research that had applied Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory in studies on public health to inform policy and practice. While this systematic review does not 'drill down' into the specific findings from the individual research which used the framework, their findings do reflect that an ecological systems theory can be effectively applied to research that involves the need to *''simultaneously focus on intrapersonal and environmental factors and the dynamic interplay between these…''* (Eriksson et al., 2018:429). They concluded *''that studies using the early concepts of Bronfenbrenner's theory, by considering interactions with and between different ecological systems, can come up with valuable results for guiding public health interventions''.* I suggest that while there are limitations to how their findings assimilate with my research, it does share an important premise that an ecological systems model can be effectively applied when considering the complexities of developing and delivering early intervention, which can be assimilated to those in a public health arena. Children's Centres were established to provide holistic support services which covered the multi-disciplinary aspects such as health, early years and education, family support and social care, and anti-poverty interventions. Along similar lines, my research is conducted in a multi-professional early years context and explores the complexities of the interactions between the practitioners working in the teams and the children and parents accessing the support. Finally, I have been encouraged by the research conducted by Dunlop (2020a, 2020b, 2021), whose research shows examples of the use of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theories to inform the framing of her study designs when considering the impact of transitions on children's wellbeing and educational attainments. Dunlop (2021) refers to a *''theoretical framework, based on a hybridised socio-bio-ecological model''* which recognises the ecological approach whilst also expanding the theory to acknowledge the complexities of relationships that surround each individual child in our settings, as well as then considering how the wider influences beyond the setting impact on children's emotional wellbeing. I am of the opinion that my study can be assimilated directly to the research conducted by Dunlop (2021) and could be considered in any future research that I have recommended from my PhD thesis (chapter seven, section 7.7). Also, in chapter

seven (section 7.1.2, figure 7.1) I present my conceptualisation that provides a visual representation of the application of Bronfenbrenner's theory in my research.

2.3 A Child's Rights Lens

Figure 2.2 (The Year of Childhood 2021 – Cathy McCulloch**,** co-founder and co-director of Children's Parliament)

It is not my intention, in this section, to document a historical timeline of the development and final ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (referred to from now on as the UNCRC, but to highlight, from the literature, the significance of the UNCRC, and the impact on driving the child rights movement. Described by Casas (1997:285) as a redefining period when children were being accepted, Casas considered that ''*The Convention offers a new framework: it is the opportunity to build up new psychosocial context (attitudinal, representational) for children''. The UN*CRC provided "*a new image of what children are*" while acknowledging that this was only the beginning and that the challenge would be to ensure "*the promises of the Convention become a reality for all children through effective implementation*". Whilst many would consider there is still a long way to go before the UNCRC can be considered to have been fully implemented for the benefit of all children and the fact that it may never become the reality discussed by Casa (1997), figure 2.2 is an example of significant progress. Figure 2.2 is a reflection of the UNCRC, developed by the Children's Parliament in Scotland, and symbolises that: ''*In March 2021, The Scottish Parliament is expected to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law''* (McCulloch, 2020)

There is overwhelming evidence corroborating the view that the UNCRC provides an International framework from which to acknowledge children as holding rights or as being rights-bearers (UNICEF), acknowledging that the implementation and interpretation of the convention differs across the world. Ben-Arieh (2005:3) considers that:

> ''*The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, through its global ratification and its reporting and monitoring mechanism, has also played a major role in increasing interest in this field''.*

Daiute (2008:701) acknowledged the significance of the UNCRC as being "a *major breakthrough, in defining children as fully human…"* however raising the need ''*to make socio-political aspects of child development more explicit, especially in relation to children's rights-based understandings and opportunities for children's self-determination''. (Daiute, 2008:703)* Harcourt and Hägglund (2013:286) support the views put forward by both Ben-Arieh and Daiute. They suggest that while the UNCRC did *"signify international recognition of human rights…"* in relation to research and child rights, too much attention has been given to the "*standards for evaluation and assessment*" and not enough to interpreting and applying children's rights beyond the UNCRC and associated articles. Their views are grounded on the assumption that whichever provision a child attends, it is the role of that provision to ensure "*that the child is met with respect as a human being with rights and is given opportunities to learn about rights and to practice them".*

Harcourt and Hägglund (2013:286) suggest the need for "*a bottom-up perspective"*, which was first considered by Katz (1992), the basic premise being that when taking into consideration child rights in practice, the child's views and perspectives of their lived experience in the setting are listened to and taken into account (UNCRC) (UN,1989:1).

The Lundy Model (2007) of child participation, applied in my research, upholds the UNCRC and, more specifically Articles 12 and 13, which ensures that children have the right to participate and to be heard and that their voice is taken into consideration and "*given due weight"* (UNCRC) (UN, 1989:1). Lundy (2007:931) argues that this '*not an option which is the gift of adults, but a legal imperative which is the right of the child.*"

Applying a child rights approach, alongside an ecological systems model of Bronfenbrenner (1979) to my research, provided assurance that the child remained the focus of my research while acknowledging the perspectives of the parents and practitioners, who are significant adults in the child's life. The research took into consideration Article 5 which recognises the "*rights and responsibilities of the parents and carers, in providing guidance to their children…based on the child's evolving capacities"* and Article 18 which acknowledges the right

of the parent to bring up their child and to "*always consider what is best for the child*" (UNCRC, 1989:1). I will expand on this in my methodology chapter (chapter four) and in the findings and analysis chapters (chapters five and six). I also review the literature, through a child rights lens, as one of the four lenses I have applied in my literature review in chapter three (section 3.4).

2.3.1 The categorisation of the UNCRC Articles – A question of 3 P's

The articles within the UNCRC are often categorised under the following headings: Provision Rights, Protection Rights and Participation Rights and the vocabulary of "*categorisation is so widespread and accepted, the 'rights categories' can easily be referred to as the '3 P's"* (Quennerstedt, 2010:619).

The underlining argument against applying the 3 P's model, put forward by Quennerstedt, is that placing the articles within the 3 P's has potentially impeded the discussions and further research of the child rights. She suggests that applying this 3 P's Model may limit the focus of those working in the field to a more narrowed view of child rights which then *"frames research on children's rights in a way that directs the spotlight to certain questions and leaves others in the shadows"* (Quennerstedt, 2010:619).

Quennerstedt develops the claim that the vocabulary of Provision, Protection and Participation "*largely lack theoretical foundation as rights terms.".* Quennerstedt (2010:620) goes on to suggest that a child rights' discourse should be in line with that of Human Rights for adults which refer to the "*civil, political and social rights*".

The literature relating to the use of the 3 P's model appears to show no consensus of the use, or not, of the categorisation of the articles within the UNCRC, under Provision, Protection and Participation.

Hammarberg (1990:99-100) suggests *"grouping the articles according to the 3 P's, as a way of providing an easy understanding of the Convention…a pedagogical tool"*. A similar view shared by Verhellen (2001), who suggests the use of the 3 P's model as a *"device for closer examinations of the Convention, or as the very definition of children's rights"* (cited in Quennerstedt, 2010:624).

Quennerstedt (2010:623) raises the question of why such a 'tool' is required at all to assist with understanding of the convention and suggests that Lansdown's (1994) use of the 3 P's model has *"a more extensive claim"* than that of Hammarberg, in that Lansdown *"couches them in the established human rights-vocabulary and presents them as 'proper' categories"*

Cole-Albäck (2020:129) argues that:

"*Despite reservations by some academics (Quennerstedt, 2010) as to the theoretical basis for classifying rights this way, I find the P's classification useful when working with educators as this is terminology educators are familiar with. This emerged when working with teams in South East England. It is as such, a pedagogical decision to use the 3 P's classification*".

I would concur with the view shared by Cole-Albäck, which I discuss in chapter four (section, 4.10), that practitioners participating in my study found the language used from a rights' perspective accessible and transferable into their everyday practice. When considering pedagogical approaches which are more directly associated directly within an early years context, such as the use of RAMPS (Lancaster, 2006), Mosaic Approach (Clarke and Moss, 2001) or Learning Stories (Carr and Lee, 2012), these appeared to place limitations on family support practitioners in how these pedagogical approaches to listening to children related to their work with parents. The categorisation of Provision, Protection and Participation rights, however, seemed to resonate with some, if not all, of the remit of both early years and family support when it came to delivery of support services to children and parents.

In celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the adoption of UNCRC (UN,1989), Routledge published the International Handbook of Young Children's Rights in November 2020, reflecting global perspectives on young children's rights (0-8 years). Murray, Swadener and Smith, (Ed, 2020: xxiii) acknowledge the UNCRC "*provides a radical and transformative lens through which to view childhood…establishes children as rights-bearers…*" and a "*…driving force for change…*". The chapters, presented under the 3 P's classification of children's rights, reflect "*…empirical research evidence, praxis and expertise across multiple disciplines…*". In their Introduction in the handbook, Murray, Swadener and Smith (2020:3-4) suggest there is a need to *"…look a fresh at the UNCRC and to examine its fitness for purpose…"* in light of findings from decades of research revealing the benefits *"…of investment in young children's early experiences…"*. Presenting the research, using the 3 P's classifications of Children's Rights, ie Protection, Provision and Participation, seems to support the view put forward by Cole-Albäck (2020). The 3 P's model helps to view child rights through a pedagogical lens, and those authors who have contributed to the handbook are advocates of children's rights. However, as much of their research shows:

 "*…huge challenges remain…far too little attention has been afforded to the rights of children…*" and the handbook, "*… provides a vital antidote to the many inadequacies in addressing the rights of young children*" (2020: xxiv-xxv). The collective voice of the contributors highlights the need to continue to examine how policy is translated and

implemented into practice, ensuring that our very young children are afforded agency in their own lives.

The earliest findings from my own study, featured in Chapter 36 of the handbook (Moore, 2020: 447-459), are a unique contribution to a child rights' approach to research, using the Lundy Model (2007) of child participation with adults, therefore "…*stimulating professional dialogue and advancing our understanding of rights-based pedagogy, in order to influence both policy and practice." (Moore, 2020: 447).* My study sets out to understand parents' and practitioners' perspectives on how a listening climate in early years settings can facilitate child voice. I therefore feel adopting a rights-based approach as my second theoretical framework has relevance and will contribute to knowledge in the field.

2.3.2 Rights Based Pedagogy

Lundy's Model (2007) not only provides my second theoretical framework, but also informs both the methods of generating data and data analysis across all the data sets when carrying out the research with both parents and practitioners, emphasising a rights-based approach to the research.

Lundy developed the Model in response to findings from a large- scale research project, conducted with school-aged children on behalf of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. A common theme repeated throughout the findings in this study was that children felt their views were not considered or taken seriously, with several examples revealing a direct violation of Article 12 (UNCRC) (UN, 1989). Lundy (2007:927) argues that Article 12 is '*a right which is referred to often by policy makers and academics, but which is rarely cited in its entirety'* causing it to be misinterpreted or loosely applied and therefore '*have the potential to diminish its impact'.*

The full text of Article 12 is shown in Figure 2.3 below.

> 1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
>
> 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Figure 2.3 – The full text of Article 12, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989:5)

In her belief that Article 12 cannot be considered in isolation to the other articles within the convention if they are to be fully understood, interpreted and executed to their full meaning, Lundy (2007:932) proposed '*that the successful implementation of Article 12*' requires consideration of the implications of four separate factors, i.e. '**Space, Voice, Audience and Influence**'. This was presented as:

- Space: Children must be given the opportunity to express a view
- Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their views
- Audience: The view must be listened to
- Influence: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate

In considering these four elements, Lundy represented a way of conceptualising Article 12 that encapsulated additional articles within the convention which she considered required equal consideration, shown in figure 2.5 below.

Figure 2.4: Conceptualising Article 12 adapted from (Lundy, 2007: 932)

This representation of the interrelatedness of the articles lends support to my decision to review the literature (chapter three) for my study through the multiple lenses of child protection and safeguarding, quality provision and practice, child wellbeing and child rights, as I consider these areas of focus have resonance with Lundy's views on which articles in the UNCRC require specific attention when considering Article 12, and reflect similarities to the four lenses I used to review the body of literature. As I discuss in my introduction to this chapter (section 2.1), I considered a further two articles from the UNCRC which I felt needed to be represented in the context of my research, i.e. Article 6 and Article 18 and I provide more detail of my decision in chapter four (section 4.6). This decision also gave further justification of having not included children as participants in the research (section 4.6.2).

2.3.3 A Rights-based Lens: A Short Summary

I believe that as a core principle of listening to child voice and applying a rights-based lenses affords children their basic right of being given voice and being heard and I have adapted the Lundy Model (2007) of child participation and applied it with adults, as my second theoretical framework. In considering Article 12 of the UNCRC (UN,1989), Lundy (2007:933) sets out the four key concepts of; space, voice, audience and influence which she considers:

> ''conceptualises article 12… to focus decision makers on four elements of the
> provision… The model reflects the fact that these elements are interrelated. In

particular, there is a significant degree of overlap between: (a) space and voice,

and (b) audience and influence''.

As my research reflects, this provides a theoretical and practical framework for practitioners to consider how they may transform practice to facilitate child voice. In the article, '*Voice is not enough',* Lundy propounds the view that Article 12 cannot be fully understood without giving consideration to other supporting articles from within the UNCRC (section 2.3.2, figure 2.4). In chapter three, I set out my review of literature which I considered had significance to my study, as viewed through the multiple lenses of child protection and safeguarding, quality provision and practice, child rights and child wellbeing, which I feel reflect the articles under consideration in the model. In addition, I have included a further two articles which I feel has relevance to my research and which I have included in my theoretical framework (Appendix 2).

The literature abounds with examples of applying the Lundy Model (2007) when undertaking participation research with children at a national and international level. However, these examples reflect research extensively with over 5s and up to 18-year-olds (or 24 with SEND). Applying the Lundy Model with under 5s or with adults, as is the case with my study, is a unique contribution to knowledge. In the context of social work, Mc Cafferty (2017:327) suggests that ''*implementing article 12 has proven to problematic due to theoretical and ethical challenges within social work…*''. He argues that ''*it is possible to overcome these obstacles using the* Lundy *Model as a real-world tool that offers practical solutions''.* Along similar lines, in my research I have shown how the Lundy Model (2007) can provide both a theoretical and practical framework to assist practitioners in facilitating child voice and, as my findings show, can also provide a method of listening to the stories of parents' lived experiences which I present using portraiture (chapter five). Lansdown (2018:8) acknowledged the use of the Lundy Model (2007) as ''*contributing to effective and meaningful participation''* when considering how to include the voice of adolescents in decision-making. Lansdown (2018:13) also reflects on a model of '' *social ecology of participation''* acknowledging that ''*adolescents' lives are impacted, both directly and indirectly, by factors…from the family, and peers, to school and the local community''.* This research has resonance with my study, as it demonstrates the application of both an ecological systems and rights-based theory to research.

When considering listening to children from a child rights' discourse Clark et al., (2005:177) put forward the view that when considering the notion of listening to children ''*rights have a place, an important one, in improving the lives of children and reconstructing their position in*

society…from that of passive dependents to that of active subjects and citizens'' . However, they also put forward the claim that we need to be open to other approaches to listening and to consider what can be described as *''ethical encounters''* (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:178) supporting what Rinaldi (2008) refers to as ''a *pedagogy of listening'',* with both perspectives placing value on relationships and *''cultures of listening''*. I am of the opinion that the Lundy Model provides a theoretical and practical framework, built on child rights, which also supports practitioners to begin the dialogues that include concepts of listening and which reflect the importance of developing relationships, which is borne out in my findings in chapters five and six. I consider that using a rights-based approach and specifically adopting the Lundy Model to support practitioners, creates an open listening climate in early years settings and lends support to the views put forward by others (Rinaldi, 2008) that *''listening to children…presupposes adults being responsible for the construction of the culture of listening''* Clark et al., (2005:182). I will return to these discussions in the next chapter, chapter three (section 3.1), where I consider the definitions of key aspects of my research, such as what is understood by 'child voice' and a 'listening climate' and where I present a review of the prominent literature before going on to review the literature through multiple lenses.

Chapter 3: Review of Literature

3.1 Introduction

Following on from chapter two, where I introduce the two theoretical frameworks which I applied to this research, in this chapter I will undertake a critical review of the literature that I have considered relevant to the focus of my study. I will discuss the justification for choosing to review the literature through multiple lenses and why I considered the four lenses of child protection and safeguarding, quality provision and practice, child rights and child wellbeing as key areas to focus on. I will also reflect on the key concepts, as represented in the working title of my thesis, to provide an understanding of these concepts and to take forward the dialogue into the fieldwork phase of the study.

There are three key elements to consider when developing frameworks for early years provision, namely policy, process, and procedure which, although often used interchangeably, are distinctly different.

Policy informs and influences direction and direct action, as these are forms of guidance or law, whereas process denotes the requirement at a high level of functionality to then implement policy. Procedures therefore follow as instruction to perform or achieve the desired outcomes of policy and process.

Policy is developed within a political and strategic arena arguably to ensure, in the case of my study, that high quality early years provision is developed and delivered which supports children's development. I state 'arguably', as this is a contested point which I do discuss in chapter one (section 1.2.2), and my findings in chapter six would suggest there are tensions between policy, interpretation (process) and delivery of services (procedure). In my final chapter (chapter seven), I put forward a recommendation for a review of the roles and responsibilities of multi-professional teams, as defined by the current job descriptions and job titles, as the findings suggest the tensions between the roles at times challenged and inhibited child voice being heard.

Empirical research is often conducted after implementation of policy to see the impact, both negative and positive, on and in practice. I therefore felt it was of relevance in my literature review to include a review on policies that were implemented during the period of the study (2012- 2021) in relation to early years, as well as empirical research which I viewed through multiple lenses.

3.2 A Reflection on Child Voice viewed through Multiple Lenses

The focus of the research for this study is to explore parents' perspectives on child voice in the context of multi-professional early years settings and also practitioners' perspectives in relation to facilitating child voice in everyday practice. Therefore, key areas of focus are children under 5, parents and practitioners in Children's Centres in England focusing on current practice and how, by creating a more open listening climate, practice might be transformed to facilitate child voice. The Core Purpose of Children's Centres (2013) set out the parameters and key aspects of the service, and I therefore deemed the review of the literature required consideration from multiple angles or through multiple lenses. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) underpins the Sure Start Children's Centre design of early intervention, supporting all aspects of a child's development and acknowledging the importance of '' *the recognition that environmental events and conditions outside any immediate setting containing the person can have a profound influence on behaviour and development within that setting* '' (1979:18). I considered the multiple lenses of: child protection and safeguarding; quality of provision and practice, child rights and child wellbeing as being significant aspects of a child's life experiences and therefore areas of relevance to reflect on how child voice has been facilitated in practice, taking into consideration these four key areas of practice.

Reflecting on my title for the thesis and focus, as stated above, and in preparing relevant literature for the review, I became more aware of this contested space and of dialogues which surround the notion of listening to children and the use of child voice to define this in practice. I considered the key concepts that lay the foundation for this study and the notion of creating a listening climate in our settings and what defines this in the context of early years practice. In the following section, I will present a brief summary of the discussions from this first phase of my literature review to introduce the views of others in the field and to add a layer of understanding and reflection to take forward dialogue into the field work phase of my research. I will then present the review of literature in section 3.3, as examined through multiple lenses.

3.2.1 The Literature Review Process

As I introduced in chapter one (section 1.4.1), I took into consideration the process put forward by Pascal and Bertram (2015a) when conducting a review of the literature which recommends reviewing the literature that evidences 'best practice' which is defined, for example, as those texts which have been peer-reviewed, such as in journal articles, and my

literature review also considers a review of policy in relation to the research focus which may not therefore meet the criteria of this definition. I made the decision to include policy documents, which I considered relevant, acknowledging the perspective of an ecological model and those outer layers which may not have direct impact on the child but are likely to impact on policy and practice (Paquette and Ryan, 2001; McDowell Clark and Murray 2013; Murray, 2019).

I did not include date parameters for this phase, as the purpose of this initial search was to gain an understanding of the wider discourse of the key concepts. I choose to revisit key texts that I had identified when studying for my master's degree, to build upon and identify more recent research, and to bring a focus to the research topic, as well as reviewing recommended literature from experts and my academic peers in the field.

3.2.2 The Image of a Child

In order to provide a foundation on which to begin to examine what our understanding of 'a child' and concept of 'childhood' is in modern society I have looked at this from a historical context. The intention is not to examine this in-depth or to elaborate from a historical position but to attempt to understand and examine these theoretical perspectives and how they may have influenced the image of a child that we have today. Literature reflects the supporting premise of perspectives on childhood over the last two hundred years as "*the process of category construction and definition must to some extent be dependent upon the society from which they emerge*" cited in (James and Prout 2015:35). The argument that "*childhood is socially and historically constructed*" was put forward by Aries (1962). Aries noted that "*children were depicted as little adults and not as a distinctive group''.* In modern Western society, the concept of childhood is seen within a developmental model, that is to say childhood is classed as a "*stage on the road to adulthood*" Archard (1993:37). *This* concept of childhood raises issues around power and the positioning of a child and reflects a deficit model of the image of children in the view of Rinaldi (2008). Qvortrup (1997) argued that ''*in order to represent children's interests and needs, it is increasingly necessary to give visibility to children as separate identities''* (Mitchell, 2010:328). Dahlberg, et al., (1999:50) add to this debate by suggesting the image of a child is one of ''*a 'rich' child engaging actively with the world…with citizen's rights''.* This later image put forward of a child as a 'rights holder' (Lundy et al., 2011; Long, 2020) and the idea of making children visible within our practice (Qvortrup, 2010; Ferguson, 2014; Lumsden,2020) has resonance with my research and is an image which I feel is not only portrayed throughout my study but also has prominence as I have applied a

rights-based lens (Lundy, 2007) to frame my research. Leading authors in the field advocating for child rights provide a unanimous voice for ensuring accountability of both the state and those working with children to afford children their rights and Mayall (2000:243) suggests; ''*children lack a voice and have a right to be heard…It is through working towards a better understanding of the social condition of childhood that we can provide a firm basis for working towards the implementation of their rights''*.

This research, and that of other key researchers, abounds with examples of raising awareness of the UNCRC and what this means in practice for children in relation to developing policy and implementing rights into everyday practice in settings (Mayall,2000; Lundy, 2007; Lundy and McEvoy, 2008; Lansdown, 2011; Tisdall, 2015, Cole-Albäck, 2020). Cole-Albäck's (2020:235) recent transnational study focused on children's rights in early childhood, with a specific focus on children under three in early childhood settings and the findings were interesting. It appears in practice that ''*although there was knowledge about the UNCRC there was no explicit systemwide approach and scarce direct reference to the UNCRC* [in settings observed]''. Cole-Albäck (2020:237) propounds the view that '' …*we need to reconceptualise* children's rights…*a more practice based or pedagogical engagement with the UNCRC* [is required]''. Of particular interest in the findings which resonate with my research is the question of the level of understanding parents had of children's rights. Whilst acknowledging that the sample of parents' views collected was small, the research shows that parents' '' *rely on health clinics and health visitors as their first point of contact for information about anything concerning their* babies''. Parents expressed a recognition that children will have multi-disciplinary support from education, health, family support and possibly social workers with one parent suggesting ''*staff in these services, more so than educators, should have knowledge about children's rights and the UNCRC''*. This concept of a multi-disciplinary approach to working with and supporting children through a right- informed lens is very much in line with my own and one that is borne out in my research. The literature, which has been reviewed through the multiple lenses and which I present in this chapter, provides ample support for the need to ensure child voice is facilitated in practice with much of the literature advocating for and evidencing the need for child- rights' informed practice.

3.2.3 An Understanding of Child Voice and a Listening Climate

Murray (2019:3) argues that ''*in order to engage authentically with children's voices, we must define what we mean by the term 'children's voices'…''*. In their development of the Mosaic Approach as a way of listening to young children, Clark and Moss (2003:2) set out

to ''*find practical ways to contribute to the development of services that are responsive to the 'voice of the child' and which recognise young children's competencies''* and this renowned research and listening approach has been adopted both nationally and internationally, as a methodology for listening to children's perspectives, of their lived experience and to inform practice. Described as a multifaceted approach (Clark, 2001:30-31) as it ''*brings together different perspectives* [child, parent and practitioner/researcher]'', the theoretical principles and methodologies are of interest to my own research as the Mosaic approach portrays the image of a child not as '' *passive object but as a social actor''* (UN,1989), and it is the multi-method, participatory and reflexive principles of the approach, which has resonance with my research. I have not included children as participants in my study (as documented in sections 1.1 and 4.6.2); however, by applying praxeological and participatory methodologies to my research, I have considered parents' perspectives on child voice and practitioners' perspectives of their practice, in relation to facilitating child voice in multi-professional early years settings. My research explores the concepts of creating an open listening climate which facilitates child voice which may lead to the transformation of practice. Clark et al., (2005:22) suggest that ''*very early in life, children, demonstrate that they have a voice, but above all that they know how to listen, and they want to be listened to''* and Warming (2005:53) suggests that there is a distinction to be made between ''*listening as a tool and listening as constituting a basic ethos of giving voice…Giving voice* [she suggests] *involves listening, whereas listening does not necessarily involve giving voice''.* Along similar lines, Murray (2019) argues for '' a *definition of children's voices that recognises pluralism in children's perspectives…*[putting] *the onus not only on hearing but attending to children's feelings, beliefs, thoughts, wishes, preferences and attitudes''.* It appears from research and practice discussed in my research (chapter six) that the notion of giving voice to children and listening to children is widely used and there is an understanding ''*that those who listen actively to children's voices come to know and understand the children's needs and interests…enabling adults to respond positively to children's needs and interests, if they chose to do so''* (Murray, 2019:1). It appears from research and from the findings of my study (chapter six and chapter seven), that what is less evident is how this can be effectively achieved in a multi-professional early year setting context, such as Children's Centres.

3.2.4 Concepts of an Open Listening Climate

My research considers parents' and practitioners' perspectives on how an open listening climate in early years settings can facilitate child voice and the review of the literature helped guide the research questions and sub-research questions. The concept of what is understood by an open listening climate in practice was explored with the senior managers and practitioners (chapter six, section 6.3). In the last twenty years, research has provided ample support which advocates and suggests that listening to children is synonymous with ethical practice (Clark and Moss,2003; Clark et al., 2005; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Rinadi, 2008), as well as an affordance of children's rights (Lundy, 2007; Lundy and McEvoy, 2008; Lansdown, 2011). Alongside the concept of ethical practice Bath (2013:362) argues; ''*that conceptualisations of listening are best understood if they are founded on an ethics of care, which brings adults and children together in democratic practices and reconnects ideas of care and education*''.

I would suggest that my research and the approach of my study can be assimilated with these principles when considering what defines a listening climate in multi-disciplinary early years settings.

When considering what defines a listening climate, I reflect on the importance placed on the environments and the 'space' created by the infant-toddler and pre-schools of Reggio Emilia and the 'cultures' or climates of listening to children as defined as a pedagogy of listening (Rinaldi, 1993). Reflecting on my own experience of Reggio, during a study week in April 2012, which inspired me to embark on my PhD journey (Chapter one, section 1.2), I have returned to my professional reflective journal to consider the concept of a listening climate that I observed and felt during my visit. In one of my earliest entries, I documented the three key words that were mirrored across the four settings that I visited which were '' Rispetto - Respect (for), Ascolto - (to) Listen and Tempo - Time'' (Moore, A. (16.04.2012) Professional Reflective Journal).

These three principles were represented in many different ways but of significance to me was the spaces created for listening to the children, families and pedagogues (practitioners) at the centres and beyond. What I mean by 'beyond the centres', and as I recorded in my observations at the time:

'' Children are visible…The 'school' is a mirror of the city and the children are agents of the city before they are born'' (Moore, A. (16.04.2021) Professional Reflective Journal).

The image of a child as a citizen from the very beginning (pre-birth) was a strong concept that I believe supports the principle of listening to child voice and one that resonates with the work of Children's Centres and early intervention approaches to supporting children and parents. I was not aware of the Lundy Model (2007) on my first encounter with Reggio. However, in my more recent visit (August 2017), during an EECERA Conference, I was able to view the experience through a different lens. The rights-based lens that Lundy provides, and that I have adopted and adapted in my study, reflects the four key concepts of Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence which I believe can be assimilated with the Reggio principles and the significance of the space and time to listen should not be underestimated when creating a climate for listening to children, parents and to each other as practitioners. Of further significance, is what constitutes or defines 'child voice', as discussed in the section above. We are familiar with the idea that children have a hundred languages and more (Malaguzzi, 1998) and this acknowledges the need to consider ''*the many features… multi modalities of child voice…not all children are oral especially the young children*'' (Murray, 2019:2). The notions of a pedagogy of listening (Rinaldi, 1993) and creating a listening climate that relates to having an ethical ethos (Clark et al., 2005) in our settings, alongside considering listening as an ethics of care, (Fielding and Moss 2011) are principles I took forward into my study.

The extensive research of Formosinho and Oliveria-Formosinho (2008, 2012) and of collaborators from the Aga Khan Foundation has made significant contribution to the understanding of a culture or climate of listening in early childhood practice. Built on a firm foundation of democracy, the research reflects the concept of ''*Pedagogy-in-Participation*'' (Formosinho and Oliveria-Formosinho, 2008) and the '*'creation of [our early years settings] as democratic spaces*'' (2016:29) that promote ethical practices and respect of children's rights. Of interest is that the research makes the direct connection to pedagogy and children's and parents' wellbeing, inspired by Laevers (2005), which is one of the four lenses I have chosen to reflect on in my study in relation to considering child voice. The notion of co-creating a listening climate that is welcoming and respectful of children, families, and educators [practitioners] resonates with my own research and theoretical approaches which I adopt. The researchers acknowledge their work has been inspired by Malaguzzi's (1998) view of a hundred languages and very much in line with the research of Pascal and Bertram (2016:74) whose praxeological approaches in research advocates for:

> ''*listen*ing *to and observing young children and parents as an integral part of understanding what they are feeling and experiencing, and what it is they need from their early education experience*''.

Of particular interest to my study is the need to develop a strong connection between the home environment and the early years setting as a means of '' *listening with and to parents and children''* (Pascal and Bertram, 2016:77-79). Of significance to my research is the importance they place on practitioners being adaptable and flexible in their approach to engaging with parents and children, and the importance of the initial contact with the ''*key person or family worker* [possible at] *the first home visit prior to the child attending the setting* [centre]''. Their research reflects a rights' approach to working with children and parents and '' *acknowledges* [children's' right] *to be listened to and for their views and experiences to be taken seriously''.* The importance of creating the time and space for listening is again reflected in their research and of equal importance is for practitioners to develop a theoretical and practical understanding of listening to children and parents. All of these principles are acknowledged in the range of approaches, methods and 'tools' they have developed to support practitioners in practice (Pascal et al., 1994; Pascal and Bertram, 1995; Pascal and Bertam, 2006a, 2006b).

Finally, I have been inspired by more recent research conducted by Lyndon et al., (2019:361) whose early findings has a focus on ''* how can listening practices be improved in early years settings through pedagogic mediation?''.* Having a strong foundation in the work of Formosinho and Oliveria-Formosinho (2008) mentioned above, Lyndon et al., (2019) explore the role of pedagogical mediation as a participatory methodology for developing democratic listening practices in early years settings.

It is the concept of the four elements i.e. openness, listening, suspending, and encountering (Sousa and Formosinho 2014) that I have found of interest and that I find have similarities with my own research. One of the things which resonates with my study is the importance placed on practitioners having the opportunities to reflect on and in practice, as modelled by the pedagogical mediator, engaging in dialogue relating to their practice and listening to child voice which leads to transformation of practice. The importance of listening to children is already well founded in research (Clark and Moss, 2001; Clark et al., 2005) as well as acknowledging children have a right to have a voice and for that voice to be heard (UN, 1989; Lundy, 2007; Lundy and McEvoy, 2012) whilst also acknowledging that listening to child voice requires multi-modal approaches (Rinadi, 1999; Magaguzzi, 1998; Clark et al., 2005; Murray, 2019), as previously noted. Of significance in the research conducted by Lyndon et al., (2019:362) as part of the suspending element of the approach, is the need to '' *give the practitioners the opportunity to begin to develop thinking … this section* [suspending] *can take time and practitioners are not pressured to move forward or make changes to practice that they are not yet ready to make''.* The research goes on to describe that following the

'suspending' element of the approach, '' *the encountering element''* is the space where that transformation of practice can be experienced, facilitating practitioners to question their practice and understanding of their pedagogical approaches to listening to child voice.

I believe that my study exploring parents' perspectives on child voice and practitioners' perspectives of their own practice of facilitating child voice, in a multi-professional context, contributes new knowledge to the discourse on child voice. My use of portraitures as a methodology (chapter five) provides an innovative way of listening to parents' and children's lived experience before they attend our setting. Adopting the Lundy Model (2007) of child participation, as a theoretical framework and adapting the model to use with adults as a means of generating data and interpreting the findings, has been acknowledged by Swadner (2019:393) as being *''a powerful new area of research''.* My study explores the construct of an open listening climate and how child voice can be facilitated in practice and in the next section (section 3.3) I consider child voice viewed through multiple lenses of child protection and safeguarding, quality provision and practice, child rights and child wellbeing by reviewing literature I felt of significance to this discussion.

3.3 Child Voice viewed through the Lens of Child Protection and Safeguarding

I considered the key text identified through my literature search relating to child voice and child protection and safeguarding, and selected text to examine which I considered to be of significance to the research. This section of the chapter addresses research that makes connections to child protection, safeguarding and listening to child voice within a national and local context, relating to early years practice and a multi-professional approach to supporting children and parents.

3.3.1 Personal Reflection

As I discuss in chapter one (section 1.4.1), a strong motivator for undertaking the research grew out of my earliest experiences and encounters working within a social work context and supporting children who were deemed 'at risk' of harm or who had been subjected to abuse and neglect. I therefore consider the issue to be of significance and requiring consideration in my study when discussing the importance of listening to child voice. In context, I undertook the research in two Children's Centres, which had both been established as Sure Start Local Programmes, to provide support services to children and families and early intervention at *''critical periods in a child's development* [and children's lives]''* (Anning and Ball,2008:9). The

multi-disciplinary aspect to establishing the centres allowed for a joined-up approach to developing and delivering services that suggests ''*weighty elements of the work could be shared with colleagues* [in other agencies]…''(Anning and Ball, 2008:135). While the programmes had responsibilities to adhere to safeguarding policies under their statutory responsibilities and regulatory bodies, such as Ofsted and the Children Act, the programmes themselves were not a statutory service and areas of work such as child protection and safeguarding were the main responsibility of Social Care. Policies and procedures were established to bring statutory agencies together with the Children's Centres, who were considered the key delivery partners of support services that would underpin the work of the statutory agencies. I review key aspects of literature in this section that reflects on these policies and procedures from a national and local perspective in relation to listening to child voice in practice. As I discuss in chapter one (section, 1.4.1), the reports following the tragic deaths of young children are well documented and the serious case reviews that follow such incidents and subsequent inquiries are available and are a valuable resource for gaining a greater understanding of 'what went wrong' in such cases, when children were not afforded their right to protection and what followed, as recorded in the majority of cases relating to a death of a child, could have been avoided.

3.3.2 A National Context

A number of inquiries following the tragic death of a child have initiated transformation procedures in social services and child protection policy and practice. A key outcome of the Beckford enquiry was the Children Act 1989, Section 17, which set out the general duty for the Local Authority to:

- safeguard and promote the welfare of the children in their area in need of care.

And that

- the welfare of children is paramount.

The act brought about the implementation of Area Child Protection Committees, who had the responsibility of bringing together all those agencies involved in child protection and maintaining the Child Protection Register (formally the At-Risk Register) and the publication of the Working Together to Safeguard Children (DoH,1999).

The Laming Report (2003:6), following Victoria Climbie's death in 2000, placed emphasis on:

> *"drawing of a clear line of accountability, from top to bottom, without doubt or ambiguity about who is responsible at every level for the well-being of vulnerable children"*.

As a result of the inquiry and subsequent recommendations, significant changes were made to the Children Act in 2004 which brought about the introduction of the, Every Child Matters Framework (ECM) (DFES, 2004). The five outcomes, i.e. Be Healthy, Stay Safe, Enjoy & Achieve, make a Positive Contribution and Achieve Economic Well-Being were introduced and organisations working with children and young people aged 0 -19 (24 for young people with special educational needs) were required to work together to plan and deliver services. It was not difficult for the Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) to align their services with the ECM Outcome Framework, as the Core Offer (2003) of the programmes very much reflected these outcomes. Children Centres were being strongly positioned as Hubs of Integrated Services. Hubs, as defined by the Local Authority, were to be the main sites of delivery of services as prescribed in the Core Offer (2003). What was also being emphasised was the need for the Child to have a 'voice' in shaping and designing services as well as the centres being required to evidence how this would be achieved.

The Children's Plan (DCSF,2007) was an ambitious ten-year government strategy aimed at improving the life chances for children, young people and their families. The plan acknowledged the significant role parents had to play in the lives of their children and set out strategic objectives to further develop local support services. The plan set out to place the family at the centre of the '*excellent integrated services'* (DCSF,2007:3) and Children's Centres were viewed as having a pivotal role to play in '*strengthening intensive' support [that would be required to fulfil the objectives] to the most 'neediest 'of families'* (6).

To assist in the development of an integrated service approach, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) (CWDC,2006:5) was introduced as an integrated assessment *'tool' created as part of a 'tool kit'.*

This included the concept of creating '*A Team Around the Child (TAC)'.* The CAF process facilitated the identification of key agencies considered to be able to best support the child and family, following an assessment of need, by applying the domains from the '*Triangle of Assessment of Children in Need and their Families'* (DoH,2000:1). The CAF process, led by an appointed, '*Lead Professional-(LP)',* was portrayed as a '*dashboard*' that indicated a child from '*no identified needs' to 'children with complex needs'* (CWDC,2006:14), the main objective being to include the child's voice in the assessment process, creating a support network around the child that would address the needs and move the child back into 'the no need domain' and out of crises, whilst also acknowledging that the circumstances may change that would bring the child back into a 'Child in Need' domain.

This concept of this safety net around the child facilitating integrated support and information sharing was one of good intent and, on first examination, the framework seemed to be a direct response to the *'significant failings'* highlighted by Laming (2003:6) and others. However, in reality, as a process the agencies often considered to be best placed to support the families were more often than not the non-statutory status agencies, who were consistently present at meetings. The statutory agencies who had the legal powers to intervene and support the families and had access to the historical and relevant family information (known as lateral checks), and who were best placed to support the families, were consistently absent from the meetings. For the sake of discussion, I would like to argue that it appeared to me to be an over-ambitious and idealistic concept.

Although there has been relatively little research in this area, an evaluation of the CAF Framework in 2006 by the Department of Children and Families (DCFS:6) revealed that:

> *'There was considerable enthusiasm at both grass roots and management level*
> *for CAF and LP work...and a widespread willingness to make these processes*
> *work...* and '*Practitioners were already identifying some positive impact on the*
> *lives of children, young people and their families...'*

The findings also showed that: *'the CAF and Lead Professional working posed many challenges...'*,

suggesting that the process added to the already heavy workload, the full extent of which agencies had not always grasped, i.e. an '*holistic assessment and partnership working'*. This resulted in:

> *"Anxiety and frustration which was generated by lack of clarity about how the*
> *work was to be done, lack of support, threshold differences and lack of join up*
> *between agencies and sectors''.*

Further research which lends support to my earlier view of a lack of consistency of levels of engagement with the process from some services suggests ''*there is an inconsistent implementation of identification and early support...a perceived lack of accountability and commitment to the CAF process...*[with schools]...*varying from partial to full engagement in the process''.* (Easton et al., 2010:6). The research reported that some families, children and young people did report that they had received timely support and, where schools were fully involved, there had been several positive outcomes as a result. Staff understanding of the benefits of multi-agency working increased and they felt they were more aware of children's and families' individual needs, making improved links between school and the home environment. However, the findings also revealed ''*significant differences in approaches*

[across local authorities] *…causing confusion about how to implement the whole process, that needed to be resolved''.*

To summarise, at a national level there have been a range of initiatives that have been developed and implemented across the UK purporting to be of benefit to families, children and young people in transforming the services providing the support. Research has shown that some of these changes have been of benefit and have been instrumental in informing and implementing changes to policy and procedures, although there is a need for further research to support these findings. However, there still appears to be a lack of consistency of interpretation of new policies and how these then translate into practice to then sustain improvements for children, young people and families. There is, I believe, a gap in the research of listening to parents' and children's experiences of support services and the impact of early intervention, as well as identifying effective methods for creating a listening climate in practice. My study will make an important contribution to our understanding of the lived experiences of parents and children and how an open listening climate can facilitate child voice.

3.3.3 A Local Context

Since 2008, within the field of child protection and safeguarding, there had been a significant number of changes made within the local authority, where the study sites are located, as a result of several Ofsted Inspections where the practice was considered to require improvement and to be inadequate, with Ofsted reporting that *"the most vulnerable children continue to be failed"* (2014:3). When referring to Social Work Practice, the research of Ferguson (2016; 2017; 2018) referred to the child appearing invisible within the encounters with families and when the focus of attention is not explicitly child-centred. He asks us to consider that the visibility of a child requires holistic encounters and is not merely a case of seeing or not seeing a child during these encounters. In his further research in this area, Ferguson (2018:65) emphasises the need for *"deeply embodied practice in which all the senses and emotions come into play and movement is central"*, when conducting home visits with families, whilst also acknowledging the need to see children in other places such as "*schools, offices, clinics, family centres"* (2018:77). This notion of making children visible within practice resonates with my study in Children's Centres where home visits are integral when engaging with parents and children. What Ferguson has highlighted is the need for an effective multi-professional approach to family support to ensure children's voices are heard, although as

Lumsden (2020:107) suggests ''*even when they* [children] *are heard, they are not always listened to, or acted upon''*.

The Allen Report (2011) lent support to the claim that early intervention in offering children and families support would have the best and longest impact on long-term life chances. His illustration, depicted on the front of the report, comparing a normal brain of a 3-year-old compared to that of a 3-year-old who had suffered neglect was a stark reminder of the key messages pertaining to his findings. Allen (2011: xiii) made an explicit link between early intervention and the need to support a child's social and emotional wellbeing, if a child is to reach their full potential. His report compounds the view that *'neglect, the wrong type of parenting and other adverse experiences can have a profound effect on how children are emotionally 'wired'*.

The Munro Report (2011) considered that early intervention and prevention were key to making a difference to children and family outcomes. It also suggested that a coordinated approach to providing support through early intervention services would be required.

In the context of Children's Centres, changes within safeguarding structures and systems can be explicitly linked to the research question when examining how child voice of under 5s is understood and reflected in practice and the need for an open listening climate to facilitate this reflective practice. The research sought to understand the lived experiences of children and parents by reflecting on current practice and how change might transform practice. (chapter five).

An ecological systems' theory model has been applied to social work over the last few decades, acknowledging the need for a strength-based and holistic approach when working with children and families. The available evidence seems to suggest that there was an imbalance of placing an emphasis on either the person or the environment when working with families, resulting in missing key elements that can make the child's voice '(*in*)visible' (Lumsden, 2020:113). Lumsden (2020) discusses child protection from a child rights' perspective, suggesting that despite significant changes within child protection in the UK, the serious case reviews into child deaths still show *"a lack of professional communication and information-sharing …",* resulting in child deaths. She advocates for the assurance of quality practice within the ECEC setting and for practitioners to be alert to the needs of the children as well as supporting and "*proactively nurturing parents…through policy, procedures and practice''* (Lumsden,2020:119:596) and propounds the view that:

> *"a child rights lens is not (just) protection…"* arguing that *"… the more the child*
> *is in danger of harm, the more important it is that we recognise their agency".*

3.3.4 Child Protection and Safeguarding – a Matter of Rights

The introduction of the ECM Framework (DfE, 2004) brought the discourse on child rights to the forefront for those delivering services to children and showed a commitment to implementing child rights into practice under the UNCRC.

The Children's Act (2004) added further momentum for practitioners to *"listen and act upon children's voices and opinions"* Roberts-Holmes (2005:55), who suggests that in doing so, he added a word of caution to those working with children. The UNCRC recognises the right of a child to participate and have their 'voice' heard, and it also acknowledges that *"Children are vulnerable, by placing the child's right to participate alongside their right for protection"* Roberts-Holmes (2005:5). The debate on whether to categorise child rights under the 3Ps, i.e. Protection, Provision and Participation, discussed in section (2.4), adds to these viewpoints.

The debate on child's rights cannot be separated from ethical perspectives within research and is one I return to in chapter four, the methodology and methods chapter. Pascal and Bertram (2009:254) have fostered the debate on ethically sound early years research acknowledging "*listening to young children is an integral part of understanding what they are feeling and experiencing, and what it is they need from their early years experience".*

The Every Child Matters (ECM) policy document, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) Tool kit, and the concept of having a Team Around the Child (TAC) appeared to advocate for child rights. However, the data from the evaluation of these initiatives (DCSF,2006:35) provides convincing evidence that suggests the child was not always kept at the focus of the service citing: '*a reluctance from some individuals and sectors to engage in CAF/LP work. Examples included practitioners not attending meetings, not initiating a common assessment, not following through the plan, and difficulties with sharing information*'.

On the basis of the findings from this research and discussed in chapter six of this thesis, it seems fair to suggest that this was often the experience in day-to-day practice.

Current research seems to validate this view, as suggested by Lucas (2016: i) '*'the empirical findings of the research demonstrated the relative exclusion of children and young people from the main elements of the CAF process.''* Of interest here is that the findings would suggest that the lack of engagement with children and young people in the decision-making process appears to reflect the prevailing image of the child and/or young person on the journey of *''becoming an adult…*[and therefore] *''incompetent and vulnerable''.* The findings go on to suggest that the CAF process had felt like a 'done to' and not 'done with' process, as voiced by the parents who participated in the research, with agencies identifying '' *what you've done*

wrong and this is what you've not done yet'' and implies a process of surveillance and not a supportive model of intervention (Steven,2016:164). The findings reflect some positive aspects of the CAF process, as reported by the parents and some of the young people who took part in the study, in relation to the levels of support received from individual support workers. However, it was clear it was the experience of the process that appeared to be failing in recognising parent, child, and young people's agency and right to a voice.

There appears insufficient research relating to younger children's experience or engagement with the CAF process to draw any firm conclusions about the affordance of child voice in the CAF process and in decisions that affect them. However, to conclude, the reports following consecutive monitoring visits by Ofsted during the period my study took place rated the local authority as inadequate and identified;

> '' *Systems and processes are neither child-centred nor fit for purpose…only a small proportion of children attend and participate in their child protection conferences…overall, children's and young people's views are not sufficiently taken onto consideration''* (Ofsted, 2014).

> ''*serious and widespread failings in some services to help and protect children…children and families do not receive the help they need at an early enough stage…partnership working with other services is not well embedded and a lack of effective multi-agency working at both operational and strategic levels is hampering the pace and extent of progress''* (Ofsted, 2016).

3.3.5 To Summarise

There is a clear link to be made here between listening to child voice through a child protection and safeguarding lens and the concept of child voice from a rights' discourse, if in fact the child's perspectives and views are to count in both the assessment process and ongoing support structures that are put in place. The child must be viewed by the practitioners and parents as having the right to have a say and their views need to be considered when decisions are being made as advocated in Article 12 and 13 of the convention. Young children need to be viewed as rights' holders (UNICEF, General Comment No 7, 2015). When considering how well the UNCRC is understood and implemented in early education, Cole-Albäck (2015:1) argues that:

> "*children, parents and professionals need to know what rights children have, and what those rights entail, otherwise the UNCRC is an 'invisible' treaty*".

This view is also supported by Long (2020:58) who suggests, *"ECEC students [who go on to be practitioners] must know what children's rights are, and how they can ensure these rights are respected".*

Their research and the findings I have presented in this section make clear recommendations that the knowledge and understanding of child rights need to be significantly increased if those adults and agencies whose role it is in this case to provide prevention, protection and early intervention in children's lives, are to give agency to children and afford them their right to have a voice in decisions that impact them. This supports my view and the relevance of reviewing the literature on child voice through a child rights' lens.

3.4 Child Voice viewed Through a Child Rights' Lens

As I stated earlier in this chapter two (section 2.3), I began to reflect on viewing child voice through a child rights' discourse as my knowledge and understanding of child rights in early years practice developed. I began to read more widely on this topic and entered into dialogue with those considered to be experts in the field. Alongside my decision to apply a rights- based lens I also applied an ecological systems lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), a view supported by Manning-Morton (2014:183) who advocates for an approach where *'' together children, parents and practitioners seek to make connections in all aspects of provision and practice''* and acknowledges the importance of recognising the interrelations between the child, home environment and early years setting.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) (from here on in referred to as UNCRC), provides a legal framework that provides a holistic approach to considering the rights of children.

The convention, divided into articles, is grouped into four themes, i.e. Survival Rights, Development Rights, Protection Rights and Participation Rights. The Convention has emphasised four general principles which are:

- That all the rights guaranteed by the UNCRC must be available to all children without discrimination of any kind (Article 2)

- That the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (Article 3)

- That every child has the right to life, survival, and development (Article 6)

and

- That the child's views must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting him or her (Article 12)

Lundy's Model of child participation, adopted and adapted in this study, conceptualises Article 12 of the UNCRC (UN,1989). It presents an accessible interpretation of the Convention and associated provision rights. The 'Voice' model (Lundy, 2007: 932), provides a theoretical and practical understanding of Article 12 based on four interrelated elements of the provision, i.e. *Space, Voice, Audience and Influence*. In relation to this study, I adopted the child-participation model to elicit the perspectives of the parents and practitioners in the children's centre. (chapter five and chapter six).

3.4.1 A Case for Monitoring

The process of monitoring how local authorities adhere to the UNCRC involves periodic reports published by the United Nations Committee on the rights of the child, the first being 1995 which are compiled from reports submitted from government every five years. Recommendations for improvement are made and an action plan completed. It is important to acknowledge that the UNCRC (UN,1989) sets the minimum standards for implementing child rights and is not considered to be aspirational enough by some (Together Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights, 2020). The Committee also produce General Comments to support with the implementation of specific articles from the Convention and there have been 24 General Comments produced to date (2001 – 2019) and Periodic Report Cards (UNICEF) that reflect a countries achievement, or not, in relation to topics of significant interest and are shown as league tables. Whilst the UK have shown some improvements across a wide spectrum they are seen to consistently underperform in relation to affording children their rights (Together Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights, 2020)

Lundy (2007) considers that although most people talk about 'child voice' and 'student voice', the concepts have not been fully understood, as Article 12 suggests.

McCafferty (2017) is of the view that the Lundy Model (2007) can be effectively used in the context of family support, child welfare and child protection and Kennan et al., (2019) illustrate how the model has been applied in practice with children and families. There is a gap, I believe, in the research literature that reflects how the Lundy Model can be applied to adults and when working with under 5s in a Children's Centre context.

Using the Lundy Model (2007) of child participation with adults (Moore, 2020), as illustrated in chapter four, methodology and methods, is an example of how a child rights' approach can be applied to research. Listening to the perspectives of parents and practitioners reflects the move to creating a more open listening climate and supports Articles 5 and 18 of the

convention (UNCRC,) (UN,1989) (Appendix 1), which requires organisations and the government to support parents in understanding and applying child rights.

3.4.2 An (In)visible Voice in Policy

While the UNCRC has been acknowledged as fundamental in driving the child rights' movement and is an Internationally ratified framework, it is not implicitly evident how children's rights are being implemented and acknowledged within policy. The UNCRC provides children with rights and acknowledges them as rights-bearers (UNICEF) and the literature suggests that while there has been significant increase in understanding and implementation of children's rights into practice, there appears a significant lack of visibility, of children's voices within, what Murray (2019:2) refers to as, the "Early childhood *macro- policies"*. Such policies, she suggests, are those that are "focused on investment return… [but] *may overlook what is important for a young child now, yet they may intrude so powerfully into the pedagogic space*" and Murray (2019:3) goes onto suggest "*childhood leaders and practitioners may need to mediate macro-policies… if they are to advocate effectively for young children".* The literature relating to early years care and education and specifically translating policy into practice, suggests there is a disconnection and lack of a homogeneous approach which ignores the focus, namely the rights of children.

Research has provided ample support for the assertion that young children require the early years provision to be of high quality if they are to flourish in their all-round development and have long-term positive outcomes (Sylva et al, 2004, 2012b; Penn, 2005; Waldfogel, 2006; Almond and Currie, 2011; Nutbrown, 2012). While there is no article within the UNCRC that specifically states the child has the right to quality provision, there are specific articles that interrelate and interact to ensure children *"must be allowed to grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity"* (UNICEF). Based on the evidence available, it seems fair to suggest that many practitioners and researchers working within early years would concur that children appear invisible to Governments when they set policy agendas (Pugh and Duffy, 2006; Nutbrown, 2012; Georgeson et al., 2014; Gambaro et al., 2015).

The findings from reviews undertaken by: Laming (2009); Marmot (2010); Field (2010) and Allen (2011) provided convincing evidence of the need to invest in and provide effective and sufficient resources, which included quality evidenced-based early intervention for young children and families. The rights of children were strongly promoted through the findings and recommendations of these reviews, yet the Laming report (2009), commissioned following the death of Peter Connelly (Baby P), clearly evidenced the continual failure of the

Government to ensure children are kept safe from harm. The "right of life, survival and development'' (Article 6) and ''*protection from violence, abuse and neglect''* (Article 19)" (UNCRC), (UN,1989:1) are not being upheld and Laming (2009:3) suggests:

> *"one of the main challenges is to ensure that leaders of local services*
> *effectively translate policy, legislation and guidance into day-to-day practice*
> *on the frontline of every service".*

Yet Ferguson (2016:1007) refers to *"the phenomenon now known as the 'invisible child' "*, when researching the work of Social Workers conducting home visits and more recently Lumsden (2020:107) refers to the *"'voices' of infants and young children [being rendered] invisible to others".* In her chapter, Lumsden draws our attention to *"the (in)visibility of infants and young children in child protection"* and goes onto argue that "*intervening in the early childhood period is crucial for improving long-term outcomes"*, suggesting that children's rights to protection are not being upheld, citing the death of Daniel Pelka (2012) and the Serious Case Review following his death (2013). Lumsden (2020:115) is of the view that:

> "*child protection not only relies on legislation, policy and procedures but on*
> *ensuring those working alongside children and families have appropriate*
> *knowledge, skills, attributes and the continual desire for professional*
> *development".*

The need to ensure that children are visible in policy and that this is then translated into practice is clear.

The invisibility of children in policy and the failure to ensure children's rights are upheld is also evident in the Marmot Review Ten Years on (2020). It would appear that one of the main priorities of the Marmot review (2010), that of children having the best start in life, has not translated into policy or practice and children remain invisible in policy. Marmot et al., (2020:6) suggest:

"*while there has been a marked change in awareness and prioritisation of health inequalities and social determinants of health…"*, referring to the period since his last review, these appear to be defined by regions within the UK, with some examples of positive change, such as Coventry, who were defined as a "*Marmot city",* in 2013. A key message from the 2020 review is the detrimental impact of austerity measures, that have occurred in some of the already most deprived areas of the country, which has led to an inability to implement effective change for children.

The Field Review (2010:5), reporting on the detrimental impact of poverty on children and families, provided:

> *"overwhelming evidence that children's life chances are most heavily predicted*
> *on their development in the first five years of life…* and *"the most effective and*
> *cost-effective way to help and support young families is in the earliest years of*
> *the child's life"*.

However, the policies and spending reviews implemented by the UK Government over the last decade, since the Field Review, have only served to add to the hardship of families and continue to have a detrimental impact on children's health and well-being. Article 27, the right to *"an adequate standard of living…that is good enough to meet [a children's] physical and social needs"* (UNCRC) (UN,1989:1), is clearly being contravened under the auspices of the Welfare Reform Act (2012) and, more recently, the political debates on Food Poverty, Food Hunger and Free School Meals in the UK.

Along similar lines, the findings in the Allen Review (2011: vii) highlighted the need for:

"*early intervention as an approach… to making lasting improvements in the lives of our children, to forestall many persistent social problems and end their transmission from one generation to the next, and to make long-term savings in public spending"*. Allen developed the claim that:

> "*In spite of its merits…achieved by national, local government and the*
> *voluntary sector, evidenced – based Early Intervention programmes remain*
> *persistently patchy and dogged by institutional and financial obstacles"*.

He went onto cite "*overwhelming bias in favour of existing policies of late intervention…* [that requires] *…strong leadership by all political parties … to overcome this bias and achieve a cultural shift to Early Intervention"*.

3.4.3 To Summarise

In this section of my Literature Review, I have highlighted the literature that illustrates the role of the UNCRC and evidence that is borne out of research which shows that children remain invisible in policy. In the examples I have given in this section, there are clear indicators of failures to uphold the UNCRC which have had detrimental consequences on young children and families.

The perspectives of parents and practitioners captured in my research and reflected in the findings and analysis chapters (chapters five and six) clearly evidenced the need for, and benefits of, a multi-professional approach in supporting families, within a context of Children's Centres, in England. Evidence from the literature reviewed reflects there has been an erosion of support services for families when they are most needed, in the earliest and formative years

of children's lives. My doctoral study will contribute to the increased awareness of children's and parents' rights to and need for practitioners and services that are sensitive, responsive, and supportive in their approach to listening. The findings and subsequent recommendations reflect the need to create a more open listening climate if we are to transform practice within Children's Centres.

3.5 Child Voice Viewed through a Quality of Provision and Practice Lens

A great deal of debate and research has gone on and continues in relation to understanding and defining exactly what is defined as a quality setting. Moss and Pence (1994), Dahlberg et al., (1999) Siraj-Blatchford and Wong (1999) and Abbott and Langston (2005) have considered the ability to measure quality as difficult. Therefore, it is questioned how it can be defined and although there are several tools and frameworks that have been developed and that lend themselves to equip settings to evaluate quality, the debates, research and refinement of effective methodologies continues.

Research makes clear links to the quality of a setting and quality early experiences with positive outcomes for children and child wellbeing (Laevers, 1994; Pascal and Bertram, 1995; Bradford,2012; Conkbayir, 2017; Ephgrave, 2018). The benefits of quality early experiences is widely recognised and supported by evidence and was a corner stone of the design and development of Children's Centres (Anning and Ball,2008; Eisenstadt, 2011) and a reason for reviewing literature through a quality lens.

3.5.1 A Measurement Discourse

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS and ECERS – R) and the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS and ITERS-R) have a long history in the domain of measuring the quality of early childhood settings. From its conception in 1980 and 1990 respectively, it has undergone several iterations to its most recent, ECERS-3 and ITERS - 3 (Harms et al., 2015). The question of applying rating scales as an effective or appropriate way of defining quality in early years has caused much debate over the years, (Moss and Pence, 1994; Dalberg and Moss,2007; Webb, 2015; Rentzou, 2017).

Moss and Pence (1994) put forward the view that tools and frameworks that reinforce rating scales have limitations and are objective and generalizable by the nature of the criteria set for measuring quality. They viewed these processes as having limited scope for discussions and dialogues between all those that need to be involved in the process such as practitioners, parents and particularly children, a view shared by Dalberg et al., (2007) who consider that

the concept of quality is: '*an evaluation of the conformity of a product or service to [universal and objective norms] …the product of a specific paradigm* [regulatory modernity] … *inscribed with the values and assumptions…'*. Dahlberg et al., *(2007:23)* argue in favour of a language that is not value laden, adopting instead the concept of '*Meaning Making… generated from within a different discourse about democracy… a process that involves making practice visible and thus subject to reflection, dialogue and argumentation'*.

This is a view shared by Webb (2015:1), who argues against '*tick-box'* measurement tools, that often do not lead to a wider understanding of the individual child's needs and therefore do not always lead to best practice. One such 'tool' that she refers to are the ECCERS and ITERS rating scales, and Webb puts forward the view that:

> *'ANYTHING that gives a score or a benchmark to work towards is dangerous and restricts reflective practice and, therefore, quality practice based on the needs of the children. It should not be about getting the highest score or copying the practice of others, or only doing the things that are on the 'approved list'.*

The debate on defining quality continues and in Rentzou's research (2017:668) in her examination of the '*growing body of the literature*', she extends the debate to '*what experiences represent 'quality' in early childhood environments*'. The concept of defining quality has caused much debate over the years as discussed by Tietze and Cryer (2004) Ramey and Ramey (2006) and Azzi-Lessing (2009) who suggest that quality can be seen as having both '*a structural and a process'* dimension with structural process being represented under what can be considered '*regulatory frameworks'* and the process dimension of quality, which reflects the relationships and conditions created within an environment and which '*are harder to regulate'.* These conclusions in the discussions are supported by the OCED report (2015), whose findings add to the debate on the complexities of defining and measuring quality. The discussions in the report Starting Strong IV, Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care acknowledge the research that evidences the importance of children having early quality encounters whilst also acknowledging the diversity of provision and therefore the complexities and diversity of monitoring systems. Their report (2015:13-14) indicates that "*monitoring is increasingly practiced [across the countries surveyed]…"* and they suggest this is due more to the requirements for regulation and compliance and offering parents a means of making choice of provision, but they also acknowledge that "*interest is growing in monitoring process quality…*", linking quality to relationships between children and staff in settings. Their findings lend support to having a clear and consistent monitoring system that

does not add layers of bureaucracy and overburden staff and therefore become unmanageable but importantly "values *the voice of staff, parents and children".*

As a rebuttal to the critics of the use of the Environmental Rating Scales (ECERS/ITERS) as a tool for measuring quality, Clifford (2005:14) argues that *"quality can be measured meaningfully with confidence"*, basing his argument on the "*results of studies conducted in the US and other countries.".*

However, there is overwhelming evidence corroborating the notion that quality, in the context of early childhood settings and children's experiences, cannot be absolutely defined or quantified by a 'standard' measure. To be able to explore beyond a 'standard' definition of what quality is understood to be, requires the creation of a quality culture and open listening climate that recognises the voice of all stakeholders, relative to each individual setting and context.

Siraj-Blatchford and Wong (1999) as summarised by Mathers and Smees (2012:10) argued that there is a need to be explicit about 'what' is being measured and 'how', when defining what quality is. They discussed three key purposes of quality measurements for "*Regulation, Research and Quality and Improvement"*. Their view is in line with the view of Moss and Pence (1994:11), who had argued against an objectivist approach to measuring quality and they reinforced the limitations and lack of stakeholder involvement. They called for a relativist approach that allows for quality to be:

> *"defined locally, varying according to the social and cultural context and reflecting multiple perspectives of stakeholders, (parents, children, practitioners and policy makers)"*

Dahlberg et al., (1999:2) lend support to the claim that the discourse on quality has common features such as questions that are '*technical and managerial in nature* '. The language used in this discourse '*seek techniques that will ensure standalisation, predictability and control'.* Measuring quality has its origins in the world of management models (Dahlberg and Moss, 2007:22) and it would seem to have become a term universally accepted in the world of early years and childhood, as it was easily translated into a discourse of measurement and assessment, value for money, audit and outcomes. Dahlberg et al (1999:13), reflect on the practice developed in Reggio Emilia whom they suggest adopt '*vocabulary [that] is quite different…"* and therefore *"… so are the consequences in terms of practice and relationships".* These different perspectives highlight how complex the discourses of quality are and, in my view, this only adds to the confusion and pressure placed on practitioners who are delivering the services to children and families. From my own experiences as an Early Years Inspector

working for Ofsted, and as a Children's Centre Leader providing the services being measured under the framework for Children's Centre Inspections (Ofsted: Revised 2014), the regulatory process caused undue pressure on organisations and practitioners. While the importance of children having early quality experiences is unquestionable, I would concur with the need to rethink how quality is defined and to ensure this is in a local context explored through self-reflection and evaluation, evidenced-based and a democratic process that involves all stakeholders.

As part of this debate on quality to improve early years provision, Pascal and Bertram (1995) developed The Effective Early Learning Project (EEL) and later the Baby Effective Early Learning Programmes (2006) (BEEL). The EEL Project offered a Quality Evaluation and Improvement tool to assist practitioners to improve the quality of early years settings and the experiences that children receive. The difference in this approach was one of reflectivity, with the practitioners becoming the researchers of their own practice with the added dimension of an external validation system that increased the credibility and robustness of the whole process. Pascal and Bertram (1995:58) considered that:

> *"Quality judgments in early childhood settings should be defined by the shared reflections and agreement of the stakeholders using a rigorous and systematic process of evaluation"*

The EEL framework involved using a defined list of 10 Dimensions of Quality that the authors had developed, after extensive piloting with a range of settings across the country, offering a more relativist approach to defining and measuring quality. The research has shown that this approach, which advocates for the need to acknowledge the views and perspectives of all those involved, has proven to be an effective process whilst also stressing the need for settings to be open to listen to what might be considered criticism, but which also needed to be accepted as a means of improvement.

 The Effective Early Learning (EEL) and Baby Effective Early Learning Programmes (BEEL) (Pascal and Bertram,1995, 2006), reflects a more praxiological approach to creating this shared definition of quality, that is inclusive and democratic and self-reflective.

Reflecting a more praxeological approach to defining quality is a view shared in Portugal through the research conducted by the Childhood Association and the Aga Khan Foundation who, over many years, developed 'Pedagogy -in-Participation' (Formosinho and Oliveria-Formosinho,2012). This pedagogical approach is "*essentially the creation of pedagogic environments in which interactions and relationship sustain joint activities"* (Formosinho and Formosinho, 2016:26). The main theoretical premise behind this approach is praxis and action,

and the creation of democratic spaces and early childhood environments which facilitate inclusive dialogues and shared learning.

The available evidence from their research, gathered over many years, reflects the pivotal role the 'educators' have to play in creating the environment that facilitates collaboration, democracy and participation, as key components when working with children and families. The early childhood education centres in Portugal are built upon the firm foundations of deep rooted *"values, beliefs and principles"* (2016:28) that reflect the multiple lenses I have chosen to review the literature in my study. Pedagogy -in-Participation is illustrated through a model of *"Pedagogical Axes"* (2016:31-32) which the findings suggest are the key components required to create the:

> *"educational environments in which the ethics of relationships and interactions enable the development of activities and projects that allow children to live, learn, mean and create, because they value the children's and families experience, knowledge and culture dialoguing with the educator's knowledge and culture".*

Ensuring that the children and families develop a sense of *"belonging"* is evident in the work of the early childhood centres, firstly to the family and secondly, so that the children and families themselves feel connected to the centre. The work of the centres is built on respect for each other and the involvement of the families in the life of the centres ensures that "*the educational environments…create opportunities that are rich in experiential possibilities" (2016:37).*

The use of the Lundy Model (2007) of children's participation and the application of this with adults in my doctoral study, provided a methodical approach that acknowledged the voice of children, parents and practitioners. The research question of how the practice in Children's Centres might be transformed by creating an open listening climate evolved out of the pioneering research in Portugal and by others (Rouse,2011; Pascal and Bertram, 2012; Messenger, 2012; Lyndon, 2012; Whally et al, 2013).

3.5.2 A Discourse on Quality - an English Context

Extensive research has shown that high quality early years provision, which integrates early education with care, has a positive impact on the intellectual, social, and emotional development of children, resulting in improved outcomes for children starting school. Research findings from the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project (EPPE 2003),

showed this to be particularly evident with children from low-income families and those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. (Sylva et al, 2003:3). The findings revealed that

> ''Pre-school was particularly beneficial to children who are more disadvantaged… [suggesting] *that pre-school can be an effective intervention for the reduction of special educational needs (SEN), especially for the most disadvantage and vulnerable children''.*

Furthermore, the evidence highlighted the importance of the quality of the setting and the experience the children receive, stating that

> *''Information from observations on the quality of each setting, using standardised rating scales, showed a significant link between higher quality and better intellectual and social/behavioural outcomes at entry to school ''.*

This reflects the significance of the discourse of quality provision and child voice within the context of this study.

In England, the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS) (DfE, 2012) sets the statutory standards for the development, learning and care of children from birth to age 5. The framework strengthens the concept of the 'Unique Child' (EYFS, 2012:92) and places emphasis on Effective Characteristics of learning and the importance of the environment and practitioners. It talks of children as being:

> *"primed to encounter their environment through relating to and communicating with others, and engaging physically in their experiences"*

All those who provide early year's provision for under 5s in England are required to register with The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), which regulates and inspects provision under Sections 49 and 50 of the Children Act 2006. Ofsted consider the EYFS when inspecting, reporting on and issuing a 'judgement' or grade against the Early Years Inspection Framework. The link between quality, wellbeing and safeguarding can be seen within the framework.

The areas of safeguarding and welfare requirements, alongside the learning and development requirements within the EYFS are classified as mandatory under legislative orders, indicated by the word 'must' (3) and reflects the importance that is placed on these key areas.

This statutory guidance and research highlight the importance of young children experiencing high quality early learning together with a secure, safe and happy childhood which they receive from home, as well as any early years provision they may attend (Sylva et al., 2004; Tickell, 2011; Nutbrown, 2012; Pascal and Bertram, 2012).

Children's Centres were inspected under their own Inspection Framework which was rolled out from April 2010 (April 2013 as Children's Centre Groups) and involved being judged under three key principles i.e. access to services by young children and their families, the quality and impact of practice and services, and the effectiveness of leadership, governance and management (Ofsted,2013).

In the past two decades, the provision of early years care and education, (ECE) including Sure Start Local Programmes, has undergone significant changes including three changes in the government and political direction that has had an impact on policy change and the implementation of austerity measures that have had considerable impact on the delivery of ECE services. Political and legislative changes gave a shift of power from central government, devolving control and decision–making, on spend for public services to local authorities. Local Authorities across England have faced increased pressure on which services require priority and ECE services have suffered in several respects over the last five years (CRAE, 2014; NCB, 2015).

The Sutton Trust (2018:4) revealed that over a thousand Children's Centres had been closed since 2009 and while their research showed that most of those remaining were positioned in the areas of most disadvantage, their findings showed a lack of ring-fenced budgets by local authorities and refocused priorities led to:

> "*move children's centres away from the original idea of an open access neighbourhood centre. Services are now 'hollowed out' - much more thinly spread, often no longer 'in pram-pushing distance'. The focus of centres has changed to referred families with high need, and provision has diversified as national direction has weakened, with local authorities employing a variety of strategies to survive in an environment of declining resources and loss of strategic direction".*

3.5.3 To Summarise

My research came at the time that the changes to Children's Centres started to occur, and these policy changes, including the changes experienced by the study sites, are reflected in the study. Undertaking my research with the study sites, as the changes were starting to impact on services, was significant, as it provided a crucial link between the study sites (proposed to move towards a Children's Centre Hub Model in 2016). The research helped to retain the focus on children and parents and what was working well whilst also acknowledging

the need to review practice and strive for transformational change that would impact on children's wellbeing.

3.6 Child Voice viewed through a Wellbeing Lens

There is rapidly growing literature on child wellbeing that indicates the complexity of the wellbeing as a concept within early years (Waters, 2009; Bradford, 2012; Mashford-Scot et al., 2012; Manning-Morton, 2014). In support of this is the growing demand for an improved understanding of wellbeing and what dynamics and circumstances influence a child's wellbeing and that of the family.

Adopting a bioecological approach as one of my theoretical lenses supports the argument for placing a focus on child wellbeing in the context of the family and the wider context, as reflected by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998,2006). The concept of Children Centres was built from the foundations of the bioecological approach, developing child-centred practice reflecting that:

> "*children have agency… [while acknowledging that] …Supporting children's agency in early years practice requires that practitioners be aware of family background and particular communities and cultures" (Hayes et al., 2017)*.

Mashford-Scott and Church (2012) make the links to children's agency and wellbeing and my study listens to the parents' and practitioners' perspective of child voice which Clark et al., (2005) suggests is linked to children's agency.

Pollard and Lee (2003:59) consider that *"research of child wellbeing is a significant emerging frontier in child development".* Their systematic literature review draws attention to the fact that research in this field appears to place an emphasis on a deficit model of child wellbeing and does not consider wellbeing from a positive stance. Their findings reveal a lack of consistent definition of child wellbeing or how wellbeing is best measured across the research and any attempts at developing a measure of wellbeing has its limitations. They suggest that one reason for this lack of a consistent definition may be down to the fact that researching child wellbeing spans multi-disciplines. The range of measurement tools used in the studies reviewed appears to only take into consideration 'individual characteristics' of wellbeing and have not considered wellbeing as a 'multidimensional construct' (Yarcheski et al. 1994:288). The lack of definition again may be a contributing factor to these variations across the studies and there is ample growing support for this claim (Ben-Arìeth, 2005, 2010; Laevers, 2005; Roberts,2010; Lundy,2014).

Pollard and Lee (2003) advocate for a clearer definition of wellbeing if an effective measurement tool is to be developed. They argue that you must know what you are measuring before you decide how to measure it. Roberts (2007:50) argues for:

> "*a distinction, especially in the context of the youngest children and their families … between 'subjective wellbeing', which focuses on how individuals feel about their own wellbeing, rather than using an 'objective' measure in which a person's state is assessed by another".*

The work of Statham and Chase (2010:3) supports the conclusions of Pollard and Lee (2003), evidencing from their study that *'there are evident difficulties in making comparisons in child wellbeing using indicators across variable contexts'*. They argue for improvements to be made in *'theorising and operationalising childhood wellbeing'* if there is to be a *'shared understanding'* of the concept of child wellbeing. They put forward the view that there needs to be more consideration given to listening to the views of children and young people in relation to defining wellbeing and including their perspectives in research through child participation. The need to include children's perspectives of their own wellbeing and therefore a subjective view, as a basic human right and child's right, has been identified as a key issue by numerous academics and research studies (Ben-Arìeh: 1999, 2002; Bradshaw and Barnes, 1999; Fattore et al. 2007,2009; Axford, 2009; Camfield, et al. 2009; Morrow and Mayall, 2009; UNICEF,2014 ; Lundy, 2014).

Waters (2009: 16) supports the concept of wellbeing as being *"complex rather than simplistic".* While research indicates this has been widely debated, a consensus view seems to be that a holistic understanding of child development and approach in meeting the needs of children is essential.

More recent research by Manning-Morton (2014) suggests we need to consider not only the theoretical context of wellbeing but also the implications for practice when working with young children. This requires us to be aware of the need and understand the level of support required if services are to reach the children most in need of support. Applying the Lundy Model (2007) of children's participation with adults in my research enabled me to listen to parents' and practitioners' perspectives and consider current practice in Children's Centres. I was able to document the Parent Stories, relating to their children's and family's life experience and overlay this with the practitioners' accounts against the rights' framework advocated by Lundy (2007:932) "*Space; Voice; Audience and Influence*". This approach lent support to the claims put forward by Manning-Morton (2014) and provided what I considered

to be an *'accessible approach''* to applying a rights framework to research *(Moore and Cole-Albäck April 2017).*

3.6.1 A Matter of Policy

The development and implementation of the Birth to Three Matters Framework (BTTM) DfES (2002), placed an emphasis on the development of children's learning but also put a focus on relationships. The four Aspects within the framework i.e. A Strong Child, Skilful Communicator, A Competent Learner and A Healthy Child promotes the interrelationship between growth, learning, development and the environment in which they are cared for and educated.

Each Aspect was divided into Components, with four components attached to each Aspect, which placed as a key focus under each Aspect. The Birth to Three Framework was developed based on research and a review of literature that evidenced the importance of early intervention and providing support to children and families to enhance the life chances and therefore reducing the likely impact of adverse experiences. Relationships between the child and practitioners (key worker) and parental partnership were key factors within the framework and are key factors within my study. As early years care and education provision increased to meet the demand of parents, particularly mothers returning to work, which was driven by Government and policy change at the time, the challenge was to ensure these settings were providing a 'quality' environment, especially for the under 3s. The importance of children's wellbeing, evidenced from the research in neuroscience, significantly influenced the design of the framework, providing a connection between theory and practice. The Framework supported practitioners to place a focus on the youngest children in their care and to recognise the significance of reflecting on practice within the 'baby rooms' and environments provided for under 3s. Concerns were raised about the variation in the quality of the settings where the youngest children were now spending significant amounts of time. Shonkoff et al., (2012:232) research evidencing the impact of adverse experiences on young children, referred to in their research as "*toxic stress",* which they considered is a prolonged exposure to stressful situations.

Abbot and Langston (2005:130) considered the Birth to Three Framework as "*as placing an emphasis on new thinking about the importance of children aged birth to three and indicates a major shift in the ways this age group has been viewed"* which was attributed to the fact that it put the focus on the youngest child and brought the concepts of care and education together, which had "*been viewed as separate entities".* The BTTM was subsumed into the

reform of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile at that time and while the document and accompanying resources were replaced in practice, the continued research, in the field of neuroscience and early intervention, is still evident (Shonkoff et al., 2012: Conkbayir,2017,2020).

The BTTM acknowledged that *"Parents and families are central to the well-being of the child… [and] A relationship with a key person at home and in the setting is essential to young children's well-being"* (Abbot and Langston, 2005:135).

They argue that the BTTM has:

> *"A final and not unrealistic expectation is that the multi-agency approach*
> *adopted in many aspects of early childhood will permeate the field, to include*
> *in their training, colleagues, such as those in the health service for example, in*
> *learning about ways the Framework can inform thinking about young children,*
> *and ways of working with them"* (141).

The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS) (DfE, 2012:9) sets the standards for a holistic policy approach to supporting children's health and wellbeing. It places a child's personal, social and emotional development as one of the prime areas of learning, alongside communication and language and a child's physical development.

Positioning my study in the context of Children's Centres lends support to the work of Abbot and Langston and the development of frameworks of good practice for our youngest children in our settings. Researching with parents and practitioners' advocates for child voice and the need to develop a more open listening climate across the multi-professional teams within Children's Centres, if we are to provide appropriate support to children and families.

3.6.2 A Measurement Discourse

The Effective Early Learning Programme (EEL,1996), as discussed earlier in relation to a quality discourse, (section 2.7) was developed for provision for over 3s and the subsequent Baby Early Learning Programme (BEEL, 2006) for children under 3 were developed by Pascal and Bertram. The programmes provide practitioners with an approach when considering quality in early years settings, which also makes an explicit link with quality and the emotional wellbeing of a child. Within the programme, practitioners have access to observation tools, developed from the Leuven Scales of Involvement and Wellbeing (1976). The programme includes both Child Involvement Scales, which reflect the 5-Levels of Involvement and Learning Experience (EYFS) and Adult Engagement, which is:

> *"based on the belief that the quality of the interactions between the educator*
> *and the child is a critical factor in the effectiveness of the learning experience"*
> *(Bertram et al., 2004)*

In this programme, there is an explicit link made between the quality of the setting and the emotional wellbeing of a child and the need for quality adult engagement with the child, which has a direct impact on the child's development and outcomes which, they suggest, can be measured using a 10 Dimensions of Quality Model (Pascal and Bertram, 1995). The scale of involvement offers a means of measuring the learning experience the child receives, which provides an indication of how much the child's needs are being met by the setting. By observing the child's level of involvement in activities, practitioners can build up an image of a child and make judgements, which provide an insight into the feelings of the child. The higher the level of involvement, referred to as level 5, i.e. sustained intense activity, is considered by Laevers et al., (1997:2) to indicate that "*high levels of well-being and involvement lead in the end to high levels of child development"* and he makes the clear links to the quality of the experiences that children receive and the child's overall wellbeing. This involvement scale, within the BEEL and EEL toolkit, enables practitioners to use observations and evaluation as a method of listening to and hearing child voice in settings and through reflection, make improvements to the quality of the practice and the child experience. A positive aspect of this framework is the participatory, inclusive, and democratic principles that are promoted by adopting the framework (Bertram and Pascal,2006; Araùjo,2012).

Mayr and Ulich (2009:45) acknowledge that '*children learn best when they are healthy and happy'*. In their development of an observation tool to assess pre-school children's wellbeing, they also made the links back to the quality of the early years setting, suggesting that a measure of a child's wellbeing may be an indicator of the quality of the setting they attend with a

> "*the recent shift within the psychology and mental health disciplines towards*
> *a focus on positive development rather than on deficits or problems"*
> (Mashford-Scott et al., 2012:234).

In their study Mayr and Ulich's (2009:45) developed what they considered to be:

> "*a theoretically and empirically based instrument for practitioners to observe*
> *and assess preschool children's well-being in early childhood settings"*

The measurement tools covered the areas of '*Social-emotional well-being and resilience of children in early childhood settings'* Their *PERIK Measurement (2009:46)-* (Positive Development and Resilience in Kindergarten), (in German: **P**ositive **E**ntwicklung und **R**esilienz

im **K**indergartenalltag)', focused on the positive development of children having identified six dimensions of well-being. Mayr and Ulich (2009:49) wanted to develop a way for practitioners to be able to '*observe and record systematically the well-being of children in their everyday educational settings'* in a less complicated way than previous measures afforded while ensuring the integrity and trustworthiness remained.

The Toddlers Wellbeing Project (ToWE, 2015-2018), a cross international project with England, Norway, and Spain, makes explicit links to child voice, expressions, and toddler wellbeing. Its 7 Dimensions of Wellbeing programme enables practitioners to have a holistic view of children in their care with attention to children deemed at risk or disadvantaged. It provides a theoretical, contextual, and practical view of child wellbeing with a specific dimension dedicated to children's voice and expressions. The project makes clear links to enhancing the quality of practice through the key areas they have considered important for a child's wellbeing, which include family, home and environmental factors; health; the setting environment and current practice; voice and expressions; language and mealtimes. When reflecting on the findings from the project, Sunderland (2019:4) describes how practitioners felt that: *"The process created a shared language for understanding the concept of wellbeing and provided the basis to facilitate change, directly impacting on toddlers' wellbeing".*

The frameworks and approaches to understanding and measuring wellbeing discussed above reflect an increasing understanding within the early years and education field of the importance of children having a good level of wellbeing, as poor wellbeing will have an adverse impact on a child's all-round development.

The innovative use of the Lundy Model (2007) of child participation, adapted for use with adults in my study, aimed to provide practitioners with practical solutions to create a more open listening climate to facilitate child voice. It increases practitioners' awareness of child rights and how a child can be afforded their right to a voice in everyday practice. This child-rights' approach enables practitioners to have a holistic lens and ensures all aspects of a child's development are taken into consideration.

3.6.3 Wellbeing - A Case for Early Intervention

There is overwhelming evidence substantiating the understanding of the importance of ensuring we provide children with the '*best start in life'* (Marmot, 2010; Field, 2010; Allen, 2011; Conkbayir,2017) and in the last three decades, research across disciplines has provided ample support for the assertion that this starts in the womb (Field, 2010; Wave Trust, 2014; Conkbayir, 2017) when the brain is developing rapidly. Research validates the view that both

positive and negative experiences in children's early childhood have a long-term impact on a child's all-round development extending into adulthood (Robert, 2010; Burke Harris,2018).

There is evidence corroborating that '*the most effective and cost-effective way to help and support young families is in the earliest years of a child's life'* (Field 2010:5). His research highlighted the damaging impact of children growing up in poverty with parents unable to meet the most basic needs of their children, acknowledging that '*by the age of three a baby's brain is 80% formed and his or her experiences before then, shape the way the brain has grown and developed'.* Field's (2010) findings lend support to the claim that the quality of the child's earliest experiences also has an impact on their long-term life chances.

Marmot (2010:14) also made the clear relationship between poverty, the detriments to health and a child's life chances. His findings lend support to the claim that *'disadvantage starts before birth and accumulates throughout life'.* His underlying argument, and link to this study, was the need to increase and sustain the level of support given to families as early as possible and the need to invest in and sustain high quality early years experiences and provision for children. Marmot (2010:16) put forward the view that:

"*To have an impact on health inequalities we need to address the social gradient in children's access to positive early experiences. Later interventions, although important, are considerably less effective where good early foundations are lacking"*

Arguing for a:

"*whole child' approach to education… Ensure that schools, families and communities work in partnership to reduce the gradient in health, well-being and resilience of children and young people…"*

The extensive research provides confirmatory evidence that stress factors and socio-economic circumstances impact negatively on a child's wellbeing as well as the parents' wellbeing. My doctoral study was undertaken during a turmoil of change for the early years sector. Change and uncertainty was as a result of political and policy decisions that resulted in significant austerity measures being put into place across the UK where the study took place. The impact of these austerity measures on service delivery and on sustaining the required support to children and families was widely debated (Manning-Morton, 2014). The findings from research with practitioners (chapter six) and my subsequent discussions (chapter seven, section 7.2.1) reflect that there were, at times, tensions between the remit of the roles of early years and family support within Children's Centres. There were reports of significant

closures of Children's Centres across the U.K and increasing narrowing of approaches from universal to more targeted services (Sutton Trust, 2018). Manning-Morton (2014:144) questions '' *in the context of targeted services, is looking after well-being of our youngest citizens a luxury the UK is no longer willing to pay for?''*. There is growing support to suggest that this is a serious question that is going unanswered.

3.6.4 The Wellbeing of under 3s

The concept of listening to children when considering their wellbeing and especially for the under 3s, is supported by Bradford (2012:58) who makes the explicit link between the quality of the setting, interaction and communication between practitioners and the children, and understanding wellbeing. The action of listening, she argues "*becomes an integral part of understanding what they [children] are feeling".* It is through listening to the child that there is greater understanding of the child's needs and the experiences the child requires. Manning-Morton's (2014:26) account of findings from the 'Talking about well-being in early childhood' research (2009-2011) concurs that *'wellbeing is a complex concept that can be used and understood in different ways…of particular importance is to look at babies' and young children's wellbeing holistically'.* There is extensive research that evidences the need for adults to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of young children, to pay attention to the environment they provide and to create positive relationships, amongst the many recommendations that promote the wellbeing of children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Bowlby, 1988, Elfer and Dearnley, 2007, Sylva et al. 2010; Roberts,2010).

Elfer et al (2003) in their research made the explicit link between the emotional wellbeing of very young children, early learning and the importance of developing positive attachments with practitioners in the settings. Their research identified the importance of developing the role of the 'key person'. The main factor to emerge was the significance of children's emotional wellbeing in nursery as a pre-condition of engaged and persistent playful exploration and discovery. The Birth to Three Matters Framework (DfES,2002) placed an emphasis on the relationship between the child and the practitioner, who was the child's keyworker, as well as the need to develop a positive relationship between the parent and practitioner. These relationships are seen as being crucial in determining the quality of the experience the child has at a setting and their learning, as well as the child's wellbeing (Melhuish et al., 2008).

Literature examined as part of this literature review concurs with the view put forward by Elfer et al., (2003) and Manning and Morton (2014) in that the explicit link between the quality

of the environment and a child's early experience is evident in research. Adverse experiences that children may have in their formative years has a negative impact on a child's wellbeing and there is overwhelming evidence supporting this. This supports my choice to undertake the literature review and reflects the connectivity between the multiple lenses chosen.

3.6.5 Wellbeing, a Right or a Need?

Bradford (2012: 4-5) puts forward the view that *"wellbeing is a term that appears in many policy documents… but when we talk about children's wellbeing, what does it actually mean?"*. She makes an explicit link between child wellbeing and children's rights, citing several articles within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN,1989), which she identifies as 'appearing under five, umbrella headings'. These she suggests are the right to a childhood, the right to be educated, the right to be healthy, the right to be treated fairly and the right to be heard. Bradford also asks us to consider several articles that she feels 'deserve attention' when considering a child's wellbeing in early years, i.e. Article 3- the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration; Article 16 – the right of a child to privacy and Article 30 – the right of a child from a minority group to learn about, practice and enjoy their own culture, religion and beliefs. I would suggest that in her attempt to assimilate the convention and specific rights associated with wellbeing and quality practice, Bradford may inadvertently have diluted both the Articles themselves and in turn how child rights translate into what is understood by child wellbeing and how this is then implemented into practice. Lundy (2014:2442) suggests that:

> *"Child well-being is mentioned rarely in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in spite of the fact the pairing of 'children's rights and well-being' appears with increasing frequency in the discourse of policy makers, childhood advocates and researchers"*. She goes onto refer to the two concepts of child wellbeing and child rights as*: "rather than being like twins their relationship is more akin to that of cousins-definitely related but with different genealogy"*.

 A view supported by Tisdall (2015:807) who suggests:

> *"Children's rights and children's wellbeing are often casually paired together in both academic literature and policy discussions, but they differ conceptually, methodologically and politically"*.

When reading the UNCRC (UN,1989) and considering how to apply it into early years practice, it is evident that there is no specific Article that gives the child the right to wellbeing, however,

connections can and should be made between them, but the literature suggests this issue remains a contentious one (Ben-Arieh,2008,2014; Camfield et al., 2009; Lundy. 2014; Tisdall, 2015). There has been inconclusive debate about the links between child wellbeing and child rights and Lundy (2014:2441) suggests most of the current debate "has *emanated from those whose primary interest lies in wellbeing and the child indicator movement…in contrast, child rights scholars have not engaged to the same extent with the concept of wellbeing".*

Lundy (2014:2441-2442) puts forward the view that the UNCRC (UN,1989) is "*acknowledged as the most comprehensive international statement on childhood"* and the state, "*the duty-bearers''* are obligated to ensure children's rights are met. However, Lundy argues '' the state must be capable of delivering [rights]… *there are areas of well-being which fall completely outside the capacity of the state and therefore the scope of the UNCRC…".* Tisdall (2015:807) concludes by suggesting ''*decisions need to be made about the relationship between children's rights and children's wellbeing – and which is the primary framing for policy and practice''.*

There are rights within the UNCRC that promote the wellbeing of children and are clearly linked to the standard of living and quality of health (Article 24), and within Article 3 the UNCRC refers to wellbeing with the concept of protection rights. In addition, the right to life and survival (Article 6) and specific rights to ensure parents are supported in being able to bring up their children (Articles 5 and 18) lend themselves to be connected to child wellbeing. I have applied a child rights' approach to my research and have incorporated the associated Articles into my research as they 'fit' well in the context of the role of children's centres in supporting children and families.

3.6.6 To Summarise

I did not set out to examine the concept of wellbeing per se but to gain a greater understanding of the discourse of wellbeing and how a child might be given voice and how that voice might be heard in the context of Children's Centres. I have considered child voice through a wellbeing lens applying an ecological systems' model and rights-based approach and concur with the view that a multi-professional discourse of child wellbeing is called for to ensure children's needs are supported. It also supports and strengthens my views of examining the literature of child voice through multiple lenses. Evidence would suggest that the UK Government, while purporting to uphold the UNCRC and consider what is the best for children, have repeatedly been found to ''*contravene much of the convention…''* , with research showing the ''*UK, together with the United States* [positioned] *near the bottom* [rankings for well-being measurements]'' (Manning-Morton, 2014:31). This suggests that

neither children's rights nor children's voices are being taken into consideration in the context of policy developments and decisions that will have a direct impact on the lives of children and parents.

3.7 Reflections – Gaps in the Research

The literature review provides a reflection of policies developed during the period the research took place (2012-2021) and through empirical research, I have presented wide-ranging viewpoints of child voice viewed through the multiple lenses of child protection and safeguarding, quality of provision and practice, child rights and child wellbeing, overlaid with an ecological and child rights' framework. Examining the literature through multiple lenses has allowed me to consider these viewpoints and reflect on the discussions and findings in relation to my research and context. I consider there is a gap in the literature in relation to child voice from the perspective of working with children and parents in a Children's Centre context and that by applying the Lundy Model (2007) with adults, I believe that my research will provide a unique contribution to research. This provides a way of understanding and implementing the UNCRC into early years and family support practice in Children's Centres, which I have identified as an under-researched area. It is my belief that my doctoral study will make a valuable contribution to developing a greater understanding of supporting under 5s and their parents, as their voices are reflected in the findings of the research alongside the contributions of practitioners. Understanding these collective perspectives provides a reflective discourse on practice and policy, developing a more open listening climate that will inform and lead to transformational practice.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

4.1 Introduction

I began this research journey by examining and introducing my reflections on my own values and beliefs, which have situated me within the research. Throughout this chapter I present my ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives that have influenced my choice of research paradigm, methodology and methods. I believe, by adopting a rights-based framework (UN, 1989; Lundy, 2007), I am acknowledging my ontological, epistemological, and axiological beliefs.

It was the intention of this study to describe and analyse the views of parents and practitioners to gain an understanding of their perspectives on child voice in the context of Children's Centres in England and to critically explore how these findings might be used to inform and lead the transformation of practice to create a strategy for embedding a more open listening climate within multi-professional early years settings. As I discuss in my personal journey in chapter one (section 1.2.1), and I expand on later in this chapter (section 4.6.2), my pedagogical justification for not including children as participants in the research was informed by research, (McLarnon,2011; Bradbury-Jones, 2014) which suggests the need for practitioners to understand, develop and embed a culture of listening into practice to then be able to advocate for the voice of the child. It is my belief that child rights cannot be enacted if the adults, who are supporting the children, do not fully understand the convention. The adults in my research are the parents and practitioners and this is further supported by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN,2003), who considered that:

''*if the adults around children, their parents and other family members, teachers and carers do not understand the implications of the Convention… it is unlikely that the rights set out in the Convention will be realised…''.* (cited in Long, 2020:54).

In this chapter I set out my methodological stance and why a qualitative interpretive study adopting a case study approach was of relevance to this study.

The previous chapter reviewed the body of literature from the perspective of listening to child voice through four different lenses: child protection and safeguarding; quality provision and practice; child wellbeing and child rights. In this chapter I present my positionality as a researcher and my choice of research focus, and I will reflect on this throughout this study, acknowledging the 'researcher's voice' through reflective commentary (Hanson, 2012). The research design and key methodological features will be presented, with sections addressing fundamental questions such as ethics in research (Palaiologou, 2012) and within that, issues

such as 'power', as well as aspects of trustworthiness and authenticity (Costely, et al. 2011). I have considered Guba and Lincoln's (1989) checks of: credibility that instils confidence in the truth of the findings; transferability that refers to the applicability of the findings in other contexts; dependability which relates to the findings being consistent and reproduceable and confirmability that the findings are those of the respondents and not researcher bias.

In considering the methodological stance best suited to the research and having positioned myself within an interpretivist paradigm, it was important to reflect on my research design, research questions and methods that would ultimately make the link with the aim of the study.

Reflexivity and methodological decisions

My earlier thoughts, as I started to formulate my PhD proposal reflected an Action Research methodology which would have necessitated locating myself, as the researcher, deep into the study sites and early years setting, if I was to include children as participants in the research. I considered my positionality from an ethical and child rights' stance and reflected on the view put forward by Guillemin and Gillam (2004:262) who refer to *"ethically important moments"* within research and the use of "*reflexivity"* as a way of understanding and resolving ethical issues that have potential implications on the research and participants. Guillemin and Gillam (2004:266) refer to the notion of "*microethics"*, proposed by Komesaroff (1995) as a means of acknowledging that everyday ethical issues do occur as part of the research process and place importance on addressing these issues to ensure ethical practice in research. This view is in line with Palaiologou (2012:4) who refers to '*ethical tension and anxiety'* within research and discusses the notion of "*meta-ethics",* when considering ethical practice. This basic premise supports the need to reflect on how we conduct our research, the choices we make and our actions, when considering undertaking research with children.

The use of reflexivity was critical throughout my research, as it facilitated what Hertz (1997: vii) referred to as an *"internal dialogue" and* provided "*a continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation''*, as described by Guillemin and Gillam (2004:275). The decision to include or exclude children in a study researching aspects of child voice was, for me, an '*ethically important moment'* in my research journey and one I recorded, as follows: ''*…emerged in research and listening to different perspectives of child participation in research. I need to reflect on my own study and consider how has child voice been heard.''* (Moore, A. (30.08.2017) Professional Reflective Journal).

Malterud (2001) discusses that for some, reflexivity can be about challenging the reliability of the research as opposed to viewing reflexivity as a way of gaining a deeper understanding of

an area of the research that requires further consideration. I believe the use of reflectivity enhanced my understanding of my study and affirmed to me my methodological decisions.

4.2 Positionality of the Researcher

When considering research from an interpretivist approach, Lincoln (1995), and Lincoln and Guba (2000), refer to an epistemology that is transactional and subjectivist. They consider the 'investigator' or researcher as much a part of the research as a participant, as they are interlinked through a shared interest or 'passion' in the research topic.

In qualitative research, subjectivity within qualitative methodology or methods has to be openly acknowledged from the beginning of the study and can be used as a positive research 'tool'. From the point of choosing the research topic or area of focus, methodology and methods to apply and the interpretation of the data, the researcher is required to reflect on their own positionality and the impact this has on the research. The view put forward by Drapeau (2002) that you have to acknowledge subjectively, see the strength and take ownership of it is very much in line with Braun and Clarke (2013), who discuss the process of reflective thematic analysis within qualitative research and applying the art of ' critically questioning' the positionality of you as the researcher.

To this end I would like to put forward my own positionality within this study, accepting that subjectively is unavoidable as I am intrinsically linked to the 'case' that is being researched and to the parents, children and practitioners involved.

I began my research by considering my personal positioning as an *"Insider-Researcher"* as defined by Costley et al (2011:5). They put forward the view that an insider – researcher is in a unique position as they have insider or special knowledge of the subject being studied and would have what they describe as;

> *"easy access to people and information that can further enhance that knowledge… and are in a prime position to investigate and make changes to a practice situation"*

I am undertaking a case study across a district within a local authority where I am the Strategic and Operational Manager for the group of the two Children's Centres taking part as study sites. Reed and Proctor (1995:195) identify a list of criteria that defines insider – led research that includes:

- Focus upon aspects of practice in which the researcher has some control and can initiate change

- An ability to open - up value issues for critical enquiry and discussion

- An ability to exercise the professional imagination and enhance the capacity of participants to interpret everyday action in the work setting

Alongside this, I have acknowledged that I am being 'invited' and 'accepted' into the study sites to undertake collaborative research, leading me to reflect on what Gair (2012:134) suggests can be considered an *"insider/outsider status"*. Other research (Naples, 1996; Merton, 1972; Breen, 2007) argues that the positioning of the researcher is neither as an insider or outsider, as research is a flexible process that has to adapt to a given situation. I drew inspiration from Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009:60) who refer to the notion of *"the space between"*, where the relationships between the participants and researcher is multi - dimensional and open to change, depending on any given situation. I found this to be true within this current study. It is this stance with which I most assimilate my positionality and one I will expand on within ethical considerations (section 4.10). I have continued to reflect on my positioning within the study sites and my differing roles, as others might perceive them. I have documented, for reflection, *'critical or significant incidents'* (Spencer-Oatey 2013:1) where my perceived position of power within the research relationships has been challenged, questioned and 'tested' at times. I have also considered this further in my discussion of ethical considerations (section 4.10).

In considering my positionality I felt it was important to give consideration too, the concept of power within research and reflect on the views of Cohen Konrad et al., (2019:401) who consider *''power is a contested topic in both definition and application''.* On reflection, I could see where the issue of power and power dynamics might be become more evident in my study, such as during focus group interviews as suggested by Stewart and Waldfogel (2007:28-29) who suggest there are different influences of *''social power* [that has] *the potential or ability to influence others in a group* [situation]''. Robson and Willams (2005) identifies with the notion of power struggles which may arise between participants in the focus group situation while Liamputtong (2011:4) considers the positive aspects of focus groups as they *''put control of the interaction into the hands of the participants and not the researcher'',* although I can see how a researcher could equally use their power to manipulate and lead a session. I believe that I took into consideration the dynamics of power when considering methods and mitigated potential issues by careful planning and experience.   In respect of my positionality in my research I wanted to reflect on the theories of power and Conhen Konrad et al., (2019:401) suggest *''little use has been made of theories of power…in research''* arguing that *''theoretical as well as practical tools are required to explore the dynamics of power''.* In relation to my approach to research considering the notion of power, I reflect on the work of Freire (1996)

who argues for a more participatory, emancipatory and democratic view of education as *''dialogue and participation are viewed by Freire as an essential social interaction''* (Formosinho and Oliveria Formosinho, 2012:14). It is the notion of empowering and giving agency to all the participants in my research that most resonated with me (Freire, 1970b) as I embarked on my research journey.

In considering my positionality within the research and research focus, I considered the views of Clough and Nutbrown (2012) who view all social research to have four key characteristics: purpose; position; persuasion and broadly political. I can identify all these characteristics throughout my research study. My purpose or rationale, as described in the introduction, chapter one, has always been about making a difference to practice, ensuring that all children have a voice and are heard within our settings. I want the research to influence practice at practitioner and policy level, leading to the transformation of environment and experiences for children and their families. This also reflects the persuasive nature of the study.

Clough and Nutbrown (2012:14) put forward the view that positioning the research as transformational and wanting to bring about change at all levels makes it 'politically oriented'. The study is positional and sits within the context of Children's Centres in England, however, will resonate with and have relevance to practitioners working with children, parents, and researchers in differing early years settings and many countries. If we are to develop our pedagogical practice and provide a listening culture and environment that places the child at the centre, I believe we must examine and reflect on our current practice in Children's Centres and beyond. (Anning and Ball, 2008; Whalley, et al. 2013)

4.3 Research Questions

Having clearly defined the aim of the study and positioned it within a social research context, identifying the research design was key to ensuring it was 'fit for purpose'. Cohen et al (2007: 78) consider that the '*purpose of the research determines the methodology and design of the research'.*

The overarching research focus sets out the parameters of this study:

> Parents' and Practitioners' perspectives on how an open listening climate
> in early years settings can facilitate child voice.

Guided by the literature and extensive experience of the researcher in the field, the overarching research questions are:

1. What are parents' and practitioners' views and perspectives on child voice within Children's Centres in England? and

2. How might practice be transformed to create a more open listening climate in multi-professional early years settings?

To give clarity, purpose and a clear focus these overall research questions were broken down into a set of research sub-questions that lent support in generating and critically analysing the findings (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012).

The five focused research sub-questions that guided the study are:

1. What is understood by the concept of an open listening climate in Children's Centres?

2. What are parents' lived experience of Children's Centres and what are their perspectives on child voice?

3. What are practitioners' perspectives and understanding of their practice in relation to child voice?

4. What changes might need to happen in order to create a more collaborative, open listening climate?

5. What strategies might be adopted to improve the listening climate and pedagogical practice across teams in Children's Centres?

I reflected on an appropriate approach to the research to identify 'best fit' considering the focus and research questions. I considered a positivist approach; however, this requires the researcher to remain independent from the research, adopting an objective position. (Hammersley, 2013). Having carefully considered my positionality as a researcher, which I discussed earlier in this chapter (section 4.2), I did not feel this to be appropriate. I have therefore chosen to adopt an interpretive stance more suited to qualitative research and have undertaken this through using a case study approach conducting the research in settings. (Cresswell, 2011). The rationale for this stance follows, as I consider my research strategy.

4.4 The Paradigm Question

Lather (1986:259) refers to research paradigms as "*inherently reflecting our beliefs in the world we live in or want to live in".* Hesse-Biber and Leavy, (2011:3) refer to qualitative researchers designing their research question in order to extract meaning from the data and to answer the "*how, why or what"* questions within research. I have applied this principle in my own research when considering my paradigmatic, ontological, epistemological and axiological perspectives that I bring to the study.

The research design for my study is a qualitative case study approach within an interpretive paradigm and the study involved researching with parents and practitioners in two Children's Centres.

Current research appears to validate the view that adopting an interpretive approach when undertaking qualitative research is best suited when researching in a 'natural setting' and when dealing with people's feelings, experiences and values (Newby, 2010; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011; Thanah and Thanh, 2015).

Interpretive research facilitates the use of methodological approaches such as: ethnography; practitioner and co-constructed research (Arnold et al, 2012); collaborative enquiry (Elliott 1991; McNiff and Whitehead 2006); praxeology (Pascal and Bertram, 2012) and reflexivity (Brookfield 1995; Hertz, 1997; Malterud, 2001; Hickson 2011;). Each of these methodological approaches reflect aspects of my own ideology and set of values that I bring to the research and within my area of expertise and early years field and have also influenced my methodological approach for this study.

An Interpretive methodological approach is, I believe, appropriate for this research because my research is primarily about listening to multiple perspectives from a range of participants within the research and from the position of co-construction and collaboration as part of the research design, methodology, methods and generating new knowledge. (Cresswell, 2011)

Braun and Clarke (2013:9) suggest that within qualitative research you require '*qualitative sensibility'* and that *a*s a researcher you need to possess a range of skills that enable you to conduct qualitative research that these skills are considered different to those required when adopting a quantitative approach. They consider that '*reflexivity'* is key as a researcher, particularly in relation to positionality, a view which I share and discuss in my introduction to this chapter. They suggest there is a need to develop an '*analytical eye* and *ear'* through the data collection, analysis and reporting stages of the study. This view of reflexivity is shared by Christensen and James (2008:6) who regard it as a '*methodological necessity'.*

As the study aimed to *tell the stories* of multiple perspectives and *voices,* within my research, I was drawn to a qualitative approach which supports the view that "*participants' experiences and meaning (personal and wider societal meaning) drive experiential qualitative research"* Braun and Clark (2013:24).

The concept of '*radical listening'* put forward by Clough and Nutbrown (2012:26) emphasises the importance of paying careful attention to '*all the voices'* of the research participants as well as the voice of the researcher within the experience. This concept has been a factor in the choice of research design and methods used in this study, as can be seen in this chapter (section 4.6), as well as informing the ethical considerations within the research (this chapter, section 4.10) (Palaiologou, 2012).

I view myself as an interpretive researcher who is as much a participant in the research as those taking part at the centres which I will discuss in more detail in this chapter (section 4.2) when I consider my positionality in the research. I also consider that this research was conducted with them, as research participants, and not on them, as research subjects (Robert-Holmes, 2005), a view I will explore further when considering ethics in research (this chapter, section 4.10).

Gaining the perspectives of those participating in the study was key to generating the data and this influenced my choice of methods and data analysis. The study is situated in a '*real life circumstance'* (Thomas, 2011:10) and Coleman and Briggs (2002) also put forward the view that interpretive research relates directly to the experiences of participants taking part in the study and that the researcher should be deeply immersed in the research and the environment where the study is situated. The study therefore adopted an interpretive perspective, which I conducted using a qualitative case study approach which I considered to be best suited to the study aims and research questions. I consider my research gets to the '*soul or heart of the matter*' and the environment where the study is situated (Hitchcock et al., 1995:317). They develop the claim that adopting the use of case study acknowledges the researcher as '*integrally involved in the case'* and are valuable when needing to '*focus on individual…or groups of actors and seeks to understand their perceptions…'.*

I believe conducting my study through an alternative paradigm such as through a positivist lens would have been diametrically opposed to both my ontological and epistemological position that I describe in the next section 4.5.1. I define my research as a case study having considered the views of Stake (1995:xi) who define case study by ''…*the particularity and complexity of a case…''* and Simons (2009:21) who similarly refers to the ''…*complexity and uniqueness of a* [case]…'' but also considers the use of case study as an ''*in-depth exploration from multi perspectives…in a 'real life' context''*   and finally, Thomas (2011:21) who suggests that a case study offers '*a rich picture with many kinds of insights coming from different angles, from different kind of information'*. I believe that all these claims from those considered experts in the field can be assimilated to my study

4.5 Researcher Perspective

Grix (2002:175) puts forward the view that understanding the ''*interrelationship between the core concepts of Social Science (ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods and sources)''* is important when undertaking any research. He refers to ''*the 'directional' and logical relationships''* of these key concepts and emphasises the significance of developing a greater

understanding for these core concepts, which he refers to as ''*the building blocks of social research''.* Grix (2002:175) develops the claim that considering the logical relationships between the different concepts helps us to conduct our research from the perspective of ''…*question – led* [and not] *method-led''.* Grix (2002:180) refutes that you can start the process of research at any point as ''*it goes against the logic of interconnectedness and will most likely result in a poor question/method fit''.* I start this process by considering my ontological, epistemological and axiological perspectives (section 4.5.1), that influenced the methodological decisions I made for my research and that I go on to discuss as part of my research design (section 4.6).

While exploring where my doctoral research journey began and why I have chosen the topic, I reflected on my ontological perspective that affirmed where my personal views, values and beliefs first started to take shape and how these have been challenged, re-evaluated and re-affirmed over my 40 years in   Early Years Care and Education. My ontological perspective is based on my strong belief that children should be valued, have a '*voice'* (Clark et al, 2005:5) and that their voice should be '*heard'* (Clark and Moss, 2005: 2) and that children's views must be considered in any decision - making process that may directly involve and affect them. (UN, 1989:5). I also reflect on my experiences, past and present, and consider how these experiences have influenced my views, values and beliefs.

I consider myself a reflective practitioner and have developed, used and continue to refine the use of reflection as a learning tool and have drawn on several models of reflection during my doctorial journey (while acknowledging the need to continue to refine and apply the reflective process throughout the study (Schon, 1991; Brookfield, 1995; Bolton,2005; Hickson, 2011; Hanson, 2012). Hickson (2011: 2) refers to reflective practice *as "a way of understanding and learning from experiences"*, drawing on her experiences within the Social Work field, whilst acknowledging that reflective practice goes beyond just this discipline. She referred to Brookfield (1995: 28), who talks of the importance of viewing ourselves and reflecting on our practice *"from as many angles as possible"* and the need to *"find some lenses that reflect back to us",* going on to refer to four critically reflective lenses. Brookfield's approach to reflective practice proposes reflecting on practice from four vantage points: autobiographical; from the student's eye; our colleague's experiences and from theoretical literature. My professional reflective journal, which I used throughout my study, ensures my authentic voice is positioned, heard and contributes to the research and findings as they unfold. The value of the autobiographical lens, referred to by Brookfield, is exemplified by Henderson (2018: 2), who considers the use of autoethnography, as having "*a valuable role to play in in helping*

practitioners express their lived experiences". Where I position myself as a researcher and those participating in the research is influenced by my ontological perspective and reflecting on these influences, I believe strengthens the integrity of my research and helps me to consider the potential biases that I may bring to the research. I introduce my positionality in this chapter (section 4.2) and again when considering ethics within my research (section 4.10). The voices of the child and parent in my study are significant and equate to Brookfield's second lens, that he refers to as the student's eye and that reveals, "*how they perceive our actions and what it is about our actions that they find affirming or inhibiting"* (xiii). His third lens, that I consider in my research, represents the voice of the practitioners, my colleagues, whose voice is reflected through their experiences in the field and captured by applying a praxeological and participatory methodology. (Pascal and Bertram, 2012; Formosinho and Oliveria-Formosinho, 2012). I have also drawn on literature and theory that I consider to be significant when researching child voice, to set a firm foundation to the study and to add validity to the topic.

4.5.1 Ontological and Epistemological Perspectives

Braun and Clarke (2013:21) suggest that ontology can be viewed on a continuum that has a realism perspective at one end of the continuum, which is a more positivist, epistemological view of research that seeks ''*the truth (and there is only one), it is 'out there' and can be accessed by the appropriate application of research techniques''.* A relativist perspective of research is at the opposite end of the continuum and is representative of a constructivist view of research. When conducting research from a relativist stance, it considers that there are multiple perspectives to be considered and that knowledge is actively constructed based on a set of beliefs or prior experiences of those participating in the research. Rouse (2018:108) highlights ''*Whilst there are often common themes across experiences, there are also highly-individualised stories''* and adopting a relativist ontological perspective to research enables existing knowledge to be considered and 'new' knowledge to be constructed and therefore reflects a constructivist, epistemological perspective. There is a middle ground of this continuum that Braun and Clarke (2013:26) refer to as critical realism that they suggest is concerned with ''*representation, construction or language practices…seeking to examine the ways language is used to create particular versions of reality''.*

My ontological and epistemological perspectives are reflective of a more constructivist approach to research that is interested in hearing multiple perspectives and, as a researcher, I am as much a part of the research as others participating. This is supported by Cresswell (2003:8) who puts forward the view that '' *constructivist research tends to rely upon the*

*participants views of the situ*ation being studied''. I consider a constructivist approach to be congruent with my methodological decisions rather than a positivist stance, as I chose to undertake a qualitative study adopting an interpretivist paradigm and my research is grounded in participant's experiences, both children and adults, as well as my own (Macfarlane, 2009).

My epistemological perspective underlines my ontological perspective through my accumulated knowledge gained from my experiences which strengthens my belief that listening to children is important and that children's voice has currency. This stance sits comfortably with my values that all voices within research should be heard and, as the researcher, I have an obligation to the participants to describe, analyse, interpret and report their perspectives. The research design and selection of methodology and methods has been shaped and influenced by the value I place on multiple perspectives within research (Cresswell, 2011). The axiology of this study is therefore built on the value placed on gathering multiple perspectives with a focus on the child voice from an empowerment perspective (Freire, 1970). Child voice from a rights discourse was explored through the literature review and through my theoretic lenses, and places emphasis on the views of children being valued, to have the right to express their views and to be 'heard' in matters that affect them (UN,1989:5). As the researcher, I examined my personal perspectives, from the aspect of my own experiences and culture and reflect on this throughout the study by being culturally aware and respectful of the different perspectives (Palaiologou, 2012).

4.6 Research Design

In this section I set out my research design as a framework that shows the methods I adopted in the study. As previously stated in chapter one, the purpose of this research was to listen to and critically analyse parents' and practitioner perspectives on how a listening climate might facilitate child voice within Children's Centres, to inform how practice might be transformed. It was therefore an empowering and transformational stance that was required.

4.6.1 A Rights Based Approach

In chapter two I introduce the Lundy Model (2007) as one of my theoretical lenses that I applied which underpins the research and places value on creating a listening climate that facilitates child voice in the context of early years settings. Lundy (2007:932) identified four interrelated concepts of Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence that, she argues, require consideration when interpreting and implementing Article 12 into practice (UN,1989). Lundy suggests there are a number of other articles that also need to be considered that impact on

our ability to facilitate child voice within our practice and, in my literature review (chapter three), I explore these in more detail through the four lenses I have assimilated with Lundy's model: child protection and safeguarding; quality provision and practice; child rights and child wellbeing. In reflecting on the Lundy Model as a theoretical lens for my research, I considered a further two articles from the UNCRC (UN,1989) that I consider have relevance to my study as discussed in chapter two (section 2.1) and I present the analysis, interpretation and findings of the parents' stories (chapter five) and in chapter six when I present the analysis, interpretation and findings from the data generated from the semi-structured interviews with senior managers and focus groups with practitioners. I also present an illustration (Appendix 2) of how my theoretical frameworks are interwoven together. I adopted the Lundy Model (2007) which had been developed for use for child participation in research (DCYA, 2015) and I adapted it to use with adults in my study (Moore, 2020). I applied the Lundy Model (2007) to firstly inform the interview guide that I developed and applied to generate the data from using portraitures with parents (Appendix 4) and that I discuss in chapter five and secondly, I used the child participation checklist (DCYA,2015) chapter six, (section 6.3, figure 6.1), that had subsequently been developed from the Lundy Model, to develop an interview guide (Appendix 4), to generate data from the semi-structured interviews with senior managers and focus group interviews with practitioners (chapter six).

4.6.2 Children as Participants in the Research

As stated earlier, as my ideas of the research design and strategy began to unfold, of key consideration was whether to undertake direct research with children as participants. My early thoughts put forward in the Research Proposal (April 2012, University of Worcester) and my visual representations of the research design that evolved over time (Academic Poster Presentation, 17th October 2015, University of Worcester), showed my reflections on the prominent literature on the discourse of young children's participation in research (Clark, 2001, Dupree et al. 2001, Lansdown, 2011, Clark et al. 2005, Rinaldi, 2005, Lundy, 2007, Christensen and James, 2008, Bradbury-Jones, 2014).

As I began to consider the research design and the potential field questions and methodology I would adopt, I began to explore the concept of positionality within research which led me to reflect on my own positionality (Section 4.2), in relation to the study sites and early years settings. I took into consideration the practicalities of undertaking the research such as the accessibility to children within the two study sites, the focus of the research and the ethical dilemmas associated with undertaking research with children. Roberts- Holmes (2005:75) asks

researchers to *'reflect continuously upon the ethical issues…on what they are doing and why they are doing it'*. I reflected on issues such as power dynamics between adults and children within research and considered how this might impact on the quality of the research, data generated and research findings.

The importance of considering inequalities of power and status when researching with child participants is widely documented (Morrow and Richards, 1996; Clark and Moss, 2002; Lancaster and Broadbent, 2003; Roberts-Holmes, 2005; Billington, 2009, Pascal and Bertram, 2012; Clough and Nutbrown, 2012; Palaiologou, 2012; Bertram et al., 2015). Billington (2009) puts forward the view that research carried out with children, and adults who are known by the children, reflects a child's rights approach to research and Clough and Nutbrown (2012:32) suggest that having a:

> *'known adult' – as interviewer – makes the research conversation with the child more meaningful (and increases the likelihood that the children's views might have impact at the preschool level, rather than being 'simply' data for a research study).*

I identified with both views when considering the potential data sources, ethical considerations and my decision to adopt a child's rights framework for the study and at this stage in my research, I felt I needed to reconsider my approach.

Considering Child Voice in the Research

There has been a plethora of research that has provided theories, methodologies and practical applications on 'listening to child voice' (Malaguzzi, 1998, Alderson, 2000; Clark & Moss, 2001,2005; Lancaster & Broadbent, 2003; Coates 2003, Lundy,2007).

My study did not set out to add to this body of knowledge but to offer a different perspective and viewpoint on listening to child voice through positive engagement with parents and practitioners. In considering this approach, I reflected on Article 5 of the UNCRC (UN,1989:4) that relates directly to 'parental guidance'. It requires that:

State Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.

Figure 4.1 The full text of Article 5, (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) (UN,1989:5)

In relation to my own study I chose to adopt a rights-based approach, using the Lundy 'Voice' model of child participation (2007) as a 'tool' for engagement and dialogue with parents and practitioners acknowledging that parents have an integral part to play in the children's centre environment.

I was mindful of other articles within the convention that specifically reference parental responsibilities and the role of the family, as illustrated by Article 18 (figure 4.2) of the UNCRC (UN,1989:6) that requires that:

1. State Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.

2. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.

3. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.

Figure 4.2 The full text of Article 18, (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) (UN,1989:6)

Reflecting on the two articles, I considered the evidence borne out of extensive research conducted by Pen Green and others (Arnold et al., 2012; Whalley et al., 2013) that showed the importance of developing successful and sustained engagement with parents and the wider family, to ensure that relationships can be developed with the child, and their research has shown that this has an impact on the effective development of the child. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) perspective needing to nurture relationships between the micro and meso systems which relate to the home and child's setting/s to avoid any tensions or conflicts in those relationships.

The Young Children's Voice Network (McLarnon,2011) highlighted the importance of supporting parents to listen to their children by establishing a listening culture within the setting. They argue that parents must feel listened to, as modelled by practitioners, in order to understand and value that their children also have a voice, and their voice and contribution is of equal importance. A key component of their work puts emphasis on the need to establish positive and trusting relationships with the parents. Developing staff commitment to a listening culture, they argue, is also key for parents to understand the positive contribution children must make to family life if their voice is heard.

Further evidence supporting my approach to the research lies in the findings of O'Conner et al., (2017:400-401). Their systematic literature review examined 21 peer reviewed studies investigating the importance of parent-child relationships and the role of the early childhood education and care educators (practitioners in my study). The available evidence seems to suggest that current research reflects the value of interventions that support parents and children to develop relationships, yet none of the 21 studies reviewed reported, through robust evaluations, the role the educators had to play, in influencing these relationships.

Their research provides confirmatory evidence which supports the need for further research investigating "*what parents and educators do to strengthen relationships with children*", promoting the importance of developing strong relationships between parents and educators and advocating the importance of the parent's and educator's relationships as they are "*critical agents of children's social and emotional development*".

It is my view that this study makes an original contribution to knowledge in this field through developing an understanding of parent and practitioner perspectives on child voice within the context of Children's Centres and how practice might be transformed to create a more open listening climate. I gave consideration to other methodological approaches that I thought might be 'best-fit' (Cresswell,2011) and that would underpin my research (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002) and one that reflects my research story (chapter one).

4.6.3 Action Research and Appreciative Inquiry – Alternative Approaches to Research

It was during the keynote address at the EECERA conference in Dublin (August 2016) that I began to question whether there was an alternate methodology that might best suit my research. Helen Bradbury discussed using reflection on practice as part of the inquiry and making the change possible through action. The idea put forward by McNiff and Whitehead (2006), that action research is conducted by the practitioners and not necessarily a professional researcher, although this is also possible as collaborative research, resonated with

my own values. On reflection, the concept of practice being improved as a result of practitioner's reflection on their own work appeared to be a possible methodology to apply to my own study and a key component of Praxeology, a view that is in line with Pascal and Bertram (2012:481) who "*believe that praxeological research has at its heart, the intention for social and political transformation*".

I also considered Appreciative Inquiry which is an approach or methodology most commonly associated with organisational change management (Cooperrider et al. 2008). It (AI) emerged from a social constructivist paradigm where Vygotsky (1978) put forward the view that learning takes place through interactions and communications with others and so he argued that knowledge is socially constructed. Appreciative Inquiry, as the name suggests, requires us to first examine an issue not from a negative but from a positive stance, (Appreciative) i.e. what is positive and working well, as well as focusing on the strengths rather than the weaknesses. Through collaboration and co-construction, the researcher should examine and explore new potentials for improvement (Inquiry). As a methodology for a change process, I believe AI is participatory and empowering.

Simply put *"AI is a process for engaging all relevant and interested people in positive change"* (Cooperrider et al 2008: 101).

On first consideration, both methodologies, could be applied to my study as they fit with my own ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives as previously discussed (section 4.5.1). I considered which methodology best suited my study and questioned my design decision. While the aim of my research was to make a change in practice, was this action research?

As discussed in section 4.2, as a researcher when considering my positionality, I aligned myself with the notion of occupying '*the space between*' (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009:54). I did not consider I was in the position of being able to conduct action research within the two study sites. At the time I managed only one of the study sites which would have made accessibility to conduct action research a challenge.

In discussions with my supervisory team, I considered whether I was considering a theory of change to underpin my research and therefore questioned whether Appreciative Inquiry as a methodology would help me to effect change. We concluded that '*I am there to be a catalyst for change… I am not there to make the change… It [the practice] is not mine to change'*. I believe my study is more suited to a more participatory and '*praxeological*' approach to the methodology, rather than an action research or appreciative inquiry, described in this section,

which I believe resonates with my beliefs and is better suited to addressing my research questions.

4.6.4 A Praxeological Approach

The use of praxeology derived from ancient philosophers (Espinas, 1890) and grew out of the world of business and economic theory and has been used in a variety of contexts. It is based on the notion of '*praxis*' referring to '*action*' and '*logia*' being the '*study of*' that human action (von Mises, 2007). Critics of praxelogy argue it is less robust as a more positivist or empirical approach and therefore suggest it lacks validity as a methodology (Mayer, 2011). As a rebuttal to this claim, Deist (2017) argued that praxelogy is often misunderstood and misinterpreted and therefore considered a less scientific approach to research, a view supported by Rothband (1962) who was a strong advocate for praxelogy, as opposed to a positivist approach, as he considered praxelogy was more reflective of democratic principles, social justice and rights philosophies.

The definition of praxis that best resonates with my study is that described by Haffenden (1997:40) who suggests that *"praxis can involve the application of the following (indicative) range of skills: observing, identifying, recording, reflecting, diagnosing, analysing, relating, fitting and modelling"*. My research design and choice of methodology and methods were theoretically inspired by Freire's pedagogical approach to education (1970:36) who held the view that education through dialogue (research included) should be '*transformational*' by applying what he terms as '*praxis*' and Schon (2005:276) refers to as the use of '*reflection on action'*. In considering the most appropriate methodological framework in which to conduct my research, I also took inspiration from research conducted by others (Pascal and Bertram 2009, 2012; Formoshinho and Oliveria Formoshinho, 2012) who advocate for participatory methodology and methods within early childhood research. Their studies reflect a shared value base and worldview that places emphasis on collaboration, democracy, empowerment, respect, inclusion and participant 'voice', amongst many other perspectives within research. Pascal and Bertram (2012:480) argue for the need for a further shift from a participatory to a *"praxeological' worldview"* that they consider will be more *"profound and intensely participatory and thus more authentically democratic".*

The definition of praxeological research that they and others offer (Espinas, 1890; von Mises, 1998; Reason and Bradbury, 2012) and how this then translates into practice, resonates with my own study and positioning as the researcher, a position that Pascal and Bertram (2012:484) consider to be '*unique*', as the researcher is part of the research alongside the participants. I

consider myself to occupy what is considered '*the space between'* (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009:54), a discussion I will expand on later in the chapter.

At the heart of praxeological research is a strong ethical code that includes the need for redistributed power in relation to participation and the 'voice' of participants, particularly those potentially more marginalised in research, including children and parents.

Along similar lines to Braun and Clarke (2013), Pascal and Bertram (2012) refer to the skilled researcher being required to develop a range of skills that facilitate the application of both reflection and action when conducting qualitative research.

I consider this alternative worldview of a research paradigm worthy of consideration within a qualitative study such as mine and one carried out within an early years educational context. Pascal and Bertram (2012:480) themselves '*invite'* researchers to*" contribute to the dialogue"* in relation to considering the potential and the possibilities this approach has to offer to our research in striving for authentic collaborative and participatory research.

My study relates to exploring the perspectives of parents and practitioners on how practice can be transformed by creating an open listening climate and I present research, in my review of literature (chapter three), that reflects the interconnectedness between supporting child wellbeing and the quality of provision, as well as practice. Evidence for undertaking praxeological research with practitioners as part of their on-going professional development to monitor impact and change is well-documented (Oliveria Formosinho and Formosinho, 2012b; 2012). Evidence for embedding a praxeological approach is borne out by this research, and they suggest that ''*provision of quality that serves children and families, needs to create dynamic praxis open to transformation''* (Machado and Oliveria Formoshino, 2016:188). This approach to research supports my methodological decisions for my study and resonates with my own personal beliefs and ethical practice, which I sought to uphold and continued to reflect on throughout my study.

4.6.5 Qualitative Research as a Case Study

Having considered the research design that I felt to be best suited to answer the research questions and sub-questions and adopting an interpretivist paradigm, I elected to use a case study approach as the most appropriate method. The approach of using a case study is also acknowledged as a form of ethnographic research or ethnography and it can be said that it follows in the path of earlier anthropology. Unlike anthropologists, who would consider those involved in the research as 'objects of study', ethnographic research:

> "*aims to get to the heart of people's understanding of life by doing fieldwork*
>
> *with them rather than them being the subject of the study".* (Thomas 2011: 124)

Researchers such as Yin (2009), Simons (2009) and Thomas (2011) have written about using case stud**y** within qualitative research and although they offer differing opinions on whether it is a method, strategy or an approach, they acknowledge the strength of using case study when looking at an individual case, '*lived experiences'* and when there is a need to study something '*in-depth'* (Thomas, 2011:124), suggesting it is the right approach for my research.

Yin (2009: 8) discusses three types of case study: Exploratory, Descriptive and Explanatory. He defines exploratory case studies as those which act as a pilot to other studies or research questions. Descriptive case studies provide a narrative account and Explanatory case studies test theories, e.g. 'how' or 'why', something happened.

Yin (2009:9) argues in favour of this choice of method when;

> "*a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events*
>
> *over which the (researcher) has little or no control"*

and he suggests that using case study as a method within qualitative research is a popular choice.

As my research is exploratory in nature, Thomas (2011:104) suggests an exploratory case study is defined as when "*you are faced with … an issue that perplexes you. You need to know more; what is happening and why?".*

Stake (2005) and Simons (2009) put forward a consensus view that a case study is about studying something that is within a real-life circumstance and in-depth. They refer to the complexities of a case to be studied, a view that is very much in line with Thomas (2011), who considers the use of case study as it allows for an in-depth view and can consider multiple perspectives, a key component of this study.

Adopting this method of investigation also allows for fluidity and flexibility within the design and through the process of generating data. While research questions have been identified prior to generating data, using a flexible approach to the research allows for the initial questions to be reviewed and enables revised or new research questions to be developed based on research findings during the data generating phase.

Having chosen case study as a method to use for the research, it was important to be clear on what defines the case within the study as this is often a challenge associated with a case study approach (Robson, 2011). There doesn't appear to be a consensus view of what defines a case. Harrison et al. (2017) suggests this may be due to the evolution of the use of case study

methodology over 40 years by a range of disciplines, which may have led to the mixture of definitions and applications.

My case study is researching the stories of two Children's Centre Hubs, situated in a district in a Local Authority within England. It elicits, through the methodology, methods, data collection and analysis, multiple perspectives, '*to tell the story*' (Riley and Hawe,2005:227) It examines the case from an holistic view and while the methods being applied allow me to examine the many parts and the similarities and/or differences that may be reflected, the study tells the whole story. Simons (2009) and Thomas (2001) share the view that the use of a case study in research, adopting an interpretive stance, is well suited as it accurately represents the participant's voice within the research. This is a view that I share and one of the reasons for my choice to proceed with a case study design, using a qualitative interpretative stance in my study

Yin (2009:50) puts forward the view that ''*a single-case study may involve more than one unit of analysis*'' defining the different units as ''*embedded units…selected through sampling or cluster techniques*'' and he defines this as an ''*embedded single-case study*''. I consider my research design to be a single-case study that is ''*a representative or typical case*'' (Yin, 2009:52) and reflects an embedded, single-case that has '' *subunits of analyses*'' as I have conducted the research across two case sites (study sites) and with different teams within those sites. I present the parent portraits in chapter five and the narratives of senior managers and practitioners in chapter six which reflects that my research has been conducted as an embedded, single-case (Yin, 2009).

4.7 Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness Within Research

Often under question are the methods adopted to evidence credibility in studies that adopt a qualitative approach (Sandelowski, 1993; Morse and Field 1994 and Angen, 2000), therefore assuring trustworthiness and creditability of my research was key, alongside the ability to evidence that the data collected, analysed and interpreted holds truth. Guba and Lincoln (1994) considered member checking to be a crucial technique from several techniques that they consider could be adopted for establishing credibility. They have critiqued the use of member or peer checking for evidencing credibility citing what they consider to be a range of problems faced by applying this method that include: differing views held by the members that can add confusion and not clarity; disagreements on interpretation of data and an eagerness to please the researcher.

In order to assure the credibility of my study I have considered several methods put forward by Guba and Lincoln (1994) and advocated by Shenton (2004), in which to demonstrate the trustworthiness of my research. Morrow (2004) puts forward the view that credibility within qualitative research relates to the internal consistency within quantitative research and she draws on research conducted by Gasson (2004:95), who considers credibility to be "*how we ensure rigor in the research process and how we communicate to others that we have done so"*. I believe that I have verified the trustworthiness of my study by including: my own reflective commentary extracting reflections from my research journal and field notes; debriefing through supervision with my supervisory team; the use of '*thick description'* (Geertz, 1973, 1983) as part of coding and data analysis and reflection on my own positionality within the research, where I have considered myself to occupy '*the space in-between'* defined by Corbin Dwyer and Buckley (2009:54) (this chapter, section 4.2).

Reflecting on trustworthiness within my study included consideration for the practicalities of conducting the research that includes; negotiating access to the study sites through ''*gatekeepers''* (Eide and Allen (2015:114) and accessing participants through the recruitment and selection phase, and I discuss this in this chapter (section 4.8.1). The issue of trustworthiness needs to be considered when discussing rigour within research. Trustworthiness was confirmed in this study by assuring credibility as discussed by Guba and Lincoln (1994) as I adopted 'tried and tested' methods for data collection. Again, I gave consideration to practical details that I believe, if delivered well, uphold the principles of trustworthiness in research. These considerations include; the use of recording interviews, by both audio and visual means as appropriate, and I chose to use a voice recorder and to use basic note taking when listening to parents' stories and interviews with senior managers. For the focus groups undertaken with the practitioners I used an audio recorder, a video camera and flipchart to aid with the transcribing of the data generated.

4.8 Methods of Inquiry

Having made the decision to use a case study as my methodology, I then considered how best to generate the data and which methods would best suit this approach and would most likely answer my research questions ensuring all data generated would be relevant. Stake (2005) and Denscombe (2011) argue in favour of using multiple methods for data collection. I identified three methods of inquiry to use as part of my research:

1. Semi- Structured Interviews with senior managers from the two study sites
2. Creating parent 'portraits' through portraiture

3. Focus Groups with practitioners from across the two study sites and from the two disciplines of Early Years and Family Support.

4.8.1 Site Selection and Recruiting Participants

A non-probability sampling technique was used to recruit the study sites and the participants, both parents and practitioners. I considered the strategy of non-probability sampling (Cohen et al 2007: 113) to be appropriate for a qualitative small-scale research study and "*derives from the researcher targeting a particular group, in the full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population; it simply represents itself*".

The sites identified were originally the three children's centre hubs, led by three different lead body organisations and situated in the same geographical locality with similar characteristics, i.e. positioned in areas with high levels of poverty; size of 'reach area' and population of under 5s; ethnic diversity of families and similar size of staffing and organisational structures. The children's centres were formed as clusters at that time (2013) and I coordinated the cluster of centres commissioned by the local authority. Therefore, I had already established a relationship with the managers and lead organisations of the centres. I sent out a letter of introduction and invitation to take part in the research to the Chief Executives of the three organisations, identified by Eide and Allen (2005:114) as '*gatekeepers…important mediators*' (Appendix 7). However, I was mindful that this was only one '*gatekeeper*' who I would be required to negotiate with. I would also be required to negotiate access to the sites and participants through dialogue with managers and practitioners I was ever mindful of my positionality, i.e. that, should I choose to, I could take advantage of my management position and authority to gain access to both the sites, practitioners and parents (Appendix 7). I followed good practice guidance for conducting ethical research to ensure I maintained credibility, dependability and upheld ethical codes of practice (section 4.10). I have included the study site profile as a way of providing context for the study findings and how they apply, acknowledging it is small-scale research and that transferability, of the research, can be applied (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). My research is not a comparative study, therefore the findings from both study sites have been combined and analysed to answer the research question and sub-questions. I have made the decision to provide a generic profile of the study sites as they have been considered as one single case study (Yin,2009, Thomas, 2011).

Study Site Profile

The study sites were situated just outside of a large city in England and had many common

work practices and characteristics, as you would expect, as they were both commissioned by the same Local Authority and operated under the Core Purpose of Children's Centres ((DfE,2012) and the Children's Centre Ofsted Framework (Ofsted, 2013). They also had their own distinct cultural identity that had grown out of being managed by the Third Sector and their longevity of being established in the heart of their communities. The common work practices in relation to organisational team structures enabled me to apply the research methods, theoretical frameworks and qualitative themed analysis approach, consistently. The commonalities and differences in their cultural identities brought a richness of the lived-experiences, of the practitioners to the research, that the findings and analysis in chapter six reflect.

4.8.1.1 Eligibility criteria for participants

The rationale, research questions and sub-research questions led the participant recruitment phase of the study and set the boundaries around the eligibility criteria. The senior managers were representative of staff holding positions of strategic leadership within both study sites, with responsibility for leading and managing early years and family support teams and service areas at the time of the study, and I considered the distinction between management and leadership when recruiting (Waniganayake et al., 2000; Whalley et al., 2008;). When discussing partnership working, Gasper (2010:103) puts forward the view that ''*good leadership and management are both required for successful organisations, especially where partnership working is a key element'',* and as the research was examining the perspectives of multi-professional teams, it was key to have representation from across the two disciplines. During the period of the field work, the study sites were experiencing a time of significant change for Children's Centres (2016) and I considered this would require engagement in the research from those in positions with strategic influence who Gasper (2010) suggests, '' [are] *open and not closed to others perspectives…innovative and flexible… and* [have] *methods of organisation that are sufficiently sound and robust to deliver services''.* The notion of an open listening climate, to the sustainability of the research, is key if transformation change is to take place.

To support the notion of purposeful sampling (Cohen et al., 2007) and reduce potential bias, the sample of practitioners was broadly purposeful in that I required practitioners to be working in the field of early years or family support within the two study sites. Patton (2002:230), suggests when recruiting participants ''*your focus may be narrow''* as he argues that purposeful sampling ''*involves selecting* [participants] *on the basis that they will be able to provide 'information rich' data to analysis''.* It was my intention to recruit practitioners who

had been working no less than 6 months (therefore having passed probation and likely to be available to take part in the study). When considering the recruitment of practitioners there were newly appointed staff in the family support team and, therefore, I reconsidered the recruitment criteria and re-opened the selection process. The recruitment selection also ensured I had participants who reflected lengthier service (to ensure they had experienced the various 'evolutionary' changes within Children's Centre structures). Practitioners who met the eligibility criteria from both sites were invited to take part. The invitation to participate in the study provided information about the research, my contact details if they would like to ask any further questions, as well as the contact details of my Director of Studies should they want to confirm the trustworthiness or legitimacy of the study. The participant profiles for both study sites, for senior managers and practitioners are presented in chapter five.

4.8.2 Portraiture as a Research Method

Kara (2015:8) reflects on traditional research methods and asks us to consider using creative methods that she argues ''*can more accurately reflect the multiplicity of meanings that exist in social contexts''.* She further suggests that the process of methods can be '' *creatively layered alongside each other to build a richer picture''.* Inspired by this description of creating pictures and using imagery to both generate and interpret data, I began to explore portraiture as a research method.

Pioneered by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) as a new methodological approach, the use of portraitures in qualitative research has its roots in an autobiographical approach. Lawrence - Lightfoot acknowledged the criticism and at times opposition levied at this methodological approach as she continued to develop and refine the method over several decades. In creating portraiture as a method of inquiry, Lawrence-Lightfoot suggests she is ''*blending art and science…*[and the portraits are] *designed to capture the richness, complexity and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context''.* Cope et al (2015:6) considers that ''*Portraiture has an underlying philosophy and process that enables the illustration of real people in real setting through the 'painting' of their stories''* and they also put forward the view that as a methodology it is complex as it involves the ''*researcher attempting to illuminate meaning of personal stories and events presented as narrative''.*

The use of portraiture as a method is ''*empowering to participants''* (Cope et al., 2015:8) as it gives the participants a space to voice difficult issues or issues they may not have discussed before (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997).

The analogy of an 'artist painting a portrait' and 'painting with words' that is used to describe portraitures resonated with me and I connected with the notion of 'listening for a story' (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2009), when considering analysis and interpretation of the story being told. For those telling their story, Lawrence-Lightfoot believed that this method of documenting assures they *'feel seen, fully attended to, recognised, appreciated, respected''.* The concept of the portraits reflecting positive perspectives of participants' life experiences (Hoffman Davis, 1993) resonates with me and reflects my ontological and epistemological stance, is best suited to an interpretive paradigm and underpins ethical principles that I bring as a researcher to my study.

4.8.2.1 A Guide to Portraiture

When investigating the use of portraitures as a methodology for my study, I considered how I would eventually present the stories being told by parents, and I was inspired by the interpretation of Hoffman Davis (1993) who suggests they can be considered 'portraits' or 'verbal canvases' that reflect the narratives of the stories supported by Cope et al., (2015:12) who suggests the portraits *''stand as individual vignettes''* for the reader to explore. In chapter five, I present the portraits of five parents [all mothers] who participated in the research. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) developed a suggested guide to inform the process for using portraiture as a method in qualitative research that reflects the stages in the research process as shown in figure 4.3 below:

Portraiture	Research Process
Placing the easel	Procedures and methods
Painting the words – the 'portrait gallery'	Results
Revealing the brush strokes	Interpreting
The frame and signature	Conclusions and recommendations

Figure 4.3 A guide to undertaking portraitures

Placing the easel (procedures and methods)

Included in this process is all the preparation work leading up to the field work that includes: research proposal and ethical approval (section 4.10), selection and gaining access to the study sites and gaining consent from the gatekeepers (Appendix 7), practitioners (Appendix 8) and parents (section 4.8.1) (Appendix 9).

The eligibility criteria for parent participants was set as those currently accessing Children's Centre services or who had accessed services in the last three years (2014 – 2017). This was

to ensure that parents taking part would have had the opportunity to have similar experiences from the Children's Centres offering services denoted as Core Purpose of Children's Centres. To further reduce the potential for researcher bias and protect the credibility and confirmability of the research (Lincoln and Guba 1985) when recruiting parent participants, I actively recruited parents who had not attended the two study sites, alongside those who had. Three out of the five parent participants [all mothers] were from other centres and I conducted their interviews first to avoid any presuppositions that I may have held regarding the experiences they had of Children's Centres. The decision to recruit parents who had not accessed my own setting was also a consequence of ethical principles and safeguarding participants. I had put into place safeguarding procedures with the 'gatekeepers' in the centres that supported the recruitment process ensuring that I would be able to 'sign post' the parents back to the staff at the centres should anything arise during the interviews that would warrant that.

Painting the words – the portrait gallery (results)

I considered which method would be most effective and yield the more in-depth and detailed accounts when capturing parents' perspectives for the study. Rubin and Rubin (1995:76 - 80) make a distinction between depth and detail in qualitative research, referring as '*depth'* to mean "*getting a thoughtful answer based on considerable evidence… full consideration of the topic".*

Having made the decision to adopt a qualitative, interpretive approach to the study, I was mindful to ensure I adopted methods that would reflect democratic, empowering, and emancipatory principles and values. I considered the view put forward by Dahlberg et al., (1999) who referred to the partnerships between parents and staff and not a process of parents being instructed but a reciprocal relationship that would inform change in practice, a viewpoint I took forward into the fieldwork stage of my study.

I was fortunate enough to be part of a Learning Circle developed and hosted by Chris Pascal and Tony Bertram at the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) in Birmingham, where Dr Helen Kara introduced her concepts on creative research methods in the social sciences. In her book, Kara (2015:82-83) shared the thoughts of Holloway and Jefferson (2000:11) who put forward the view that '*conducting interviews is always a creative process because interviewer and interviewee work together to create meaning'*. I began to explore Kara's view (2015:8) of ''*enhancing interviews, [to] produce richer and more insightful data than interviews or associated methods would do alone"* and considered how I might apply this to my research.

Adopting the method of portraiture and creating parent portraits seemed to be the choice best suited to my research. However, it was also important, at this stage of the study, to consider how the data would be analysed, interpreted, and presented. I explored the use of Creative Research Methods suggested by Kara (2015) alongside other techniques in qualitative research studies and, as I discuss in chapter five, I include an artist's interpretation of the portraits as a *''visual interpretation''* (Lyons, 2017:126).

In their use of portraiture, Given (2008:645) suggests '' *the portraitist listens for* [the story] *…through interview and informal conversation'', I* therefore consider that I have adapted the interview technique and applied portraiture as a method and I believe this upholds the principles outlined in the EECERA Ethical Code for Early Childhood Researchers (section 4.10.1) which requires all research actions to be ''*transparent and documented fully, with data and methods made open for external scrutiny and critical review'* '(Bertram et al., 2015:4).

 When choosing to use portraiture as a method for generating data, I felt it was important to use audio recording to ensure I captured the '*detail of [parents] responses, and the language and concepts they use in talking about their experiences and perceptions'* as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2013:92). They stress the importance of the transcripts being '*thorough and of high quality'* (162) as well as ensuring, as researchers, we consider the ethical challenges faced by our choice of research methods. Applying ethical principles to this stage of the research included; ensuring parents were made aware of, and consented to, both participating in the study as well as consenting to have the interview recorded, and not being over reliant on note taking (Appendix 9). It was important to give my full attention to the parent as they told their story and for me as the researcher to ''*listen for the story*'' (Welty: 1983:14; Cope et al., (2017:10) reminds us that ''*it is important to be immersed in the story of each participant''*. The parents' narratives were captured by applying the Lundy Model (2007) of child participation with adults, in this case the parents, and by using an interview question guide (Appendix 4), as suggested by Liamputtong (2011). The interview guide was originally designed as a method to use when conducting focus groups and I adapted it to use as a guide for conducting interviews with parents. The method of portraiture in research is to give the participants their own voice in their story (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997). The interview guide was structured to enable the parents to talk about their experiences and their children's experience by providing background and historical context which I describe as a Family Tree and aspirations they had for themselves and their children. Then the parents were asked to describe the key challenges they faced before attending the Children's Centre. The guide then encourages the parents to describe the service and support they received from the

Children's Centre and the difference this support made to their lives. The themes for my study were identified from a more extensive interview guide that had been tested as part of a Case for Change programme I helped lead at the study sites (Innovation Unit, 2014), and which involved ethnographic research to capture 'a day in the life of' families who were accessing support services at the Children's Centre as well as from other agencies within the authority. I adapted the interview guide and identified the key themes to support parents in telling their stories for my research. (Appendix 4).

My choice of themes was also guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) as one of my theoretical frameworks and O'Neil (2020:114) puts forward the view that: *''Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model encourages us to look at the context that surrounds a person…. Within this context we can examine the multiple ways that identity, voice, and culture are represented in each of the ecosystems in the participants' lives''.* Viewing the parents through this lens and by listening to their lived experience, acknowledge their lives and those of their child/ren's transition between the different ecological systems. The Lundy Model (2007) informed the data generating phase of the research and influenced the choice of themes that guided the interview assimilating the themes with the four concepts of; space, voice, audience and influence which I introduce in chapter two (figure 2. 5).

Revealing the brush strokes (Interpreting)

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) consider this step of the research process as the researcher interpreting the portraits created from the stories being told which Cope et al., (2017:10) suggest is the *''construction of the cohesive aesthetic whole…finding the linkages and connections amongst the different issues and concerns raised by the participants''.* The full transcripts of the individual stories were typed, and I applied a coding framework (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994) to provide a structure on which to collate and present the large quantity of data transcribed and to help me make sense of the data and assist in reducing the data to help with later analysis. The use of thematic coding and thematic analysis, as used by Braun and Clarke (2013) was then applied, using a system of colour coding as the themes emerged and my second theoretical framework, the Lundy Model of Child Participation (2007), assured a rights-based approach to my study and gave assurance that my research was conducted within ethical considerations as well as within a human and child rights discourse. The four concepts of; Space, Voice, Audience and Influence (Lundy Model,2007:932) was then used to support the analysis and interpretation of the parents' stories based on *''the different*

elements that are most meaningful for answering [your] research question…so it is about meanings, rather than numbers'' (Braun and Clarke, 2013:223).

The frame and signature (conclusions and recommendations)

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) consider this the final step in the process when using portraiture in research and it assimilates with the conclusions and recommendations of the research. Cope et al., (2017:12) suggest:

> *''the portraits depict a moment in time…such as an experience of adversity,*
>
> *giving* [participants] *the ability to describe their understanding, their stories,*
>
> *and the roles and importance of variables relevant to them, which helps the*
>
> *reader to understand the challenges, success and positivity more*
>
> *thoroughly''.*

I present the findings from the parent portraits in chapter five and my final reflections and recommendations in chapter seven of the thesis acknowledging the significance of and the contribution made to knowledge by the research.

4.8.3 Semi-structured Interviews with Senior Managers

As discussed in this chapter (section 4.8.1.1) I recruited senior managers who at the time of the study were representative of staff holding positions of strategic leadership within both study sites and I felt the engagement of senior managers was pivotal to the study. I applied a non-probability sampling technique (Cohen et al 2007: 113) when recruiting participants who could represent the perspectives from the disciplines of family support and early years. This strategy for recruiting is also known as a ''*funnel approach''* (Spradley, 1979:34) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994:202) put forward the view that:

> *"Many qualitative researchers employ purposive, and not random, sampling*
>
> *methods. They seek out groups, settings and individuals where the processes*
>
> *being studied are most likely to occur"*

When considering the most appropriate method to use in my research, I considered adopting the use of focus groups as I had found them to be an effective method when capturing the perspectives of practitioners for the study as I discuss later (this chapter, section, 4.8.4). I considered the opinion of Kitzinger (2005:57) who viewed focus groups as an: "'*ideal' approach for examining the stories, experiences, points of view, beliefs, needs and concerns of individuals."* However, I also had experience of the use of semi-structured interviews as part

of my master's in education and I had adapted the traditional interview technique when undertaking the portraitures with parents, and therefore felt confident in using semi-structured interviews as a method. I had the opportunity to pilot the interview schedule that I was able to adapt for use as my interview guide with parents (Appendix 4) and again felt confident that a similar interview guide could be used with the senior managers.

Spradley (1979:34) has fostered the debate on the use of interviews when conducting ethnographic research, considering them to be conversations with people from whom you want to hear their experiences and knowledge of a topic and he argues that by conducting a series of interviews, you can build up a picture of common experiences across participants. Dyer (1995:56-8) argues that '*'an interview is not an ordinary conversation…it has a specific purpose, it is often question-based with the questions being asked by the interviewer''*. A similar view is put forward by Kvale (1996:125) who considers conducting interviews as an '*'interpersonal situation…knowledge evolves through a dialogue''* while acknowledging that you have to move the '*'interaction beyond a polite conversation'',* suggesting the '*'interview is a stage upon which knowledge is constructed through the interaction of the interviewer and interviewee roles''* (Kvale, 1996:127). Braun and Clarke (2013:78) put forward the view that interviews are '*'professional conversations…getting the participants to talk about their experiences and perspectives''*. I considered the views put forward and believed that adopting the use of semi-structured interviews with senior managers would be an effective method to use. When considering the use of semi-structured interview techniques in my study, it was important that I explored the potential challenges and therefore limitations this method might bring to the study. (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002; Cohen et al., 2007; Braun and Clarke, 2013).

One challenge of using this method is the potential volume of the data collected and the time that is necessitated in transcribing and later analysing and interpreting the data. A further problem is how to retain anonymity or confidentiality when eliciting the experiences of the participants, an issue I refer to in ethical considerations (section 4.10.1). I anticipated that the numbers of managers identified to take part as participants in the research would be low and accessibility would pose limited challenges, therefore making interviewing a practical and manageable method. Silverman (2013:199-205) draws our attention to practical challenges the researcher needs to consider if using interviews in their research and reinforces the fact that '*collecting data is much more than a technical matter'*. He refers to the use of '*interview guides'* that allow the researcher to strike a balance between adopting an '*in-depth semi-structured or conversational interviewing style'.* This view was supported by Liamputtong

(2011:1) when referring to Focus Group Interviews and one that I have chosen to adopt in my own study.

A further challenge of using this method is the skills required by the interviewer as described by Sandy and Dumay (2011:247):

> *'conducting semi-structured interviews requires a great deal of care and planning before, during and after the interviews with regards to the way questions are asked and interpreted'*

An aspect to take into consideration when conducting semi-structured interviews is research bias of both the interviewer and participants, which would have an impact on the trustworthiness of the research and Salazar (1990:569) suggests *''it is essential to recognise that one's personality and behaviour may affect the* [participant's] *responses…ensuring as far as possible that 'bias' factors do not have an effect on the data collected''.* When considering using interviews as a method in research, it is important to consider the finer details and technical aspects in preparing for the interviews such as the use of audio-recording equipment and all that is required to maintain this equipment as this adds additional tasks to the process. While there are challenges associated with the use of interviews and other methods for generating data, using reflexivity throughout the study, *''is an essential requirement for good qualitative research''* (Braun and Clarke, 2013:37) as it enables you to critically reflect on and document all aspects of your research journey. As I document in chapter five, I experienced some challenges with using equipment.

When conducting interviews, I felt It was important to create a relaxed atmosphere when preparing to conduct the interviews while reflecting a professional approach and value to the research. I was very mindful that I was known to all participants and took into consideration the *''space in-between''* (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle,2009:60) that I considered myself to occupy which I discuss earlier in this chapter (section 4.2)). I believe careful planning prior to the interviews is of great importance in helping to reduce research bias and the use of an interview guide as suggested by Liamputtong (2011) and others (Kvale,1990; Patton, 2002; Braun and Clarke, 2013) as this assures that *''the same basic lines of enquiry are pursued with each* [participant]…[with] *the commitment to ask genuinely open-ended questions which offers the* [participant] *the opportunity to respond in their own words''* (Patton,2002:343- 344). I made the decision to develop an interview guide adapted from that used by Liamputtong (2011:76) as this had proven to be effective with focus group interviews and, therefore, I would be able to apply the same guide when researching with the practitioners. I used the structure of the interview guide that suggested: 1. Introductory Question; 2. Transition Question; 3. Focus

Questions; 4. Summarising Question and finally 5. Concluding Question. I made the decision to apply the Voice is not enough model Checklist for Participation (DCYA, 2015:21-22) (chapter six, section 6.3, figure 6.1) which was developed by Lundy and others, as part of the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Ireland and which is ''*underpinned by Lundy's Model of participation''.* I adopted the checklist as the focus questions to guide the interviews with senior managers and practitioners (Appendix 6). I discuss the focus questions in more detail in chapter six (section 6.3, figure 6.1), when I present the findings.   I felt this would provide a consistent structure and reduce research bias while generating data across the different data sets. I also felt it would assist in the analysis and interpretation of the data and apply what Braun and Clarke (2013:201) consider as ''*analytic sensibility…interpreting data through a particular theoretical lens… to notice patterns or meaning''* which they suggest then helps you to '' *systematically identify and report the salient features of the data''* (223).

4.8.4 Focus Group Interviews with Practitioners

Focus group interviews originally called '*focused interviews'* (Merton and Kendall 1946) had their early origins in the fields of sociology and social psychology, in relation to research on social groups and group behaviour, clinical psychology, applied to group discussions, interactions and group therapy techniques, and advertising and market research. They provided versatility and increased accessibility to groups of consumers where, for example, consumer's opinions on products or services were required. The historical origins and use of focus group methodology remains pertinent in research today. Merton (1989) reflected that the basic purpose of focus groups was to '*gather qualitative data from individuals who have experienced some particular concrete experience' (*cited in Stewart et al 2007: 9).

While there are suggested disadvantages to using this methodology, such as the discussions within a focus group may provide insufficient in-depth insights into the experiences and views of participants or they limit the topics and issues that can be discussed, if a topic is seen as 'sensitive' the consensus view seems to be that using a focus group approach to gather data in qualitative research has important qualities not necessarily evident in other research methods. Kitzinder (2005:57)) puts forward the view that:

> "focus group methodology is an 'ideal' approach for examining the stories,
>
> experiments, points of view, beliefs, needs and concerns of individuals".

Of interest to me, and the reason I chose this method is the interactive and participatory nature the approach can offer, in bringing a group of research participants together to explore a set of issues. The group is '*focused in the sense that it involves some kind of collective activity*

such as debating a particular set of questions, reflecting on common experiences' (Kitzinder 2005:1)

This interaction or 'group effect' described by others (Carey and Smith 1994; Barbour 2007; Stewart et al 2007) facilitates more in-depth discussions on a focused 'topic' or issue whilst also enabling the individual perspectives to be 'heard', if conducted well. It is the group interaction and collective insights that create what Stewart et al (2007:43) describe as a *"synergistic effect".* This refers to the way the participants of the focus group respond to but also build on the responses of others. Interactions between participants can be viewed as a positive resource in data analysis: *"Participants provide an audience for each other which encourages a variety of communication" (*Kitzinger 2005:108)*.* This method fits within the theoretic framework I have adopted for the research as well as supporting the use of the thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2013), when analysing the data collected. Focus Group Interviews facilitate participants to reflect on their experiences that draws more on their feelings, values and beliefs as suggested by Morgan (1998) and Gibbs (2007) who argue in favour of using focus group as a method to help produce data that may be less accessible without the dynamics of group interactions and revealing insights from a collective as well as individual viewpoint.

The dialogic and pedagogical nature of the approach promotes what Freire (1993), cited by Liamputtong (2011:23), refers to as *"collective action or reflection"* defined by Freire as '*praxis'*, the act of bringing theory and practice together. He places importance on the pedagogical praxis that takes place as he considers this is what is empowering and facilitates the greatest change. Freire refers to this as the *"human agency"* of the participants to have the power to bring about change, which adheres to the EECERA Ethical Code (Bertram et al., 2015:3)

> "to *distribute power between all participants…allows all involved to actively*
>
> *have a voice…and contribute equitably and appropriately"*

I took into consideration the challenges, limitations and criticisms of the use of focus group methodology, described by Liamputtong (2011) and others (Jowett and O'Toole 2006; Krueger and Casey 2009) which include: concerns that not all participants may be allowed a 'voice' where the topic may evoke "*strong or opposing opinions"; that a " shallower understanding of an issue"* may be obtained compared to that gained in an interview or that some topics may be perceived as "*unsuitable for a focus group environment"* due to their personal nature or sensitivity around a topic. In addition, focus groups, if designed and used correctly warrant a great deal of time for preparation and successful execution and creating a non-threatening and comfortable environment is critical if the method is to be successful. Drawing on the

expertise of Liamputtong gave me the confidence and conviction to make use of focus group interviews, particularly around the practicalities of conducting them and I adopted the use of a focus group question guide as suggested by Liamputtong (2011) (Appendix 6), that became key to the success reflected in the data generated, findings and analysis chapters of this study (chapter six). To overcome some of the suggestions of the challenges and limitations of using focus groups as a method, I arranged to conduct them in situ where the practitioners would be familiar and feel comfortable with their own surroundings which I believe facilitated a more relaxing atmosphere (Hennick, 2007). I followed the advice put forward by Liamputtong, (2011:71-76) with regards to room preparation and refreshments and I used the structure of the interview guide to prepare my own specific guide. All the practitioners who participated were asked to consent to taking part in the research (Appendix 8). In considering the ethical principles of research, I was mindful that I was conducting the field work with practitioners during the Islamic period of Ramadan and took into consideration therefore that some participants would be fasting, and I had asked in advance of the session if it would be appropriate to have refreshments on offer. I was also mindful of the need to consider the timing and length of the focus group session particularly in the case of study site two, as I had recruited ten practitioners from both early years and family support to attend together and had scheduled two shorter focus group sessions to take place. I also made the decision to recruit a ''*notetaker or assistant moderator*'' as suggested by Liamputtong (2011:63), who considers this as ''an *essential* [to] *record the key issues emerging and other factors that may be important in the analysis and interpretation of the results''.* This would also support with the different elements that are required to conduct focus groups such as; audio, visual and written recordings which is also a view supported by Barbour (2007). I was able to recruit a colleague and fellow PhD researcher to assist with three out of four of the focus group sessions which did add challenge to the fourth session which I delivered on my own. The audio and visual recording gave me some assurance as I was able to use these as cross reference points against the notes I had made.

4.9 Limitations of the Study

I am of the belief that this research has contributed to new knowledge and ways of creating a pedagogy of listening in the context of a multi-professional early years setting, and I will expand on this when considering the contribution the research has made to new knowledge, in Chapter eight (section 8.2)   as well as the implications for the research and when considering my recommendations (section 8.3).

It is important to acknowledge that all research has limitations, and I will consider some of the limitations of my research in this section. Of note, is that the study constitutes small-scale research conducted with two study sites and the participants included five parents, nineteen practitioners and four senior managers. However, I believe I have conducted a well-designed study that has provided reliable data that is relatable and that informs policy and practice. While the research only took place across two study sites, I believe the study includes 'rich' data that addresses the key area that has until now been under-researched. I was able to recruit and focus on key participants who represented the staff across the two disciplines of family support and early years which were key components of the research. This enabled me to 'drill-down' to understand specific behaviours, experiences and work practices that related to the research questions. The initial recruitment criteria may have been limiting as it had the potential to exclude staff members who may have had an interest in participating. I reviewed the recruitment criteria to then include newly appointed staff as well as staff members who had a lot of experience in their area of work, which I believe then elicited a wider range of perspectives to add to the 'rich' data collected.

All the participants were female which did reflect the employment profiles of both Centres at the time, as well as reflecting a high percentage of mothers that access and engage with Children's Centre Services, as was the case at the time of the study. These limitations provide an opportunity for future research to conduct a larger scale study across more study sites to include representation from the diverse settings that reflect the early years sector which I discuss when I consider further research in Chapter eight (section 8.5).

As discussed in chapter four (section 4.11), I designed a pilot phase which informed my choice of methods and I believe I gained confidence as an early researcher to undertake the study. When considering the use of Focus Groups in research it has been suggested that you need to take into consideration if the participants are a group of strangers or are familiar and known to each other, as this changes the dynamics of the group and has potential to have issues with hierarchy of participants (Liamputtong, 2011). As the participants within the focus groups were all known to each other and there was potential for the more experienced staff to influence the discussions, I was mindful to ensure all participants had the opportunity to contribute and allowed time and space for this. When analysing and reporting on the data I ensured I selected data extracts ''*that strongly and clearly evidenced [my] analytic claims…[gave] vivid examples [that were] clear and concise''* (Braun and Clarke, 2021:133-134). I was also aware of the need for the data collection and coding process to be ''*thorough,*

inclusive and comprehensive'' (Braun and Clarke, 2013:287) to reflect the voices of all participants taking part in the research.

When reflecting on the limitations of the research I considered the theoretical frameworks and methods that I adopt for the study. Acknowledging that the Lundy Model of child participation (2007) has been widely adopted (Büker, 2020) and it is considered to be a legally bounded framework there is a dearth of literature critiquing the model. In considering the limitations of the Lundy Model, it has been extensively implemented in the context of children over 5 and of school age and into adolescence and not, with under 5s. I have chosen to adopt and adapt the model in the context of early childhood and education relating to under 5s and with adults and as Swadener (2020:393) suggests my study *''is a powerful new area of research''.* As I discuss in chapter two (section 2.1) (Appendix 1), I made the decision to add Article 6 In the context of my research which refers to a child's right to life, survival and development and that I believe has significance in relation to the context of my study. The concept of children and families appearing at times to be invisible in our service resonated with me and literature I explored in chapter three reflects the need for early intervention and support for families. I also added Article 18 (chapter 4, section 4.6.2) (Appendix 1), that makes specific reference to parental rights and responsibilities and that appropriate assistance, should be given to support parents or legal guardians in their roles and that facilities and services for the care of children should be available.

A further potential limitation of the use of the Lundy Model as a theoretical framework and as a method of data collection relates to the multifaceted nature of the model and the topic of children's rights that necessitates the participants have a level of understanding of the UNCRC and specific articles. Limited knowledge of the specific articles applied in the research may lead to misinterpretation when applying child rights in practice. I mitigated against this limitation by; introducing the research through several initial Engagement Events to support practitioners to become familiar with the Lundy Model, the UNCRC and specific articles, providing information packs when recruiting participants and including visual aide memorise of the Lundy Model and the UNCRC at each focus group and interviews with senior managers and parents. I believe I retained the integrity of the Lundy Model by applying it across all data sets while also introducing

The fieldwork was undertaken at the start of the re-commissioning process for Children's Centres in the local authority leading to political and financial uncertainties for the Centres. I have documented my positionality in chapter four (section 4.2) and acknowledge myself as a researcher occupying what has been considered as *'the space-between'* (Corbin-Dwyer and

Buckley,2009) and discuss the ethical considerations for this research in the next section (section 4.10). I was mindful of my positionality and impact this may have on the research and I was conscious of the need to use bracketing (Tufford and Newman, 2010:80) to mitigate the potential of researcher bias throughout the research process with the use of reflectivity. I worked closely with my supervisory team as well as taking opportunity to disseminate my research and receive critique from peers throughout the whole of the PhD journey.

4.10 Ethical Approval Process

Ethical Considerations

As part of the section on methods I will set out the ethicality of the research, not only from the position of adhering to codes of practice and obtaining ethical approval from the University's Research Degree Ethics Committee but examining and interpreting what this really means in practice. The views of Palaiologou (2012:3), who discusses ethical practice in early childhood, resonates with my own views as a researcher. She considers that ethical practice:

> *'Is concerned with how people around early childhood research and practice*
> *conduct their work through morally upright practices and how different points*
> *of view are considered'*

I continuously questioned and examined, through self-reflection as well as with the support of all those participating in the research, and by disseminating my research at every opportunity, what Palaiologou (2012:3-4), describes as *'Meta-ethics'*. This takes us beyond just considering what is "good" or "right" practice, as these are subjective terms, to really considering our actions and the cause or consequence of our actions within research.

In choosing to adopt a praxeological approach to the research, I took into consideration the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2014-revised 2018) and the EECERA Ethical Code for Early Childhood Researchers (Bertram et al, 2015). The set of ethical principles, within the EECERA code of practice, resonates with the current study and supports the spirit of participatory research with a strong value base and ethical praxis. This code of practice promotes high standards within research involving children or vulnerable young people and adults. It sets out a set of ethical principles to guide practice, which are addressed below to in relation to this study.

4.10.1 EECERA Ethical Code (all quotations in this section are taken from EECERA Code for Early Childhood Researchers, Bertram et al., 2015)

The child, family, community, and society

The research is rooted in work within the community and with children and families, in a children's centre context, and as the researcher, I set out to attempt to '*give voice'* to all those participating in the research. As such, the choice of research paradigm, methodology and methods adopted and discussed in this chapter were key in upholding an ethical code of practice within the research.   Framing the study within an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998, 2006) serves as a permanent reminder that while the child remains the focus of the research, this cannot be seen in isolation from the systems and relationships the child experiences.

The research acknowledges the rights of the child '*from pre-birth'* by eliciting the parent's and practitioners' perspectives on child voice in relation to the children's centre services and the environment.

Democratic values

Adopting the Lundy Model (2007) as the framework in which to conduct the research has positioned the study within a rights perspective and specifically '*paying due regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child' (1989).* Similarly, this rights-based pedagogy approach was supported by applying a strong praxeological and participatory stance. The '*distribution of power between all participants as far as possible'*, was a key consideration, acknowledging '*participants as subjects, not objects with rights'.*

Justice and equity

The study is based on the desire to *'give voice'* to children by eliciting the perspectives of practitioners and parents, leading to a greater understanding of *'child voice'* and how we can inform practice and policy that might lead to transformation of practice. The choice of methods used as part of the research to collect multiple perspectives supports the principle of '*giving credence to diverse voices'* in the research, an issue I addressed in section 4.81, when designing my site selection and recruiting participants. The practicalities of my choice of methodology comes into play when considering 'justice and equity' within ethical considerations.

Knowing from multiple perspectives

Acknowledging my positionality within the research was critical here in ensuring the research was undertaken upholding an ethical code of practice, recognising the importance of the multiple perspectives within the research. As the researcher conducting the study within my own setting, I considered myself to occupy, what Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) define as occupying the '*space between'*. The idea that the relationships between the participants and researcher is multi-dimensional and open to change, depending on any given situation. The aim of the study is to '*extend knowledge of understanding'* [of practitioners' and parents' perspectives] by building on *'existing work and disciples',* seeking to generate and offer a new and meaningful contribution to knowledge.

I addressed the issue of assuring credibility within the study by affording time to re-define the relationship between myself, as the researcher and those participating in the study. This was essential, not only to give clarity to my role the research but also to stress the aspect of voluntary consent to take part. I wanted practitioners and parents to be willing participants and not feel coerced into taking part because of my positionality. At the early stage of my study I planned and delivered a series of pre-research sessions to colleagues, which I considered Engagement Events and where senior managers and practitioners attended. I was able to introduce the research and I began to gather the thoughts of colleagues to inform my research design, methodology and methods that I would take forward. I consider that these sessions helped to define and establish my positionality as a researcher. I asked that the information about the research get cascaded across their Children's Centres to assist with later recruitment of participants and I believe this gave assurance that the participants were not coerced into participating but were interested themselves in taking part. As colleagues were more familiar with the study, I proposed to undertake the research at the study sites where I felt colleagues were best placed to consider parents who may be willing to participate in the research. I discuss the recruitment of parents to participate in section 4.8.2.1.

Integrity, transparency and respectful interactions

There is growing literature on insider/outsider research that provides examples of the complexity of negotiating positionality in the field and refers to issues such as power relationships and research bias that may occur from existing knowledge of the people and the cultures within the study sites. (Merriam et al, 2001, Costley et al, 2011, Milligan, 2016). Much of the current debate revolves around what Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009:) refer to as a researcher occupying *'the space in-between'* while Milligan (2016:235) talks about a

researcher being an *'inbetweener'*. Having acknowledged myself as occupying 'the space between' as a researcher within my own setting I was drawn towards the views of Crossley et al., (2016) who discuss the notion of 'power' within relationships of the researcher and the participants. Adopting a praxiological approach to the study I believe helped redress the 'power' and shift my own positioning. My experience of the relationships during the data collection stage to some extent correspond with those of Crossley et al., (2016). Part of my ethical considerations was where to conduct the interviews with parents. The choice was given, and four out of the five of the parents chose to have the interviews conducted at their homes. The remaining one took place in the parent's room in the children's centre. This choice was offered because I was aware of the power differential between a researcher and its participants. I ensured that my own physical safety and welfare, as the researcher, was protected by putting in safeguarding protocols followed by the study sites themselves. Of further ethical consideration was an awareness of the sensitivity of the research and the need to consider and anticipate the potential consequences of the research. I was mindful that I was exploring areas of parents' lives that were private and personal and that had the potential to elicit strong feelings and emotions and as a researcher I was aware of the need to be able to respond empathically as well as stop the interview if required. I was sensitive to the needs of the children present during two of the parent interviews and the impact the responses from the parent may have. As discussed earlier in my thesis (Section 4.6.2) I was mindful of the views of Clough and Nutbrown (2012:32) who argues that the *'' 'known adult' as the interviewer makes the conversation with the child more meaningful ''* and they suggest that this reflects ''a child rights approach to research…'' which in turn makes the data meaningful and not ''*simply data for a research study''*. I therefore did not consider it ethically appropriate to include children as participants in the parent interviews.

As a researcher conducting research at my own setting, I chose to interview parents from other children's centres within the city to assist in reducing any potential bias I may have held. Three out of five of the parents had accessed support from other centres. I reflected that I did not believe they viewed me as a total 'outsider' as parents gave in-depth responses to my questions, leading to a more 'insider perspective'. I noted that *'as parents told their stories their individual experiences came through'* (Moore, A. (06.05.2018) Professional Reflective Journal). I was conscious that parents may perceive me from an 'outsider' perspective occupying a manager's role of a children's centre. I therefore ensured the Information given to parents about the research was clearly associated with the University and the Centre for

Research in Early Childhood. I also ensured that the information carried the organisation's logos to ensure accountability and legitimacy.

I had already established relationships with practitioners from both study sites as the manager of one of the sites and having worked across the district with neighbouring centres. However, in order to assure credibility of the research I took time to ensure practitioners gained familiarity with the study and the aims. Jensen (1997) refers to the '*power and politics'*of undertaking work-based research and argues in favour of personal honesty and being clear on the aims and outcome of the research that participants are contributing to. The engagement events I refer to earlier helped, I believe, in reducing anxiety or feelings of coercion that my position as 'the manager' may have created as I was 'inviting' colleagues to take part in the research. The notion of occupying ''*the space between''* suggested by Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009:60), when conducting the research helps to break down the concept of ''*insider versus outsider status''* that is associated with discussions of power relations. Acker (2000) suggests that the concepts of insider or outsider researchers is a contested space that should be acknowledged and debated as part of the research process and I maintained a research journal throughout the study to document using the process of reflectivity.

I conducted my data collection in an open and transparent manner ensuring that informed consent was understood and gained from all those concerned with the research. This included the initial consent from the Chief Executive Officers (the gatekeepers) (Appendix 7) to conduct the research at the two study sites and informed consent from the parents (Appendix 9) and the practitioners (Appendix 8). Detailed information packs were given out which described the purpose of the research; the request from the participants; the type of data that would be collected, analysed, interpreted and an idea of how the findings might be shown i.e. Case Study.

Equality and rigour

I conducted focus groups with practitioners from both study sites and as a researcher conducting the study on my own setting, I was mindful always of maintaining '*the highest ethical standards*' which '*guarantees participants their rights*'. Having gained informed consent from all participants, I continued to reflect on my positionality throughout the process and took a virtual 'temperature check' as the focus groups proceeded. I devised a focus group question guide utilising Lundy's (2007) Voice is not enough model of child participation to maintain the focus on the key research question and sub-questions limiting the potential to divert attention of the practitioners to wider aspects of their roles and work within the centres.

Probe and prompt questions were applied as required; however, these were only used to gain clarity and a deeper understanding of some issues discussed.

The practitioners taking part in the focus groups were recruited from across the two study sites and from different disciplines within the centres and I applied consistency across the focus groups, supporting the notion of 'site triangulation' as put forward by Shenton (2004). Three out of five of the parents interviewed were from centres unknown to me previously, therefore also adding to the credibility of the study.

Academic scholarship

As well as the academic rigor required of the research, it was imperative that the transcribing of the data facilitated the analysis and later presentation of the findings, ensuring faithful interpretation of the data, recognising the '*authentic contribution*' of the participants. Throughout the study I have taken the opportunity to present the research at local, national and international conferences, receiving critic and peer support. I have ensured I have represented the authentic 'stories' of the participants, '*ensuring the highest ethical standards for dealing with participants which guarantees participants their rights'.* I have taken the opportunity for '*peer scrutiny'* of my research as discussed by Shenton (2004), attending and presenting at CREC Learning Circle and have been able to refine different aspects of my research and enhance the credibility of the study.

It is important to consider key aspects that define ethical research which includes consideration of informed consent and the right to withdraw, confidentiality and anonymity and ethical practices around handling data. Informed consent from all participants was gained immediately prior to participants taking part in either the interviews or focus group sessions. This gave time to assure informed choice based on information provided which also stated the right to withdraw from the study.

I maintained confidentiality of participants throughout all stages of the research unless explicit consent was obtained to do otherwise and I was mindful of assuring anonymity by making slight changes where required but without altering the meaning substantially (Guenther 2009). The participants were allocated a pseudonym and/or assigned a code, as in the example of the parent interviews (Parent 1 Helen's Story) and senior managers (SM1) and practitioners (EY1/FS1). I maintained separate password protected documents that contained the non-anonymised data (Braun and Clarke, 2013:169) for cross reference purposes. All audio and visual recordings of focus groups were downloaded immediately following a session and

again stored electronically and password protected. All hard copies of data generated during the field work phase of the research were stored securely in a locked filing cabinet.

Social contribution

The EECERA ethical code (Bertram et al., 2015) for early childhood researchers provided a guide and framework that supported me in striving for ethical praxis and I believe helped instil confidence and trust between participants and myself and ensured '*the research embodied an awareness of social responsibility towards the communities and societies in which it is conducted'.* The rational for conducting the research was made clear and the participants all acknowledged the significance of the study and the research question and showed a willingness to contribute to a topic worthy of research. Both practitioners and parents alike appreciated the '*contribution'* the study would make towards *'advancing scholarly knowledge'* that has the potential to '*impact on both policy and practice'.* I consider this to contribute to addressing the issue of '*transferability'* within a small-scale research study. Guba and Lincoln (1985) and Shenson (2004) put forward the view that transferability from an interpretivist stance relies on the researcher providing adequate contextual detail about the study sites and participants that assists those reading the research to apply to their own situations. I also address transferability from the findings as evidenced through the '*rich descriptions'* (Geertz,1973) reflected in the data analysis and findings.

I have reflected on how my research has adhered to the definition of 'trustworthiness' criteria put forward by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Shenton (2004) and have considered how I have addressed the issues of credibility and transferability through my ethical considerations. They also ask researchers to reflect on dependability and confirmability when conducting qualitative studies. I hold the view that as a qualitative researcher I have demonstrated dependability and confirmability by evidencing a research audit trail during my fieldwork activities, data collection, analysis and interpretation. Adopting a reflective approach throughout my research has, I believe, strengthened this as I have ensured the 'voice' of all participants is dominant within the research and not my own.

4.11 Pilot Phase

I designed a pilot phase into my research design in order to critically reflect on and inform my choice of methodology and methods to assure methodological rigour. There are a range of reasons why it is advantageous to factor in a pilot phase or pilot study into your research as suggested by Teijlingen et al., (2001:293) Table 4a.

I identified from their list, several advantages to this stage in my research (indicated in bold in table 4a).

Table 4a: Edwin R. van Teijlingen et al., (2001:293)

• **Developing and testing adequacy of research instruments**
• Assessing the feasibility of a (full-scale) study/survey
• Designing a research protocol
• Assessing whether the research protocol is realistic and workable
• **Establishing whether the sampling frame and technique are effective**
• **Assessing the likely success of proposed recruitment approaches**
• **Identifying logistical problems which might occur using proposed methods**
• Estimating variability in outcomes to help determining sample size
• Collecting preliminary data
• **Determining what resources (finance, staff) are needed for a planned study**
• Assessing the proposed data analysis techniques to uncover potential problems
• **Developing a research question and research plan**
• **Training a researcher in as many elements of the research process as possible**
• Convincing funding bodies that the research team is competent and knowledgeable
• Convincing funding bodies that the main study is feasible and worth funding

The pilot phase of the study gave me the space to consider and pilot different methods I might adopt as part of a qualitative study and one that required listening to multiple perspectives including parents. As part of a series of engagement events with practitioners I introduced several techniques and frameworks that could be applied to this study such as; RAMPS (Lancaster and Broadbent 2003), Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001), Learning Stories (Carr and Lee,2012) and the use of Reflective Journaling (Bolton,2005; Moon, 2004). I was also able to pilot the use of Photo Voice (2003) applying RAMPS (Lancaster and Broadbent, 2003). However, all these approaches proved to be challenging to both early years practitioners in that they were time intensive, and for family support who were unfamiliar with the early years frameworks. The pilot therefore informed my choice of methods by piloting the interview guide and themes that I used to complete the parent portraits (Appendix 4) as well as the interview guide, I adopted for the semi-structured interviews with senior managers and focus groups with practitioners (Appendix 6).

This stage in my research gave me the opportunity to build up a 'rapport' with the managers and staff teams from the potential study sites. I was also mindful of the limitations and concerns surrounding the use of a pilot study (Holloway,1997, van Teijlingen et al., 2001); however, I am of the opinion that I mitigated against the limitations by adopting the use of reflexivity throughout my study adding to the trustworthiness of the research. This pilot phase helped develop my early thinking around methodology and methods and my positionality and I reflected on this as follows:

> '…*First steps to creating a pedagogical learning space and community of practice and staff are already discussing how they could change process and systems to ensure early years and family support have a shared approach. Pedagogical praxis in evidence'*.
>
> (Moore, A. (09.07.2012), Professional Reflective Journal)

It was during the pilot phase that the lead body (gatekeepers) of one of the centres decided not to take part in the study, leaving the two study sites that did take part.

4.12 Reflections and Conclusion

This chapter has described the choice of methodology and methods I made to undertake the study and having considered the most 'fit for purpose' approach I chose to use a qualitative case study and interpretivist paradigm. I considered that this approach well-matched my ontological, epistemological and axiological stance that had influenced the research topic and places the right for a child to be heard at the centre of the research. Adopting a praxiological and rights-based approach strengthened my beliefs and was one of the main drivers influencing the research design. I have introduced the methods for data collection and considered the benefits and limitations to these methods aided by the findings in the pilot phase of the study and participants' feedback and response.

I considered the ethical principles for the research and 'mapped' these against the EECERA Ethical Code for Early Childhood Researchers (Bertram et al., 2015) ensuring I paid attention to the trustworthiness of the research alongside transferability, dependability and confirmability of the study.

I consider that I have positioned myself as occupying 'the space between' (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009), as researching within my own setting and have clearly stated my positionality using reflexivity to self-scrutinise the research and mitigate against researcher bias (section 4.2). In Chapter five I present the profiles of the parents that took part in the research.

Chapter 5: Parent Portraits

5.1 Introduction

In my study I have applied an interpretive approach to the research, and, for the purpose of my study, I have used an embedded, single case study approach (Yin,2009), as a way of listening to the multiple perspectives of the participants who took part in the research. I describe this approach in more detail in Chapter four (section, 4.6.5) methodology and methods, where I identified the case and I describe my methods of inquiry and present the profiles of the study sites taking part in the research, along with my process for recruiting participants (chapter four, section 4.8.1). Finely, in chapter four, I introduced the methods and techniques I used to collect the data in order to seek answers to the research questions:

1. What are parents' and practitioners' perspectives of child voice within Children's Centres?

2. How might practice be transformed to create a more open listening climate in a multi-professional early year setting?

The five sub-research questions that guided the study are:

1. What is understood by the concept of an opening listening climate in Children's Centres?

2. What are parents' lived experiences of Children's Centres and what are their perspectives on child voice?

3. What are practitioners' perspective and understanding of their practice in relation to child voice?

4. What changes might need to happen in order to create a more collaborative, open listening climate?

5. What strategies might be adopted to improve the listening climate and pedagogical practice across teams in Children's Centres?

As a researcher, I have been drawn to the research experience of Braun and Clarke (2013:15) who suggest there are *''three different types of questions in qualitative research'',* and these are:

- The research question(s) – what am I trying to find out?
- The questions I asked of participants to generate the data
- The questions I asked of the data, in order to answer my research question(s) and sub-research questions.

As I was seeking to explore parents' perspectives on child voice, I felt I needed to give the parents the opportunity to *'tell their story'* (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:12) and I describe this in more detail in chapter four (section 4.8.2). The five parents' portraits presented in this chapter (section 5.2) provide a summary of each parent's story taken from the interviews, presented as portraitures (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1999).

I consider that parent voice is underrepresented in research, and, in the context of early years multi-professional settings such as Children's Centres, which is where I situate my study. Harcus (2012:105) suggests:

> *''practitioners cannot support the learning of children effectively if they do not know enough about a child, their family's context and ideas, the experiences they have had and the family values that underpin them''.*

Harcus (2012:113) conducted her action research in the context of a Children's Centre and reflects on the need to establish strong relationships with the child, parents and the family. She suggests, from reflecting on her research findings, that we need to:

> *'' consider the possibility of power imbalance…if our aim is to work closely with parents to better support a child's education, then we need to develop an approach that values what parents think and feel about their child's learning''.*

When considering how to present the participant profiles in this chapter, I considered my rationale for conducting the study, which placed the child at the focus of the research. In chapter three (section, 3.2.3), as part of the review of the literature, I present research that advocates for creating an open listening climate in early years settings where multi-professional teams are supporting children and families. This reflects the need for practitioners to support parents to understand the importance of listening to their child and understanding that their child has a right to a voice and for their voice to be heard (chapter four, section 4.6.1). I provide a further rationale in chapter four (section 4.6.2) for having chosen not to include children as participants in the research, supporting the view that in order for practitioners to be able to support children and parents, and for this support to be effective, the practitioners need to have a shared understanding, in their setting, of what it means to listen to both the children and the parents, by creating a more open listening climate (Lyndon et al., 2019). I have applied a child rights framework as one of my theoretical lenses (chapter two, section, 2.3) and I discuss how I applied the framework throughout the thesis, making the connection between the adults (parents and practitioners in my study) needing to understand the UNCRC (UN,1989) and transforming practice to be able to facilitate child

voice and to afford child agency in their own lives. The Lundy Model (2007) has prominence in this chapter as I have applied the model not only as one of my theoretical lenses, but also, as a tool for generating the data (chapter 4, section 4.8.2.1) and again to analyse and interpret the data in this chapter (section 5.3).

By using the method of portraiture, pioneered by Sara Lawrence -Lightfoot (1983), I have brought the child and parent voice to the forefront of my research in this chapter (section 5.2). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997: xv) consider portraiture as a way to *''record and interpret the perspectives and experience of* [those being studied] *documenting their voices and their visions…''* This lends support to my choice of also applying Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) as a second theoretical lens. In order to interpret the stories, I present in the parent portraits, we need to understand the parents' social environment in context and consider the bi-directional relationships that are being formed (Bronfenbrenner,1995). The voice of the practitioners featured in my research is also a focus of the study, as I sought to understand the practitioners' perspectives on child voice within the context of their work in Children's Centres. I present the profiles of practitioners and senior managers, who participated in the research, in chapter six.

Presenting and portraying the parents' stories as I have chosen to do in this chapter, ensures that I have listened to and found a way of "*coordinating multiple perspectives*" in my research (Wenger, 1998:274). This also supports the view put forward by Pascal and Bertram (2012:486) who ask us to consider *''redistribution of power in a democratic, inclusive and collaborative way''*. I was very aware of my positioning as a researcher and I reflect on this in chapter four (section 4.2). When reflecting on the multi-professional and integrated service model of Children's Centres in England, Clarkin-Phillips and Carr (2012:177) "*apply the notion of an affordance network for engagement opportunities",* that lead to improved engagement of parents and their families with the Children's Centre. In portraiture, this stage is considered as painting the words – the portrait gallery - (chapter four, section 4.8.2.1) which represents the results in traditional research methods.

Harcus (2012: 121) considers the implications of her research on the practice at the Children's Centre, and as a practitioner she reflects on her own "*tendency to elicit the information from parents that [she] thinks will be useful or think is important for the staff team to know…"* suggesting it is important to "*enable parents to focus on what is important to them…".*

She goes on to suggest that by "*Finding a way to link the two perspectives will better enable us to work together… our focus of attention [on the child] is more likely to be shared".* I believe I am facilitating the linking of the two perspectives of parents' and practitioners through my research.

5.2 Parents' Portraits

The sub-research question posed with regard to the parents was:

Question 2: What are parents' lived experiences of Children's Centres and what are their perspectives on child voice?

I consider that two further sub-research questions will be informed by the parent data set:

Question 4. What changes might need to happen in order to create a more collaborative, open listening climate?

Question 5. What strategies might be adopted to improve the listening climate and pedagogical practice across teams in Children's Centres?

I believe I have applied ethical considerations throughout my study and also when working in the field undertaking the research, as I describe in detail in chapter four (section 4.10.1). When considering ethical codes of practice, (Bertram et al., 2015) and for the sake of anonymity, general female pseudonyms have been assigned to each parent and child, supporting the notion of good ethical practice in early childhood research. Palaiologou (2012:3), considers:

the ''term 'ethical practice' is concerned with how people around early childhood research and practice conduct their work through morally upright practices, and how different points of view are considered''.

I have applied ethical principles when generating the research data, and throughout the phase of analysis and interpretation, by using reflexivity and ensuring the participants' voices are 'heard' in the research. I have woven direct quotes into the narratives in this chapter through the parent portraits, and also throughout this chapter when I present the findings (section 5.3.1.1). I have applied a themed analysis method described by Braun and Clarke (2013) and multi-levels of coding using the Lundy Model of child participation (2007) and the subsequent Lundy Model checklist for participation (DCYA, 2015). The examples taken from the parents' narratives are glimpses of their lived experiences to assure confidentiality and anonymity and I discuss the Interview Guide and themes that shaped the parent portraits in chapter four (section 4.8.2.1). The written portraits are supported by an artist's interpretation of the parent narratives to add what is defined as '' *visual reading, using drawing as a visual interpretation of the transcribed meaning'' (Lyons, 2017:126).* The characters depicted in each portrait, drawn by the artist, are fictional images and any resemblance to persons living or dead are coincidental.

5.2.1 Parent 1 Helen's Portrait

Figure 5.1 Helen's Portrait - Life's a challenge

Helen started her story at a point when she was facing extreme challenges for herself and her son and she shared her experience of Post Natal Depression and alcohol dependency which resulted in her son being placed on a Child Protection Register. Following the breakdown of her marriage, which necessitated Helen living with her mom, Helen's son was taken into foster care by the Local Authority where she was living at the time.

She worked hard to turn her life around, and as a result, her son was taken off the Child Protection Register. She then made the difficult decision to move away from what Helen described as "negative influences". This resulted in Helen and her son living in a refuge when she arrived in Birmingham.

Family Tree

Helen is a single mother with a son aged 3 ½ and is 3 months pregnant. She has extensive extended family on her paternal and maternal side and, in addition, has extended family on her stepfather's side which means she has multiple siblings and also cousins for her son. Helen only has one sister living close by in the City and the rest live in her hometown.

Helen described herself as having a good support network if she needed help but acknowledged straight away that she has relied on the support from the Children's Centre to get her through.

Aspirations

Helen had positive aspirations for herself and her son with a long -term plan to return to work. She had a career before having her son and is interested in possibly returning to that.

She acknowledged how important an education is and wants to be a positive role model for her children. *'' I tell him I'm going to school… when I'm having my English and Maths lessons*". She would like to go on an access course and then on to University and the Children's Centre is helping her to consider these options for the future. She is trying to maintain her own health through the pregnancy

Key Challenges

Helen described the challenges she faced with her son living in a refuge. While they had a 2-bedroomed flat, life was very difficult. Helen had to come up and down the stairs with her son a lot in order to meet the staff in the office, do the laundry in the communal laundry room or, as she smoked, go outside for a cigarette. As a mom on her own Helen found this hard.

"*I had my son 24/7*"

"You could only do your laundry once a week as the space was shared, and a young baby created more dirty washing than that". She found her son's behaviour challenging as living in the refuge made it hard to create boundaries.

Helen lived at the refuge for 3 ½ months in total. She did find a local Children's Centre and put her son into the nursery. Helen's first experience of the Children's Centre was not a positive one.

"*I felt they were judging me, for living in a refuge... Maybe that was just how I was feeling*"

Helen and her son were moved to the house she now lives in. She was keen to stress throughout her story that she wanted the best for her son and to build a home. From starting with no furniture and carpets, just rugs on the floor so her son could walk about safely, she managed to get the house straight in 3 months.

Helen was still finding her son's behaviour a challenge and had started him in a new nursery where she found out about the local Children's Centre. The staff at the nursery rang the Children's Centre for her and the Family Support Worker came out to her house.

Throughout Helen's story she identified with the challenging behaviour and gave many examples of what she meant by this.

Helen talked of her continued dependency on alcohol and "taking the wrong hands in friendship" which has led to her son being placed back on the Child Protection register. She is trying to turn her life around for her son and now the new baby.

Helen attends an AA support group independent of the centre and feels she has met a lot of nice people who are a support to her.

Services and Support

Helen talked about the Parenting Courses that she had accessed at the Children's centre i.e., Triple P and Promoting Happier Parenting, and was able to give examples of the different strategies she had been able to try with her son. She acknowledged how her own anxieties and stresses had a part to play in this.

Helen talked about the different services she attends at the centre including English and Maths lessons and they have also found her a counsellor who she sees at another centre. Helen appreciates this support and how it is helping her to understand why she started to drink.

Helen returned to the positive influences the Parenting Programmes have had and she intends attending another Triple P in the New Year as her son is older and she wants further advice on how to manage his behaviour.

Helen felt that having a consistent member of staff at the start of her journey with the centre was important and enabled her to build up the trust to work with her. She now appreciates that there are other staff she can turn to and she does now feel she can do this.

She described how she had used the Stay & Play and relies on the crèche on the day her son isn't in nursery, otherwise she would not be able to attend the courses she does.

Her son needs routines and structure she says, and the centre have helped with this giving her advice on how to set routines and boundaries.

Feelings of Support & Services

Helen felt it was important to have "*somewhere to go... having a building local was good as I'm not from round here so find it harder to integrate*". She also says how much her son likes attending the centre.

She described the Family Support Staff as ''*always finding solutions... hungry for solutions... and not   a tick box exercise".* Helen feels in control of the situation but acknowledges that at times the Staff have to be firm and open with her but feels they are working "with her". She confidently described a situation at a recent core group meeting where she felt she had to challenge the Social Worker and feels she does have a voice.

Helen says,'' *how important it is that the agencies work together to support families''.*

Impact

Throughout her story Helen expressed the difference the centre was making to her situation and that she knew now with the new baby where she can go for advice and support.

She expressed the difference the stay & play and creche had made to her son's development and that she felt he was ready for Nursery school when he started there.

Attending the Parenting programmes had taught her a lot. She has also completed a course on Child Development and says this has helped her understand play for children and how important that is.

> "I'm trying to chill out more. As a parent. they tell you to pick your battles (in
> relation to challenging behaviour)".

Helen stressed how responsive the Children's Centre is '' *unlike my first experience*", she says, ''*She has never felt judged and likes their honesty when working with her*''.

Figure 5.2 Helen's Portrait – Lifelong Learning.

5.2.2 Parent 2 Dianne's Portrait

Figure 5.3 Dianne's Portrait – Life Changing

Dianne began her story at the time she was 38 weeks pregnant. She is a qualified Learning Assistant, holding NVQ Level 3 and had been working full time in a school at the time she went on maternity leave. It was her intention to return to work full time and find a suitable nursery for the baby.

Dianne was proactive at seeking out services while she was pregnant. She knew that she wanted to be involved with baby groups after the baby was born. Having been used to working for 8 years and having a lot of friends and daily contact, Dianne felt she needed to remain sociable. Dianne wanted her baby to socialise early and mix with other children of different ages.

As Dianne had worked for a school that was attached to a Sure Start Children's Centre, she said she knew a little of what Children's Centres did so she set about finding out where her local centre was.

Her first experience of the Children's Centre was Bumps to Babies. Dianne smiles at this point as she remembers that she was the only one pregnant at the time, as all of the other moms had had their babies. Dianne said this wasn't a problem. They all got along. Staff adapted the programme to ensure her needs were met and she started to form firm friendships with the ladies attending.

Family Tree

Dianne is 27 years old, living in inner City Birmingham, and has been a single mother since her daughter was 5 months old. She is now aged 3 years and 4 months.

She describes herself as having a large extended family on both maternal and paternal sides of the family, including third generation on both sides. Dianne has 2 sisters and a brother. They are all live fairly local and therefore are available to support Dianne if she needs it. Dianne feels that due to her circumstances her daughter is very close to her maternal great nan and grandparents. Her daughter does visit her dad every weekend and then sees her family on her paternal side.

Aspirations

Dianne had very positive aspirations for herself and her daughter. She acknowledged the benefits of volunteering at the centre and how this increased her experience. Dianne wants to continue running the holiday sessions.

She had the opportunity to apply for a Family Support Post at the centre and did get it. Unfortunately, due to the DBS taking too long to come through and then changes in the funding, the post was withdrawn. This experience has given Dianne confidence to try again. Dianne says she will take part in any further courses offered to continue with volunteering.

Key Challenges

Dianne feels her challenges started when her husband left her. Her life changed along with the plans they had. She couldn't return to work. The job had been full time and she needed 16 hours, so she found herself unemployed.

Dianne described how she had suffered from depression before and was aware that this could happen again, given her situation, so she knew she had to keep contact with the centre and the new friendships she had made.

> "*They say you know who your friends are, when you most need them... and I certainly did... only 2 out of a load of friends proved to be true friends when needed*"

Dianne is referring to friendships she thought she had at work and outside of work. However, since losing her job these 'friendships' soon ended

Services and Support

Dianne continued to access a range of services on offer and that were appropriate for her and the baby's age i.e. Weaning; Well Baby Clinic; Getting Vitamins. She went onto explain that the Health Visitors would attend the services at the Centre and give out vitamins and then the Children's Centre Staff attended sessions with the Health Visitors. She felt this was very effective.

Dianne had to travel to her health centre to see her own Health Visitor and they were not the same team as those visiting the Children's Centre. She said this would have really helped if they had been the same staff she was seeing at the Children's Centre sessions.

Dianne has been very active in the Children's Centre and stresses how important the Stay & Plays have been for herself, in order to meet other parents but especially for her daughter. She had the opportunity to send her to Nursery when she was 2 years old, but Dianne made the decision that a Nursery wasn't the best setting for her daughter at that time.

Dianne praised the Stay & Plays and the positive relationships her daughter had made with the staff and making friends. "*She misses it now she goes to school*"

Dianne has volunteered and is an active parent on the Parents' Forum. She talked about services that the centre could deliver that they currently were not offering. Dianne and a number of other parents felt there needed to be more services in the holidays. They discussed this with the staff, and they volunteered to run holiday activities. This has been very successful and has given Dianne more experience for when she returns to work.

Feelings of Support & Services

Dianne gave a lot of praise for the support she received at the time her circumstances changed.

> "*The staff were such lovely staff, more like friends and I always felt I could approach them*".

Consistency of the staff was key to the support Dianne received.

Impact

Dianne acknowledged that her health could have been a lot worse after her husband left but the centre was there for her and her daughter.

> "*If I hadn't have gone to the centre and my daughter hadn't have gone to Stay & Play she wouldn't have been the sociable child she is today… confident…independent*".

Dianne said that the services had helped her daughter get ready for school.

Dianne has made some very good friends and they meet outside of the centre. They have a lot in common with a number of the other parents who have also worked in schools and education.

Figure 5.4 Dianne's Portrait – Giving back through volunteering

5.2.3 Parent 3 Paula's Portrait

Figure 5.5 Paula's Portrait – Starting life behind bars

Paula starts her story describing her own challenging childhood, growing up with her own mom suffering from mental health and cancer resulting in both Paula and her sister going in and out of care during their early childhood.

These early childhood experiences had a "*destructive*" impact on Paula and as a teenager, she found herself involved with drugs, crime and in negative relationships that resulted in her getting pregnant.

Paula ended up being given a custodial sentence whilst pregnant and as a result had her son in a women's prison. She was eventually moved to a Mother & Baby Unit and then onto an open prison which Paula describes as "*having more freedom*" with her son to shop once a week and start to rehabilitate into the community

Family Tree

Paula, aged 33, is a single mom with one son. She has one sister and her mother in her extended family, both of whom do not live in the City. Paula describes their contact as "*limited*".

Aspirations

Paula described herself as "*feeling like Britain in Bloom… it gave me the reassurance that I needed to go on and put it all back…give it back by using my experiences*" Paula says she is the "*first one to break the cycle*"

Paula has achieved her degree and gained a job as a Family Support Worker in another agency supporting vulnerable clients. Paula hopes to continue her education and go on to a master's degree, but the finances are a barrier to higher education.

She spoke of the cuts at the centre over the last few years that meant she couldn't use the phone there if she needed it *"it's a joke really… the computer being restricted"* but always felt and still feels supported.

Key Challenges

Paula's son was 2 years old when she was released from prison. Her relationship with her own mom had broken down 6 years previously, so she was on her own with her son.

Paula tried to rebuild their relationship but found it "*mentally draining…hard because of the past*" and she had to make the decision to start again somewhere new away from her past experiences to limit the chance of reoffending and going back to her old ways.

Paula and her son were placed in a Mother & Baby hostel until they were rehoused in her current property, knowing no one.

Paula felt she was alone with her son and referred to the challenges her son faced at this point. Having been born in prison, he had very little awareness of danger of the roads and she feared that he would get hurt.

She described herself as "*depressed and lonely" at this time, having had her own very destructive background*", having been in prison and come out with her son "attached to her hip"

While out in the local park one day she met another mom with a young child who told her about the Children's Centre and offered to take her along.

Services and Support

Paula felt she had a "*great deal going on…with her mom… with her own background*" and that she wasn't playing enough with her son. So, the Family Support Worker came into the home and modelled play with her son.

Paula had begun to drink again as she was "*lonely…and scared of history repeating itself*" and the Family Support Worker gave Paula support to seek additional help from an agency to offer support with her alcohol dependency.

Paula described having a "*rapport*" with her Family Support Worker. "*She supported me no matter what my background…she started to encourage me as I wanted to do social work and support others*"

Paula was supported to go to college for an access course and eventually successfully achieved her degree. She was very proud of her achievement, "my *family support worker came to my graduation… she is a pretty amazing women…my inspiration and the only one who listened to me*"

Paula said that the consistency of one Family Support Worker was the key and although she knows she can ask for help if she isn't there, this constant in her life was important.

Feelings of Support & Services

Paula praised the Children's Centre services and Family Support Worker and although her son is now older and past the age of support from the centre, Paula knows she is still able to pick up the phone for advice. She does still use the centre to access a computer, which she especially did when she was studying.

Her son benefitted from the Play in the Home sessions as Paula needed to learn how to play with him. The services and support got her out of the house. Paula described her son as having challenging behaviour (especially about the roads) and the centre helped with this.

He attended the crèche when Paula attended courses which helped him play with other children. She has also been on trips to the seaside.

Paula was able to get debt advice. ''*Unfortunately, this support stopped because of the cuts*'' but Paula described when she looked back at the support she had received meant she had "*done a lot of work*".

Impact

Paula referred to being "*reassured*" by the Family Support Worker when times got difficult. The Centre enabled her son to socialise. He eventually went to the nursery. Paula said, "*without the centre (she) probably would have been lost*''.

She says she owes her "*morals, values and parenting*" to the Family Support Worker.

Paula was helped to become a volunteer with Home Start and this gave her the experience as an "*ex-offender when no one else would give her a chance*" and she then had the experience for her degree and to look for work.

Figure 5.6 Paula's Portrait – A sense of pride

5.2.4 Parent 4 Katie's Portrait

Figure 5.7 Katie's Portrait- Existing in a bubble

Katie starts her story… Before Katie came to the Children's Centre, she described herself as "*alone in a way*". Although she had family and friends around her Katie didn't feel she had anyone to talk to and ask questions.

Katie felt she got herself into a number of different relationships but felt that none of them were good for her which resulted in Katie withdrawing even further from family and friends. The relationships changed her as a person and made her even more isolated

Family Tree

Katie is a single mom with one daughter. She has her mom and dad who are separated. Katie has brothers, one of whom lives in Australia.

Aspirations

Katie now wants to go out and meet new people. Her overall dream is to live in Australia, close to her brother.

Key Challenges

From the moment Katie found out she was pregnant; Social Services were involved due to her partner at the time. Katie's daughter, Kelly, was born at 28 weeks, Katie felt pressured with different agencies telling her different things which resulted in her breaking down in the hospital. Katie's main concern at the time was her new born baby on the neonatal unit who was described as 'critical', and Katie was concerned for her safety. Katie spoke with the

agencies and asked for space to deal with her emotions. Staff at the hospital supported Katie and arranged for counselling.

Whilst Kelly was on the neonatal unit Katie felt like she was in a bubble. She was aware of other parents with their children on the unit but didn't feel connected to them. One day Katie popped out of the unit and when she returned could hear the machine alarms going off and doctors and nurses rushing onto the unit. Katie wondered which baby it was for, not expecting it to be Kelly. Katie wasn't allowed to go into Kelly's room and panicked thinking Kelly had flatlined. In fact, Kelly had pulled her breathing tube out and the medical staff were putting it back.

Prior to being pregnant Katie had trouble settling in one place. She would live between her mum and dad; she had a flat in Bristol but subsequently lost it and her relationship broke down. Whilst living in a hostel Katie met someone but the relationship was violent, and Katie then spent time with her mum and friends

Services and Support

Katie started accessing the children's centre since Kelly was one year old and had a Family Support Worker who introduced her to a number of services. Being new to the area Katie was apprehensive about attending services, "*I just want me and my baby at home, I don't want to talk to anyone*"

Katie was supported by her Family Support Worker to attend the services and he stayed with her in the groups. Gradually other service users would speak with Katie and she started to open up to them. Gradually Katie started to attend more services at the Children's Centre including the Freedom Programme. Katie was told about the nursery provision for Kelly and how it could support her social skills. Katie was nervous sending Kelly to nursery, but she soon realised how supportive it was and, through attending, Katie found out about other services she was able to attend like HENRY and Volunteering, "*I don't know if I want to go [to HENRY], and they were like it's a chance to meet new parents - another lot of new parents, so though why not just push me and that is what I needed, a push*" .

Feelings of Support Services

Katie thinks all of the services at the Children's Centre have really helped her, including the counselling that she received at the Centre. Katie describes the services she attended as doing something –they changed her bit by bit as a person from this isolated, 'don't want to know'

kind of person, to this really outgoing, 'want to be on the ball', 'want to know different things', 'want to know what's going on' type of person.

Katie was wary of her Family Support Worker when she first met him even though she knew him. Katie describes the home visits she received as more personal and private but aware of why they had to be carried out. Katie did feel that if she refused the visit, professionals would think that something was going on and therefore let the Family Support Worker in. The professional relationship between Katie and her Family Support Worker grew and Katie felt like she had known him all her life as they got on really well and she saw him as a friend rather than a Family Support Worker.

Katie felt at the beginning that the Children's Centre was not the place for her and was worried about saying the wrong thing and it being escalated but set herself a 'personal challenge' to attend to benefit herself and her daughter.

Katie felt everything that the centre had offered her was enough. Although she said there were

'' *'run - ins' with staff''*, 99% of the time she felt staff were on the ball and as a result Katie sees herself as a changed person which she never thought could happen.

Impact

Katie described walking through the gate and smiling, "*this place has had an effect on me from the day I come right up until now*"

Now Kelly is going to school Katie has enrolled on a college course, "*I didn't think I would be walking out as a parent and having some form of place to go to study, I thought I walk out unemployed, just going to be a mum, go to school to be bored.*"

Katie has been volunteering with the Centre and plans to go to the gym in her spare time when Kelly is at school.

Figure 5.8 Katie's Portrait – Kelly's new adventure

5.2.5 Parent 5 Tracey's Portrait

Figure 5.9 Tracey's Portrait – A black cloud

Tracey's starts her story at a time when she was on maternity leave with her third baby and a great deal of her time was taken up with the children and the family. Tracey reflects on the birth of her first child, before she went to the Children's Centre

Family Tree

Tracey lives with her husband and three children and described how she came from a large family. Tracey is the eldest of seven, and most of whom have remained living in the City and close by. Tracey's mom remained in the City and has been a great support and Tracey explained that she was close to her sister and although she had moved away, she travelled back regularly, and the children were also close to her. Tracey explained that the family had been ''*close knit… I raised most of my siblings''*.

Aspirations

Tracey explained it was her own self-determination that finally helped her to manage and feels she has ''*turned 360 degrees in terms of her mental health and wants to help other women in the community''*.

Tracey described how she had developed an interest in her own health and that this was ''*rubbing off on the children… my children and husband are proud of my achievements''.* Tracey has gone on to volunteer as Peer Support to other parents and outside of the Centre has set up her own support group for women. Tracey explained ''*its important that we as mothers be a role model in the community… help the community.*

Key Challenges

Tracey considered that her challenges began when she moved away from the family home and got married and had her own family describing that ''*for the first 5-6 years probably didn't know many people…my social life wasn't linked to the community, I was working, newly married…*''

Tracey reflects that on the birth of her first child '' *I suffered postnatal depression…triggered like after 6-months my dad passed away…I had to have an emergency C-Section*'' [On reflection, Tracey explained she did not know it was post-natal depression until much later].

Tracey continued to describe the challenge at this time as a result of the traumatic birth '' *I wasn't awake… I couldn't bond with my child and I think that was the worst thing*''.

Tracey described her feelings at this time and considered that she was not listened to by the hospital and feels she had ''*a really bad experience…[I felt] a dark cloud following me everywhere*''.

Services and Support

Tracey explained that she had attended ante-natal sessions at the local health clinic which were run by the staff at the Children's Centre and although the staff kept in touch with her before and after the baby was born, Tracey was not able to attend the Children's Centre, due to the ''*sleepless nights… not functioning well… the sessions started in the morning and I was getting up late*''

It was during one of the sessions where Tracey was able to attend that a speaker talked about Post Natal Depression and Tracey explained '' *what she said clicked and I realised I was a victim of post-natal depression*''.

Tracey was able to gain support from the Children's Centre including specialist counselling.

Feelings of Support Services

Tracey has received support from the Children's Centre through all three pregnancies and has continued to work after having taken maternity leave. She described the support she received from her Family Support Worker/s, during this time '' *my case worker was very helpful… she was there if I every needed anything…*''. Tracey referred to the lack of support from her Health Visitor '' *I had post-natal depression, she wasn't willing to acknowledge that*''.

Tracey explained that she suffered again from the loss of her grandmother and she believes this ''*kind of bereavement or trauma triggers your post-natal depression…it really knocked me…*''

Impact

Tracey described how she was able to pick up the phone again to the Children's Centre and received the help and support she needed. Counselling was available for Tracey and also a Parenting Programme that she felt helped her ''*to manage the work life balance…to reconnect with my children, listening to my child tentatively…it helped me what the Children's Centre did…at the time they did offer what I needed and wanted and helped put me in the recovery position''*.

Tracey described the support from the Children's Centre as ''*someone holding my hand and saying you will be OK''*. Tracey felt the ''*home environment was calmer… if the mother is calm the home environment is calm, if the mother is getting support services from [parenting programmes] the skills are brought into the home''*.

Figure 5.10 – Tracey's Portrait – The road to recovery

Reflections

In this section of chapter five, Parent Portraits, I provide a glimpse into the lived experiences of five parents who took part in the study. The portraits have been divided into seven distinct topics: Parent Story; Family Tree; Aspirations; Key Challenges; Services and Support; Feelings of Support Services; Impact. I discussed in chapter four (section 4.8.2.1) how these themes evolved out of a pilot study exploring the 'day in the life of families' (Innovation Unit, 2014) and which I adapted for use in my study.   On reflection, there are commonalities across the five parent narratives that reflect periods of adversity in their lives and their access to the Children's Centre Services that had an impact on their lives and that of their child/ren. I have chosen to present the parents' narratives ahead of those of senior managers and practitioners, acknowledging the contributions parents make in research and respecting

parents as the first educators and experts in their child's lives (Athey,1990; Field, 2010; Allen, 2011). Presenting the stories of the parents' and children's lived experiences in portraits, I believe, reflects my ethical approach to my research of listening to the voices of participants and models the concept of an open listening climate being explored through the research. Finally, I believe it reflects a cultural shift of power (Freire, 1970) away from practitioners and underpins the praxeological participatory approach of my research and that of others (Formosinho and Oliveria Formosinho, 2012; Pascal and Bertram, 2012; Rouse, 2017). Rouse (2017:119) argues for ethically robust research that demonstrates how;

'' *we should work in ways that respect and truly hear the wisdom and experience of children, families, and frontline practitioners. It needs to be genuinely collaborative process, and one that understands and carefully balances the power dynamics that may exist''.*

In the next section (section, 5.3) I describe how I managed and undertook the research analysis of the parent portraits through the different phases of the research process. This includes how I managed and organised the information, generated data, applied coding frameworks and analysed the data and finally, I present the findings based on my analysis and interpretation of the data. I describe my decisions for choosing the research methods in chapter four (sections 4.8.) and include the challenges and limitations as well as the advantages of using my chosen methods in research. I also present in section 5.3.1, my analysis of findings taken from the portraitures of the parents participating and provide the findings from my interpretation of their voices, moving through coding to identifying the themes (Braun and Clarke (2013). Braun and Clarke (2013:225) suggests the process of ''*developing themes from coded data is an active process…the dataset provides the material basis for the analysis…you want to [then] identify a number of themes that capture the most salient patterns in the data, relevant to answering your research question''.* This stage of the process, when using portraiture as a method, is considered as revealing the brush strokes and is assimilated with interpreting the data in traditional research methods, as I discuss in chapter 4 (section 4.8.2.1).

The narratives provided by the parents in the parent portraits in the previous section, were analysed by applying the Lundy Model (2007) as a tool for analysing and interpreting the data and using a qualitative themed analysis approach developed by Braun and Clark (2013) to explore and answer the overall research questions and sub-research question. I present how I applied the Lundy Model for generating data in chapter four (section 4.8.2.1) as part of my justification of my methodology and methods. In the next section I present how I applied the

Lundy Model (2007) to the analysis and interpretation stage of the study using a three -staged process for data analysis.

5.3 Organising, Coding and Analysis of Parent Portraits

A three staged process to data analysis

Concept Analysis – Parent Data Set

The research sub-question:

What are parents' lived experiences of Children's Centres and their perspective of Child Voice?
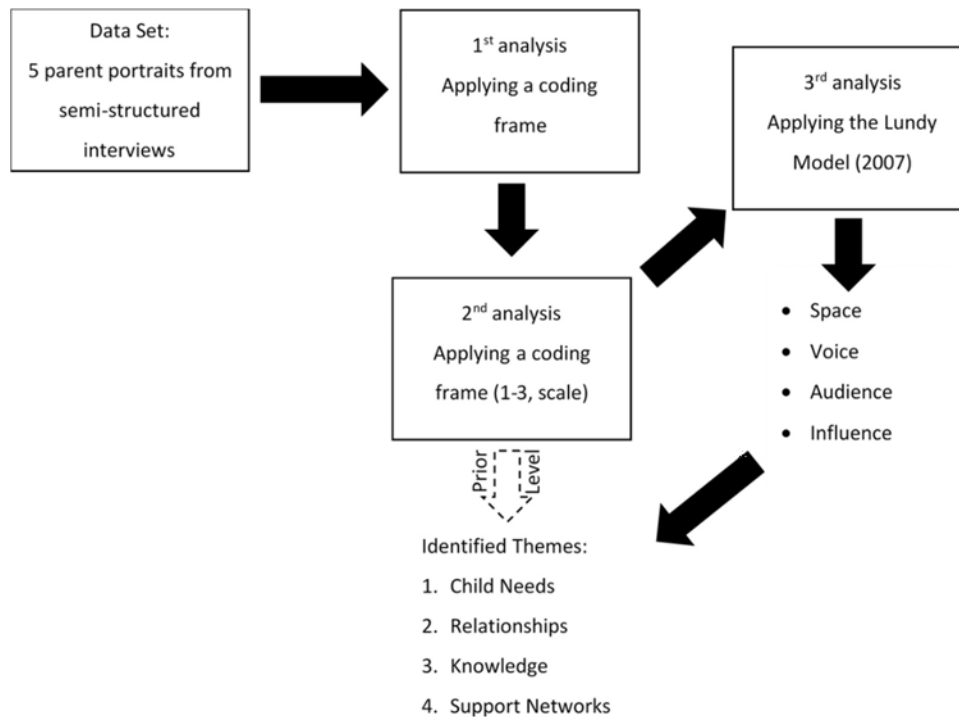
Figure 5.11 Concept Analysis Map

Figure 5.11 illustrates the process that I used once the Parents' Stories had been collected and reflects three stages in the process of analysis. Braun and Clarke (2013:204) refer to the process of ''*immersion in the data…to become intimately familiar with your data set's content, and to begin to notice things that might be relevant to your research question[s]'*.

As part of this familiarisation with the data Braun and Clarke (2013:205) refer to the need to develop

''an analytic sensibility'' which they suggest then helps you to move *''beyond a surface, summative reading of data…[to] reading the words actively, analytically, and critically, starting to think about what the data means''.*

Stage one:

I initially applied stage one in the process of my analysis by using the Framework Method of coding data (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994) and applying it each transcript of the parent interviews. An example of a transcript taken from one parent interview can be seen in Appendix 5.

I applied a numerical coding system to the framework as a 1- 5 point scale, with point 1 reflecting data that was less useful/contextual data (do not analyse) moving to point 5 that described data as being very useful and 'thick and rich', as defined by Geertz (1973, cited in Rouse, 2018:240). The definition of 'thick data' was originally introduced by Ryle (1949) who defined 'thin' data as constituting surface level data and who argued that to generate 'thick' data, the data would have context. Geertz (1973) considered data from a more analytical approach and argued that it is therefore an interpretative approach and it is the analysis of the data that yields 'thick description' and represents *''the complexity of situations and are preferable to the simplistic ones''* (Cohen et al., 2007:21). I considered this to be an effective scale to apply as I did not regard the definition of point 1 to be overtly dismissive of the parents' contribution, merely describing data to be of a contextual nature and therefore limiting analysis. This data was used to create the individual parent portraits I present in this chapter (section, 5.2).

Having completed the stage one process on all five parent stories, I observed that on my first interpretation, applying a 5-point scale did not reflect the depth of the parents' stories that I had felt during the face-to- face interview. When analysing data *'' the most important criterion is to probe the data in a way that helps to identify the crucial components that can be used to explain the nature of the thing being studied''* (Denscombe, 2007:247). I believe that I have a responsibility, once I have been entrusted with a parent's story, to interpret the data in such a way as to assure the *''trustworthiness''* of the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010*)*. Reflecting on my interpretation of the data at this stage I considered my positionality as the researcher and acknowledged that my own lens as the researcher would have an influence on my interpretation of the parents' stories (Brookfield, 1995*).* This also reflected the notion of '*an ethic of care'* (Noddings, 1992). Costley et al., (2011:44) suggest:

> *''Caring carries a moral obligation* [trust]*…if you accept the offered trust, you are in a privileged and powerful position''.*

I strongly believe that the data and evidence that I had collected through the parents' stories, required me to ''*produce insights into the meaning of the data that go beyond the obvious or surface-level…taking an inquiring and interpretative position''* (Braun and Clarke, 2013:203-204).

I was able to discuss, what I considered to be an 'ethical dilemma' at a Learning Circle held at CREC entitled Data Management and Data Analysis (Lyndon, November 16th, 2017). My colleague described having encountered a similar dilemma while undertaking her own research and on reflection had made the decision to revise the coding scale on the framework to represent a 1-3, point scale. Revising the scale ensured that the rich data parents shared of their lived experience was heard, reported, and informed the research. I therefore revisited stage one in the process of my analysis and interpretation, applying the 1-3, point scale to my coding framework which I felt was now considered as a ''*scale of thick description''* (Lyndon et al., 2019:365).

Stage two:

This redefining of the parameters of the coding framework did allow for the parents' lived experiences to be heard through the process of interpretation and analysis. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005:10) considers that portraiture assures the stories can be analysed in a way that demonstrates trustworthiness of data that is often challenged when using qualitative methodology. It allows for reflection on each part of the story and the researcher can see the emerging themes being revealed.

I believe through my reflection on the process as a researcher, I have taken an ''*active, engaged position in which the [narrator] searches for the story, seeks it out, and is central in its creation''* (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005:10).

At this stage of the process of analysis I have used the theoretical lens of Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998,2006) '*bioecological model',* acknowledging the '*emphasis on the dynamic, bi-directional relationships between people and context' (*Hayes et al., 2017: 6). A clear link can be made here between my research and adopting an ecological viewpoint to aid the interpretation and analysis of the data and the overarching themes that I have identified from the parents' stories. The importance of positive relationships is a strong concept that threads through the ecological model along with the need for a level of stability of experience in a child's life. The parents' stories reflect their lived experience and that of their child/ren before

they accessed the Children's Centre and they reflect on the impact the service has had on being instrumental in changing their lives, capturing the transitions between the ecological systems.

Following this initial analysis of the data using the coding frame it was important to acknowledge that this stage two analysis was at an priori level and the themes that were identified were only tentative at this stage of the process. Further analysis was required to gain a deeper level of understanding of the data and to identify central themes. I therefore went onto stage three in the process.

Stage three:

Having completed the task of using the redefined coding framework to the five parent portraits and starting to identify central themes I then conducted stage three of the analysis process (figure 5.11) and applied the Lundy Model of child participation, reflecting on the data through the concepts of: *"Space, Voice, Audience and Influence''* (Lundy, 2007:932). I believe the process of over laying the Lundy Model (2007) as a third stage of the analysis process, as I discuss in this section, helped me to make the explicit link between my research and my second theoretical rights-based lens. I also applied the Lundy Model checklist for participation (2015) as part of the fieldwork with senior managers and practitioners at both study sites that I present in chapter six (section 6.3, figure 6.1), and I felt that applying it against the Parent Data set would assist with later analysis and enable me to compare context at different levels and between the different data sets. This approach would assist with the notion of methodological triangulation suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (2018) where I have used several methods of collecting data which includes: semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Noble and Heale (2019:67) suggests that *''triangulation is a method used to increase the credibility [trustworthiness] and validity of research findings''.* However, Tracy (2010:843-844) is of the view that *''…triangulation does not lay neatly over research from interpretive paradigms''* and further suggests the use of the term *'crystallisation' (*Ellingson*, 2008)*. This notion of crystallisation applies to the use of multiple lenses which I have applied in this study across a range of data sets. The use of crystallisation of data, Tracy suggests, still requires the use of multiple methods for data collection and analysis and the application of a different theoretical frameworks but for the purpose of deepening the understanding of the research context, I would suggest that applying the same theoretical lens across the data sets is evidence of crystallisation of data. Tracy (2010:844) also refers to *''multivocal research''* that she suggests is *''closely aligned with the notion of crystallisation''.* I feel my approach to

generating data, analysis and interpretation reflects the multiple voices of all those who participated and emulates the principles of portraiture which ''*captures the essence of the participants…adds to the* [research] *auditability…to hear the voice of the* [participants] *telling their stories''* (Cope et al., 2017:10).

5.3.1 Illustrative Examples of Identifying Themes applying the Lundy Model with Adults

In order to manage the large amount of data within the parents' dataset I used the process of colour coding (electronically) by highlighting the elements of the parents' stories to identify overarching themes. I mapped these themes across all five parent portraits which I felt I was able to do as my interview guide (Appendix 4). gave a structure and focus throughout the interview while allowing for the parents' individual experiences to be heard. The overarching themes that I identified were:

1.   Child/ren's Needs
2.   Relationships
3.   Knowledge
4.   Support Networks

Braun and Clarke (2013:248-249) are of the view that the process I have described above, while it is ''*analytical, it is preparatory…''* what follows is the *'' deep analytic interpretative work to make sense of and interpret the patterns [you've] identified in the data''.* They suggest that you need to be able to define your themes in a ''*few short sentences…to really distil the essence of what each theme is about''.*

I present extracts taken from the parent portraits in this chapter (section, 5.2) and from reflections following analysis and interpretation (section 5.4), as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013, 252) as ''*illustrative examples taken from the data…* [and] *…as examples of the analytic point[s] [I am] claiming'*.

By analysing the data, having applied the Lundy Model with adults, I was able to see many similarities across the parents' stories in relation to the four central themes that I have identified: Child/ren's Needs; Relationships; Knowledge and Support Networks. Applying a child rights lens at this stage of analysis as one of my theoretical lenses, ensured the child/ren remained the focus of the research, with their voices being 'heard' through the parents' lived experiences. In this section (5.3.1.1) I provide illustrative examples of how ''*the concepts of space, voice, audience and influence can be actioned in practice so that practitioners can meaningfully and effectively implement the right* of the child'' (Kennan et al., 2019:206). In the

case of my study, this is in the practitioners working with children and families and in the context of Children's Centres. However I believe that it ''*will resonate with and have relevance to practitioners working with children [and] parents*…[in other context]'' (Moore, 2020:457).

I will provide a more detailed discussion (chapter seven) of the findings by re-visiting the research questions and sub-research questions and connecting them to theoretical frameworks. I will discuss the significance of the findings on future practice, make recommendations from the research and I will present the original contribution to knowledge that I have made by conducting the research.

Child/ren's Needs

One central theme that helps to define child/ren's needs is the passion and conviction that parents had when they talked about their child/ren, as being their priority and that everything they were doing was for the sake of their children, '*breaking the cycle'* and '*wanting to make a home for [my] son'.* The theme of child development was implicit across the parent portraits and the social and emotional wellbeing of their child/ren was acknowledged as very important with frequent reference to themes that included: '*lack of early bonding', 'socialising with other children' and 'managing their child/ren's 'challenging' behaviour'.* One tension that featured within this theme was the understanding of the possible detrimental impact their own life experiences and present circumstances may have on the child/ren's development and life chances. The need for their child/ren to '*be happy'* was a significant theme. This recurring theme across the parent portraits will be of interest when considering the findings from the data generated from senior managers and practitioners (chapter six) and when considering the impact for future practice (chapter seven). The findings would suggest adopting and embedding a child rights-based approach to work in early years settings and in a multi-professional context, such as Children's Centres, when considering how best to support the child and parents.

Relationships

The second central theme expressed by all the parents was the need to develop trust within relationships and this related to relationships with family members, friends, practitioners at the centres and other agencies the parents encountered. An acknowledgment was made by some parents of the '*poor choices'* they had made with relationships that had had an influence on their lives. Parents referred to '*the loss of trust with other agencies'*, sometimes with explicit examples and others more inexplicit, leading to difficulty in trusting in other services

that may be available to offer support. The importance of the first encounter with the centre needing to be positive was evident, as parents described these encounters and made the link with the positive change that followed. Parents referred to: '*Family Support as being interested*' and '*Services and staff are very approachable'.* A sense of belonging was conveyed to either the centre or later in their journey to their wider community and this included the need for their child/ren to be able to make friends. Parents talked about their child/ren '*trusting [early years staff] at the setting'* and '*being more confident, independent and 'ready for school',* as a result of attending the early years services at the centre.

Across the parent portraits it appears that developing trusting relationships with settings and practitioners plays an important role in defining the relationship going forward and the need for a listening culture is evident. The concept of an open-listening climate is complex and whilst the reflection on theory (chapter two) and the review of literature (chapter three) provides confirmatory evidence that a listening culture impacts on the quality of provision and practice that ultimately improves outcomes for children, how this is created and sustained needs further reflection to put into context.

Knowledge

The third central theme was the acquisition of knowledge. Parents made frequent references to the importance of gaining 'knowledge' in order to be able to make changes in their lives and therefore improve chances for themselves and their child/ren. This reference to 'knowledge' ranged from accessing support services throughout the different stages of their journeys such as ante-natal, post-natal, health and wellbeing, parenting skills and further and higher education as well as their child/ren attending a range of early years services such as: stay & play, creche and later nursery services before starting school. Parenting Programmes offered by the centres were referred to positively and not seen as a 'done to' approach, with the parents articulating the impact these sessions had had on them and their child/ren. Parents emphasised ''*education and learning…English and Maths [aspiring]to go onto higher education'* and more specialist support, '*received counselling and access to the Freedom Programme [specialist support for victims of Domestic Abuse].*

It appears that Children's Centres and associated partner organisations play a significant role in supporting parents to gain knowledge and new skills to help with caring for their children as well as transferability to meet long-term aspirations. Of interest here is the concept of providing support that is empowering, emancipatory and requires a shift in power away from the practitioners to give agency to parents and children.

Support Networks

The fourth central theme was the need for support networks. The sense of belonging that was reflected in relationships was also related to the importance of support networks, both at the time the parents were accessing services and also beyond their time at the centre. The theme of friendships which developed at the centre and were sustained outside of the services were frequently referred to, '*before I started at the Children's Centre I was alone…I didn't have that network…I got to the point where I was going down the right path*' and an acknowledgment that the Children's Centre had made a different to their lives, '*I couldn't have done it without the Children's Centre*' and '*I know the Children's Centre has made a difference*'.

Parents were able to articulate the aspirations for their future and for their child/ren's futures which had links to the theme of knowledge but also evident was a sense of pride and determination. Volunteering featured in all the lives of the parents and wanting to '*give back*', '*gain new skills to eventually go back to work*' and '*being able to go onto support other parents and/or vulnerable young people*', who may face similar circumstances as themselves.

As the research took place during a period of austerity and political change in relation to early years provision, of significance here will be the impact on future support services to children and parents. Consideration may have to be given to re-designing and re-prioritising support services with thoughts on innovative approaches and developing partnerships to support children and families.

The themes defined above were identified having applied the three stages of the analysis process (figure 5.11) and as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013:260) this was not a linear process but involved identifying ''*the themes not only in [their] own right, but in relation to [the] research question, and in relation to the other themes; the analysis [is] interconnected''*. In the next section 5.3.1, I present the findings illustrated under the four factors from the Lundy Model (2007): Space; Voice; Audience and Influence.

5.3.1.1 In their own words…

The findings are structured under the headings of the four concepts: Space; Voice; Audience and Influence and the individual parent's reflections are presented. As Lundy (2007:933) suggests ''*the model reflects the fact that these elements are interrelated… there is a significant degree of overlap between (a) Space and Voice, and (b) Audience and Influence''* (figure 3.2) and the views captured in the Parent Portraits reflects this overlap. I interweave parents' quotes throughout the narrative to draw inference and/or at times correlation with the central themes and I reference these to the individual parent, when I consider it adds to

my own narrative. I refer to parents, noted in brackets, e.g. as (Parent 1 Helen), (Parent 2 Dianne), (Parent 3 Paula), (Parent 4 Katie) and (Parent 5 Tracey).

5.3.1.2 Interpreting Space

The first concept of Space, evoked parents' perspectives on both a physical space, in relation to a building – the Children's Centre, as well as their individual experience of support services and the 'space' they created for the parent and child/ren over time. Across all five parent portraits the initial experience of 'entering' the building or meeting practitioners who supported them to access services, was key to the subsequent relationships that developed. A correlation with the second central theme, relationships, can be seen here. The location of the centre to their home was important to the parents, to enable them to have regular attendance at services as well as having the support from the practitioners who were close by.

The links to the first central theme of child/ren's needs can be deduced when the parents made frequent reference to Stay & Plays and Crèche support and later when the child/ren were able to attend the Nursery provision (Parent 1 Helen) (Parent 2 Dianne) (Parent 3 Paula) (Parent 4 Katie) (Parent 5 Tracey). The parents had accessed support from the Children's Centres at different stages in their own journeys. However, for those parents who needed ante-natal support, this 'space' was pivotal to meeting the child/ren's needs as well as their own. The ability to be able to transition across services, such as moving onto post-natal support, was valued by the parents. Parents described the critical periods in their lives when they felt they were able to access the specialist services offered by the Children's Centre and they acknowledged the impact this had on them and their child/ren (Parent 1 Helen) (Parent 5 Tracey). The parents ''*reflected on how these experiences had impacted on their children's development…the Children's Centre was clearly identified as the 'space' they needed…for emotional as well as practical support*'' (Moore, 2020:451).

Parent 1 - Helen's Portrait

Helen felt that being able to attend groups was very important for her and her Jack: Bumps to Babies; Baby Massage; Stay & Plays; and Creche, while she attended Parenting programmes

The links between home and the Children's Centre were key to Helen and were pivotal in helping her to set future aspirations both for herself and Jack

Helen also described the building as being "approachable", this seemed important to Helen as Jack wanted to go.

Helen felt that Jack "loved" attending the Stay & Play and Creche and missed it when he didn't go

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

Figure 5.12 (a) Space – Parent 1 – Helen's Portrait

Parent 2- Dianne's Portrait

Dianne felt it was really important to make a connection with her local Children's Centre when she was pregnant, she worked in a school, connected to a Children's Centre and knew what they offered.

Dianne explained that it was important to have a local Children's Centre as she had to see a different set of Health Visitors at the Health Clinic than she saw at the Children's Centre " it would have been better to see the same team".

The Children's Centre had Stay & Play for Jessica. The weaning sessions were important for a healthy start for Jessica and she was able to access free vitamins.

Started at Bumps to Babies, to get support for herself but knew she needed to "get out of the house...suffered from depression previously and was worried about Post Natal Depression"

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

Figure 5.12 (b) Space – Parent 2 – Dianne's Portrait

Parent 3 – Paula's Portrait

Paula explained how she was new to the area, knew no one, and at chance meeting with another parent in the local park, she learnt about the local Children's Centre and "I've never looked back"

Paula was able to access Parenting Programmes and received debt advice [she had received none of this support before being released

The Stay & Play was very important to Paula in supporting her with Ben. Paula was worried about Ben not having an awareness of danger, such as from the roads as he hadn't been outside the prison.

The creche service was a great support to enable Paula to access the Parenting Programmes she wanted and other services such as Adult Education, she had missed out on education.

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

Figure 5.12 (c) Space – Parent 3 – Paula's Portrait

Parent 4 – Katie's Portrait

Katie described how she didn't know if the Children's Centre " was for her". She just wanted to be at home with her daughter Kelly having had a very challenging start to Kelly's birth.

Key for Katie was that the Family Support Worker started home visits, the home was Katie's and Kelly's "safe space", this felt intrusive at first but having the Family Support Worker accompany her to the Children's Centre made the difference

Katie was slowly introduced to a range of services and she took her time deciding if they were for her. The staff talked to Katie about the nursery and the benefits to Kelly's development, Katie wanted the best for Kelly at all times

Katie described how she nervous meeting people

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

Figure 5.12 (d) Space – Parent 4 – Katie's Portrait

Parent 5 – Tracey's Portrait

Tracey explained that she felt it was important that the Children's Centre was there as a support network, "the fact I know they are there so if I need anything they can help"

Tracey was unable to access the support services when she first needed them "I never used to go as I had sleepless nights...it was to late by the time I got up and was functioning"

Tracey was able to access a range of support services later on, as she described how she first realised she had been a victim of Post Natal Depression and then being able to go to a Stay & Play and Baby Matter Sessions.

Tracy was able to attend Counselling sessions provided by the Children's Centre and then Parenting Programmes " learning to listen to my child attentively"

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

Figure 5.12 (e) Space – Parent 5 – Tracey's Portrait

5.3.1.3 Interpreting Voice

As suggested by Lundy (2007), the parents' reflections showed that 'space' and 'voice' were often interrelated acknowledging that without the 'space' their 'voice' and that of their child/ren would not have been 'heard'. Home visits conducted by Family Support Practitioners were considered a key time when they felt someone was listening to them and their child/ren, and establishing this link between home and the Children's Centre was crucial (Parent 1 Helen) (Parent 2 Dianne) (Parent 4 Katie). The parents were able to describe how they were able to access a range of Parenting Programmes, depending on their needs and how as parents they had learnt the significance of listening to their child/ren (Parent 3 Paula) (Parent 5 Tracey). This correlates with reflections in the next concept of audience, as being 'heard' and 'listened to' requires 'an 'audience'. The parents were able to articulate their understanding of the need for Home Visits as they described how ''*visiting practitioners observed and 'listened' to their child/ren, carried out developmental checks and at times role-modelled how to play with the child/ren*'' (Moore, 2020:452). The second central theme, relationships, featured significantly alongside the concept of voice as parents acknowledged the need to develop trusting relationships. Examples were given, both from their personal relationships as well as relationships with practitioners, of the negative impact caused when trust is broken. Parents were able to describe how they had felt their individual and child/ren's needs had been met as they had been 'seen' and heard', by practitioners (Parent 2 Dianne) (Parent 4 Katie) (Parent 5 Tracey).

Parent 1 – Helen's Portrait

Helen spoke of Jack throughout the interview, he was the focus. She spoke of his needs and wanting to make a home for her son. Helen expressed her concerns about her son's "challenging behaviour" and felt that living in a refuge had no boundaries.

Helen spoke of her alcohol dependency and the impact this had on Jack. Jack was now back on the Child Protection register as a result. Helen described how she had suffered from Post Natal Depression after having a C-Section.

Helen felt Jack had been supported a great deal at the Children's Centre by attending the Stay & Play and creche and now he was attending a PVI Nursery part time and that was helping a great deal in helping her develop a consistent approach to managing behaviour.

Helen described how Jack was getting involved in the new pregnancy by attending the scans with her and talking about the new baby.

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

Figure 5.13 (a) Voice – Parent 1 – Helen's Portrait

Parent 2 – Dianne's Portrait

Diane described that she had had all intentions of returning to work [her husband left when she was 5-months pregnant] "their lives changed". Dianne described that she "knew the Children's Centre was their to support her and Jessica through the challenges".

Dianne explained how the Stay & Play had helped Jessica to " socialise with other children, learn independence and is definitely confident because of it now...got ready for school"

The Family Support Worker visited at home and Dianne explained how Jessica loved having her visit. Jessica draw a picture [during the interview] of the staff in the Stay & Play and talked about all of her friends at the Children's Centre.

Dianne was an active member of the Parents' Forum at the Children's Centre

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

Figure 5.13 (b) Voice – Parent 2 – Dianne's Portrait

Parent 3 – Paula's Portrait

Paula described how the Children's Centre had supported her and Ben [having had Ben in prison] and as Paula was alcohol dependent.

Paula was able to identify that there were issues with attachment to Ben, as she had been in prison first 2 years of Ben's life.

Paula explained the support Ben received from attending Stay & Play as she was concerned about "his challenging behaviour".

Ben was also able to get support by attending a creche at the Children's Centre while Paula was able to retrain as well as attend Parenting Programmes. Paula learnt how to support Ben more.

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

Figure 5.13 (c) Voice – Parent 3 – Paula's Portrait

Parent 4- Katie's Portrait

Katie described how her choice of relationships had been poor and she ended up in an abusive relationship with the father of Kelly. Katie had felt isolated at this time, returning home to her mother's home for support.

Katie explained that she knew she "had to go to the Children's Centre" as this was the expectation of the other professionals who were supporting her with Kelly, at the time

'Before I started at the children's centre, I guess, I was alone in my way of thinking... he [family support worker] said, "you know you can go in, and there are all these services that you can go to"... he walked in with me... and we went from there, slowly, slowly"

Katie was introduced to support services at the Children's Centre that would offer support to both Katie and her daughter Kelly such as Baby Matters and creche support so that Katie could attend groups. As Kelly had been premature it was important that she received support for her development

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

Figure 5.13 (d) Voice – Parent 4 – Katie's Portrait

Parent 5 – Tracey's Portrait

Tracey described how she hadn't felt "listened to [by other professionals]... my Family Support Workers at the Children's Centre was so helpful".

Tracey was able to describe how the services and [gaining a voice] had then had an impact on her home life and the children.

Tracey explained how she felt the parenting programme had given her a voice as a mother and wife "having consistency in terms of what you say to your children" and then understanding her children more so they had a voice

Tracey described how she felt her "children were happy...the home is now happy and calm...if the mother is calm the home is calm"

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

Figure 5.13 (e) Voice – Parent 5 – Tracey's Portrait

5.3.1.4 Interpreting Audience

In interpreting this concept, I have drawn on the definition of 'Audience' from Lundy (2007) while acknowledging that I am applying the model with adults. However, as the child is the focus of my research, I am applying it to both the child and the adult. In the case of the child/ren, under article 12 they have a ''*right to express their views…and…to have their views considered and taken seriously [given due weight]''* (UNCRC) (UN,1989:1). As Lundy (2007:936) explains ''*while adult human beings have a right to express their views, they do not have the right to have them given weight…''*. Lundy makes a distinction between ''*…views listened to (not just heard)*'', therefore defining two separate aspects. All five parent portraits by inference identified with the concept of an 'audience' as they re-told their story about their lived experiences and were able to articulate periods of being 'heard' while at times not being 'listened' to. There were also examples, after accessing the support from the Children's Centre, where both themselves and their child/ren had been 'listened to', as demonstrated through the transformation in their lives, that had taken place. The notion of listening also involving the act of looking and observing suggested by Lancaster and Broadbent (2003) was also evident and links with the previous concepts of space and voice and later influence (Parent 1 Helen), (Parent 3 Paula), (Parent 4 Katie). The central themes are evident as part of this concept of 'audience' when parents reflect on relationships and friendships and a key factor was *''not being judged''* and ''*the notion of sustained and quality relationships with professionals and friendships…this was a prominent thread across the stories''* (Moore,2020:435).

The parents articulated clear examples of themselves as 'the audience' of their child/ren, linking to the first central theme of child/ren's needs and how the Children's Centre had helped them through Parenting Programmes as well as the help from Family Support and Early Years staff (Parent 2 Dianne), (Parent 3 Paula), (Parent 4 Katie).

Parent 1 – Helen's Portrait

Helen felt that she could not have got as far as she had nor Jack if it hadn't been for the Children's Centre.

Helen talked about having a place to go as being important but Helen also knew the Family Support Worker would visit at home.

Helen was able to access a range of support services for herself and Jack where she felt listened to, especially the counselling (off site but organised by the Children's Centre).

Helen explained "I feel I can contribute to core group meetings and I have confidence to challenge the social worker ... I feel in control now".

Audience

HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

Influence

HOW: Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

Figure 5.14 (a) Audience – Parent 1 – Helen's Portrait

Parent 2- Dianne's Portrait

Dianne was able to get advice with weaning and Jessica was able to 'dancing' and the centre had Zumba for children.

Dianne emphasised the importance of friendships for herself and Jessica. Finding things in common with friends was important

Dianne described how there was not any holiday services at the centre and she volunteered with other parents and set up holiday provision'' it was very successful''.

Dianne explained that Jessica "loved going to the centre and misses it when she doesn't...she is at school now but goes in the holidays"

Audience

HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

Influence

HOW: Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

Figure 5.14 (b) Audience – Parent 2 – Dianne's Portrait

Parent 3 – Paula's Portrait

Paula described how she received support by going to the centre but the Family Support Worker also visited at home and emphasised that this had been important as the staff "modelled play".

Paula explained how important it was that the staff members for both herself and Ben was consistent

The Children's Centre staff gave support when it was needed, "they were firm as required but solution focused".

Paula described how she felt about the staff at the Children's Centre, as they believed in her and gave her the opportunities to gain her English and Maths.

Audience

HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

Influence

HOW: Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

Figure 5.14 (c) Audience – Parent 3 – Paula's Portrait

Parent 4 – Katie's Portrait

Katie explained that she didn't feel she needed the support before coming to the Children's Centre but she went onto to describe how each service and staff member/s had supported her and Kelly

Katie was able to access the counselling service at the Children's Centre "that worked out who you are as a person and what happened in your life...it released all the tension

Kelly knows[the keyworker] now, she trusts them but she still needs to learn to trust and bond with the others".

Katie described how she felt that the staff " should have a recommendation because I can't think of the nursery without smiling...they brought a warm feeling" Katie was able to clearly describe the help both herself and Kelly were given.

Audience

HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

Influence

HOW: Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate
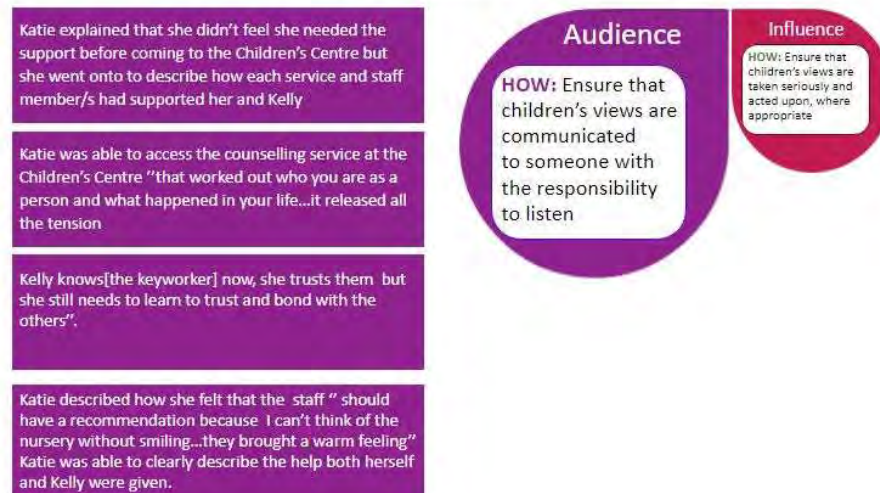
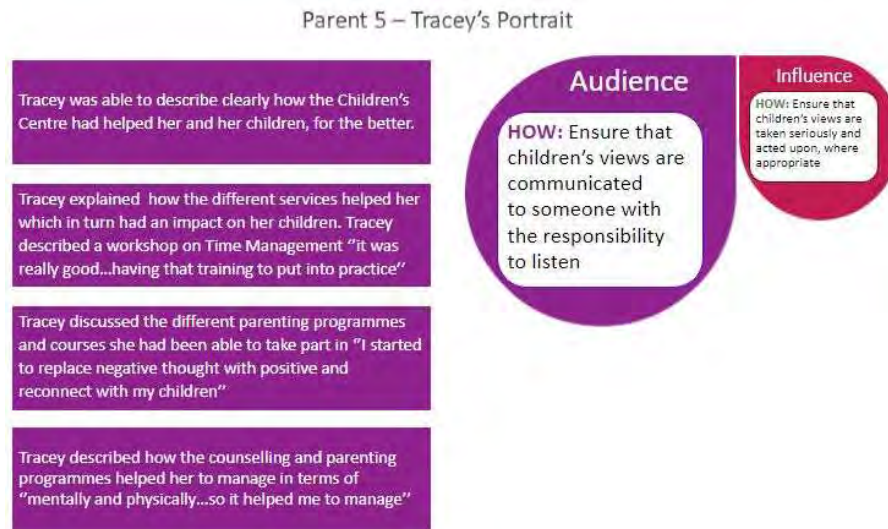Figure 5.14 (d) Audience– Parent 4 – Katie's Portrait

Figure 5.14 (e) Audience – Parent 5 – Tracey's Portrait

5.3.1.5 Interpreting Influence

The concept of 'influence' was very apparent across the five parent portraits and overlaps with the concept of audience (Lundy 2007). Lundy (2007:938) argues, in respect of article 12 ''…*attention needs to focus on the extent of influence; what constitutes the 'due' in 'due weight' ''.* The parent portraits reflect examples where practitioners have been the audience, and this has had an impact on transforming their circumstances as those perceived as the 'audience' have been able to support and apply influence. Parents were able to reflect on the changes in their own lives that then influenced the change for their child/ren. The support services that the parents accessed, either for themselves or their child/ren, were very influential in respect of the transformation in their lives. Parents related this to the practitioners, the other parents and to themselves, as being role models for their children (Parent 1 Helen), (Parent 4 Katie), (Parent 5 Tracey). The third central theme of knowledge can be assimilated with the concept of 'influence' both as parents and children acquired knowledge and also shows how the increased knowledge then influenced the ability to develop aspirations and affect transformation (Parent 3 Paula), (Parent 4 Katie). What was evident was how ''*parents showed that they had developed independence and self-reliance…they had gained confidence to make their own decisions that had a positive influence on the lives and future aspirations for their children''* (Moore, 2020:454). The parents' stories relayed examples of how they were guided through the different services or at times referred into other organisations for specialist support and this reflects the feelings that parent

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portrayed of being 'listened to' and their needs being understood (Parent 1 Helen), (Parent 4 Katie).

The desire to 'give back' in some way was apparent either to the children's centre, their community or by transitioning into volunteering and/or employment, that would benefit others (in similar circumstances to themselves). Volunteering at the Children's Centre and/or partner organisation was a route to achieving the notion of 'giving back' and four out of five of the parents were registered as volunteers (Parent 2 Dianne), (Parent 3 Paula), (Parent 4 Katie), (Parent 5 Tracey).
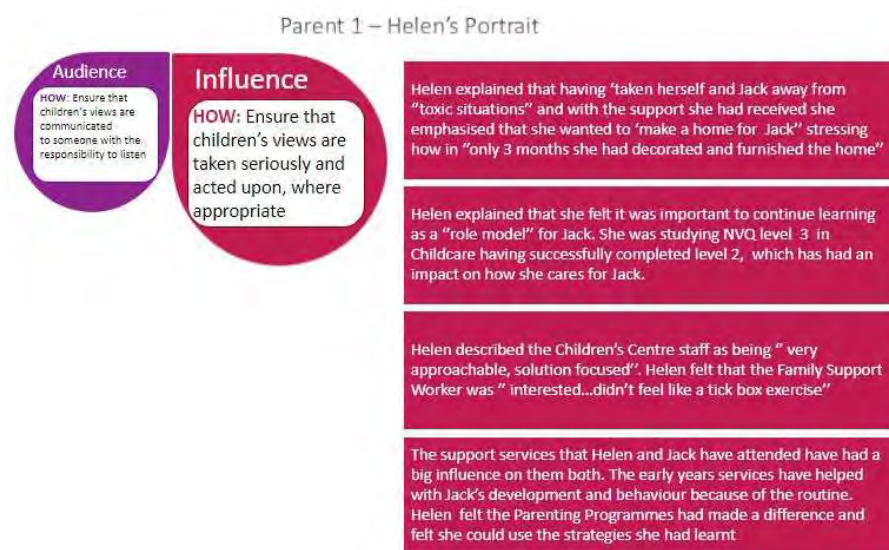

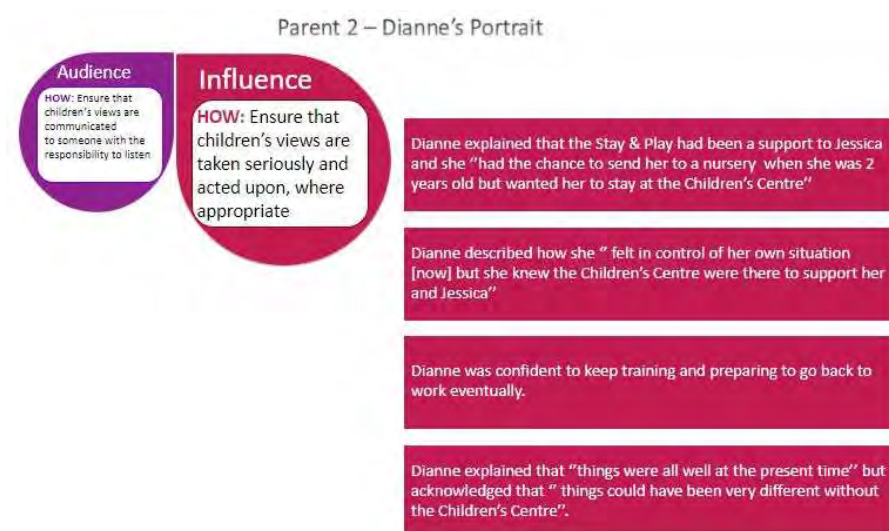Figure 5.15 (a) Influence – Parent 1 – Helen's Portrait

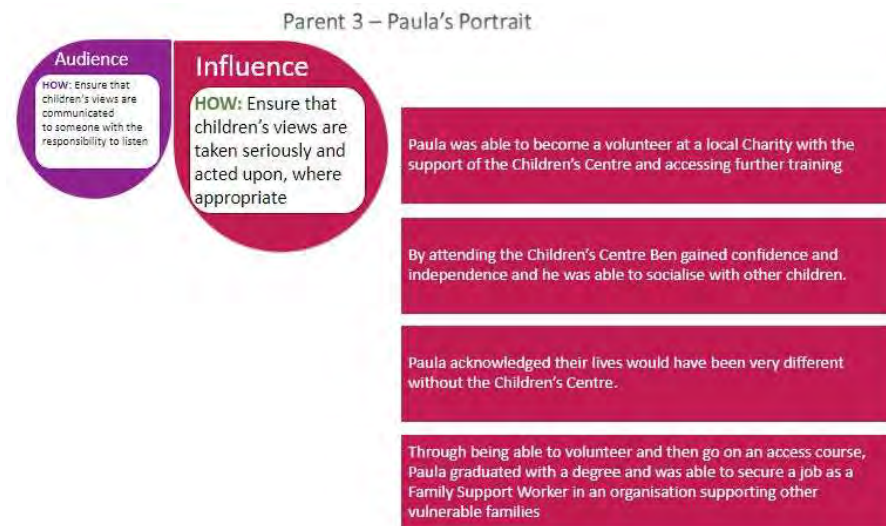Figure 5.15 (b) Influence – Parent 2 – Dianne's Portrait

Parent 3 – Paula's Portrait

Audience
HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

Influence
HOW: Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

Paula was able to become a volunteer at a local Charity with the support of the Children's Centre and accessing further training

By attending the Children's Centre Ben gained confidence and independence and he was able to socialise with other children.

Paula acknowledged their lives would have been very different without the Children's Centre.

Through being able to volunteer and then go on an access course, Paula graduated with a degree and was able to secure a job as a Family Support Worker in an organisation supporting other vulnerable families

Figure 5.15 (c) Influence – Parent 3 – Paula's Portrait

Parent 4 – Katie's Portrait

Audience
HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

Influence
HOW: Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

Katie described how she "can't help smiling [walking through the gate at the Children's Centre] because this place has had an effect on me"

"next step school for Kelly... she is so happy and I want her to grow up with a dream to chase...that is all I care about that she is happy". Katie spoke with confidence about seeing herself as a "role model" for Kelly now

Katie described how she " needed pushing" and she has had a chance to meet new parents, lots of new parents and we got on so well and learnt different things, and that was also down to the nursery as they were involved".

Katie is now volunteering at the Children's Centre and has started to study. She has personal goals now that she never thought she would have " I want to give back"
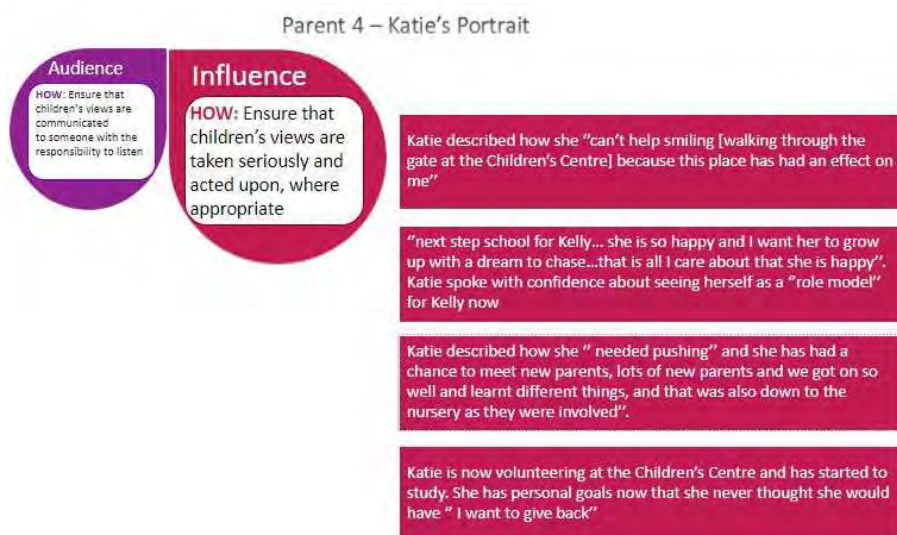
Figure 5.15 (d) Influence – Parent 4 – Katie's Portrait
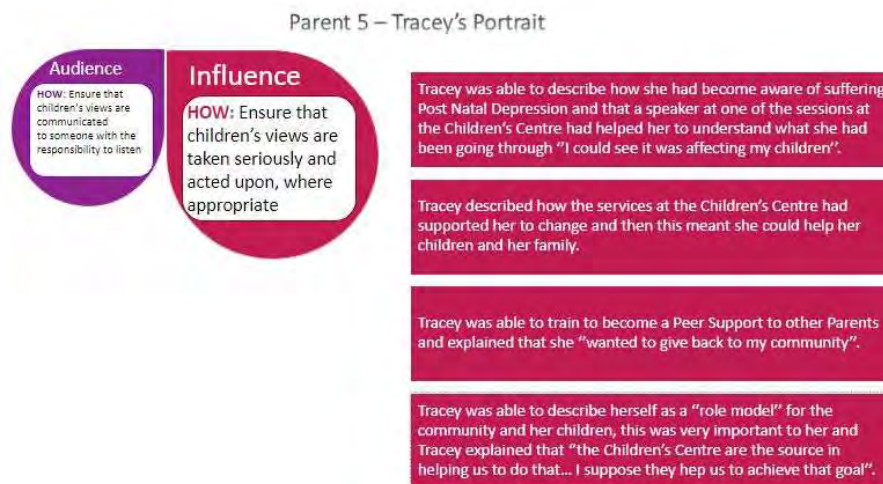
Figure 5.15 (e) Influence – Parent 5 – Tracey's Portrait

5.4 Reflections of Parent Portraits

In this chapter I have discussed the findings from five Parent Portraits that were captured through the use of portraiture as a method in qualitative research in order to answer the research questions and sub-question(s). I have presented the data having applied a three-stage process to the analysis, using a coding framework and the Lundy Model (2007) to interpret the data. The Parent Portraits have provided an insight into the 'lived experiences' of the parents and children before and after accessing support from the Children's Centre. From the analysis of the data four central themes were identified: 1. Child/ren's Needs; 2. Relationships; 3. Knowledge and 4. Support Networks, and I provide a brief definition of the themes as I interpreted the stories being told. I have correlated these central themes with the four concepts of: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence from the Lundy Model (2007) of Participation with children and I have shown an innovative way of interpreting and applying the model with adults, which I feel is an example of how I am contributed new knowledge to the field. My research has ''*opened a door to an alternative way of engaging in dialogue with parents and children*'' (Moore, 2020:457) and the findings from the parent portraits have contributed to understanding what is understood by the concept of an open listening climate in Children's Centres which I discuss further when I revisit the research questions in chapter seven and in my final discussions and recommendations.

In the next chapter (chapter six), I present the profiles of the senior managers and practitioners who took part in the research and I present the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the four senior managers and from the focus group interviews conducted with nineteen practitioners who participated.

Chapter 6: Practitioners' Profiles

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the participant profiles of the four senior managers and nineteen practitioners who participated in the research. As described in chapter four, methodology and methods, in order to answer the overall research questions and sub-research questions, I chose to use semi-structured Interviews with senior managers which I considered to be an effective method to use in order to answer the research questions as supported by Thomas (2011:163) who suggests:

> *"you can get the best of both worlds from semi-structured interviews [comparing structured and unstructured interview methods] … and is most commonly used in most small-scale social research''.*

I used focus group methodology with frontline practitioners which I believe reflects what Liamputtong (2011:23) describes as ''*dialogic focus groups: critical pedagogical practice''*. From an ethical stance, I considered both methods to generate data from multiple perspectives, reflecting a Freirean approach to pedagogue, of active participants of knowledge and linking knowledge to action.

In both cases, I applied the Lundy Model (2007) as first discussed in chapter 2 (section 2.3.2) as a theoretical framework, reflecting a rights based approach to research and I used the child participation checklist (DCYA, 2015) as shown in figure 6.1 (section 6.3), as the tool for generating the data. The in-depth findings and analysis of the data generated are discussed in this chapter, having applied a qualitative themed analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2013) to analyse and interpret the data generated.

6.2 A Programme of Participation

The tables below illustrate the practitioner profiles for both study sites and as discussed in chapter four (section 4.8.4), due to the timing and availability of the participants, the early years and family support practitioners at study site one participated in separate sessions. Table 6a represents the practitioner profiles from study site one, from early years and as there was 100% attendance at this focus group session, I have not included an attendance table. Table 6b represents the practitioner profiles from study site one, from family support, and the attendance at the focus group sessions and due to practitioner commitments, I delivered two focus group sessions with the group. Due to the timing of the focus group sessions and numbers of participants recruited, I carried out two focus group sessions at study site two,

inviting the same participants to take part, however, as noted one practitioner, from family support, was not available for the second focus group.

Table 6c illustrates the participant profiles of early years and family support who participated in the combined focus group sessions. Table 6d illustrates the attendance of practitioners, from study site two, across two focus group sessions and unfortunately, not all participants could attend both. At the time of the field work the staffing structures and definitions of roles of the two study sites differed which is reflective of the attendance of a greater number of practitioners, at study site two, that were defined as family support than early years however their service delivery areas crossed over into early years. An example of this would be practitioners delivering Infant Massage and Parenting Programmes such as Incredible Years, while the services may be perceived as early year's the practitioners were considered as working in the family support team. I believe this cross over of disciplines and knowledge and qualifications added value to the focus group discussion and not an imbalance which may be perceived from the tables.

The profiles for the senior management who participated in semi-structured interviews, from both study sites, is illustrated in table 6e. As discussed in chapter four (section 4.8.1.1), the senior managers were representative of staff holding positions of strategic leadership within both study sites, with responsibility for leading and managing early years and family support teams and service areas, at the time of the study. Again, there may be a perception of an imbalance of representation from the two study sites, but this is reflective of the positions held at the time the study took place.

Practitioner Profiles Focus Group Interviews – Early Years, Study Site One

Practitioner	Team
1	Early Years
2	Early Years
3	Early Years
4	Early Years

Table 6a – Early Years Practitioner Profiles

Practitioner Profiles Focus Group Interviews – Family Support, Study Site One

Practitioner	Team	Focus Group One	Focus Group Two
5	Family Support	*	*
6	Family Support	*	-
7	Family Support	*	*
8	Family Support	*	*
9	Family Support	*	*

Table 6b – Family Support Practitioner Profiles and attendance (* denotes attendance)

Practitioner Profiles Focus Group Interviews – Multi-professional, Study Site Two

Practitioner	Team
1 (EYP5)	Early Years
2 (EYP6)	Early Years
3 (FSP6)	Family Support
4 (FSP7)	Family Support
5 (FSP8)	Family Support
6 (FSP9)	Family Support
7 (FSP10)	Family Support
8 (FSP11)	Family Support
9 (FSP12)	Family Support
10 (FSP13)	Family Support

Table 6c – Practitioner Profiles

Practitioner Profiles Focus Group Interviews – Multi-professional, Study Site Two

Practitioner	Focus Group One	Focus Group Two
1	-	*
2	*	-
3	*	*
4	*	-
5	*	*
6	*	-
7	*	-
8	*	*
9	-	*
10	*	-

Table 6d – Practitioner Attendance at Focus Group Sessions (* denotes attendance)

Semi-Structured Interviews- Senior Manager Profiles (both study sites)

Senior Manager	Study Site		Team
1 (SM1)	1		Family Support
2 (SM2)	1		Early Years
3 (SM3)	1		Early Years
4 (SM4)	2		Generic

Table 6e– Senior Manager Participation

6.3 Senior Managers' and Practitioners' Data Set

The overall research questions for the study are:

1. What are parents' and practitioners' views and perspectives on child voice within Children's Centres in England?

2. How might practice be transformed to create a more open listening climate in multi-professional early years settings?

The sub-research questions posed to senior managers and practitioners were:

Question 1. What is understood by the concept of an open listening climate in Children's Centres?

Question 2. What are practitioners' perspectives and understanding of their practice in relation to child voice?

I consider that two further sub-research questions will be informed by the data sets:

Question 4. What changes might need to happen in order to create a more collaborative, open listening climate?

Questions 5. What strategies might be adopted to improve the listening climate and pedagogical practice across teams in Children's Centres?

Figure 6. 1 illustrates the Lundy Model checklist for participation (DCYA, 2015:22) developed as part of the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015 – 2020 (DCYA, Ireland, June 2015). I adopted both the Lundy Model (2007), as discussed in chapter 2 (section 2.3.2) and the checklist as a basis for the interview guide (Liamputtong, 2011) (Appendix 6), which I developed to use as part of the semi-structured interviews with senior managers and the focus group interviews with the practitioners at both study sites. The checklist was originally developed by Professor Lundy in consultation with ''*representatives from Government Departments and agencies*'' (DCYA, 2015:22), to help those organisations who support children and young people to ensure they can implement Article 12 of the UNCRC (UN,1989). It is important to state at this point that the Lundy Model (2007) and subsequent Participation Checklist (DCYA,2015) have been predominantly applied to research with older children of school age. In my study, I have applied the Lundy Model of children's participation with adults participating in the research as a way of understanding the practitioners' perspectives on child voice in the context of their work in Children's Centres and with under 5s.

I discuss my reasoning behind including the voice of senior managers in the research in chapter four (section,4.8.1.1.), which supports the view of Isles-Buck and Newstead (2003:13) who consider that:

> ''*Managers need to be able to hold and develop a vision so that the rest of the team are constantly aware of what their work is about and why it is important to change and develop their practice…*''.

When reflecting on leadership skills across and within multi-profession teams, I was able to reflect on my own leadership position and training from the NPQICL (Whalley et al., Book 4, 2004:37) which considered that:

> ''*One of the most important contributions that can be made by senior [managers] – those holding designated leadership roles- is to encourage the leadership qualities and tendencies of others. This can add significantly to the quality of services provided and encourage the professional development of all'*.

In this chapter (section, 6.3), I present the findings as a combination of voices of senior managers and practitioners from across the two study sites to answer the research questions and relevant sub-research questions. As discussed in chapter four (section 4.6.5), I consider that my research can be defined as an embedded single-case study (Yin, 2009) as opposed to a multiple or comparative case study (Thomas, 2011). It was not my intention to set out to compare the two study sites which would involve what Schwandt (2001) defines as 'cross-case analysis' (Thomas, 2011:141), which places the emphasis on the comparison. My interest lay in exploring the phenomenon and focus of the research, i.e. the perspectives of practitioners as a collective voice. I interweave direct quotes as illustrative examples where I feel they support my narrative and I identify the participants' contributions by the following codes: Senior Manager (SM1, SM2) and I will distinguish between Early Years as (EYP1, EYP2) and Family Support as (FSP1, FSP2).

Figure 6.1 Lundy's Model Checklist for Participation (DCYA, 2015:22)

6.4 An Open Listening Climate

The concept of an open listening climate that I first introduce in chapter three, (section3.2.3) and in the context of an early years setting, sits firmly within a praxeological paradigm (Oliveira-Formosinho and Formosinho, 2012) and is underpinned by ethical praxis, democratic principles and a sharing of 'power' that supports the use of ''*participatory* and *practice led research*'' (Pascal and Bertram, 2012:477). The idea of the need to create an open listening climate is foreground in the theory of Pedagogy – in -Participation, which is the work of the Early Childhood Centres in Portugal by the Aga Khan Foundation and the Childhood Association (Formosinho and Oliveira-Formosinho (2008a). In more recent research, Lyndon et al., (2019:361-362) refer to ''*openness and listening*'' as part of a wider empirical study conducted by Lyndon (2021) who adopts the use of Pedagogical Mediation as a method of fostering the practice of listening in order to ''…*explore better ways of listening to children…*'' to better understand ''…*how can listening practices be improved in early years settings through pedagogic mediation? ''*.

I introduced the concept of an open listening climate as part of my research with the senior managers and practitioners as an introductory question, as suggested by Liamouttong (2011:76), to ''*generate some knowledge about the participants' perspectives regarding the issues under investigation''*.

Figure 6.2 is an illustration of the words and phrases from the senior managers and practitioners that were associated with the concept of an open listening climate and I will present the themes and, in some cases, sub-themes that were identified from across the multiple voices (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Figure 6.2 Open Listening Climate (Alison Moore, 2021)

The results from across the two data sets and two study sites produced four different themes which related to the concept of their perspectives on an open listening climate in practice and, within the themes, one sub-theme was evident.

The four themes were:

1.   The Environment

       Sub-theme: The act of active listening and being heard

2.   Relationships

3.   Methods and tools

4.   Impact on practice

The four themes and one sub-theme are presented below.

6.4.1 The Environment

The sense of the need for the environment to be established in order to create an open listening climate was evident across the breath of the findings. However, this did not always relate to the physical space but there was a crossover with other themes. The views expressed referred to both the Children's Centre as a physical presence, as well as the need to create the atmosphere that promotes the act of open listening and therefore contributes to the climate. There was a shared understanding of the need for 'open listening' and a range of views and perspectives of what this meant in practice.

> ''*I think it is about creating an atmosphere or a freedom for people to be able to talk… and know that people will listen to them but not just listen but take on board and have an impact, so we don't just listen to parents, we take on board what they've said…*'' [SM4].

The connection to the environment was expressed as creating, ''*somewhere that feels safe and secure*'' [SM3] which was associated with the early years space as well as a space for the adults, which included the practitioners working at the Children's Centre, ''*a safe environment, people say what they think, non-judgemental*'' [FSP8].

Sub-theme: The act of active listening and being heard

A sub-theme that emerged within the theme of the environment was an acknowledgement that the act of listening needs to be active and that there is a need to not only listen but also to show someone they have been heard and was expressed as:

> ''*active listening*'' [SM1], the need to ''*stop and listen…when you know you haven't got 1001 other things to do…hearing what they are thinking*'' [SM2].

This perspective correlates with the findings that are reflected under the four concepts of: Space; Voice; Audience and influence which I discuss later in this section. This concept of active listening also overlaps with a number of the other themes such as Relationships, Methods and Tools, and the Impact on Practice. The overall perception of an open listening climate strongly acknowledged the role the practitioners play in creating an open listening climate from across both disciplines. However, less evident was how this related to children in practice. The act of open listening to the children was made more explicit but not exclusively so by practitioners and senior managers from the early years field, such as:

''*Safe place is different for every child depending on their personality, learning style, what is happening in their lives at the time and who their special people are…children are able to express themselves freely in all areas of the nursery*'' [SM3].

It was acknowledged that listening also included observing ''*body language*'' [FSP5] and this is made more explicit in how that relates to practice in discussions of voice (section 6.5) and audience (section 6.6).

Implicit in the findings were the links made to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the understanding of an open listening climate and language which is featured within the framework, such as:

'' *healthy, enriched environment and enabling*'' [EYP2], ''*child-led – asking what they want to play with*'' and '' *Continuous observations*'' [EYP3], ''*The need to respond to non-verbal responses and modelling listening skills*'' [EYP4].

The role that family support played at listening to children was less evident when discussing an open listening climate but became more explicit in other areas of questioning. When considering how listening to children impacts on practice, the view expressed by one senior manager was that:

''*I don't think we do that terribly well with children across the board and we are really good at it with parents but think there is a lot more we can do with children*'' [SM4].

It was considered that the study would contribute to the idea of ''*how to do it*'' in relation to improving the open listening climate for children. This can be linked back to the rationale for undertaking the research (chapter two, section 1.2) and the overarching research questions:

1. What are parents' and practitioners' perspectives on child voice within Children's Centres?

2. How might practice be transformed to create a more open-listening climate in a multi-professional early year setting?

6.4.2 Relationships

Running alongside the importance of creating the right environment which promotes an open listening climate was the implicit reference to relationships by practitioners. When practitioners shared their understanding of the concept of an open listening climate, they expressed the importance of values. These values included:

''*non-judgement*'' [FSP2] [FSP8] [EYP5]. The need to model values, ''*we care so they* [children] *care*'' [EYP4].

> Practitioners referred to ''*having no barriers*'' [FSP7] with specific reference to equality and opportunities for children and parents whose first language is not English, ''*Staffing engaging with different cultures*'' *and "The need to respect everyone- what they say, even the children*'' [FSP5] and '' *if children do not speak English then get certain words from mom to make the child feel at ease*'' [EYP1].

One practitioner was able to express the concept of open listening as ''*allowing them* [children] *to be themselves…when one Polish child used to shake with nerves in 'class' I asked them something in Polish and started singing songs, they opened up*''. [EYP4].

While another spoke of the need *for ''positive relationships, approachable, speak at their [children] level, and speak their language. Powerful when you can speak to them in their language and you see that the child recognises the language*'' [EYP3].

Practitioners did not make explicit reference to 'power' and positionality; however, reference was made to the importance of an open listening climate in relation to organisational structures, with inference to the need for practitioners to be supported and the role 'management' [no specific examples were given] played in this:

> ''[it] *requires training, space, change to organisational culture*'' [FSP1]
> ''*Everyone listened to*'' [FSP3].

This was supported by [SM2] who talked about ''*taking someone else's point of view…sharing what you are thinking and bringing it all together*''.

The perception of the role that early years and family support undertake in relation to listening to children and parents and importantly where practitioners considered improvements could be made to practice, was more explicit when discussing the four concepts in the Lundy Model.

6.4.3 Methods and Tools

The need for specific methods and tools to facilitate the act of open listening was referred to in more detail when describing the Space that needs to be created (section 6.4.2), their understanding of Voice (section 6.5), who is the Audience (section 6.6) and how can the Audience impact and influence change (section 6.6.1). However, in relation to creating an open listening climate it was suggested that practitioners required support, particularly when listening to children. These suggestions related to practical methods and techniques, as well as having methods in place to document and evidence child voice. The need for improvements were acknowledged by practitioners and senior managers and this was expressed by the need to: ''*create a change initiative to improve things''* [FSP2] ''*listening as a whole process''* [FSP3] and supported by a senior manager who considered, in order to create a more open listening climate, you need:

> ''*different approaches that you will use to actively come and listen, methods and tools to make it easier for clients and service users or early years staff members''*.[SM1].

The use of reflection, as part of open listening, was frequently referred to by early years practitioners who, as an example, referred to the use of: ''*All about me booklets'' and '' continuous observation, using feedback from parents and recording everything''* [EYP4].

Less evident were the methods that family support adopted to create an open listening climate with children, as parents who received support appeared to be the focus. Practitioners described this as: ''*when parents are in need they want to be listened to''* [FSP6]. ''*Parents can take over at a home visit…parents think you are their family support worker not the child's''* [FSP10]. This is also linked with the earlier concepts of 'power' in relationships and is explored further in this chapter (section 6.4.2).

6.4.4 Impact on Practice

The practitioners were able to articulate their understanding of an open listening climate and give clear examples where they felt this was in evidence, both across teams and across study sites. There was an open acknowledgement, when considering implications for practice under the concepts of space, voice, audience and influence that improvements could be made to listening to child voice. This was often linked to the practical methods and techniques, as discussed previously, but more implicitly was linked to the distinctions made between roles. The practitioners were clear about their individual roles defined by their associated title of

either family support or early years but what was less evident was how the two disciplines worked together. Practitioners were able to give some examples of how they had started to undertake 'joint work' to support children and parents such as:

'' *observations had started to take place on home visits and as part of the pre-caf assessment…placing the focus on the child''* [FSP8]. However, after further discussion, practitioners questioned how effective this had been at listening to the child's voice *''not child friendly…smiley faces don't open up dialogue with children''* [FSP10].

Family support expressed their concerns that '' *family support don't spend enough time in the home…just a snap shot view of the child''* [FSP11] and links were made to specific roles and relevant training *''Family Support do observations but may be looking for the wrong thing''*[FSP2].

Practitioners were able to express examples where joint working with family support and early years had been effective with positive outcomes for the child and parents, but the acknowledgements that improvements could be made to practice were unanimous.

> *''I* [Family Support] *had a joint visit with the Children's Centre SENCO…we were able to have different perspectives of the same visit… of the parent and of the child''* [FSP4].
>
> *''staff* [Family Support] *feeding back to parents in creche… a joint discussion with the parents''* [FSP4]
>
> *''early years advising family support on appropriate toys they can take out on a home visit to engage with the child and make them feel comfortable''* [FS1].

While there were examples of more recent improvements, this was not considered embedded in practice. Practitioners and senior managers were of the view that developing ways of working together could be, and needed to be, improved and was the way to change practice.

6.5 Perspectives on Space

The findings that follow relate specifically to the four aspects of space, voice, audience, and influence from the Lundy Model (2007). The concept of space is not explicitly defined and has been interpreted by the participants. However, the use of the Checklist for Participation as the 'tool' for gathering the data from both data sets, with specific questions being asked, placed the focus of the research on the child. In relation to space, the following questions were asked:

- Have children's views been actively sought and can you describe how?

- Is there a safe space where children can express themselves freely and can you describe this space?

- How do you take steps to ensure all children take part?

Figure 6.3 is an illustration of the words and phrases that were associated with the concept of space and I will present the themes and, in some cases, sub-themes that were identified from across the multiple voices (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Figure 6.3 Space (Alison Moore, 2021)

The results from across the two data sets and two study sites produced four themes which related to the concept of their perspectives on space, in practice and within the themes, and two sub-themes were also evident. The four themes were:

1. Support Services

2. Home Visits and New Birth Visits

3. Making Children 'Visible'

   Subtheme: Observations and Recording

4. Relationships

   Subtheme: Communication

The four themes and two sub-themes are presented below.

6.5.1 Support Services

There was a consensus across all participants that while the types of services being delivered may differ between teams and across the two study sites, the support services available to parents and children provided the space that facilitated children being listened to and being

heard. Practitioners spoke with confidence when referring to their own service but were also able to articulate some examples from across the service specifications. Practitioners, both within early years and family support, were able to name services that they felt enabled children to be heard with some going on to describe how this is achieved. It was evident that those services defined under an early year's remit such as: stay & play; creche and nursery provision were perceived as being more able to facilitate child voice with some limitations and challenges being expressed. Illustrations given for these services included, with creche and stay & play:

> ''record everything…post it notes…children's views, likes and dislikes, if they don't like messy play, we find an alternative'' [EYP2]

> ''Constantly observing…get feedback from parents…ask children want they want out to play with'' [EYP3]

> ''giving children choice…time and space'' [FSP5]

Practitioners gave very clear examples and spoke with confidence of how staff in nursery and/or preschool provision listen to children and in what ways practice facilitates this.

> '' children are involved in everything that we do in nursery and are central to everything…a child's physical voice influences what we provide, such as when they ask for something…the majority of seeking children's voices is done by observing children. How they use the environment, interacting with one another, using equipment'' [SM3]

> ''it has got to be a place where children feel comfortable, confident and able to express themselves…we try to be an open-ended resource kind of setting… so children can have their own thoughts and feelings and share them as much as they can'' [SM2]

> ''I think our nursery is a lovely safe space, designed around the children, the rest of the centre is so multi-purpose, with no designated creche room, pack away…I would really like to have everything set up for the children, just make it nice as it should be for the children' [SM4]

It was evident that practitioners who talked about services defined under a family support remit were able to give examples of services they perceived would facilitate child voice. However, it appeared that there was less confidence about how this was achieved. There were exceptions to this where examples of practice were described. Of interest were the limitations and challenges described by family support practitioners; however, there were instances where other participants were able to suggest solutions. It was less obvious if the solutions

were being implemented in practice or were a wish for future improvements to practice. One example given was the limited time that was being given to work with families ''*a 6-week intervention doesn't work*'' [FSP8] and while practitioners agreed, one suggested a solution was ''*from the outset – introduce yourself to the child- this is what you're here for, having a conversation*'' [FSP8].

Examples were given of three specific support services that practitioners considered facilitated listening to children, and in particular, very young children who were non-verbal. All three services include support for the parent and the child/ren. Again, of less evidence was how the service/s achieved this.

The practitioner articulated the importance of Baby Massage as a service for listening to babies such as:

> ''*through non-verbal cues…Is the child comfortable?...when parents take off the clothes, showing respect towards the child, asking their permission…*''
>
> [FSP6]

Musical Babies is a support service to help with the development of language and communication of babies up to 18 months old, and parents are supported, through the medium of music, to communicate with their babies. No specific example was articulated that evidenced the facilitation of child voice. Finally, practitioners made reference to Baby Club which is a postnatal support service delivered in partnership with Health Visitors that provides a range of advice and guidance to new parents. The presumption of practitioners was that these services would facilitate listening to children and children being heard as suggested by the aims of the service. However, no explicit example was given of how this was achieved in practice or how it was evidenced.

6.5.2 Home Visits and New Birth Visits

A distinction was made between Home Visits and the New Birth Visit that was connected to the timing of these visits and therefore the significance of them, in relation to listening to children and children being heard. Practitioners felt that the New Birth Visit, conducted as soon after the birth of the baby as practical, provided the opportunity to observe the parent and the child ''*in the home environment…the bonding between mom and baby*'' [FSP6].

One practitioner considered that ''*home visiting is a safe space*'' [FSP11] and of interest was the view given by one senior manager who acknowledged that this is the family's home, ''*I think we need to have respect for the family home as a safe space and try to avoid using the family home for anything that just might be challenging*'' [SM4].

It was interesting that at this point the practitioners discussed the methods that were used at the visits which they perceived helped them to elicit child voice such as: '' *concentrating on child information* in *the Red-Book* [Personal Child Health Record]'' [FSP4] and the ''*pre-caf process"* [process of pre-assessment to help determine level of support required]. The effectiveness of these procedures was implicit, but a level of confidence was displayed when practitioners discussed the visits. The limitations of these visits were also referred to such as: ''*We [family support] don't have many resources for the voice of the child...parents can take over at a home visit''* [FSP10]. Practitioners talked of '' *child observations...child has a voice... sometimes parents think the child doesn't understand''* [FSP7] and one referred to a ''*sheet- child and babies observation...insight into a view of child...facial expressions...tick how you think they feel and children can draw on it''* [FSP6]. This practitioner was referring to a process that had been tried by family support but was not currently being used.

It was evident that practitioners and senior managers could see that improvements could be made to how child voice was being heard, particularly within the context of family support. These improvements related to 'the space' which in most cases was the family home and on other occasions, related to service provision delivered both on and off site. There were exemplars of practice referred to, where joint working had made a difference; however there was an acknowledgement of the need to improve joint working between the roles of family support and early years:

> '' *I think staff [family support] plan their visits and think about the conversation with the grown up so what is happening with the child...I think staff making home visits are very conscious of the children and whatever they are doing out there might impact on the children or involve them in some way...early years staff do it more naturally, going in from a child's perspective, putting themselves in the place of the child and what that feels like...family support have done some work around that''* [SM4]
>
> ''*I don't come from an early years background but I have done home visits and we see the children there and I go on the floor and sit with them, read a book to them...I've encouraged the staff to go to the nursery and met with the keyworker of any children whose family they are working with...''* [SM1]
>
> '' *there is a lack of link between early years and family support...however [joint visits] might not always be a good thing, it may be a barrier''* [FSP4].

The discussions on working with the family in their home led practitioners on to considering the concept of a 'safe space' and how did this might facilitate children to express themselves.

In relation to early years, they related this concept to early years services. It was recognised by senior managers and practitioners that having contact with the child/ren was essential.

6.5.3 Making Children Visible

Senior managers and practitioners identified that the child was the focus of the work within the Children's Centre, acknowledging the different services that are explicitly designed to meet the needs of children and those services with a specific parent support remit. There was an understanding of how parent support programmes then have a direct and/or indirect impact on outcomes for the child. As part of the discussions on children being able to express themselves, a connection was made with safeguarding in relation to a safe space, and again the defined roles of early years, family support and the service provision was evident. Of interest was that the concept of '*invisible children'* (Ferguson, 2014) was made explicit by one senior manager, in respect of early years provision, with family support making inference to this concept with examples of needing to see children on home visits.

> ''*through observing the room and individual children, staff have been made conscious of and have discussed in staff meetings the potential 'invisible children'. This can be seen when collating learning journey evidence''* [SM3]
> ''*Always ask to see the child – visit when the child is at home- sometimes families will lose the child too (child overlooked) …make a positive relationship with the child, make sure you engage with the child''* [FSP10]

Practitioners also spoke of occasions where on home visits it is not always possible to see the child ''*child was not up on a visit'* [FSP4] but practitioners spoke confidently of their views of what is a safe space ''*stay & plays and creche…groups where children are and can interact"* [FSP5].

It was apparent that practitioners were able to describe with confidence the aims of the services and the role they play within their defined remits in supporting children and parents. The role of early years is more easily described as their work is defined through the parameters of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Local Authority and Safeguarding requirements and Ofsted frameworks. Some of the early years provision within Children's Centres are required to be registered with Ofsted and therefore meet the same standards. Other non-statutory services such as stay & play, some creche services and family support are required to meet standards in the Ofsted framework for Children's Centres. However, how this is achieved is less prescriptive, less defined, and much more open to interpretation by the individual centres. Both study sites, having been part of the earliest roll-out of the Sure Start

initiative, had well-established services and work practices, and were considered exemplar centres both at a local and national level. There was an understanding across practitioners and senior managers that the child had to be the focus of the role of Children's Centres and, in relation to both study sites, the consensus was that there was still need for improvement. The following theme related to both perceived good practice at the time of the study and was also a key area that would help improve practice across the teams.

Sub-theme: Observation and Recording

Practitioners and senior managers identified positive aspects of using observation and recording for facilitating child voice in their everyday practice. Observation and recording were more easily described and evidenced within an early year's service with less explicit examples being cited by family support practitioners. The method of using observation and recording has a very clearly defined purpose in early years provision for supporting children's development, as again as it sits within educational, developmental and inspection framework.

> ''*In the nurseries, definitely listening to the children, they* [staff] *are watching observing and seeing and making changes on what they see…documentation is an issue as I think it's the time and in our heads we know It* [listening to children] *is happening, we are doing it, putting it down on paper , that one, I'm not so sure of''*[SM2]

> ''*through regular discussion and reflection…we are making change in the under 2s room, make it softer and friendlier''* [SM3]

The method of observation and in fact reflection, as mentioned above, is embedded in the role of early years practitioners who referred to examples such as:

''*Reflection booklet* [used] *after the session''* [EYP4]

''*Continuous observing e.g child wants the doll's house, but on the 2nd day I assumed they would want the same, but they didn't''* [EYP3]

''*There is always a way in nursery…child observation helps a child have a voice''* [FSP6]

''*Within activities, we [nursery] hear their comments or take cues from facial expressions/body language etc…Staff are continually changing the layout of the nursery and routines based upon these observations and their reflections''* [SM3]

It became apparent to me that observation in relation to children and the role of family support, specifically during home visits, was less utilised to facilitate child voice. The process of observing either children or parents during such visits was a more informal process which

formed part of what could be considered as the visual orientation of a visit. Family support will have a purpose for a visit whether it is the New Birth Visit, a Home Visit or one that has been instigated as a result of another 'driver' such as a referral from another agency and therefore the purpose is task driven. This is not to say this is negative; however, it was acknowledged that improvements could be made. This was supported by a senior manager who considered,

> ''*we've always had an approach around doing observations of children and getting and taking children's views in an age-appropriate way when we can, but I think we can kind of strengthen that observation, which are really important, not for all children but particularly pre-verbal children.* [SM4]

I believe that as part of my research I have evidenced, through the parent portraits, that listening to parents' lived experiences forms part of listening to, hearing, and acting upon the child's voice and is integral to the work of all practitioners working with children and families. It is evident that the use of observation and recording within early years practice is one method of listening and responding to children that is embedded in practice. It was also acknowledged, if not explicitly, by early years practitioners that there is always room for improvement. This view is supported by another senior manager,

> ''*I need to encourage them* [family support], *I mention this in team meetings, they need to know the children as they go on home visits they will be able to talk to them* [children]*and get more out of them…You cannot go on home visits and start talking to a child, as they* [children] *get scared, it is quite daunting, it is that safe space between you and the child, if they know you-you do not have to ask them questions''* [SM1].

What was apparent to me was the gap between evidenced- based practice, the use of observation within an early year's remit and then being able to interpret, adopt and transfer this evidenced-based practice into a family support context. This will form part of my discussion and recommendations later in this thesis and it also informs the sub-research questions in relation to knowing what is required to inform and transform practice.

The last theme that came from the findings from the senior managers and practitioner research was the importance that relationships played in underpinning all aspects of the work across the teams and both study sites.

6.5.4 Relationships

Within the findings in relation to the concept of space, the senior managers and practitioners referred to the importance of relationships. However, I would suggest this was often assumed by the descriptions or examples given of their practice. Positive examples of building relationships included:

> ''*they* [children] *can become very familiar with their family support worker visiting the home on a regular basis… key workers in the nursery, their* [children]*behaviour and demeanour shows that they are comfortable that they feel secure in their environment and that there are good interactions here, I think it shows that we are doing something right''* [SM4].

One practitioner described ''*positive relationships and* [being] *approachable…child at story time would often fall asleep but when I read the story in Arabic, he stayed awake, he understood''* [EYP3]

Another practitioner described how important it was to make relationships with other professionals outside of the centre who would be working with the child and parents ''*working with the Health Visitor and POWS* [pregnancy outreach worker service] [FSP3]. One example described how family support and early years had started to consider how relationships between the two teams could be strengthened

> ''*parent consultations and listening to children, we have a group* [Parent Support]*and towards the end of the session the early years staff from the creche come into the group with the children and share food…the facilitator of the Parent Group will ensure the parents learn about the things the children are learning such as Healthy Eating''* [SM1]

The issue of the importance was crystallised by one senior manager:

> ''*I think it's* [creating the space] *mainly through positive relationships with staff because you could have the most beautiful buildings and the most expensive toys and resources but if the staff are not going to interact with the children they* [children] *won't feel safe with the staff or trust the staff and the space won't make a difference…but you do need the positive space and environment around them* [children]'' [SM2].

The importance of communication was apparent in the responses and I illustrate this below.

Subtheme Communication:

Examples of the importance of communication was often implicit and connected to relationships and the environment that the staff created, i.e. the space, that facilitated child voice. Positive examples were quoted, such as children having *''caring and responsive adults around them at all times…the keyworker approach reinforces this further''* [SM3].

Children having *''free choice…open-ended resources…enable a child to express themselves freely''* [SM2]

> *''Children are not forced to express themselves- they are given opportunity…staff use their skills to assess whether a child just needs more time or does not want to say anything'' [SM3].*

Early Years practitioners working directly with children were able to describe activities and parts of the routine that facilitated communication:

> *'' Circle time, calm space, relaxed atmosphere, children tune into one another, bounce off each other…Listen and pick up model listening skills''* [EYP4]

Communication was also discussed in relation to pre-verbal or non-verbal children such as being,

'' difficult for under 5s and younger children…responding to cues'' [EYP5]. Practitioners talked about communication in relation to children with special needs, such as, ''difficult with a child with a disability'' [FSP6] and *'' a child with additional needs''* [FSP7]. Another practitioner was able to describe how they [staff] *'' learn to respond to a non-verbal response''* [EYP4] and they went on to describe how a child standing next to the parent will wait to hear the conversation between the staff and the parent before the child will respond either verbally or by their body language and actions. This requires staff to be flexible with the routine, as well as the equipment and choice of activities that are made available to the children. The focus groups, as shown in this chapter (section 6.2), were undertaken as two separate study sites. In the case of study site one, early years and family support took part in separate sessions whereas in the case of study site two, practitioners from across the two teams came together in a shared session. From my observations of practitioners taking part in the focus groups, it was apparent that relationships had been established and while they were able to describe an element of working across the two different remits of early years and family support, they were of a shared viewed that improvements could be made. One example came from a senior manager who gave their account of an example of an opportunity which they considered was missed in respect of working together to support children when the family are also receiving support through family support:

''it felt like two different departments, like there is the family side and I was dealing with the child… mom needed a lot of family support… [working together] … the child had SEND…it would have done him [the child] *the world of good''* [SM2].

6.5.5 Reflection on Space

The importance of relationships has been inferred and at times made more explicit throughout the section relating to the space that is required to capture child voice as part of an early years and family support context. It was clear to see through senior managers' and practitioners' responses that relationships, as reflected through the ecological systems within the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998), are essential. The connectiveness between the environments that surround a child need to be established in order to influence the impact the different environments have on a child. There are explicit factors clearly articulated by early years practitioners that support the development of the relationships with children and their parents. However, this is less evident within a family support remit and particularly in relation to home visits and the relationship with children. As suggested by Hayes et al., (2017:29):

> *''Real children with real families in real early childhood settings do not exist in compartmentalised worlds…Bronfenbrenner's theory offers a powerful framework for understanding how different theories and approaches fit together''.*

The main rationale for undertaking the research, discussed in chapter one (section 1.2.), chapter 2 (section 2.6.1.1) and later in chapter 3 (section 3.4) illustrates the significance of developing support systems around the child who needs to be the centre of the work and then around parents and families. It has been evidenced in the responses given that there are examples of practice that supports the ability to develop relationships and also an acceptance that there is room to make improvements to practice and therefore acknowledges that:

> *''Children's learning environments extend beyond the immediacy of the early years setting…the child and the immediate environment are at the centre – the first level of influence-other levels have powerful influence…The second level contains the major settings experienced by the child…her home, the service or setting and the relationships between theses environments''* (Hayes et al,. 2017:26).

My study attempts to address the gap between the setting and the home alongside bridging the gap between work practices considered to fall under the specific roles of early years or family support. This section has looked at the perspectives on the space and the previous section considered the concept of an open listening climate in the work with children and parents. In the next section I present the findings in relation to the concept of voice (Lundy Model, 2007).

6.6 Perspectives on Voice

The concept of Voice is the second aspect identified by Lundy (2007:933) who suggests that:

> '' *The model reflects the fact that these elements are interrelated. In particular,*
> *there is a significant degree of overlap between: (a) space and voice, and (b)*
> *audience and influence''.*

The response gained from senior managers and practitioners, in relation to the perception of voice, appeared to support this view, as a number of the themes reoccurred, such as: Observation and Recording, Relationships and creating a Safe Environment to facilitate child voice.

Using the participation checklist (DCYA, 2015, figure 6.1), the following questions were asked:

- What information have children been given to ensure they know how to form a view?
- Do children know they do not have to take part and how do you facilitate this?
- Have children been given a range of options of how to express themselves and can you describe some of these options?

Figure 6.4 is an illustration of the words and phrases that were associated with the concept of Voice and I will present the findings under the following additional three themes identified under the perception of voice:

1. Play
2. Multi-professional approach and assessment
3. Parent Partnership

Figure 6.4 Voice (Alison Moore, 2021)

6.6.1 Play

The theme of play was made more explicit when discussing the perspectives on child voice, although it was clear when practitioners described the space in the previous section, that play, in the majority of cases, was intrinsic to the space facilitating child voice. There was a strong sense of play being a main conduit through which children learn and develop and have a voice. This was described as:

> ''*Voice through play''* and *''Professionals getting down and playing with the children-modelling''* [EYP5]
>
> ''*in nursery, free play, what are they* [children]*playing with and how are they playing''* [FSP7]
>
> ''*there are different areas throughout the nursery for children to use how they choose and within this express their views in a wide variety of ways. There are noisy areas, quiet areas, busy areas, outside etc within these areas we have a wide variety of resources both structured and open-ended''* [SM3]

Of interest was how the questions posed under voice seemed to elicit practitioners' views, with respondents giving clearer and more practical examples of how children can express their voice. This was more evident in the case of early years who referred to specific activities that are provided which they feel stimulates child voice such as:

> ''*circle time, snack time, singing songs using props that give ways to make it easier for children to express themselves''* [EYP4]
>
> ''*children's reaction to an activity…choice helps''* [EYP1]

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''Encouraging them [children] *constantly gives them a lot of attention so they
can express themselves next time…indoor and outdoor''* [EYP2]

The interview gave one senior manager time to reflect on their role in relation to ensuring the
child is the focus of the work, but they also expressed how important it was that staff can
articulate how children are supported to express themselves. They felt that:

*''I think as a manager now I think it's something I will have to do, go back and
to say how its* [listening to children] *is going to improve on the outcomes for
the children or how this is going to benefit the children and I need to be able to
ask that question of all the settings…in supervision, I need to make sure the
child is the focus again, we do get lost with all the paperwork, they are making
an impact on child's lives''* [SM2].

The view that play facilitates child voice can be linked back to the UNCRC and is highlighted
by Lundy (2007), as children should be afforded the ability to express their views through a
range of media and not just verbally.

6.6.2 Multi-Professional Approach and Assessment

In respect of family support and their perspectives on child voice and how this is facilitated
through their role this was related back to methods and 'tools' that are used within the remit
of their work. The assessment process and use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF),
both as an initial 'tool', such as the pre-caf and then on-going assessment of the family through
the family-caf process, were cited as examples of supporting listening to children. The
practitioners referred to an in-house computerised system where they record their visits and
the process of Team Around the Child, which enabled managers to reflect with the staff, both
family support and early years, who are working with the family. Practitioners talked about:

''Reports, attendance [at services] *and it* [completing pre-caf] *as everyone's'
job''* [FSP3]

''we can make a referral to early years to creche, playscheme [for older
siblings] *and holiday provision''* [FSP1]

However, practitioners considered that there were:

''barriers and barriers are created'' [FSP3] with reference to both the process
and the people. *''missing active cases and not giving early support''* [FSP5] and
of interest was the perception of *''missing links''* [FSP3] [SM2] or *''lack of
connection with early years and family support''* [FSP5]

However, the view of one senior manager suggests:

> *"on the whole they* [family support] *are very good at reflecting that in case*
> *recordings, some better than others, but good case recordings really bring out*
> *the voice of the child somehow''* [SM4].

Another suggesting that: ''*more concentration has gone into the child voice through our*
chronology in files [chronological recording of children 'seen'] [SM1]

The importance of multi-professional working was emphasised as being key to ensuring
children have a voice including pre-verbal and young babies. This continued on from the
methods and recording 'tools' applied as it was felt that other professionals and agencies
working with the children and families also facilitated child voice. The practitioners suggested:

> ''*Professionals are really important for the voice of the child, family and older*
> *children''* [EYP8]

''*Family support don't spend enough time on home visits… just a snap shot view''* [FSP4] with
the inference that it also requires the observations from other professionals to facilitate the
voice of the child. Another practitioner followed this by suggesting the, ''*use of the Red Book*
to see when other professionals have seen the child which is key for bonding and knowing the
child'' [EYP5]. One practitioner made the connection between multi-professional working to
include early years teams at the centre and not just external partners, i.e. ''*Development*
checks downstairs'' [FSP11] which referred to the on-site nursery and working together with
early years.

When asked in the interview, one senior manager spoke confidently about how the centre
listens to child voice in relation to multi-professional working and the improvements that had
been made in recent years:

> ''*through stay & play, writing case studies, family learning* [delivered by a
> partner agency] *even when staff go on home visits they do assessments so if*
> *they have young babies we talk to the health visitor, midwives and other*
> *professionals…this was different say 2 years ago even when family support did*
> *not see that* [joint working] *is important…it was all about the mom''* [SM1].

There were clear examples given of how improvements had been made in their practice and
they were able to describe what some of the work now looked like when working with other
professionals and how children and parents were supported by working together, both across
early years and family support as well as with other external agencies. While it has been
acknowledged that the child is the focus of both early years and family support, it was evident
that developing a positive partnership with parents was the key to being able to support the
child.

6.6.3 Parent Partnership

This study attempts to understand parents' and practitioners' perspectives on child voice and the five Parent Portraits presented in Chapter 4 reflect the lived experiences of parents and children before and after accessing support from the Children's Centre and early years setting. In her model, Lundy (2007:933) *"conceptualised article 12 while acknowledging that Article 12 can only be understood fully when it is considered in the light of other relevant UNCRC provisions"*. When considering how children are given a voice, thought is given to the right for children to be given guidance from adults (article 5) and in this study I have also included article 18, as I describe in subsection 3.8.1, which refers to the support services that are developed for parents for them to best support their children.

It was acknowledged by one senior manager that:

> *'' generally, without much prompting they* [family support] *are kind of covering the child's perspective and advocating on behalf of the child in what they are saying…''*

and in relation to working with parents they suggest that:

> *''I think it comes across really well in the parenting work and the other types of work, I mean feedback from parents…parents largely talk on behalf of their children, some parents don't get their children at all so you can't always rely on that but most parents are able to talk about their children which is really important, their knowledge''* [SM4]

One practitioner described how important it is on home visits to greet the child not just the parent, *''so we are modelling talking and listening to children''* [FSP9]. Another discussed the importance of *''building trust with parents and the child…child builds a bond with you and you hold the child and they feel safe''* [FSP10]. It was apparent that practitioners thought it was important to consider *''how we represent ourselves…slowly build up trusting relationships''* [FSP1].

The practitioners felt that *''parents need to understand and become more aware about their child* [child voice] *…encourage the parent by praising the child 'educate the parents'…good communication''* [FSP2].

One practitioner described their home visits and supporting parents to ensure the home is safe, as a means of listening to child voice as their observation would identify where parents needed support, *''work with the parents to achieve a home that is safe, happy, caring''* [FSP4] and another referred to *''not judging a parent…need to give tips overtime''* [FSP1]. Of interest

was the idea that staff should ''*get extra nosey at a new registration*'' [EYP5]. However, this was not to suggest a negative judgement or action but said as a colloquialism understood amongst those present.

In relation to early years, practitioners were able to give clear examples of developing positive partnerships with parents in order to listen to child voice and making strong links between the home and the setting. These examples included:

> ''*explain to parents* [their child's voice is important] *give time for mom to talk…big role to support parents to step back and let their child develop independence*'' [EYP3].

The notion of parents giving feedback to inform practitioners, and using this as a means of listening to the child, as well as this being a two-way process was stated by several practitioners;

> ''*encourage parents to try activities at home and parent's feedback*'' [EYP1]
> and
> '' *staff feedback to parents such as after creche…discussions with parents*'' [FSP2]
> ''*can ask them what they* [children] *like to do at home and what are they like at home*'' [EYP3]

6.6.4 Reflection on Voice

Exploring practitioner perspectives of child voice through their practice seems to be showing a widening of the gap, in relation to child voice being facilitated and being heard and between the defined roles of early years and family support practitioners. The practitioners that held a specific role were each able to articulate their perception of child voice and how their role and defined tasks for their team facilitated this. The senior managers have been able to articulate their perspectives of what, at times, they know to be the case and at others when they have shared their vision for making improvements to practice improving the outcome for children. That leads us on to considering that if we are to facilitate children to have a voice and are to ensure that their voices are heard, then we must question, who is the audience? (Lundy 2007)

6.7 Perspectives on Audience

Audience is the third concept identified by Lundy (2007:937) who suggests that:

> ''*Even where there is no doubt about the child's view on an issue, there is no guarantee that their views will be communicated to or taken on board by those*

adults who are in a position to give them effect. This would suggest the need to ensure that children at least have a 'right of audience'—a guaranteed opportunity to communicate views to an identifiable individual or body with the responsibility to listen''.

Using the participation checklist (DCYP, 2015, this chapter, figure 6.1), the following questions were asked:

- What processes are in place for communicating children's views?
- How do you ensure children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/people have the power to make decisions and can you give an example when this has happened?

Figure 6.5 is an illustration of the words and phrases that were associated with the concept of Audience and there were examples given that reflect an overlap from previous concepts in the model. I will present the findings under the following three themes and one sub-theme, identified under the perspectives on audience:

1. Support Services

   Subtheme: Working across teams

2. Parenting Programmes
3. Training

Figure 6.5 Audience (Alison Moore, 2021)

It was evident from the findings in this section that practitioners within early years and family support and also the senior managers could identify themselves and their teams as the audience for children and parents. While similar themes reoccurred and have been previously

presented under the two concepts of space and voice, the examples given were more illustrative. Under this concept, they gave a deeper insight into how they believed themselves to be the audience and in some cases were able to describe the outcome for the child. Practitioners were also able to reflect on their practice and identified areas they felt could be improved. One senior manager felt that:

''*Everyone is the audience if we are to be a listening climate children's views are communicated''* [SM3] and another expressed that:

''*Who will support them* [children]*, us, everyone, I think we've all got the power…like when they say it takes a village to raise a child''* [SM1].

Of interest was the view articulated by another senior manager in relation to 'who' the audience is for children they perceived that:

''*It should be everybody really, shouldn't it, parents most importantly as they are way more important than us…for us it is the staff, volunteers, whoever is coming into contact with the individual children but I think we should do loads with the parents where you help to improve parenting which always includes listening to and understanding your child, so when you count the impact of that, powerful thing for the family''* [SM4].

The following findings are illustrative examples of how practitioners perceive audience.

6.7.1 Support Services

Practitioners acknowledged that the ability to facilitate child voice listen and respond in order to show children that they have been heard, occurs mainly through the support services that are in place. When I refer to support services, these are inclusive of services defined as having an early years and/or family support remit and the findings presented are representative of the two disciplines.

Practitioners from early years and family support spoke strongly about having visibility of the child and parent in their service and how they [staff] should take responsibility for acting when attendance drops. There was emphasis placed on getting to know the children and parents in their service as well as the need to maintain a register of attendance, as they felt a pattern of poor attendance would be more likely to be of concern if the behaviour was out of the normal routine for that family. A feeling of trust and support in the relationships were conveyed, and not one of sanction and consequence for lack of attendance. The need for children and parents to attend a specific service and/or, in some cases, this attendance being made a condition of the Child in Need Plan was inferred by the very nature of that service, such as a

specialist service to support women experiencing or having experienced domestic violence. The visibility of the parent and child was of key importance and on a regular basis.

The process of maintaining visibility, and knowing the children and parents was articulated by the individual teams.

> ''*Learning Journals, base line when the child starts, midway and at the end…staff communicate with one another, child concerns*'' and ''*stay & play register to monitor attendance…with creche we have a keyworker who children are comfortable with, they* [child] *go to, they just know*'' [EYP2]
>
> ''*The key person system* [nursery] *reinforces this* [evidence of audience] … *It is evidenced within children's learning journeys, their progress trackers and incident forms, behaviour records*'' [SM3].
>
> ''*Using the new birth and home visits and the pre-caf and observation sheets to focus on the child and work with the family…*''[FSP8].

It was noted that the observation sheets referred to were not currently used in practice but had been part of the visits.

> '' *Peer support, the team are good at bringing child to the centre* [encouraging parent out of the house]*to attend services and then the child is the centre of our conversations…easily lost* [child's voice] *when concentrating on the parents' needs*'' [EYP6]

The examples given by family support described the support services that are designed to support both the child and the parent, and in some cases, the methods and tools applied to evidence child voice were discussed. However, they did not expand on this.

Of interest was the reference made to the challenges and limitations of being able to listen and respond to children that indirectly related to visibility and contact with the child and parent. The services such as stay & play and, in some instances, creche support were non-statutory services, short in duration and often term time only provision. This was considered to be a limiting factor when getting to know the child and parent if attendance was on a voluntary basis. The nursery provision was considered to have more effective strategies and systems in place for monitoring children's progress. However, not all families receiving family support and also deemed in need were able to access nursery provision.

While staff from both early years and family support were able to articulate their perception of their role in relation to identifying themselves as the audience for child voice, the examples of a shared approach to this were limiting. Each discipline and in turn each team and individual staff member were able to reflect on their practice in relation to the role of the service and

the role of the practitioner within it. However, it was evident there were areas of practice where improvements could be made. The examples given seemed to suggest that the practice of open listening was in some cases more informal and occurred between staff who were working closely together, in specific disciplines and in specific teams.

Subtheme: Working across teams

When discussing opportunities for joint working across the teams, one example was given of how child voice is facilitated and who is perceived as the audience in that partnership. It was considered due to the visibility of the child that:

''the *nursery* [in that instance] *will* [be the audience] *because they spend so much more time with the child than in groups where you can't spend a lot of time baselining or tracking a child, they* [staff in groups] *have such a short amount of time…''* [SM4].

Family support staff were able to reflect on previous models of working when the Sure Start Local Programmes were first established, and they shared their concerns of the more recent service specifications and how this may impact on the role and their ability to support children and parents.

One practitioner spoke passionately about:

''*Not giving up, keep going back and go the extra mile…We had home play where early years and family support would visit the family together, modelling play and encouraging the parents…If families can't come out, we take things to them''* [FSP8]

When discussing who constitutes the audience and also the roles and the process in place to facilitate child voice, the view that previous good practice had been eroded by remodelling of service specifications was also supported by a senior manager who suggested:

''*Planning is required to take early years with them* [family support]*, it seems the obvious thing to do but it costs money, it is a resource…Family Support is family support and early years is early years but together they can give us what is needed, but on their own they don't necessarily…at the moment the new model doesn't have much give in it but we have factored in some home play but we haven't defined this home play yet''* [SM4].

The new model refers to the recent remodelling of early years services by the local authority with an Early Years and Health and Wellbeing Model being delivered through a collaboration between the Health Visiting Service and four Third Sector agencies. The new model was in the

initial developments at the end of the research period and therefore beyond the scope of this thesis.

The process that did appear to offer an approach to joint working and one that suggests a more open listening climate between teams, was the child review meetings which in some cases referred to as the Team Around the Child Process. The purpose of these meetings was to facilitate a reflective conversation with practitioners who were supporting and had visibility of the child and parent. Both study sites had developed their own systems over the years to support this process and, at the time of the study, discussions were taking place to integrate the teams and sites under shared protocols of practice. These developments were in their infancy and therefore the examples given reflect previous practices, as individual teams and centres.

Practitioners were able to reflect on the CAF process and the multi-agency meetings [Team Around the Family] and how the teams at the study sites were able to contribute and support children and parents. The family support staff discussed how other agencies were also invited to these meetings such as early years, nurseries, SENCO [Special Educational Needs Coordinators] and sometimes Health Visitors. It was evident that practitioners considered there were advantages of this 'wider audience' for listening to child voice which also involved the concept of Influence, discussed in the next section.

The examples given included:

> ''*the nursery SENCO is also the Children's Centre SENCO so if they* [child] *has a speech and language problem, as an example, she* [SENCO] *would be aware that the child was in both services, but this role isn't in the 'new model'* [SM4]
>
> ''*staff communicating with other staff…work with their*[child] *health visitor such as when they have a speech and language issue…joint visits with the health visitor and joint visits with the social worker''* [FSP4]

Family Support staff were able to reflect on and give positive examples of joint working with internal and external teams that then had a more positive outcome for the child and parent. One practitioner referred to the ''*triangle of early years, family support and the family''* [FSP4]

The Lundy Model (2007:936) makes the link between the audience, who are responsible for listening and responding to child voice and the importance of the audience having influence in the decision-making process.

Early Years staff described the use of observations as a means of listening to the child and of then being able to

''*implement what they* [early years practitioner] *need to do for the child…the*

family support have their responsibilities and then we talk to health visitors to

help us find out more about the child…guide or direct to the right service for

extra support'' [EYP2].

This was supported by another practitioner who felt:

''*they* [early years] *can only say and do so much then they get support from the family*

support worker'' However, it was also acknowledged that ''*when you say family support*

worker to the parent it stops the parent getting support, they are scared'' [EYP3]. This was

supported by another practitioner who referred to:

''*Parents open up to you* [early years] *but when you bring someone else in, they*

don't know [family support] *they* [parent] *lose trust they are worried''* [EYP4].

One family support practitioner referred to ''*the organisation giving family support 'the*

power' to provide the services to support the parents which then impacts on the child''

[FSP11].

This was in response to the family support practitioners acknowledging themselves as the

audience but requiring the resources and the structures to then facilitate and enable the staff

to provide the right level of support required. The model of Right Service Right Time that had

recently been introduced by the Local Authority was referenced and I will discuss this under

training (this chapter, section 6.5.3).

Practitioners went on to describe an example they considered to have a positive outcome,

reflecting on how the practitioners perceived themselves as the audience and how they were

able to respond collectively and make decisions that would impact on the child's experience.

''*early years worker observed the child and the mother and was concerned*

about the 'behaviour' observed [referring to the relationship between the child

and the mother] *…shared their concern with family support and other early*

years colleague…support was put in place which eventually led to a referral

being made for additional support for the family'' [FSP8].

6.7.2 Parenting Programmes

Practitioners spoke passionately about the Children's Centre services and how they felt they

were the audience of children and parents as well as how they were then able to make a

difference.

> *''We provide HENRY* [Health Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young] *Stay & Play, and services for different age children…parents are empowered, not judged''* [FSP5].
>
> *''Incredible Years* [specialist parenting programme] *I have two roles to support the child and to support the parent to learn how to support their child…powerful experience''* [FSP11].
>
> *''we need to think about the support that needs to be put in place e.g. incredible years, baby massage… peer support across the teams…we have light blub moments''* [EYP6].

This view was shared across the practitioners in the focus group who were able to reflect on good practice but also acknowledged that more could be done.

A number of specialist parenting programmes were referred to such as The Freedom Programme delivered to women [Domestic Abuse], Protective Behaviours [supporting the understanding of what it means to feel safe] and parenting programmes to support with mental health issues. Practitioners were able to articulate their understanding of the child's voice and being heard when parents are facing adversity. While some improvements had been made to practice since senior managers and practitioners had accessed specialist training, it was too early to see the impact of the training on practice and outcomes for the children. However, practitioners and senior managers were able to give an example from their recent experience of the role they had played as the audience and how they had been able to influence the decisions and therefore influence the outcome for the child.

> *''Week 4 of the Freedom Programme help mothers to understand the effect the home environment and domestic abuse has on children…this is a heavy session and the mothers need support as they then have to go home after the session…we show them techniques from Protective Behaviours and how to make themselves safe…who are their safe network…this will help keep the child safe''* [SM1]

Of interest was the perspective of one practitioner who understood the child was the focus of the work, they also described the connection between the parent, often the mother, being supported and being healthy as they would not be able to support their child if this was not the case.

> *''We support the family, and this trickles down to the child but if parents are unwell* [referring to mental health] *how can they support their child? But as professionals we are there for the child''* [FSP12]

The findings from the Parent Portraits (section 4.2) would appear to support this perspective as they reflect the lived experience of the mother and the child and the voice of the child can be heard through this lived experience. The impact that the Children's Centre had on the mother and as a result the child was clearly articulated in the examples given by the mothers. A different perspective of audience was suggested by one senior manager who highlighted the importance of practitioners being the audience for the child and parent, but the teams were also the audience for each other which then facilitated child voice and guided the decisions.

> ''*staff talk about their own practice* [in team meetings] *…this is very good they*
> *have only just started to do this so openly, they learn from each other…I share*
> *serious case reviews and staff then talk about the work they are doing and how*
> *their decisions can impact on the child and family''* [SM1].

The importance of being able to evidence the work and the impact this has had on children and parents was acknowledged as this was considered to then reflect the whole process of support that had been provided by the Children's Centre and in some examples, with external organisations. There was a shared understanding of how both early years and family support had made recent improvements to documentation and case records and they had been able to start to bring the work of the teams together, but they also referred to needing to strengthen this work further. There was some evidence to suggest that there was a 'gap' between the two disciplines of early years and family support in relation to a collective approach to listening to and hearing child voice and then responding appropriately to meet the needs of the child first and then the parent. It was suggested that more recent training, both from the Local Authority and in-house training where teams came together, had influenced the practice.

6.7.3 Training

There was an understanding and acceptance from across the teams that it was important to be able to access training for their continual professional development. Practitioners and senior managers were able to give examples of specific training events they had accessed, and they were able to demonstrate how they felt the training had improved their practice.

Senior Managers were able to articulate where they perceived practice had improved and they reflected on areas requiring improvement, which reflects a good level of leadership and self-evaluation of their work area. They spoke positively of improvements that had been made as a result of senior managers and the strategic leadership team improving the ways of

working together and communicating across the two disciplines. The value of this peer support was acknowledged:

> ''*We* [family support] *considered if mom is happy the child is happy…there is a bit of truth in that but I think we were ignoring the child's needs at times and the child's needs weren't being met…now we are involved in the conversations about nursery places and 2-year old funded places so we look at the child's needs first*'' [SM1].

This was in reference to training that had been given by a strategic lead in the centre, from early years, providing in-house training to early years and family support to improve the uptake of nursery places. A recent review of 2-year-old nursery uptake had been completed by the local authority which showed significant low numbers of available nursery places were being filled. Yet, in the specific ward where the study sites were located, the percentage of two-year-old children registered with the centres and the numbers of registered cases with family support was high. As a result, the centres had developed and implemented a process to ensure that all 2-year old children in the area were identified, registered with the centres and enabled to access appropriate services based on the need of the child.

Practitioners and senior managers acknowledged how powerful in-house training could be and that training did not have to always involve going on a training course.

One senior manager was able to reflect on training with family support, which I delivered as a result of introducing the research and engaging the senior managers and practitioners from both study sites. This training enabled the practitioners to consider the Lundy Model (2007) and to see how it could be applied in practice. Practitioners had begun to consider how the child voice could be heard within the family support process, what that means and how it might be recorded in case files.

> ''*I think they* [family support] *were very interested when they met you and had a lot of discussion about how we listen to children and what does listening mean?…good case recording really brings out the voice of the child*'' [SM4]

6.7.4 Reflection on Audience

The perception of audience and influence, in relation to child voice, are intricately connected (Lundy 2007) and as the practitioners and senior managers gave their reflections the concept of Influence was evident.

6.8 Perspectives on Influence

Influence is the fourth concept identified by Lundy (2007:937) who acknowledges the importance of the relationship between the previous concepts of space, voice, and audience. Lundy suggests that it is the action of making change happen and seeing change occur for children, therefore reflecting the influence, which is a true reflection of listening to children and showing their views have been '*'given due weight''*. Practitioners working with children need to have a high level of understanding of listening to and responding to children to ensure children are afforded the opportunities and experiences that are going to make a difference to their lives. Lundy describes this as being *''child-empowering rather than negative and opportunity restricting''*.

In the case of young children, there is a direct link back to article 5 of the UNCRC, as I discussed in chapter four (section 4.6.2), which acknowledges the responsibilities of parents and adults to give children support and guidance to express their views. Article 18 requires that parents are given the appropriate support and assistance to fulfil their role. Therefore, it is essential that practitioners understand their obligation to influence change through their practice.

Applying the participation checklist (DCYA,2015) the following questions were asked:

- How have the children's views been considered by those who have the power to effect change?

- What procedures or processes are in place to ensure children know their views have been taken seriously?

- Have the children been provided with feedback and if so, can you describe how this was achieved?

The findings for this section lend support to the interconnectedness, as suggested in the Lundy Model (2007:932), of the articles within the UNCRC (1989) and encompass the research findings from across the other three concepts. It can be evidenced from the findings that practitioners and senior managers acknowledge the importance of listening to and responding to child voice and they can identify their responsibilities as the audience.

Figure 6.6 is an illustration of the words and phrases that were associated with the concept of Influence and there were many examples given that reflect a strong overlap from previous

concepts in the model. I will present the findings under the following two main themes and two sub-themes, identified under the perspectives on influence:

1. Safeguarding

Subthemes: Record Keeping

                 Safe Environment

2. Partnership Working

Figure 6.6 Influence (Alison Moore, 2021)

6.8.1 Safeguarding

The theme of Safeguarding and sub-themes of Recording and a Safe Environment were discussed as separate entities, as well as being linked together, if at times through inference and not direct reference. Practitioners who had responsibilities defined within a family support context commented on processes and procedures that were part of their role where they felt they had influence. Practitioners described and were able to draw on clear examples of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process and the role of the Lead Professional within that process. While this role can and should be undertaken by any agency that is involved with the family and as suggested, tends to be the agency that first identified that the family required support, the Children's Centres have been responsible for leading the process. While the practitioners inferred this was not acceptable as it placed heavy work demands on the centres, the sense that practitioners felt empowered to influence decisions for the child and parent mitigated these concerns. The comments included:

> ''*these* [CAF meetings] *are well structured and well-structured plans focus on the children…Children's centre leads the CAF meetings… Other organisations shy away from lead professional- comes back to the Children's Centre…we use our power*'' [FSP8].

> ''*want to make a difference…sometimes banging head on a brick wall* '' [FSP4].

The practitioner was referring to their frustrations of trying to work with other agencies in the process and for key areas of work to be undertaken with families that aren't always considered to be the role of the Children's Centre.

Practitioners spoke passionately about developing trusting relationships with the parents, especially if they were part of the CAF process.

> ''*trust comes when you do something about it* [influence]*they will come again* '' [EYP2]

One practitioner described an incident where the police had to be involved due to a disclosure by a parent and they felt:

> ''*let them* [parents] *know what will happen next. There is a process the parents need to know*'' [EYP4]

Subtheme: Recording

The practitioners referred to in-house electronic management systems where case files were maintained. These were predominantly used by family support, but one early years practitioner acknowledged that it was important for their team to also use this system. The practitioner felt that case records should reflect the voice of the child and that they should be able to see, from the record, what support the child and family had received.

> ''*Need to chase…stay in touch with the family support worker, use the system to see if anything has been done in relation to the issue and if not approach those involved*'' [EYP2].

This example was a very powerful one in respect of influence and the teams being accountable to each other for ensuring the child is heard within the process. The early years practitioners identified that they would see the child and the parent the most and, if they had raised a concern, they needed to follow this concern up to advocate for the child.

The senior managers referred to the importance of their roles and being able to influence change both for the child, parent and by making improvements to practice. In the interviews with senior managers, one senior manager referred to staff supervision as a time where reflections should relate to child voice and ensuring issues of concern have been followed up.

> '' *as the manager I think it's something I'll have to do in supervisions, ensure the child is at the centre, the focus…what is the outcome for the child, what benefit has it* [the support] *been''* [SM2].

The importance of their role was summarised by one senior manager:

> '' *very important, crucial because the staff rely on you as you've got the final decision to make…* [in relation to continuing to support the parent or close the case] *I've gone home after a case supervision and thought, did I make the right decision and I've come back the next day and thought should I have kept the case open…it is important to hold your hand up as it is a child's life''*[SM1]

Not only was the concept of developing a more open listening climate becoming more evident as the practitioners reflected on their individual roles and responsibilities but also the collective responsibility and the level of accountability to the child, parent, other agencies and to each other.

Practitioners considered the Child Review Meetings [sometimes referred to as Team Around the Child] as a key time when the child's voice is heard, as other staff and external agencies are invited to these meetings. The review meeting would take place around 6-8 weeks after the Children's Centre had initiated support work with the family to see what work had been undertaken against a set plan.

> ''*child review meetings allow us to get together and have the nursery perspective, specific services can influence the action plan and the outcomes for the child and family…school engagement of there are older siblings…Health Visitor, SENCO and a well-being perspective* [referencing a specific practitioner and specialist service]'' [FSP8].

The specific practitioner followed up with their understanding of the process and how it helped the child:

> ''*in the case of Child in Need or Child Protection Plan if anything has been missed out, we can point it out… when the voice is not heard* [referring to the support the specialist service provides].

Subtheme: Safe Environment

The notion of a safe environment was predominantly referred to by early years practitioners, although in the context of family support, ensuring the home was safe for the children was seen as a key role.

''children's safety, safe environment…checking safety on home visits, giving advice and educating the parents'' [FSP4]

Family support also made the link to a safe environment in respect of the home being a safe space for relationships to be developed.

''if the parent is relaxed the child sees that the parent is responding…need to reassure the parent… they are then a role model for the child'' [FSP5]

In respect of early years, the practitioners spoke with confidence of the methods their service use to ensure child voice is acknowledged and they can influence decisions being made. They related this directly to practice within early years services such as:

''Planning, following the child's interests…providing feedback to the children by using photographs and displaying the children's work…produce a book on topics so they can see what they want to do… praise the children'' [EYP4]

''Having a safe environment for them [children] *to explore, they flourish intellectually…child is happy''* [EYP2]

In respect of the nursery provision, the senior manager was able to describe, again with confidence, how they support children to be heard and that practitioners are able to influence practice.

''There are no formal procedures or process but the children can see in our daily practice that they are listened to as staff respond to what the children are saying…children are usually provided with immediate feedback, informally and naturally…the most important thing to me is are the children and making sure that they them and their needs remain central at all times'' [SM3].

6.8.2 Partnership Working

It was recognised by practitioners and senior managers how the centre, the specific teams and individual roles contributed to supporting children and their parents and how children were given opportunities to have a voice within the space. They described what they understood child voice to be and identified themselves as having responsibility, as the audience, to respond to the children and influence future practice to meet their needs. It was acknowledged that they could not always achieve this alone and that it required several agencies to work together to provide the *'Right Service at the Right Time' (2018)* (revised as Right Help Right Time 2020). They also made specific reference to specialist services they had developed in-house and others they had commissioned from other organisations such as HENRY (Heath Exercise Nutrition for the Really Young) and Startwell Healthy Programme. The

practitioners also referred to 'signposting' to other agencies, such as Home Start (Community Network of Volunteers) when families required support that was over and above the remit of the Children's Centres. One practitioner described this as the Children's Centre:

''*having a ceiling on what we can do…Health Visitor really useful, that* [working together] *makes a huge difference''* [EYP4]

As the Children's Centres work predominantly with children under 5 years, the Midwifery and Health Visiting Service were the main agencies they considered they needed to engage with. Within the family support remit, working closely with Social Care was essential when children were subject to Child in Need or Child Protection Plans and/or had a CAF in place. Developing a close working relationship was acknowledged as being key to supporting the child and parent successfully. The practitioners described how important it is to work with other nurseries outside of their own nurseries on-site, as some children receive nursery funding to attend other local nurseries. Local Schools were seen as key partners to support the transition of children from nursery into school, as well as when they support families with older siblings.

''*working with schools, their SENCOs, supporting the family''* [FSP8]

The practitioners also acknowledged that partnership working involved working across departments within the Children's Centre and how important this was in ensuring the child's needs were being met. One senior manager offered their final thoughts on developing effective ways of working together, across early years and family support:

''*I definitely want more joint working with early years and family support…we are going through different times and changes are happening* [restructure in progress] *maybe having early year sand family support sitting together* [shared office space] *so changing the way we have always worked…you hear 'early years don't work with family support then family support don't work with early years, but I want us to work together, it is crucial for the children and parents'* [SM1].

The senior managers identified areas of good practice within the teams and the Children's Centres as a whole, whilst also acknowledging the challenges and where they considered improvements could be made. Practitioners from both early years and family support spoke with confidence about their own service and were able to identify key aspects of each other's roles that support child voice. They were also able to describe the challenges and how improvements to working together would enhance their practice.

6.8.3 Reflection on Influence

The concept of audience and influence are closely linked, and Lundy argues that in respect of article 12 we need to consider the extent to which we can and should influence and action children's views. The concept of acting upon what parents and children are telling us are equally important as being heard and being listened to.

6.9 Creating an Open Listening Climate

Figure 6.7 Child's Rights lenses (Alison Moore, 2021)

Figure 6.7 is an illustration of the words and phrases represented by applying a child's rights lens to the research. The image reflects the collection of the multiple voices of senior managers and practitioners.

The focus groups and semi-structured interviews were designed to address and inform the overarching research questions:

1. What are parents' and practitioners' perspectives on child voice within Children's Centres?

2. How might practice be transformed to create a more open listening climate in multi-professional early years settings?

There were five sub-research questions that helped to generate and critically analyse the findings and four of these were explored through this part of the study:

Question 1. What is understood by an open listening climate in Children's Centres

Question 3. What are practitioners' perspectives and understanding of their practice in relation to child voice?

Question 4. What changes might need to happen in order to create a more collaborative, open listening climate?

Question 5. What strategies might be adopted to improve the listening climate and pedagogical practice across teams within the Children's Centre?

To help inform these sub-research questions and to bring this part of the field work to a close, I posed the following question:

Can you think of one area of your, your team's and/or the Children's Centre practice that you could start to influence and/or change?

The ideas that were shared unanimously reflected the need to create a more open listening climate within daily practice, procedures and approaches to ensure the child was the focus of the work.

The child as the focus

One senior manager expressed:

> ''*I guess it's making sure the child is the centre of everything you do and remembering that because we get a lot thrown at us but you are making an impact on the children especially those that are most vulnerable…SEN children and more and more disadvantaged families''* [SM2]
>
> '' *Listening more… we feel so pleased when we do, when it impacts on the child and makes a difference''* [FSP11]
>
> ''*We will 'look' a bit more, stop and think''*[FSP8]
>
> ''*Case supervision must include 'how much time you have spent with the child' – losing focus of the child''* [FSP10]

New ways of working

There was a strong shared voice about needing to and wanting to work differently for the benefit of children.

''More involvement with Stay & Plays if a child [attends] *who we are working with in family support''* [FSP4]

''Should be able to work together more…collaboration between departments, joint meetings'' [EYP4]

'' Need joint home visits with nursery'' [FSP2] This was supported by a senior manager who *suggested:*

''Working together…nurseries doing joint home visits with the key worker, parents are more inclined to work with family support worker when the child attends the nursery'' [SM1]

'' Spend time in the nursery…more involvement with nurseries and family support'' [FSP4]

'' Reinstate Child Review Meetings'' [FSP4] [these had temporarily been put on hold]

'' Family support meeting soon to plan to look at and change the observation sheet on home visits to capture the child's voice'' [FSP8]

'' Benefits of joint visits…after initial visit go back, see what has been achieved'' [FSP12]

Shared Training

The issue of shared training and spending more time together to develop connections and relationships were seen as keyways in which practice could be changed which would then influence future practice.

''More sessions connected to family support and early years… I don't even know the names of all the family support staff'' [EYP2]

''More inset days with early years and family support, with a shared focus'' [EYP3]

Practitioners and senior managers spoke positively about training that had been given in-house and more that had been planned, some of which was as a direct result of the findings from the research. As part of the remodelling of the early years and health and wellbeing service, significant investment was going into training across all the teams, some of which had already been delivered and the positive benefits were already being evidenced in the work.

6.10 Reflective summary

In this chapter I have discussed the findings from semi-structured interviews with four senior managers and focus group interview sessions with nineteen practitioners, representative of early years and family support practice in Children's Centres. The study has provided an opportunity to explore the understanding of child voice in the context of their work and to examine the concept of an open listening climate through a child's rights lens alongside an ecological model. These findings inform the overarching research questions, as the interviews and focus group interview sessions provide a means to reflect on current practice within the remit of early years provision and family support roles and start to consider the challenges and the benefits of creating a more open listening climate across the multi-professional aspects of the work to ensure the child is the focus.

There is a shared understanding revealed through the data which reflects a need to revisit current practice and to make improvements by considering what works well but could be improved and by generating new ideas to improve the ways of working together. This can be achieved by viewing the child through an ecological lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which clearly places the child at the centre of our practice, and it is widely acknowledged that practitioners have a pivotal role to play in facilitating child voice in practice. Applying an bioecological lens on the research facilitates reflection in and on practice and helps to ''*identify some of the key features that may create a rich learning environment for children*'' (Hayes et al., 2017:93). Listening to child voice in early year settings is crucial if practitioners are to meet the individual needs of children (Clark and Moss, 2003, 2005). Applying an ecological framework provides a lens through which to reflect on how practice creates a listening culture which goes beyond listening as a process (Clark et al., 2005) and also reflects the ethical relationships and ethical encounters required. The ecological lens enables practitioners to reflect on the positive relationships with parents and children developed over time which are required for a ''*nurturing pedagogy*'' (Hayes et al., 2017:128). This shared lens of reflection from an early years and family support perspective facilitates practitioners to listen and hear child's voice. The research makes a meaningful contribution to the work with children and families, considering new perspectives by reflecting through multiple lenses as suggested in the literature review and through child rights informed practice. The data generated across all three data sets, i.e. parent portraits, semi-structured interviews with senior managers and focus group interviews with practitioners from across disciplines provides enriching insights into current practice in Children's Centres and a glimpse at evidence of good practice when fascinating child voice. Rinaldi, (2005:192) advocates for practitioners to work together in the

''*process of constructing knowledge about children*'' and listening to the parent stories of their lived experience and their children's lives provides a practical approach that practitioners in early years multi-professional settings can take forward into their everyday practice. The research provides practitioners with an approach of using portraiture as a method for facilitating parents and children to 'tell their stories' and a way of recording and interpreting the stories (Lawrence Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997: xv). The research suggests that by applying an ecological and rights-based lens when reflecting on and in practice, a more open listening climate will be created that facilitates and makes the child's voice visible in our settings (Rinaldi, 2005). This *''multiple listening or openness to other 'voices'*' (cited in Clark et al., 2005:35) is reflected in the study and resonates with the multi-professional context in which the research has been conducted.

The research has contributed to knowledge by providing effective 'tools' and approaches which practitioners can apply to their practice to embed a listening pedagogy as a listening culture into practice. Firstly, the research suggests practitioners should apply a child's rights lens when considering their practice to which both early years and family support practitioners can align themselves. This ensures the child remains at the focus of the support provided while still acknowledging the needs of parents. Secondly, the research provides evidence that applying both the Lundy Model (2007) reflecting on the four concepts of space, voice, audience, and influence alongside the participation checklist (DCYA,2015) as a set of reflective questions, are effective tools to use when reflecting in and on practice. They are adaptable for use in a multi-professional context of early years and family support, as the research shows.

The chapter that follows, chapter seven, leads into my discussion on the data generated across the different data sets in the study and reveals the commonalities across the data collected and the analysis of the findings. In chapter seven I also present my thoughts on the implications for future practice, considering the transferability of the findings from the research in the context of the changing landscape of early years and work with families during the period of the study. I will discuss the limitations of small-scale research and present my conclusions and recommendations to inform practice and the potential for further research in the field.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

My thesis documents my nine-year PhD journey, but it is also a testament to over 40-years of my personal commitment to wanting to make a difference to the lives of children and their families. My passion for working with children started at a young age and I always knew the career that I wanted to undertake. My roots lie in early years and my earliest training as an N.N.E.B which was for many years the most recognised qualification to achieve if embarking on a career in early years, set me on my journey. Many colleagues and experts in the field today speak of their journey from this same training and starting point, that gave such a firm foundation to our work with children.

One of the main motivators when I set out on my PhD journey stemmed from my earliest experience of working in an early years and social care context.This highlighted the importance of ensuring a child has a voice in decisions that were being made about their lives and is one I refer to at the beginning of this thesis, in chapter one (section 1.2.1), chapter two (section 2.1.1) and chapter three, (section 3.2). It was while I was working in a Family Centre, as they were known in the early 1980s, that a Social Worker brought a mother and her baby into the centre for support. The baby was considered at risk of neglect and therefore likely to suffer harm and, following an assessment of need, the next step on the Children's Services Plan required the mother to attend the Family Centre for support. I recognised the mother as someone that I had gone to school with and who I knew had experienced her own traumas and abuse within her own family and as a result had grown up in the care system. I have come to understand, as I have continued with my professional development and from work experience over the 40 years, that the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Burke Harris, 2018), that the mother experienced in her early life had a huge impact on her ability to make an attachment and relationship with her own baby. The mother had not had a positive role model in her life and her own traumas had been imprinted on her ability to parent her baby. While I was not able to support this mother and her baby directly, to assure good ethical practice, the memory of the experience has always stayed with me. I had recently lost my own mother at the age of eighteen and know whilst I am left with my own intrusive memories of this loss, I was determined that I wanted to support children and families through such adversities.

 I have remained a strong advocate for all children but particularly for children whose earliest life experiences are ones surrounded by adversity, inequality, disadvantage, and whose voice

needs to be clearly heard. My leadership role within Sure Start Children's Centres enabled me to consolidate all my work and life experiences to help provide support to children and families. Trauma Informed practice (McLarnon,2018:21), highlights the importance of every contact counting and having professional curiosity and to be sensitive and responsive when working with children and families. In this final reflective chapter, I consider my early experiences and working in the multi-professional early years setting of a Children's Centre and reflect on what I set out to achieve with my research and to examine: Did I answer the questions?

1. What are parents' and practitioners' perspectives on child voice with Children's Centres?
2. How might practice be transformed to create a more open listening climate in multi-professional early years setting?

My professional heritage reflects that I started with a firm foundation of early years practice and principles that I was then able to use within the role, now defined in Children's Centres as Family Support. While the work entailed observation and assessments of parenting capacity, running a home and the ability to budget and cook amongst other things, the child always remained the focus of the work. My early years qualification, knowledge and experience was pivotal in ensuring that the child's voice was heard and that their wellbeing which, as the literature suggests in chapter three (section 3.6), is explicitly influenced by their early life experiences and should always be considered as a key focus in early years settings. I will revisit this reflection later in considering the research question and final recommendations from the research.

A second motivator and springboard for submitting my research proposal was my experience of a study week in April 2012 spent at Reggio Emilia. This pedagogical approach had influenced my practice for many years and visiting the Malaguzzi Centre and infant-toddler centres had been a life-long ambition. I refer to this experience in chapter one (section 1.6) as '*taking a journey of discovery into a child's world' and 'wanting to enter into dialogue with other colleagues…hearing and seeing through their lenses'*. My research experience has enabled me to have professional dialogues within the Children's Centres, as this thesis documents, but also beyond with local, national, and international encounters which I list in Appendix 10. I was able to revisit Reggio Emilia more recently during an EECERA Conference held in Bologna where I was able to visit an infant-toddler centre that had been established below an apartment block. This environment felt more reflective of my own experience as several trailblazers and Children's Centres set up in the first development of Sure Start made use of

community buildings to ensure the service was accessible to families. The experience at Reggio Emilia and encounters with friends and colleagues through communities of practice continues to influence my knowledge of pedagogy and I am now able to disseminate this through my current role teaching at University College Cork and leading the Professional Practice Placement programme for future early years practitioners.

Chapter five and six leads into my discussion in this chapter on the data collected across the different data sets in the study and shows the commonalities across the data revealed through the analysis of the findings and I reflect on the findings in relation to each of my research questions. I also present my thoughts on the contribution to new knowledge my research presents, the implications for future practice and consider the transferability of the findings from the research in the context of the changing landscape of early years and work with families during the period of the study and going forward. I will discuss the limitations of small-scale research and present my conclusions and recommendations to inform policy and practice and the potential for further research in the field. I will start with revisiting the research questions to see if I achieved what I set out to do with my research.

7.1.1 Review of the Research Design

I consider that conducting the research using an embedded single case study approach rather than from a multiple case study design was appropriate at the time the study took place (Yin, 2009). As discussed above, the study sites had gone through significant re-structures over several years and at the time of the study the two Children's Centres were about to enter a re-commissioning process. Applying the same theoretical frameworks to generate data using portraitures with parents, semi-structured interviews with senior managers and focus group interviews with practitioners enabled me to replicate the data by capturing the collective perspectives as well as facilitating individual contributions. I believe this adds a strength to the study that I will reflect on when considering the implications for the research and my recommendations. It has facilitated the representation of the findings as a complete story that is made up of different perspectives that reflect the differences as well as the commonalities of practice, at the time of the study. The use of portraitures captured the lived experience of the children and parents assuring the voice of the child was represented and heard in respect of contributing to the outcome and implications of the research.

7.1.2 Conceptualising the Theoretical Lenses

I provide a conceptualisation of the two theoretical lenses that I have applied to my study which is an ecological systems approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and a right based-approach (Lundy Model, 2007) and I offer a visual representation of this in figure 7.1 below. The conceptualisation expressed by this visual representation reflects the links between the two theoretical approaches that place the child at the centre of early years 'practice and links with empirical research conducted by others. I believe this visual representation addresses the title of my thesis and aims of the research:

Parents' and Practitioners' Perspectives on How an Open Listening Climate
in Early Years Settings Can Facilitate Child Voice

The findings from my study contribute new knowledge to the discourse of child's rights and provides innovative ways of applying a methodology of child participation, with adults to support practitioners to create an open listening climate that facilitates child's voice in everyday practice. The visual representation places a rights model (Lundy, 2007) around the child which I equate to Bronfenbrenner's 'micro-system' and while the context may differ, in that children and parents may access a range of different service provision and practitioners may be working in different contexts, I conceptualise early years practice that places the child at the heart of our work. The Lundy Model (2007) and subsequent child participation checklist (DCYA, 2015) provide a practical and accessible 'tool' that the research has shown can be adapted to also be used with adults. The visual representation then reflects the ''*nested systems of influence''* (Hayes et al., 2017:15) suggested by Bronfenbrenner's model (1979), that acknowledges the interconnectedness of the different aspects of a child's life, such as a child's early years setting and their home environment, which equates to the 'meso system'. The research has evidenced the use of portraiture as a method and is a unique opportunity to listen and record the stories of the lived experience of children and parents before the children attend the early years setting. Having these portraits supports practitioners to identify and understand the needs of the child to then be able to, as Hayes et al., (2017:79) suggests, ''*draw on the key principles of Bronfenbrenner's theory''*, and as advocated by Lundy (2007), afford children their rights by considering the four interrelated concepts of ''*Space, Voice, Audience and Influence''.* The research has evidenced how both theoretical lenses can be applied in practice.

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My thesis has reviewed other research through multiple lenses of child protection and safeguarding, quality provision and practice, child's rights and child wellbeing that I felt were of significance to this study and that I have positioned, in my visual representation, as layered across the different levels of influence. Considering child voice through these multiple lenses ensures we develop a holistic worldview of early years practice (Pascal and Bertram, 2012) to extend and have influence to be able to both transform policy and practice and which I relate to as the 'exo' system and 'macro' system, within the ecological systems theory.

My conceptualisation of the theoretical lenses in my study resonates with research conducted by others. In research conducted that considered participation of adolescents, Lansdown (2018:12) developed a conceptual framework reflecting both a rights discourse and ecological systems theory, acknowledging the need to apply a holistic lens when considering the individual [child] and acknowledging ''*all levels of the social ecology starting with the family and moving out to the wider social political domains''.* I consider my conceptualisation in my thesis to be an adaptation of this earlier work, applied to an early year's context and extending it by considering the multiple lenses through which to view child voice, from a multi-professional dimension.
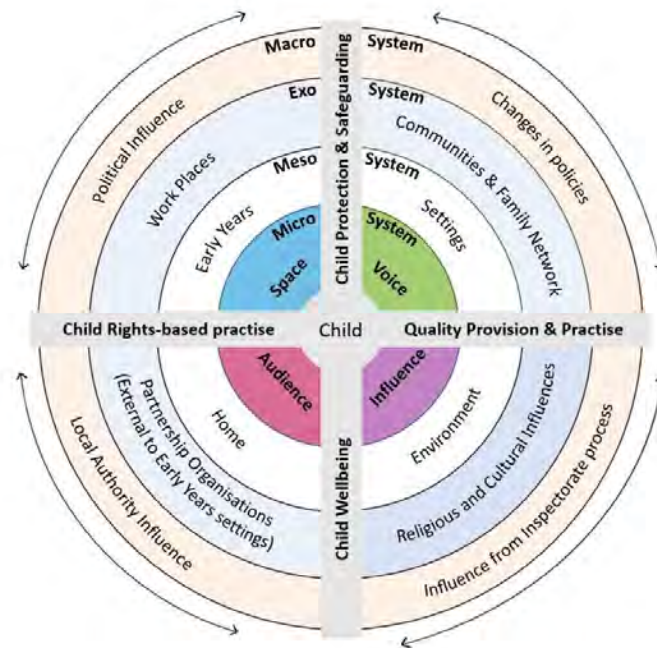

Figure 7.1 A conceptualisation of the theoretical lenses. Adapted from: Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory (1979), Lansdown (2018) (UNICEF)Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation and Lundy Model of child participation (2007)

7.2 Research Questions Revisited

The study was conducted because of the two key motivators discussed above, and in response to and to build on, the empirical research examined in the literature review, chapter three. As documented in chapter three (section 3.2), considering child voice through the multiple lens of child protection and safeguarding, quality provision and provision, child rights and child wellbeing encapsulates my own values and principles. Making children visible in our practice when supporting families was a key objective of the study and unlocking the potential of children to be heard, by creating an open mlistening climate from which to hear and respond to child voice from a multi-professional perspective, was essential. I wanted the research to be accessible and meaningful to practitioners, and as discussed in chapter two (section 2.3.3), I believe by framing the research through an ecological and child's rights-based theoretical lens, the study will resonate with practitioners in a range of early years settings and service provision. By adapting and applying the Lundy Model (2007) I believe I have been able to respond to a gap in research and practice which I will return to in my discussion on my contribution to new knowledge (section 7.5). This approach ensured that the child remained the focus of the research and I used the Lundy Model (2007) and subsequent participation check list (DCYA, 2015) as the tool for analysing the data. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013) enabled me to reveal the shared themes across the data sets. This revealed 'rich data' (Geertz, 1973) of the lived experience of parents and children that reflects the perspectives on child voice in the setting. Analysing the data from the practitioners' revealed the perspectives on child voice in practice and considered ways of transforming practice to create a more open-listening climate.

The study's main objective was to explore parents' perspectives on child voice and practitioner's perspectives of the current practice of facilitating child voice in Children's Centres, reflecting on how practice might be transformed to create a more open-listening climate. There were five sub-research questions that emerged from the review of the literature that informed the choice of methods I applied and that I felt would best suit my research design of conducting a qualitative interpretative study with parents' and practitioners'. Choosing to use portraiture to generate data with parents, I believe, lent itself to exploring the parents' understanding and perspectives and therefore supports my research question and I found this to be true when applying semi-structured interviews with the senior managers. The use of focus group interviews with the practitioners gave me the multiple perspective and collective voice from across two disciplines of early years and family support while still facilitating the individual contributions. The sub-research questions supported the

main research question, and I will discuss these in this chapter (section 7.2.1) before I revisit the final title that I have chosen for my thesis.

While I have not conducted a comparative study, what is of interest at this stage are the commonalities of the themes and sub-themes that are reflected from the findings across the data sets. The themes may have been revealed in different ways as they reflect the perspectives of parents and practitioners who will view their experiences through a different lens. However, applying both an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner,1979) and a child's rights informed approach (Lundy, 2007) to the research and analysis has assured the child has remained the focus of the research.

7.2.1   Sub-Research Questions Revisited

Question 1. What is understood by the concept of an opening listening climate?

While I did not ask this question directly to the parents, the reflections of the parents' lived experiences that I reflect on in the portraits, in chapter five, reveal that the process of open listening was at times present. My data suggests, through the examples I present in chapter five (section 5.3.1), that there are examples of positive outcomes of parents and of child voice being heard and practitioners actively responding. Similarly, the environment and act of open listening described by senior managers and practitioners would appear to support the perspectives of parents and children being listened to, having applied a range of methods and tools considered to assist in this process as discussed in chapter six (section 6.3.3). My data further suggests that practitioners working within the defined roles of early years can create a more open listening climate for children to be heard as it is a more natural process for early years practitioners and a significant part of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and practice within early years settings. Parents and practitioners alike were able to describe the environments in the early years provision that facilitated child voice and the data reflects a shared understanding that there is still room to make improvements.

It was evident that the remit laid down for family support at times caused a tension between listening to the parent or the child as part of the work carried out by the family support teams. This would appear to correlate with the literature reviewed in chapter three, from the report commissioned by the House of Commons (2013:13) that raised concerns about the revised core purpose of Children's Centres released in 2013. The report suggests that *''…the wording* [in the core purpose] *was too broad to be meaningful…* [there were] *also concerns about apparent tensions such as whether centres should prioritise children or parents…''.* This appears to also support the concerns expressed in the 4Children census

(2014), that suggests Children's Centres were expanding their services. However, there seemed to be less emphasis on providing services for children and more focus on providing support to parents. Sylva (DfE, 2013) shared these concerns suggesting there were very few children being supported by Children's Centre services due to the focus being placed on targeting support to families as a result of reprioritising by the newly elected coalition government (2010). There were some examples given by parents of certain aspects of the role of family support that reflects how the child/ren were supported, as shown in chapter five. However, the data would suggest this is less explicit than with early years.

The case for early intervention is well researched and, as shown in chapter three (section 3.6 and subsequent section 3.6.3), clear links are made to the wellbeing of our youngest children and providing that essential support as soon as required. My data reflects that how the centres were able to support children was more easily defined by early years practitioners as they have an early year's curriculum (EYFS) and the knowledge and skills acquired through training assures a level of confidence. The core purpose for the role of early years are more defined and relate to: providing early years services including nursery provision or link to stay & play and creche, providing quality experiences and providing evidenced-based programmes that support the child's all-round development. The literature discussed in chapter three (section 3.5) reflects the importance of early years policy that links to quality practice in the foundation years and the connection between supporting parent's health from the ante natal period, as this has a lasting impact on the future outcomes for children. The data showed that while there was a shared understanding that the focus of the support should revolve around the child, it was less evident how work undertaken by family support practitioners could ensure this was the case.

Reflecting on the data in this way has made me question that in retrospect when strategic leadership defined the specific job titles, roles and responsibilities within the Children's Centres, did we unintentionally misdirect the focus away from the child? The data strongly indicates this may be the case at both study sites and as shown in chapter six (section 6.3 through to 6.6). The concept of creating a more open listening climate, as explored in chapter six (section 6.7) may be one solution to redress this imbalance and I will discuss this further in my conclusion and recommendations later in the chapter.

The development of Sure Start Children's Centres and the evolution over decades of the reshaping and refocusing of Children's Services at a local and national level has, without doubt, had a significant impact on the practice at the time of the study. At the time of the fieldwork phase of the study, the study sites were about to enter a further period of

uncertainty for the future of the Children's Centre model, which is reflected in this research, and the defined roles of practitioners were under review. The local authority had established Family Support Hubs across the city which had responsibility, under the Children's Trust Arrangements at the time, to lead on the Early Help Strategic Plans delivered through Local Authority Family Support Teams. In addition to these arrangements, the local authority was entering a recommissioning process for Children's Centres which may also lead to remodelling of service provision that is reflected in this research. While it was evident that Children's Centres would have a role to play within the Early Help offer in supporting children under 5, what was less evident at this time was how this work would be undertaken and by whom. The issue of defining family support in the context of an ever-moving landscape within Children's Services goes beyond the scope of the findings in this study; however, the data seems to support the need for further review.

In respect of my research and practice within the study sites, I am of the opinion that there is a need to further develop a joint approach across the centre to supporting children and families which would be enhanced if a more open listening climate was embedded into practice across the teams.

I would suggest that my research shows a need to further explore what is understood by an 'open listening climate' in the context of both early years and family support to ensure the focus is placed on the child in a multi-professional setting which is then underpinned by the support given to parents. I will expand on this when I discuss further data relating to practice and strategies for transforming practice and considering the transferability of skills, knowledge, methods, and tools from practice within early years.

Exploring perspectives on practice through this study revealed a tension between the two disciplines of early years and family support in relation to the specific roles assigned to the teams. There was a shared understanding of the need to keep the child as the focus of the work; however, priorities often driven from external influences at times diverted the attention to a focus on the parents' needs above those of the child. By applying an ecological and child rights lens to view the data, I was able to explore the understanding of an open listening climate in relation to child voice and practice. The findings from the parents and practitioners revealed that the principles that constitute an open listening climate were evident, reflecting there is a foundation from which to explore the concept further, in relation to creating a climate that best suits the context. In chapter five, an example reflected in the findings include: transition across service provision for children and parents facilitated by effective communication between staff teams. Home visits had been a key space where

parents felt they had been heard and consequently their children and themselves were able to access appropriate support to meet their needs and examples were given by parents of really feeling listened to and not just heard (Lundy, 2007). In chapter six (section, 6.7) practitioners expressed their understanding of creating an open listening climate in settings which includes ensuring the child is the focus of the work, establishing new ways of working together across teams to better support children and parents and to develop shared training to further develop the understanding of a listening climate. These principles aligned with my own conceptual understanding as well as with those from other research and are built on foundations of democratic values afforded through trusting relationships and interactions, sustained over time and underpinned by a child rights-based pedagogy. The openness relates to a willingness to listen to the multiple perspectives and to adapt and be flexible to change and transform practice. The data revealed that there were examples of good practice, approaches and methods that could be taken from early years and applied in a family support context that would facilitate child voice.

Question 2. What are parents' lived experience of Children's Centres and what are their perspectives on child voice?

By applying the Lundy Model (2007) as part of the data collection, I was able to gather ''thick descriptions'', (Geertz, 1973) that reflected the parents' lived experience of Children's Centres, as revealed in chapter five, viewed through a child's rights lens. The portraits provide a lens with which to view the parents' and children's lives, affording practitioners the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding and acknowledgement of children and parents' level of wellbeing based on the parents' and children's experiences, before and after accessing support. Using the participation checklist with practitioners assured the focus was on the child and revealed the tension and challenge family support encounter within their defined roles in comparison to early years. As detailed in the literature, (chapter three, section 3.6), there is overwhelming evidence that reflects the need to make the connections between the wellbeing of the child and family and the implications for practice. As suggested by Hayes et al (2017:29) ''*real children with real families in real childhood settings do not exist in compartmentalised worlds'',* and my data clearly reflects the complexities of family lives that practitioners need to understand and be able to respond to in the earliest years of a child's life. This part of the research has contributed to the existing literature on what is considered best practice, referred to in chapter three, and identified a gap in the knowledge of how multi-professional teams within early years settings can work together to provide a seamless and coherent approach. I

will discuss this finding later in this chapter (section 7.5.4) when I present my recommendations following the research.

The need to develop trusting relationships was a common theme across the data sets and related to several aspects, i.e. parent relationships with the child/ren, parent relationships within their own lives and families; relationships with the Children's Centres and practitioners within specific service areas, relationships that the children and parents develop with other families and relationships that were developed external to and beyond their time at the Children's Centre. While the dynamics of these diverse relationships may be different, the fundamental concept of trust was key to positive or negative encounters. The data would suggest further work is required to bridge the divide between the two disciplines to strengthen a team approach when supporting families which would allow the practitioners to, as Gasper (2010:22) suggests *''re-examine their philosophy and practice to increase co-operation and move towards co-ordination''.* I would concur with the suggestion made by Gasper (2010:29) and my own findings appear to support the view that:

''[teams working together] *requires staff who are attentive and who actively listen, who look beyond the immediate needs of their specialist skills and who are aware of their colleagues' knowledge and skill areas…this kind of working demands a willingness to work in combination with different emphasis at different times''.*

The research seems to strongly indicate that this shared approach could be strengthened by applying both an ecological and child's rights-based lens on the work practice, both of which have the child in the centre and reflects that the parents are pivotal influences in a child's life. My research has shown that once this shared lens is applied in practice, the potential for eliciting the lived experience of parents' and children is strengthened. By using portraitures as a method of 'telling the stories', centres can document the stories and evidence the support that has been provided and the outcomes for the children and parents, as this study shows. This method provides an opportunity for a deeper reflection of the issues children, parents and families are facing than a traditional assessment process can offer, as the authentic voice of the child and parent is heard. It places child voice at the heart of the decision-making process as it makes the child visible in our practice. I would suggest therefore that my research has made a meaningful contribution to developing a greater understanding of an open listening climate in a multi-professional early year setting and reflects what strategies and methods have the potential to reveal new perspectives on the challenges of working across two disciplines.

I sought to explore the 'lived experience' of parents and children, attempting to understand the parents' perspectives on child voice in relation to their experiences before and after they had accessed support. I applied the method of Thematic Analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2018, 2022), and followed the six phases of the process and applyed this method to the Parent Portraits. Appendix Five is a worked example of how I applied Thematic Analysis to one of the Parent Portraits. The transcribing and re-listening to the stories, at phase one of the method, facilitates what Braun and Clarke (2022:42) consider as gaining ''*deep familiarity with the content*'' and at this phase I was able to consider the potential patterns developing across the five parent portraits, which led onto phase two of coding the data. For the coding phase I considered segments of data taken from each interview using the interview guide, that seemed meaningful and relevant for answering my research questions. As I discuss in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3) I reviewed the data twice, having applied a 1-5-point scale that appeared to be what Braun and Clarke (2022:69) describe as being ''*…to narrow''*, and therefore I finally applied a 1-3-point scale to ensure I was able to reflect on the depth of the lived experience of the parents.

I began to generate the initial themes as phase three of the method suggests, by using colour coding to identify core ideas, concepts and connections across the data which enabled me to consider what Braun and Clarke (2022:88) refer to as ''*trying to cluster codes into broader patterns that are coherent and meaningful''.* I then applied the Lundy Model (2007) at phase four of the process to assist in developing and further reviewing the themes that were developing from the parents' stories to ''*highlight the most important patterns across the dataset in relation to the research questions''* (Braun and Clarke, 2022:35).

As the themes were developed at phase five of the process I developed a brief summary and definition for each theme as illustrated in Chapter five (Section 5.3.1) which enabled me to move onto the final phase of Thematic Analysis, defined by Braun and Clarke (2022:119) and thereby ''*setting the scene and telling the story…''.*

Capturing parent stories revealed that despite the complex lives and adversities they were faced with, their children were their focus. The findings suggest where parents were unsure of how best to support their child, the Children's Centre provided the knowledge and support to help parents' and this was very much valued. The findings reflect when the support was given there were positive outcomes for the child and the parents which had a long-term impact on the outcomes for the child. The stories provide practitioners with a deep insight into the needs of the child, as parents described their own life experiences and they clearly articulated that they wanted a different life for their child. Documenting parents' stories

using portraitures affords the child and parent a voice that practitioners can listen to and appropriately respond to when they have a greater understanding of the child's life, and when an open listening climate is embedded into practice. As the research shows, consideration needs to be given to bridge the gap between the roles of early years and family support teams to ensure the child voice is the focus. The links between home and the setting are pivotal and by strengthening the shared approach to supporting the child and the parents, the best support and early intervention can be put in place.

Question 3. What are practitioners' perspectives and understanding of their practice in relation to child voice?

When discussed in the literature in chapter three (section 3.6), there is ample empirical research to support the link between quality practice and/or provision and the quality of the experience's children have in their early years settings. As indicated by the research, the discourse on how to measure the quality of the provision is still widely debated. However, I would suggest that in a multi-professional early year's context, the use of Laevers' Scales (1994) to evidence quality and the levels of wellbeing is to be commended. Several Children's Centres, both in the local authority where the study took place and further afield, had reported the use of the tool to evidence their work with children and families and the evaluations of the Effective Early Learning (Bertram, Pascal et al., 1996) and Baby Effective Early Learning Programmes (Bertram, Pascal et al., 2006) provide further evidence that supports the use of this method. I would further suggest that using these two sets of indicators as a lens to consider a child's emotional well-being and level of involvement has the potential to bridge the gap between early years and family support in respect of a shared lens to view child voice.

There was a distinct difference between the knowledge, understanding and skills of early years practitioners and family support in relation to understanding child development, and how they listen to child voice within their service. This is to be expected when the specific training programmes on offer, and accessed by the workforce, are traditionally structured with this divide of professional roles. The generic training for family support, at the time of the study, had a strong focus on process and procedures relating to assessment of need but did not require practitioners to have training or hold a related qualification in early years. Several Family Support practitioners held a qualification in Health & Social Care and there was some training on offer to support those practitioners who were delivering specialist support to parents, such as the Freedom Programme, Parental Emotional Well-being and Incredible Years. The early years practitioners, in contrast, held a minimum Level 3 qualification relevant to the post and the senior managers came from a

specific professional heritage to reflect the post they held and the teams they managed. This seems to support my earlier reflections on my own experiences when working in a family support context when the focus was placed on the child and the practitioners held an early year's qualification. The data appears to support the idea that whilst there is an understanding that the child has to be at the centre of the work, the practitioners are constrained by the boundaries of their defined roles, which are also bound by financial constraints and organisational structures.

Training was one of the key themes that came through in the research and the findings suggest there is a gap in both knowledge and practice which could be supported through development of shared work practices and training. During, and by the end of, the field work there was evidence that the research had started to influence how practitioners across the two disciplines could enhance practice through creating a more open listening climate. As observed by one of the senior managers, the study and my early dissemination of the findings appear to have provided the space to begin the shared dialogues across the teams and I will expand on this thought when considering what strategies might be put in place to transform practice. The concept of an open listening climate can be revisited here, since a short-term solution to bridging the divide could be to review and revise the operational structures that would ensure that shared working practices are embedded into the culture of the centres.

In summary, the data shows that there was a shared understanding that practice could be, and needed to be, improved and this research has facilitated the start of the journey for the practitioners to consider how this might be achieved. The review of the empirical research, as considered through multiple lens in chapter three, provides strong support for the need to provide quality experiences for children where rights informed practice is in place which ensures that the child is made visible by practitioners who are sensitive, responsive and supportive to the needs of children. The service provision can then be developed with parents and children as a direct response to gaining a greater understanding of their lived experience and their needs, as shown through the methods adopted in this study.

The findings reveal a disconnect between early years and family support in respect of their perspectives on child voice and their practice. Whilst early years were able to confidently articulate good examples where they facilitated child voice, and as a result changed practice, this was not as confidently described by family support. Family support were able to describe what they understood constituted listening to child voice but were only able to draw on a few concrete examples of how this had been facilitated to inform decisions that were then put in place for the family. Decisions on interventions that could be put in place were more often based on parents'

needs and while this would have the potential to improve outcomes for the child, these decisions were not informed by child voice.

Question 4. What changes might need to happen in order to create a more collaborative, open listening climate?

Question 5. What strategies might be adopted to improve the listening climate and pedagogical practice across teams in Children's Centres?

I have chosen to reflect on these two sub-research questions together as they have some similar elements such as the concept of creating or improving the listening climate to transform practice. However, they will require individual reflection to consider how they might be achieved. The thesis focused on gaining a greater understanding of parents' and practitioners' perspectives on child voice and reflects on the practice at the time of the study. While the findings reflect the beginnings of dialogue between practitioners and senior managers, it was beyond the scope of the research to identify and implement practical techniques to improve listening. There is potential to extend the research beyond this study, which I reflect on later in this chapter when I consider the implications for the research and recommendations; however, my discussions at this stage will focus on what underpins an open listening climate and therefore what change needs to take place that leads to transformation of practice.

It is important to acknowledge that it was evident from the findings that practitioners and senior managers could see the potential for making improvement to practice across the centres and teams. The findings across the data sets revealed examples that evidenced some good practice in relation to a listening climate as shown in the Parent Portraits in chapter five which reflect positive outcomes for the parents and children, as a result of accessing support from the Children's Centres. As the data shows in chapter six, practitioners and senior managers were able to affirm this by providing examples from practice that reflected aspects of listening and responding to children and parents. It was evident, as previously identified that the early years provision within the Children's Centres was able to create more opportunities for listening to child voice as defined through the curriculum frameworks and defined roles of early years practitioners. Similarly, the data revealed elements of good practice which evidenced effective partnership with parents which involved applying methods for exchange of dialogue.

It was also evident that the strategic structures from external influence and operational structures that had been created, placed boundaries around work practice which then limited how child voice could be heard in the context of family support and the dynamics of the relationship with parents.

Consideration of the strategic influence that appeared to have an impact on current practice was beyond the scope of the research; however, the study gave the practitioners and senior managers the space to reflect on these issues and the findings can be taken forward for further discussions. I will reflect on this in more detail when considering my recommendations from the research.

While change to the strategic structures requires a long-term plan and is determined by local and national influence, I am of the view that change can be implemented at an operational level which can inform and transform practice. I am not suggesting a quick fix or that change can occur overnight, but I believe this research has supported the start of the dialogue.

When reflecting on the differences between the two questions I will first focus on the aspect of what changes might need to happen. I believe that the research can inform the start of a change process within the centres that took part in the research, as well as supporting all those organisations who work with children and parents, with the ultimate aim of improving early experiences and opportunities for children. This is true of both the UK and beyond, as applying a rights framework supported by the UNCRC provides an international lens and therefore the research informs early years practice from a global perspective.

I believe that to make transformational change, as my research set out to explore, requires a cultural shift that goes beyond a physical change to practice methods and involves the organisation to first examine the value and belief systems within the organisation.

I am of the opinion that the research has evidenced the use of a child rights-based framework which the Lundy Model and participation checklist provide, as an effective approach to make transformational change at an organisational and operational level. Organisations will be required to validate the rights-based approach and disaffirm any beliefs and practice they feel no longer supports this shared approach and I believe the findings from the research provide the catalyst for this validation process to begin. The process of re-framing existing values and beliefs in relation to the child rights approach can then follow, and again the findings from across the data sets reflect the models of good practice that practitioners would want to maintain and continue to build upon. This reflects a Freirean approach (2002) which suggests that the organisation, staff, children and parents will be active participants and contribute their knowledge and experience to influence transformational change. I believe this also

reflects a praxeological approach which I identify with in my introduction in chapter one (section 1.1) and reaffirms my positionality as a researcher, discussed in chapter four (section 4.2). The EECERA Ethical Code (Bertram et al., 2015) which underpinned my research practice has relevance in the change process to assure democratic principles and participatory pedagogies are in place. The findings from the research can inform this stage of the process. The study did not have the scope to fully explore the strategies required to support the change process to include creating a climate that is more open to listening and I include the need to continue to explore strategies as a recommendation (section 7.5.4). However, it is important to acknowledge that, as the findings suggest, the Lundy Model (2007) lends itself to this process as the concepts of Space, Voice, Audience and Influence are interchangeable. The findings presented in chapter six suggest several areas of practice requiring improvements to be made and, again, I present recommendations in this chapter (section 7.5.4) to take forward suggestions identified in the findings. What is essential at this stage is that once the cultural shift has been validated and articulated, the new behaviours are required to be role modelled over time to ensure that transformational change becomes embedded and sustained in practice.

7.3 What is Understood by the Concept of an Open Listening Climate?

I revisit this question as I reflect on my research journey and have collected, collated, analysed, interpreted and finally reported my findings from the research I have undertaken. In chapter one (section 1.2.1), I initially introduce the concept of an open listening climate as conceptualised by experts in the field, evidenced through empirical research and embedded into their pedagogical practice. I have come to understand, during my PhD journey, that whilst research reflects the use of different theoretical frameworks and methods used, and that the contexts in relation to pedagogical environments differ, these are created in a cultural context for their children, and in the setting in the research there is a shared aim and vision for pedagogy. The aim of creating an open listening climate in the context of a shared vision for early years is to afford children a 'voice' and as Malaguzzi (1998) suggests ''*through a hundred languages or more''.* The different pedagogical philosophies around the world can and have informed my own beliefs of quality pedagogical practice but it requires practitioners to create and co-construct, with the children and parents, what we come to understand as an open listening climate in their context.

The concept of openness in respect of practice requires practitioners to be flexible and adaptable to meet the needs of children and parents and to be open to change by being willing

to listen to other perspectives. It is the element of listening that needs a greater understanding and the process of actively listening moves beyond merely 'hearing' to absorbing the information and then responding. Listening is influenced by the environment and the climate that we create. The change process and cultural shift required to transform practice, as previously mentioned, requires practitioners to challenge their current understanding and practice of listening and reconstruct a new way of working and discourse. I believe that the climate, therefore, relates to the ethos and fundamental values that underpin the practice that Rinaldi (2008:65) refers to as working in a context of multiple listening by creating a '*pedagogy of listening',* which then illustrates an openness. I believe I have shown through the research that applying a rights-based lens, such as the Lundy Voice Model (2007), affords and authenticates our ethical practice which ensures we create a listening climate built on rights, democracy and respect, which is further underpinned through applying an ecological lens. The bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) is appropriate as it supports practitioners to ensure the child is at the centre of the work whilst also acknowledging the wider influences and how they impact on the lived experiences of children. The data presented in chapter five, in the parent portraits and in chapter six, reflecting the findings from the practitioners and senior managers, evidenced the interconnectedness between the influences and the importance of these relationships. In summary, I believe the study reveals the parents' and practitioners' perspectives on child voice in the context of the settings and the findings inform how practice might be transformed to create a more open-listening climate across early years settings. The research supports transformation of practice in relation to a multi-professional approach through developing a shared pedagogy of listening.

Chapter 8: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I conclude with my final reflections and in considering my doctoral journey and my research I put forward my contribution to knowledge and I provide recommendations that reflect the potential of the study to have an impact and influence the transformation of support services to children and families at a local, national and international level. The recommendations are informed and influenced directly from the findings that emerged from the research and I also put forward suggestions for further research. I conclude the chapter with my final thoughts on what I believe I have achieved by conducting the research and my final reflection on making children and families more visible in our service to afford children their rights.

8.2 Reflections and Implications for the Research

This research has direct implications for all those working in the early years sector and service providers who have the responsibility for supporting children. It has the potential to impact on local, national, and international perspectives of early years and family support services.

The research involved two Children's Centres in the West Midlands in England, whose core purpose was to provide support to children under 5, parents and their families to improve life chances for young children. They achieved this by providing or ensuring there was access to quality early years experiences, including early years nursery provision to support their learning and development, parenting support through evidenced-based intervention programmes and support through providing opportunities such as stay & plays, supporting the health and wellbeing of children and families through early intervention programmes and meeting the needs of children and the parents in the local communities by providing access to a range of community initiatives including volunteering to assist in strengthening families and communities. Both study sites had been delivering community-based service provision for a number of years prior to leading and delivering on the Sure Start Children's Centre programmes and had established exemplar services that had received local and national recognition. At the time that the research took place, (2012 – 2018), the Sure Start local programmes and later Children's Centre Services had gone through periods of significant change and at a local level had involved a re-structure of leadership in the areas in which the study sites were situated. Considering the current position of the two study sites at the time

the research began influenced my decision on the research design which I discuss in the next section. While there were uncertainties of the future delivery of Children's Centres within the local authority where the research took place and right across England at the time the study took place, I am of the opinion that the concept of creating an open listening climate that facilitates child voice is conceptually transferable across settings and service providers who support children and parents. I believe applying a child rights lens provides a theoretical model that is universally accepted and transferable to other settings and areas of practice. The research has implications for future policy development, and as I suggest a cultural shift in work practice is required if transformational change is to take place and that this shift requires strong policies to underpin practice.

8.3 Contribution to Knowledge

Throughout the thesis I have referred to key areas which may require further consideration and change to take place that would assure a more open listening climate is created and embedded into multi-professional early years practice. Through reflecting on child voice through multiple lenses, I identified a gap in knowledge in an area that had been under researched, i.e. that of considering how an open listening climate in a multi-professional early years setting might facilitate child voice and I have adapted and applied the Lundy Voice is Model (2007) with adults. I consider that my research contributed to new knowledge in three significant areas:

- **Adapting the use of the Lundy model (2007) of child participation to my research and applying it with adults participating in the study.**

I was invited to contribute a chapter in the Routledge International Handbook of Young Children's Rights, written and published in November 2019, to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the United Nations on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989). The chapters were structured under the categorisation of the three Ps, i.e. protection, provision and participation and my research has been acknowledged under participation rights. In an introduction to the section of the handbook on participation rights, Swadener (2020:393) has acknowledged my study as contributing to new knowledge and as ''*a powerful new area of research''*, referring to the methodology and applying a child participation model to ''*primary caregivers and early educators…in support of increasing children's voice and efficacy''*. The methodology and methods applied to the study provide innovative ways for practitioners to reflect in and on practice, to create and embed a more open listening climate and to facilitate children's voices in early years settings. The editors suggest in the foreword of the handbook

that it is clear from the contributions made across the chapters that ''*huge challenges remain* [and] *as documented in the handbook, far too little attention has been afforded to the rights of young children* (2020, xxiv). The need for advocates of children's rights who will ensure that the principles of the UNCRC are upheld in policy and practice is pivotal if the rights are to be truly enacted. My research provides a practical approach based on sound theoretical principles to give practitioners in early years settings a positive way forward in beginning to understand the discourse on child's rights and then how to implement the UNCRC and afford children their rights into everyday practice, when supporting children and parents.

- **Applying an ecological systems and child's rights lens to a multi-professional perspective when working with children and families, bridging the knowledge gap between early years and family support to assure professional dialogue.**

The study reflects a conceptualisation of applying both an ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as well as a rights-based lens (Lundy, 2007) to practice in early years settings and a multi-professional perspective has been added through the research. The research identifies that there is a knowledge gap between the perceived roles of early years and family support when supporting children and families in a multi-professional context and the findings suggest that there are effective methods of listening to child voice within early years services that could be adopted and, if required, adapted to meet a family support remit. My study contributes new knowledge to early years practice which identifies the need to make improvements to ensure there is professional dialogues and a culture of listening, to ensure that the child is the focus of the work whilst also acknowledging the needs of parents.

- **Generated insight into the lived experience of parents and children through contextual field research in the home and using portraiture to tell their story to help inform and transform practice.**

This doctoral study has contributed an innovative approach to listening to and recording the lived experience of children and parents before accessing support services by applying the method of portraiture. Traditional methods used by Children's Centres in the past have been the use of Case Studies and templates such as 'You said…We did' to evidence the impact of the service provision on children and families. From my own extensive experience of leading a group of Children's Centres, these methods have gone some way in evidencing good practice models. However, my study has contributed the use of portraiture as a holistic lens through which to reflect in and on practice alongside a rights-based approach to support the creating and embedding of an open listening climate.

8.4 Recommendations

The recommendations which follow have been informed by the rich data the research has generated and I am grateful to the study sites and participants who took part. I must thank the parents who contributed their stories and the lived experience of the children to help inform and transform future practice in multi-professional early years settings. I recommend the following:

1. Organisations working with children in the context of early years, as well as within multi-professional teams, should adopt a child's rights- based lens to facilitate child voice and efficacy by placing the child as the focus of the work. Practitioners will need to develop a greater understanding of the UNCRC to afford children their rights and to support practitioners to create and embed an open listening climate into everyday practice.

2. Adopting the Lundy model of child participation with adults, as a theoretical framework and bound by an ecological perspective, to bridge the knowledge gap between the multi-professional teams, in the context of early years, who support children and families. Exploring every opportunity for collaboration across the teams, through professional dialogue and integration of daily work practices, to provide a seamless and coherent approach to facilitate an open listening climate and child voice. Adopting an early year's perspective across the work will ensure that whilst it is acknowledged that parents require support, the child remains the focus of the work and the professional dialogue and listening culture will help provide a coherent approach.

3. Training and continuous professional development needs to underpin the first two recommendations for practitioners to develop a greater understanding of the UNCRC and implications for future practice. The findings of the research lend themselves to informing the development of training materials that can be applied to a range of contexts for professionals working in early years as well as a multi-professional context.

4. Extend the body of research to include more settings that are representative of the early years sector and multi-professional teams supporting children and families which embeds an open listening climate into early years practice. The dissemination of the research, which will impact and influence at a strategic policy level as well as an operational level, is required to generate interest in the findings and to establish pathways forward leading to transformation of practice. I discuss this further in this chapter (section 8.5).

The study found there were tensions between the role of early years and family support that at times challenged and inhibited child voice being heard. The findings reflect that within the remit of family support, the priority at times was not on the child but on providing support to parents and the child's voice was often missed or given less consideration. The findings gave examples of good practice models within early years services that could be adopted and, if required, adapted to use with family support to ensure that the child is the focus of the support offered. My final recommendation that requires a long-term strategy would be to consider:

5. A review of the roles and responsibilities of multi-professional teams, such as in Children's Centres and as defined by current job descriptions and job titles. To apply the principles of a rights-based approach reflecting an early year's perspective as the findings suggest, to ensure an open-listening climate is created and embedded to transform practice.

8.5 Areas for Future Research

Reflecting on the thesis, there are further areas for future research that I recommend, informed from the multi-vocal voices in the study and from the need to create and embed a more open-listening climate into early years practice to facilitate child voice.

1. Further research needs to address the gap between the information, advice and support parents receive from early years settings and from a family support perspective, to help better understand the 'lived experience' of the child and parent and the full range of issues they are faced with. This would enable a more holistic approach to be taken when making decisions with the parent of what support should be put in place to ensure the child has the best outcomes.

2. I recommend that further research is conducted to increase the understanding of a child rights- pedagogy and how child voice can be best facilitated through creating a more open-listening climate. This research can expand beyond Children's Centres to include the diverse settings which provide early intervention to children and families, as a rights approach to practice should not be bound by a specific setting but afforded to all children.

3. More research is required exploring methods and effective 'tools' to use based on existing evidenced -based practice to facilitate child voice and make child voice visible in practice and this research should include children as co-researchers. The methods developed as part of the Lundy Model (2007) and other research that advocates for child participation in research can be adopted. This could also include the use of

portraitures as a methodology for deep level reflection and documenting insights relating to the lived experience of children and parents, their relationship with the support services and the impact and outcomes for children.

8.6 Final Thoughts

For my final thoughts I reflect on the final title of my thesis Parents' and Practitioners' Perspectives on how an Open Listening Climate can facilitate Child Voice in an Early Years Setting and the rationale for undertaking the research and ask myself if I have achieved what I set out to achieve. On a professional and personal level, I can proudly say that I believe I have. At the start of my PhD journey, I had for seventeen years been leading Children's Centres established in the heart of the community with the support of the organisations, teams and most importantly the children and their families. The role had enabled me to bring together all my experience, that at the time spanned 35 years, to develop Children's Centre services that gained a strong reputation for providing high-quality support for families that had an incredibly positive impact on families' lives. Being acknowledged as an inspirational leader of the Children's Centre, by Ofsted and others, was a very personal achievement and I believe my professional heritage greatly influenced my ability to fulfil the role. The experience I had at the Children's Centre will be forever imprinted on me and I take the memories with me as I start a new professional and personal journey into Higher Education.

I carried out the research at a time when Children's Centres and the early years sector were about to go through the most turbulent times, they had probably experienced over the 40 years I have worked in the field. I am grateful that the two Children's Centres agreed to take part in the study, and I believe the research reflects the dedication of the teams for the need for continual improvement to transform practice to ensure the child is always at the centre when supporting children and families. Applying a child's rights-based lens to the work has helped to facilitate child voice and efficacy in the multi-professional teams in the Children's Centres and this research has started to close the gap between early years and family support services.

I had the privilege, through my research, to be invited into the homes of the children and parents whose stories are documented in this thesis and through this methodology I have helped practitioners gain a greater understanding of the stories using portraitures to show a rich picture of the lived experience of children and their parents. Through this study I have ensured that it is the voice of the child that informs and can transform our practice.

8.7 Reflections of The Voice of the Child

Reflecting on the finished thesis and the journey I have been on, I want to end this part of the journey with a final look back to what inspired me to advocate for child voice to ensure the child is always visible. I have been greatly influenced both personally and professionally by my experiences working in early years and I feel privileged that I had the opportunity to work for 17 years at the Children's Centre. During the time I spent working at the Children's Centre, I know I was able to make a difference to the lives of children and families and I was able to inspire others who worked alongside me to have a professional curiosity and to really listen. The PhD has given me the opportunity to contribute new knowledge and influence practice at the Children's Centre but also in other early years settings and family support provision. At the beginning of my thesis, I described how I drew inspiration from Te Whāriki early years curriculum from New Zealand and the concept of the woven mat (whāriki) and I believe this symbolises a firm foundation on which to continue to weave the child's ongoing journey of learning. As I can continue my journey, in my new role of supporting future early years practitioners, I would like to consider that my research is offering a firm foundation to build upon and contributes new knowledge to the rights discourse helping to bridge policy, practice and research which aims to afford all children their rights.

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Convention on the Rights of the Child

Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly Resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989

entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with Article 49

Preamble

The States Parties to the present Convention,

Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Bearing in mind that the peoples of the United Nations have, in the Charter, reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person, and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Recognizing that the United Nations has, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenants on Human Rights, proclaimed and agreed that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status,

Recalling that, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance,

Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community,

Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding,

Considering that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity,

Bearing in mind that the need to extend particular care to the child has been stated in the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924 and in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1959 and recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (in particular in Articles 23 and 24), in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (in particular in Article 10) and in the statutes and relevant instruments of specialized agencies and international organizations concerned with the welfare of children,

Bearing in mind that, as indicated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth",

Recalling the provisions of the Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with Special Reference to Foster Placement and Adoption Nationally and Internationally; the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules) ; and the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict. Recognizing that, in all countries in the world, there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, and that such children need special consideration,

Taking due account of the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child, Recognizing the importance of international cooperation for improving the living conditions of children in every country, in particular in the developing countries,

Have agreed as follows:

PART I

Article 1
For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

Article 2
1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

Article 3
1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

3. States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

Article 4
States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation.

Article 5
States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.

Article 6
1. States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.

2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

Article 7
1. The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.

2. States Parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights in accordance with their national law and their obligations under the relevant international instruments in this field, in particular where the child would otherwise be stateless.

Article 8
1. States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.

2. Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity.

Article 9

1. States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. Such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents, or one where the parents are living separately and a decision must be made as to the child's place of residence.

2. In any proceedings pursuant to paragraph 1 of the present article, all interested parties shall be given an opportunity to participate in the proceedings and make their views known.

3. States Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests.

4. Where such separation results from any action initiated by a State Party, such as the detention, imprisonment, exile, deportation or death (including death arising from any cause while the person is in the custody of the State) of one or both parents or of the child, that State Party shall, upon request, provide the parents, the child or, if appropriate, another member of the family with the essential information concerning the whereabouts of the absent member(s) of the family unless the provision of the information would be detrimental to the well-being of the child. States Parties shall further ensure that the submission of such a request shall of itself entail no adverse consequences for the person(s) concerned.

Article 10

1. In accordance with the obligation of States Parties under Article 9, paragraph 1, applications by a child or his or her parents to enter or leave a State Party for the purpose of family reunification shall be dealt with by States Parties in a positive, humane and expeditious manner. States Parties shall further ensure that the submission of such a request shall entail no adverse consequences for the applicants and for the members of their family.

2. A child whose parents reside in different States shall have the right to maintain on a regular basis, save in exceptional circumstances personal relations and direct contacts with both parents. Towards that end and in accordance with the obligation of States Parties under Article 9, paragraph 1, States Parties shall respect the right of the child and his or her parents to leave any country, including their own, and to enter their own country. The right to leave any country shall be subject only to such restrictions as are prescribed by law and which are necessary to protect the national security, public order (ordre public), public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others and are consistent with the other rights recognized in the present Convention.

Article 11

1. States Parties shall take measures to combat the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad.

2. To this end, States Parties shall promote the conclusion of bilateral or multilateral agreements or accession to existing agreements.

Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or

(b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

Article 14

1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.

3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Article 15

1. States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

2. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of these rights other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Article 16

1. No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.

2. The child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 17

States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.

To this end, States Parties shall:
(a) Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of Article 29;

(b) Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources;

(c) Encourage the production and dissemination of children's books;

(d) Encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous;

(e) Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of Articles 13 and 18.

Article 18

1. States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.

2. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.

3. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.

Article 19

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

Article 20

1. A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State.

2. States Parties shall in accordance with their national laws ensure alternative care for such a child.

3. Such care could include, inter alia, foster placement, *kafalah* of Islamic law, adoption or if necessary placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. When considering solutions, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.

Article 21

States Parties that recognize and/or permit the system of adoption shall ensure that the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration and they shall:
(a) Ensure that the adoption of a child is authorized only by competent authorities who determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures and on the basis of all pertinent and reliable information, that the adoption is permissible in view of the child's status concerning parents, relatives and legal guardians and that, if required, the persons concerned have given their informed consent to the adoption on the basis of such counselling as may be necessary;

(b) Recognize that inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of child's care, if the child cannot be placed in a foster or an adoptive family or cannot in any suitable manner be cared for in the child's country of origin;

(c) Ensure that the child concerned by inter-country adoption enjoys safeguards and standards equivalent to those existing in the case of national adoption;

(d) Take all appropriate measures to ensure that, in inter-country adoption, the placement does not result in improper financial gain for those involved in it;

(e) Promote, where appropriate, the objectives of the present article by concluding bilateral or multilateral arrangements or agreements, and endeavour, within this framework, to ensure that the placement of the child in another country is carried out by competent authorities or organs.

Article 22

1. States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties.

2. For this purpose, States Parties shall provide, as they consider appropriate, co-operation in any efforts by the United Nations and other competent intergovernmental organisations or nongovernmental organisations co-operating with the United Nations to protect and assist such a child and to trace the parents or other members of the family of any refugee child in order to obtain information necessary for reunification with his or her family. In cases where no parents or other members of the family can be found, the child shall be accorded the same protection as any other child permanently or temporarily deprived of his or her family environment for any reason, as set forth in the present Convention.

Article 23

1. States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.

2. States Parties recognize the right of the disabled child to special care and shall encourage and ensure the extension, subject to available resources, to the eligible child and those responsible for his or her care, of assistance for which application is made and which is appropriate to the child's condition and to the circumstances of the parents or others caring for the child.

3. Recognizing the special needs of a disabled child, assistance extended in accordance with paragraph 2 of the present article shall be provided free of charge, whenever possible, taking into account the financial resources of the parents or others caring for the child, and shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development.

4. States Parties shall promote, in the spirit of international cooperation, the exchange of appropriate information in the field of preventive health care and of medical, psychological and functional treatment of disabled children, including dissemination of and access to information concerning methods of rehabilitation, education and vocational services, with the aim of enabling States Parties to improve their capabilities and skills and to widen their experience in these areas. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 24

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.

2. States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures:
(a) To diminish infant and child mortality;

(b) To ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care to all children with emphasis on the development of primary health care;

(c) To combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, *inter alia*, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution;

(d) To ensure appropriate pre-natal and post-natal health care for mothers;

(e) To ensure that all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, the advantages of breastfeeding, hygiene and environmental sanitation and the prevention of accidents;

(f) To develop preventive health care, guidance for parents and family planning education and services.

3. States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.

4. States Parties undertake to promote and encourage international co-operation with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the right recognized in the present article. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 25

States Parties recognize the right of a child who has been placed by the competent authorities for the purposes of care, protection or treatment of his or her physical or mental health, to a periodic review of the treatment provided to the child and all other circumstances relevant to his or her placement.

Article 26

1. States Parties shall recognize for every child the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance, and shall take the necessary measures to achieve the full realization of this right in accordance with their national law.

2. The benefits should, where appropriate, be granted, taking into account the resources and the circumstances of the child and persons having responsibility for the maintenance of the child, as well as any other consideration relevant to an application for benefits made by or on behalf of the child.

Article 27

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

2. The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development.

3. States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

4. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to secure the recovery of maintenance for the child from the parents or other persons having financial responsibility for the child, both within the State Party and from abroad. In particular, where the person having financial responsibility for the child lives in a State different from that of the child, States Parties shall promote the accession to international agreements or the conclusion of such agreements, as well as the making of other appropriate arrangements.

Article 28

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:
(a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;

(b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;

(c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;

(d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;

(e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.

3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

2. No part of the present article or Article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given

in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

Article 30

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

Article 31

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Article 32

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

2. States Parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure the implementation of the present article. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of other international instruments, States Parties shall in particular:
(a) Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;

(b) Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;

(c) Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article.

Article 33

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances.

Article 34

States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:
(a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;

(b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;

(c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

Article 35

States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.

Article 36

States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.

Article 37

States Parties shall ensure that:
(a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age;

(b) No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time;

(c) Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age.

In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances;

(d) Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action.

Article 38

1. States Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child.

2. States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 15 years do not take a direct part in hostilities.

3. States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of 15 years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of 15 years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, States Parties shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest.

4. In accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population in armed conflicts, States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict.

Article 39

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

Article 40

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others and which takes into account the child's age and the desirability of promoting the child's reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society.

2. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of international instruments, States Parties shall, in particular, ensure that:
(a) No child shall be alleged as, be accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law by reason of acts or omissions that were not prohibited by national or international law at the time they were committed;

(b) Every child alleged as or accused of having infringed the penal law has at least the following guarantees:
    (i) To be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law;

    (ii) To be informed promptly and directly of the charges against him or her, and, if appropriate, through his or her parents or legal guardians, and to have legal or other appropriate assistance in the preparation and presentation of his or her defence;

    (iii) To have the matter determined without delay by a competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body in a fair hearing according to law, in the presence of legal or other appropriate assistance and, unless it is considered not to be in the best interest of the child, in particular, taking into account his or her age or situation, his or her parents or legal guardians;

    (iv) Not to be compelled to give testimony or to confess guilt; to examine or have examined adverse witnesses and to obtain the participation and examination of witnesses on his or her behalf under conditions of equality;

    (v) If considered to have infringed the penal law, to have this decision and any measures imposed in consequence thereof reviewed by a higher competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body according to law;

    (vi) To have the free assistance of an interpreter if the child cannot understand or speak the language used;

    (vii) To have his or her privacy fully respected at all stages of the proceedings.

3. States Parties shall seek to promote the establishment of laws, procedures, authorities and institutions specifically applicable to children alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law, and, in particular:

(a) The establishment of a minimum age below which children shall be presumed not to have the capacity to infringe the penal law;

(b) Whenever appropriate and desirable, measures for dealing with such children without resorting to judicial proceedings, providing that human rights and legal safeguards are fully respected.

4. A variety of dispositions, such as care, guidance and supervision orders; counselling; probation; foster care; education and vocational training programmes and other alternatives to institutional care shall be available to ensure that children are dealt with in a manner appropriate to their well-being and proportionate both to their circumstances and the offence.

Article 41

Nothing in the present Convention shall affect any provisions which are more conducive to the realization of the rights of the child and which may be contained in:
(a) The law of a State party; or

(b) International law in force for that State.

PART II

Article 42

States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.

Article 43

1. For the purpose of examining the progress made by States Parties in achieving the realization of the obligations undertaken in the present Convention, there shall be established a Committee on the Rights of the Child, which shall carry out the functions hereinafter provided.

2. The Committee shall consist of ten experts of high moral standing and recognized competence in the field covered by this Convention. The members of the Committee shall be elected by States Parties from among their nationals and shall serve in their personal capacity, consideration being given to equitable geographical distribution, as well as to the principal legal systems.

3. The members of the Committee shall be elected by secret ballot from a list of persons nominated by States Parties. Each State Party may nominate one person from among its own nationals.

4. The initial election to the Committee shall be held no later than six months after the date of the entry into force of the present Convention and thereafter every second year. At least four months before the date of each election, the Secretary-General of the United Nations shall address a letter to States Parties inviting them to submit their nominations within two months. The Secretary-General shall subsequently prepare a list in alphabetical order of all persons thus nominated, indicating States Parties which have nominated them, and shall submit it to the States Parties to the present Convention.

5. The elections shall be held at meetings of States Parties convened by the Secretary-General at United Nations Headquarters. At those meetings, for which two thirds of States Parties shall constitute a quorum, the persons elected to the Committee shall be those who obtain the largest number of votes and an absolute majority of the votes of the representatives of States Parties present and voting.

6. The members of the Committee shall be elected for a term of four years. They shall be eligible for re-election if renominated. The term of five of the members elected at the first election shall expire at the end of two years; immediately after the first election, the names of these five members shall be chosen by lot by the Chairman of the meeting.

7. If a member of the Committee dies or resigns or declares that for any other cause he or she can no longer perform the duties of the Committee, the State Party which nominated the member shall appoint another expert from among its nationals to serve for the remainder of the term, subject to the approval of the Committee.

8. The Committee shall establish its own rules of procedure.

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9. The Committee shall elect its officers for a period of two years.

10. The meetings of the Committee shall normally be held at United Nations Headquarters or at any other convenient place as determined by the Committee. The Committee shall normally meet annually. The duration of the meetings of the Committee shall be determined, and reviewed, if necessary, by a meeting of the States Parties to the present Convention, subject to the approval of the General Assembly.

11. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall provide the necessary staff and facilities for the effective performance of the functions of the Committee under the present Convention.

12. With the approval of the General Assembly, the members of the Committee established under the present Convention shall receive emoluments from United Nations resources on such terms and conditions as the Assembly may decide.

Article 44

1. States Parties undertake to submit to the Committee, through the Secretary-General of the United Nations, reports on the measures they have adopted which give effect to the rights recognized herein and on the progress made on the enjoyment of those rights
(a) Within two years of the entry into force of the Convention for the State Party concerned;

(b) Thereafter every five years.

2. Reports made under the present article shall indicate factors and difficulties, if any, affecting the degree of fulfilment of the obligations under the present Convention. Reports shall also contain sufficient information to provide the Committee with a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Convention in the country concerned.

3. A State Party which has submitted a comprehensive initial report to the Committee need not, in its subsequent reports submitted in accordance with paragraph 1 (b) of the present article, repeat basic information previously provided.

4. The Committee may request from States Parties further information relevant to the implementation of the Convention.

5. The Committee shall submit to the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, every two years, reports on its activities.

6. States Parties shall make their reports widely available to the public in their own countries.

Article 45

In order to foster the effective implementation of the Convention and to encourage international cooperation in the field covered by the Convention:
(a) The specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund, and other United Nations organs shall be entitled to be represented at the consideration of the implementation of such provisions of the present Convention as fall within the scope of their mandate. The Committee may invite the specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund and other competent bodies as it may consider appropriate to provide expert advice on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their respective mandates. The Committee may invite the specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund, and other United Nations organs to submit reports on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their activities;

(b) The Committee shall transmit, as it may consider appropriate, to the specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund and other competent bodies, any reports from States Parties that contain a request, or indicate a need, for technical advice or assistance, along with the Committee's observations and suggestions, if any, on these requests or indications;

(c) The Committee may recommend to the General Assembly to request the Secretary-General to undertake on its behalf studies on specific issues relating to the rights of the child;

(d) The Committee may make suggestions and general recommendations based on information received pursuant to Articles 44 and 45 of the present Convention. Such suggestions and general recommendations shall be transmitted to any State Party concerned and reported to the General Assembly, together with comments, if any, from States Parties.

PART III

Article 46
The present Convention shall be open for signature by all States.

Article 47
The present Convention is subject to ratification. Instruments of ratification shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Article 48
The present Convention shall remain open for accession by any State. The instruments of accession shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Article 49
1. The present Convention shall enter into force on the thirtieth day following the date of deposit with the Secretary-General of the United Nations of the twentieth instrument of ratification or accession.

2. For each State ratifying or acceding to the Convention after the deposit of the twentieth instrument of ratification or accession, the Convention shall enter into force on the thirtieth day after the deposit by such State of its instrument of ratification or accession.

Article 50
1. Any State Party may propose an amendment and file it with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Secretary-General shall thereupon communicate the proposed amendment to States Parties, with a request that they indicate whether they favour a conference of States Parties for the purpose of considering and voting upon the proposals. In the event that, within four months from the date of such communication, at least one third of the States Parties favour such a conference, the Secretary-General shall convene the conference under the auspices of the United Nations. Any amendment adopted by a majority of States Parties present and voting at the conference shall be submitted to the General Assembly for approval.

2. An amendment adopted in accordance with paragraph 1 of the present article shall enter into force when it has been approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations and accepted by a two-thirds majority of States Parties.

3. When an amendment enters into force, it shall be binding on those States Parties which have accepted it, other States Parties still being bound by the provisions of the present Convention and any earlier amendments which they have accepted.

Article 51
1. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall receive and circulate to all States the text of reservations made by States at the time of ratification or accession.

2. A reservation incompatible with the object and purpose of the present Convention shall not be permitted.

3. Reservations may be withdrawn at any time by notification to that effect addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall then inform all States. Such notification shall take effect on the date on which it is received by the Secretary-General.

Article 52
A State Party may denounce the present Convention by written notification to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Denunciation becomes effective one year after the date of receipt of the notification by the Secretary-General.

Article 53
The Secretary-General of the United Nations is designated as the depositary of the present Convention.

Article 54
The original of the present Convention, of which the Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish texts are equally authentic, shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.
IN WITNESS THEREOF the undersigned plenipotentiaries, being duly authorized thereto by their respective governments, have signed the present Convention.

UNICEF UK
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London EC1V 0DU

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unicef

A SUMMARY OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

unicef

UNITED KINGDOM

ARTICLE 1 (definition of the child)
Everyone under the age of 18 has all the rights in the Convention.

ARTICLE 2 (non-discrimination)
The Convention applies to every child without discrimination, whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities or any other status, whatever they think or say, whatever their family background.

ARTICLE 3 (best interests of the child)
The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.

ARTICLE 4 (implementation of the Convention)
Governments must do all they can to make sure every child can enjoy their rights by creating systems and passing laws that promote and protect children's rights.

ARTICLE 5 (parental guidance and a child's evolving capacities)
Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and carers to provide guidance and direction to their child as they grow up, so that they fully enjoy their rights. This must be done in a way that recognises the child's increasing capacity to make their own choices.

ARTICLE 6 (life, survival and development)
Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential.

ARTICLE 7 (birth registration, name, nationality, care)
Every child has the right to be registered at birth, to have a name and nationality, and, as far as possible, to know and be cared for by their parents.

ARTICLE 8 (protection and preservation of identity)
Every child has the right to an identity. Governments must respect and protect that right, and prevent the child's name, nationality or family relationships from being changed unlawfully.

ARTICLE 9 (separation from parents)
Children must not be separated from their parents against their will unless it is in their best interests (for example, if a parent is hurting or neglecting a child). Children whose parents have separated have the right to stay in contact with both parents, unless this could cause them harm.

ARTICLE 10 (family reunification)
Governments must respond quickly and sympathetically if a child or their parents apply to live together in the same country. If a child's parents live apart in different countries, the child has the right to visit and keep in contact with both of them.

ARTICLE 11 (abduction and non-return of children)
Governments must do everything they can to stop children being taken out of their own country illegally by their parents or other relatives, or being prevented from returning home.

ARTICLE 12 (respect for the views of the child)
Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life.

ARTICLE 13 (freedom of expression)
Every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information, as long as it is within the law.

ARTICLE 14 (freedom of thought, belief and religion)
Every child has the right to think and believe what they choose and also to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents to guide their child as they grow up.

ARTICLE 15 (freedom of association)
Every child has the right to meet with other children and to join groups and organisations, as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights.

ARTICLE 16 (right to privacy)
Every child has the right to privacy. The law should protect the child's private, family and home life, including protecting children from unlawful attacks that harm their reputation.

ARTICLE 17 (access to information from the media)
Every child has the right to reliable information from a variety of sources, and governments should encourage the media to provide information that children can understand. Governments must help protect children from materials that could harm them.

ARTICLE 18 (parental responsibilities and state assistance)
Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their child and should always consider what is best for the child. Governments must support parents by creating support services for children and giving parents the help they need to raise their children.

ARTICLE 19 (protection from violence, abuse and neglect)
Governments must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.

ARTICLE 20 (children unable to live with their family)
If a child cannot be looked after by their immediate family, the government must give them special protection and assistance. This includes making sure the child is provided with alternative care that is continuous and respects the child's culture, language and religion.

ARTICLE 21 (adoption)
Governments must oversee the process of adoption to make sure it is safe, lawful and that it prioritises children's best interests. Children should only be adopted outside of their country if they cannot be placed with a family in their own country.

ARTICLE 22 (refugee children)
If a child is seeking refuge or has refugee status, governments must provide them with appropriate protection and assistance to help them enjoy all the rights in the Convention. Governments must help refugee children who are separated from their parents to be reunited with them.

ARTICLE 23 (children with a disability)
A child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community. Governments must do all they can to support disabled children and their families.

ARTICLE 24 (health and health services)
Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.

ARTICLE 25 (review of treatment in care)
If a child has been placed away from home for the purpose of care or protection (for example, with a foster family or in hospital), they have the right to a regular review of their treatment, the way they are cared for and their wider circumstances.

ARTICLE 26 (social security)
Every child has the right to benefit from social security. Governments must provide social security, including financial support and other benefits, to families in need of assistance.

ARTICLE 27 (adequate standard of living)
Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.

ARTICLE 28 (right to education)
Every child has the right to an education. Primary education must be free and different forms of secondary education must be available to every child. Discipline in schools must respect children's dignity and their rights. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.

ARTICLE 29 (goals of education)
Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.

ARTICLE 30 (children from minority or indigenous groups)
Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.

ARTICLE 31 (leisure, play and culture)
Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.

ARTICLE 32 (child labour)
Governments must protect children from economic exploitation and work that is dangerous or might harm their health, development or education. Governments must set a minimum age for children to work and ensure that work conditions are safe and appropriate.

ARTICLE 33 (drug abuse)
Governments must protect children from the illegal use of drugs and from being involved in the production or distribution of drugs.

ARTICLE 34 (sexual exploitation)
Governments must protect children from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.

ARTICLE 35 (abduction, sale and trafficking)
Governments must protect children from being abducted, sold or moved illegally to a different place in or outside their country for the purpose of exploitation.

ARTICLE 36 (other forms of exploitation)
Governments must protect children from all other forms of exploitation, for example the exploitation of children for political activities, by the media or for medical research.

ARTICLE 37 (inhumane treatment and detention)
Children must not be tortured, sentenced to the death penalty or suffer other cruel or degrading treatment or punishment. Children should be arrested, detained or imprisoned only as a last resort and for the shortest time possible. They must be treated with respect and care, and be able to keep in contact with their family. Children must not be put in prison with adults.

ARTICLE 38 (war and armed conflicts)
Governments must not allow children under the age of 15 to take part in war or join the armed forces. Governments must do everything they can to protect and care for children affected by war and armed conflicts.

ARTICLE 39 (recovery from trauma and reintegration)
Children who have experienced neglect, abuse, exploitation, torture or who are victims of war must receive special support to help them recover their health, dignity, self-respect and social life.

ARTICLE 40 (juvenile justice)
A child accused or guilty of breaking the law must be treated with dignity and respect. They have the right to legal assistance and a fair trial that takes account of their age. Governments must set a minimum age for children to be tried in a criminal court and manage a justice system that enables children who have been in conflict with the law to reintegrate into society.

ARTICLE 41 (respect for higher national standards)
If a country has laws and standards that go further than the present Convention, then the country must keep these laws.

ARTICLE 42 (knowledge of rights)
Governments must actively work to make sure children and adults know about the Convention.

The Convention has 54 articles in total. Articles 43–54 are about how adults and governments must work together to make sure all children can enjoy all their rights, including:

ARTICLE 45
Unicef can provide expert advice and assistance on children's rights.

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Appendix 2 – Theoretical Frameworks (Adapted from: Ministry of Education (1996);

Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998; UNCRC,1989; and Lundy (2007)

Ethics Approval Form

GUIDANCE NOTES

PART 1 of this form is to be completed by any researcher (staff or PG student) who has answered 'YES' to one or more questions on the "Ethics Checklist" and forwarded to the relevant Institute Ethics Representative.

PART 2 is to be completed by the relevant Institute. If the project is approved at this stage, Part 2a is completed and a copy of the form is forwarded to both the Graduate Research School and to the researcher. Ethical Review is now complete. If it is not approved, Part 2b is completed and a copy of the form is forwarded to both the Graduate Research School and to the researcher. The researcher now has the opportunity in Part 2c, if he/she chooses, to address any issues raised by the Institute. Once Part 2c has been completed the form should be forwarded to the Secretary of the Institutional Ethics Committee.

PART 3 is to be completed by the Chair and/or Secretary of the Institutional Ethics Committee. If the project is approved at this stage, Part 3a is completed. If it is not approved, Part 3b is completed. In both instances, a copy of the form is to be forwarded to both the Graduate Research School and to the researcher.

Ethics Approval Form

PART 1 – Details of Research Project and Ethical Issues

Researcher:	Mrs Alison Dilys Moore
Email:	alison.moore@admcreativesolutions.com
Institute:	Education
Status:	Research Student
Supervisor (if PG student):	Scott Buckler
Project Title:	Where is the voice of the child? An investigation of how children's perspectives, of their early childhood setting, with in Children's centres, are collected and used to inform service design and decision making with a specific focus on developing an understanding of what is required to incorporate the 'voice of the child'.

Project outline (give brief details of the aims and objectives of the project and the methods that will be used; if the research involves human subjects you must detail the selection process, sample size and type, exclusion criteria and if the subjects will be paid an *honorarium*):

Aim - To examine in depth the processes adopted and applied by Children's Centres to enable the voice of the child to be heard.

Objectives -

To understand what factors contribute to these processes being successful or not.

Evidence where processes are shown to be successful and why

Where evidence shows the processes to be less successful, develop and test a model to support improvement.

Research Question

Where is the voice of the child in Children's Centres and how is it used by the practitioners to evidence impact and outcomes?

Methodology

Qualitative Case Study Approach in a Children's Centres in Birmingham

Methods

Participant Observations, using Video, Narrative Interviews with parents. Focus groups with Teachers and professionals, The Mosaic Approach - multi method approach.

Sample:

5 Babies (defined under 2), 10 Children (up to 5yrs), 8 Parents (for Narrative Interviews), Staff caring for the children, Teachers from the schools the children move onto. Family Support & Early Years Practitioners working in the Children's Centres.

Purposive Sampling will be used. Research needs to take into account different times of the day and different staff with their key group. Therefore selection of children will be from across different times of the day and different days of the week to include a number of children and activities and experiences.

What ethical issues came to light in completing the ethical checklist?

> **1. Participants who are particulary vulnerable or unable to give informed consent - Children.**
>
> **2. Co-operation of gatekeeper for initial access to group/participants**
>
> **3. Insider Research and observer effect**

How does your research design address these issues?

> **Use BERA Ethical Guidelines for Eduactional Research**
>
> **1. Informed consent from the parents. Seeking Child's Assent, that children can be active participants in research that relates to their lives and experiences. Use observational skills to ensure position of self as researcher is not causing distress. Take time to build up trust and rappore with the children before any research starts to take place. Build up trust and confidence of the staff that the children trust and have confidence in. Children have the right not to participate and to withdraw from the research.**
>
> **2. Seek approval and consent from Centre Lead agency, and all partcipants with in the centre. Signed consent for evidence to be used. Explicit about research and maintain effective communication to ensure full understanding of the research. Feedback continuously. Make position of self as researcher very clear, establish framework for research and set boundaries. Inform the participants that they have the right to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time.**
>
> **3. Spend time developing trust and understanding of the research, with the staff team prior to the research commencing. Ensure they fully understand the research and that they are comfortable with being recorded by video. Ensure feedback sessions and peer review of the video are built into the research schedule. Ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported.**

Signature of Researcher: Date: June 2012

Signature of Supervisor (if PG student):   Date: June 2012

PLEASE NOW FORWARD THIS FORM TO YOUR INSTITUTE ETHICS REPRESENTATIVE

PART 3 – Institutional Ethical Review

3a.

The researcher has undergone institutional ethical review and has demonstrated that the ethical issues have been satisfactorily addressed. I/We thus confirm that the project has the University's ethical approval:

Signature of Secretary of Ethics Committee:	_____	Date:	23.01.2013
Signature of Chair of Ethics Committee:	_____	Date:	

Please give details of how the researcher was able to demonstrate that he/she had satisfactorily addressed the ethical issues:

> **Alison provided full responses to all the queries raised in a separate document, 18/12/2012. These were felt, by the IoE ESC to be appropriate and relevant responses. There were two points that were considered not to be completely addressed:**
>
> **It was felt that further detail on how the data protection act would be complied with would be helpful - how will the data be kept confidential, for example and for how long will questionnaires be stored?**
>
> **Further clarity is needed on how parents will be selected from the sample.**
>
> **There is no need to update the sub-committee on these points and ethical approval is given, but we recommend that Alison addresses these points in her research / write-up.**
>
> **Sue Howarth 23.01.2013**

3b.

The researcher has undergone institutional ethical review and did not demonstrate that the ethical issues have been satisfactorily addressed. I/We thus confirm that the project does NOT have the University's ethical approval:

Signature of Secretary of Ethics Committee:	_____	Date:	
Signature of Chair of Ethics Committee:	_____	Date:	

Please give details of why you felt the researcher was unable to demonstrate that he/she had satisfactorily addressed the ethical issues:

Appendix 4 – Parents Interview Guide

Parent Interview – Schedule

Opening Question – Family Tree	Can you tell me about your family? – mapping everyone in the family How old are they? What do they do? How are they related?
Introductory Question - **Brief Life history**	Can you describe your brief life history before starting at the Children's Centre?
Transition Question-Aspirations	1. What aspirations do you have for your child/ren? 2. Are the services/support providing enough support to help with aspirations? 3. Are there any barriers to you achieving your aspirations? 4. How does this link with what the child/ren want?
Focus Question/s	1. Can you identify the key challenges you were facing/faced as a parent that your child/ren faced/facing before you received support?
Services/Support	1. How long have you been using the centre/accessing support? 2. Having identified the challenges, you faced/are facing can you tell me about the services and/or support you received/are receiving and your child/ren received/are receiving? • Is there other support/services you access independently from the centre? 3. Did you receive the service at home/centre/somewhere else?

Feelings of Services/Support	How do you feel/felt about the services/support you received/are receiving?
	   • Are services approachable?
	   • Are they offering what you need/want?
	   • Is there something else they could be offering?
	   • Do you feel services promote independence /empowerment or dependence?
	
	What do you think you child/ren feel/felt about the services/support they receive/received?

Health	As a family how do you promote your own health needs? • All health: physical and emotional How do you feel your health impacts on the children? How do you feel your health & wellbeing will impact on what you and the family want to do in the future?
Impact of services and/or support	What do you feel was different after you accessed the service/support? What difference do you feel it made to the child/ren? • What activities do you think supported their learning & development and how?
Summarising Question/s	1. After all that has been discussed through the questions and the responses – Can you tell me what you feel is the most important to you at this present time?
Conclusion Question	1. Have we missed anything or is there something you feel we should have talked about but didn't? Thank you.

Transcript of Audio Parent Interview 06/12/2016 – 'Paula's Portrait'

A - can you tell me a little bit about the family - a bit like a family tree how old they are, what they do and how you're all related.

J - me I'm 33, I'm mum ▇ who's 11, my sister who's 39 ▇ aunty, my mum is 65, they're not close they live in ▇ where I grew up, that's kind of it really not really got much contact with my extended family apart from that

A - can you describe a brief history before starting at the children's centre

J - to get a better understanding of it all - my mum suffered from mental health issues so we were in an out of care, she had cancer twice so we were in care then. last time I was put into care I was 14 through my adolescence it was really destructive and I became involved in drugs and crime, when I fell pregnant with ▇ I got arrested for something and I got a four year custodial sentence so I had ▇ when I was in prison, I went into custody 3 weeks before my due date and I was sentenced on my due date to 4 years and he came a week later, I went to a mother and baby unit and then an open prison to tend for ▇ needs more because ▇ was getting older and at the open prison you could go out more, go shopping once a week, more town visits to integrate ▇ into society, it was quite interesting and for me it worked. when I got my parole date and was released it was really hard for me because I didn't speak to my mum for 6 years and we are quite a distant family but because of ▇ and coming out prison I tried to build that relationship but is was mentally draining me as well because a lot has gone on in the past and then obviously with my offences and my past I had to make the decision whether to go home or make a start and that was my decision to do that for ▇, cause I couldn't live with my mum because there was too much emotionally going on with me and I didn't want to reoffend and put myself in a predicament that put me and ▇ at risk so I moved to a mother and baby flat hostel thing place whilst waiting to get housed supported accommodation and then I got this place here in ▇ so I took it and then I went to the park one day took ▇ to the local park and saw this girl who had a little girl the same age of ▇ and they got on really well and then she was like I haven't recognised you round here and I explained I'm new to the area and she said about play ad stay sessions and asked me to go with her, I got in touch with the sure start centre through the girl i met at the park. I think I was depressed and lonely i went out as an independent person with a very destructive background and came out with a 2 year old attached to my hip and even though we had had town visits ▇ wasn't used to roads and would run everywhere which was quite stressful and I think because a lot was going on and trying to rebuild the relationship with my mum with her mental health issues I felt like I wasn't playing with ▇ and I was maybe not interacting with ▇ as much, my family support worker came in ▇ and did some play sessions with me in the home, it was my issue basically but it was that reassurance from someone, I think I was scared of repeating history or whatever and then I was drinking quite a bit because I was lonely I went to my family support worker I think what I liked about ▇ is ▇ always ▇ always supported me no matter what even if I was at fault, when I said I was drinking quite a bit ▇ made me ring Aquarius and they started to ask about ▇ and I was drinking most evenings of the week when ▇ was in bed. 7pm I was lonely so would drink and get all emotional. When they started asking about ▇ I got scared and put down the phone. the rapport I had with my family support worker ▇ knew that would be enough for me and it was and ▇ started to encourage me regardless of my background and what I wanted to do I wanted to do social work and support others and use my negative experiences to help others. ▇ encouraged me to go college to do my access course to do maths and English ▇ supported me through my degree ▇ was even

there on my graduation day ██ a pretty amazing woman. I always get her upset when I talk about ██, ██ was my inspiration that was my inspiration how I wanted to get well and give it back ██ was the only one that had ever listened and supported me with what I wanted to do. ██ never made me feel too scared even with the drinking I wasn't scared to approach ██, ██ was stern firm and fair but it wasn't unworkable.

A - do you think that, I've heard this, it's been ██ I've been hearing about, was it because it was consistent

J - yes that rapport you build with someone that's where you get the trust and open up to people

A - how long have you been using the centre

J - I moved here January 08 ██ was about 2 2 1/2 and he is 11 now,

A - did it carry on as children's centres are under 5 did they carry on after he turned 5

J - yes they did obviously they've got to that point where they have to sign you off, because of the support I have had I was maintaining myself anyway so my issues were addressed I didn't want to let go but ██ said I don't need you and need to sign you off as ██ is over the threshold. They are still there I've been using the computer for job applications and they've helped me with a reference for jobs there still supportive if I go in there with a parenting issue I asked ██ the other day struggling full time work with childcare because there's no afterschool club and the one that is nursery based which ██ isn't going to appreciate at 11 years from 3.30 - 5.30 at night. what's the age where obviously preparing for secondary school, what's the age where it's good for ██ to come home on ██ own for an hour, not quite yet leave until secondary school anything like that I can always go to for advice and I get sound advice

A - having identified the challenges your faced tell me about some of the services and the kind of support right at the start when your first

J - at the play and stay sessions because I was isolated because ██ unawareness of the roads so obviously that turned into challenging behaviour and then id freak out because of it so I did Triple P and PHP

A - how did you find those

J - good it was nice, sharing stories with others, I felt isolated normally if you have your first child you go to your parent and I couldn't do that it was nice to have someone to talk to and it was getting me out of the house in the day, then the play session what ██ did with me

A - toy library?

J - yes they had toy library but I never really used that, even though the relationship with my mum they do get him good gifts and toys and we've never really struggled from that point and I'm good at money management. I did at one point, there was ██ from ██ centre helped me with some sort of debt. I think the law firm used to help with money management but then they stopped all that because of cut backs again. When you go back to the history have done a lot of work.

A - did ██ go to crèche

J - yes ██ did

A - anything in the holidays?

J - we've done the local fayres and the fete days in the summer holidays, did a coach trip to Weston and there was another one ███ was in the bath don't know what █ was doing but I went to stop █ and █ smashed █ face █ remembers it better then I did, when █ went to school about 4 when █ was asked how █ did it he said mummy did it which in a sense I did trying to stop █ falling, quite remember what it was but I got treated quite badly with that one and because of my history in care I was scared that they were going to take █ off me. █ was fantastic with that I was quite resistant to authority and working with service before I come across quite hostile my mum was with me when social services used to come.

A - is █ like an advocate for you

J - yes definitely

A - did you receive in the home or centre, both isn't it

J - yes

A - what do you think ██, speaking for ██ now, what did █ think of the services, crèche

J - it was great we didn't know anybody, had no family here or friends, it integrated ██ into society and built █ a support network so when █ went to nursery there were familiar faces there built up the confidence and the social aspect and the play and stay that's your child development, its all of it really

A - so do you feel █ was ready for school after going to all those services

J - Yes he's always been a pretty socialable kid but I think that's from being on the mother and baby unit because there was always 12 mothers and babies

A - is he independent

J - yes he's always been alright

A - so in relation to health as a family how would you rate your health needs now emotionally and physical

J - physical if I get signs of stress, I go through phases, I like boxing I might go for a run or swim, boxing at the moment on a Wednesday. I appreciate ██ more now and sometimes if I feel down well have a date night. Health wise were both fine we visit the dentist regularly if I have any issues we go to the doctors, we eat healthily

A - you'd know where to get help from if you needed it

J - Yes

A - did you use your health visitor much when you came ████████

J - ██ was over 2 so not really in a sense that's an important part where the children's centre came into play ██ was a very young child but not in need of a health visitor but without that probably would of been a little lost

A - changed quite a lot now as having 2 1/2-year-old check by the health visitor

J - 2 until they go to school is a big gap

A - 5 mandatory visits have to be carried out one of which is 2 1/2-year check

J - that's good specially cases of baby p

A - what do you feel is different after accessing all these services

J - feel like Britain in Bloom, it's just give me the reassurance that I need to go on and put it back, give it back imp well established aren't I, I can use my experiences and then the experiences form professionals that have worked well with me, obviously it's how I've engaged as well, you will always have boundary with people

A - maybe more aware of what you might face

J - my parenting to be more understanding, not so snappy with ▮▮, talk it through more with them whereas parents tend to be hot headed and scream and shout a lot, now I'll explain to ▮▮ after why and I find that works a lot better now, ill break it down and talk to ▮▮ about it

A - how do you think you all the experiences you went through impacted ▮▮

J - really difficult that one is, to be like really and say at no point it impacted on ▮▮ it must of done but

A - said the roads, clearly identified

J - probably did to be fair it's just me and ▮▮ everything I was going through ▮▮ was going through he got the backlash of everything

A - but you've dealt with all of that and the CC has really helped

J - yes it's that support and like I said not making you feel that you can't approach somebody and its workable

A - after all we've discussed and your questions and responses can you tell me what you feel is the most important to you at this present time for you ▮▮▮▮

J - I've got the degree and I work as family support worker meant to be going back to do my masters in social work and without ▮▮ believing in me and listening to what I want to do I can put it into practice and setting small steps and goals and targets to get where we are I wouldn't be where I am now, parenting, morals, values all of me as a person ▮▮▮▮▮, set a good example to ▮▮ we came from this ▮▮ watched me study and now work so it gives that same morals again otherwise we could have a low income family on job seekers allowance, repeating that cycle, I'm the first one to break that family circle

A - aspirations, those are them

J - Yes

A - do you see any barriers at the moment to getting them, money and MA

J - they've accepted me in today's society they are not looking for a text book social worker they want transferrable skills, money is a big one and just whether any of my experiences might come into play when doing it whether that will affect me emotionally and mentally, pretty well driven

A - have we missed anything or is there something you feel we should have talked about that we haven't, about the centre

J - no all the cut backs that have been made I remember years ago a benefit clinic was running the one day and because of cutbacks couldn't use the phone, absolute joke really, the computer been

really restricted but everyone's still really helpful, you can go in there and don't get turned away, can't do this for you but will find an alternative

A - we all find it hard when we are told we can't do something and try and find a way round it, building itself approachable and friendly

J - yes bit where walk in can sit and chill, nursery, sensory room is good, home start volunteered to be a family support worker there, even though he was over 5 and couldn't support any more, last year finished degree struggled to find a job because of experience they helped me volunteer with Home Start to get the experience

A - you did home start training

J - finished that stopped volunteering when I got this job, October home start volunteer

A - they helped you with the application

J - cause of my criminal record that was a barrier and they want 2 years' experience so to put on my CV to say I've done family support work, they still support me I don't think they'll ever stop they can't get rid of me.

A - it can be hard to stop working with some families as you can see now, to come out with a degree is amazing

Appendix 5 – Coding Framework

Phase 1 Coding Framework – Parent Interview Audio Data Sources - Developing Themes

1= Of interest and some use   2= Very useful   3= Very useful and 'thick' (Geertz)

Key: Support Network, Transformation, **Children's needs**, Knowledge

Participant(s):- ■	Data source type:- Interview		Date data was generated:-061216
Total running time of footage:- hr	Audio reference:- 061216 ■		
Area	**Developing themes /Topic Coding**	**Significance (1 – 5)**	**Further notes/Child Voice/UNCRC**
Opening Question – Family Tree	Single Parent (33) Son aged 11. Although well over 5yrs was worth interviewing to see the difference the CC services has made to their lives. Has a sister (39) and their mom (65) Distance away and estranged. No other family	1	
Brief Life History Pre Intervention	Very difficult childhood. A mom with mental health resulting in the children being brought up in care/in and out of care. Drug use, crime. **Got pregnant and custodial sentence 4 years. Had the baby in prison and spent 2 years of the son's life in prison.** Moved into an open prison which had a bit more freedom. Shopping out once a week to enable rehabilitation into community. Made the decision to move to ■ away from past and bad influences. Was doing OK but started to use alcohol of an evening as was lonely	2 2	Voice
Key challenges you were facing/faced as a parent	Past life influenced current position. **Difficult attachment** having been in an institution for the first 2 years of son's life. Son had challenging behaviour. Wasn't used to roads. Found it difficult to manage his behaviour Alcohol dependant	2 3	Voice

That your child/ren faced/facing before you received support?	Didn't like authority because of experience		
Focus Question/s **Services/Support**	2008. Was in the local park and started to talk to another parent. They told her about the CC and Stay & Plays. Started to attend. Never looked back. Stay & Play **Parenting Programmes – Triple P and PHP.** **Debt Advice** **Coach Trips** **Creche** Support at home and at centre. **Volunteered with Home Start to gain experience. Trained with them. They gave her the opportunity the CC set it up. Help with Support to gain English, Maths and get onto Access Course the Degree.**	2 2 2	Space Influence Influence
Feelings of **Services/Support**	Son gained confidence, independence, socialised and integrated with other children. Gave support when most needed. Consistent member of staff. Approachable. Firm as required but solution focused.	2 3	Space Voice Space Audience Influence
Health As a family how do you promote your own health needs? • All health: physical and emotional	Well now but acknowledges would have been very different without CC.	2	Space Audience Influence

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How do you feel your health impacts on the children? How do you feel your health & wellbeing will impact on what you and the family want to do in the future?			
Impact of services and/or support	Feels like "Britain in Bloom" Knows the CC made the difference	3	Space Audience Influence
	Successfully completed Degree and now Family Support Worker with Vulnerable clients/Housing	3	Space Audience Influence
Summarising Question/s	Wants to do MA and be Social Worker Barrier is funding course. Concerns past history will affect her becoming a SW.	2	Influence
Aspirations	Role model for son. Broken cycle by striving to work	2	Space Voice Influence
Conclusion Questions			

Appendix 6 – Practitioners Interview Guide

Focus Group Question Guide

Opening Question	Name, position and how long worked in the organisation?
Introductory Question	What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the phrase 'Open listening climate'?
Transition Question	Think back to a time you didn't feel listened to – How did that make you feel? Think back to a time you felt listened to – How did that make you feel?
Focus Question/s SPACE	1. Have Children's Views been actively sought, and can you describe how? 2. Is there a safe space where children can express themselves freely and can you describe this space? 3. How do you take steps to ensure all children can take part?
VOICE	1. What information have children been given to ensure they know how to form a view? 2. Do children know they do not have to take part and how do you facilitate this? 3. Have children been given a range of options of how to express themselves and can you describe some of these options?
AUDIENCE	1. What processes are in place for communicating children's Views? 2. How do you ensure children know who their views are being communicated to? 3. Does that person/people have the power to make decisions and can you give an example when this has happened?
INFLUENCE	1. How have the children's views been considered by those who have the powers to effect change? 2. What procedures or processes are in place to ensure children know their views have been taken seriously? 3. Have the children been provided with feedback and if yes can you describe how this was achieved?
Summarising Question	1. After all that has been discussed through the questions and the responses – Can you tell me what you feel is the most important to you at this present time? 2. Can you think of one area of your/the centre's practice that you could start to change/influence?
Conclusion Question	1. Have we missed anything or is there something you feel we should have talked about but didn't? 2. This is the first of a number of focus groups I am holding in the two centres with Family Support and Early Years. Do you have any advice of how I could improve?

Appendix 7 – Informed Consent Organisations

Alison Moore
P/T PhD Student University of Worcester

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

How can the voice of the child be effectively 'heard' and facilitate change in a Locality of Children's Centres?

I (insert name)   (insert position)   authorise for Alison Moore, P/T PhD Student, University of Worcester, to undertake research within and with employees of (insert organisation).

I have read the Participant Information Sheet provided and understand that Alison Moore has received appropriate Ethical Approval from the University of Worcester to undertake the research.

I understand how the research will be conducted and the methods that will be used and I will ensure Alison Moore is made aware of and adheres to all policies and procedures that relate to the research.

I understand that (insert organisation) can have the option to withdraw from the research at any time.

Signature

Name

Date

N.B Review to take place every 3 months to ensure all parties involved in the research are satisfied with the progress and that all policies and procedures have been adhered to within the scope of the research. A record of this review will be recorded and maintained and form part of the documentation audit trail within the study.

Dates of reviews scheduled to be held in the first year:

 January 2016.

April 2016

July 2016

October 2016

Appendix 8 – Informed Consent Practitioners

Consent to Participate in a Research Programme

Research Title

How can practice be changed to ensure the voice of the child is more effectively heard in the creation of an open listening climate across teams in Children's Centres?

I have read the attached Participant Information Sheet and understand the aims of the study, the methodology & methods and that ethical approval has been granted by the University of Worcester.

The CEO/Centre Manager and/or accountable body for my organisation has signed informed consent for research to be undertaken with my organisation.

I have agreed to participate in phase 2 of the above research. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.

The research design is a Case Study working with 2 Children's Centre Study sites and as such follows the principles of relational and situational ethics. The research is participatory and collaborative and therefore as co-researchers and key-participants, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Please know that participation in this project is voluntary and that you may choose at any time not to participate.

I give consent for photographs and/or recordings to be taken during the research, with the understanding that these will be used to aid the researcher in documenting the event. (see use for media consent form)

The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.

I understand that additional informed consent will be sought from the adults (staff and parents and child participants).

I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing or questioned on why I have withdrawn.

I voluntarily agree and give my full consent to participate in the research

Participant's Name (Print): ....
Participant's Signature: ....
Researcher's Name (Print): Alison Moore ....
Researcher's Signature: ....
Date 24th January 2017

Birmingham City University - Research Consent

Appendix 8 – Informed Consent Practitioners - Media

Participant Consent Form – Use of media

Research Title:

How can practice be changed to ensure the voice of the child is more effectively heard in the creation of an open listening climate across teams in Children's Centres?

	Tick ✓	
The researcher has my permission to focus observations on my interactions with other participants during the research		
The researcher has my permission to access the photos, photo reflections, and other documents I develop as part of the reporting research		
The researcher has my permission to use audiotape and video recording equipment for group and individual conversations during the research		
The researcher has my permission to use audiotapes, video recorders, and photographs that may include me in presentations, as long as they do not identify me by name or through other background information without my consent.		

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate

Participant's name (PLEASE PRINT): ....

Email address: ....

Phone number: ....

Participant's Signature: ....

Date 28th June 2017

Researcher's Name: ....

Researcher's Signature: ....

Appendix 9 – Informed Consent Parents

Research Project - Consent to participate form

How can practice be changed to ensure the voice of the child is more effectively heard in the creation of an open listening climate across teams in Children's Centres?

My name is Alison Moore; I am a PhD Research Student at CREC (Centre for Research in Early Childhood) and Birmingham City University. I am also Head of Children's Services at ██████ ████████████████ As part of the research project I am capturing the voice of parents and children to understand the issues they face, their views on services that currently support them and uncovering insights of the way parents and children would like things to be.

I (print name) _____ am the parent / carer / legal guardian of _____(child's name under 5 only).

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, provided in the Information Sheet for Participants.	☐
2.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project. I understand my child's assent (consent) will also be gained.	☐
3.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing or questioned on why I have withdrawn.	☐
4.	The procedures regarding ethical approval and principles of ethics in the research, have been clearly explained.) to me.	☐
5.	Consent for audio recording and using photographs as part of the research, has been explained to me.	☐
6.	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	☐
7.	I, along with the researcher and the Children's Centre, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	☐

Name of Parent_____(print)

Signature_____

Date_____

Children's Centre Nominated Staff _____(print)

Signature_____

Date _____

Researcher's name _____(print)

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix 9 – Informed Consent Parents - Media

Participant Consent Form – Use of media

Research Title:

How can practice be changed to ensure the voice of the child is more effectively heard in the creation of an open listening climate across teams in Children's Centres?

	Tick ✓	
The researcher has my permission to focus observations on my interactions with other participants during the research		
The researcher has my permission to access the photos, photo reflections, and other documents I develop as part of the reporting research		
The researcher has my permission to use audiotape and video recording equipment for group and individual conversations during the research		
The researcher has my permission to use audiotapes, video recorders, and photographs that may include me in presentations, as long as they do not identify me by name or through other background information without my consent.		

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this pilot

Participant's name (PLEASE PRINT): ....

Email address: ....

Phone number: ....

Participant's Signature: ....

Date 28th June 2017

Researcher's Name: ....

Researcher's Signature: ....

Appendix 10 – Dissemination of Research

Publications

Moore, A, (2020) How to create an Open Listening Climate Using the Lundy Model of child participation with adults. In: J. Murry, B.B. Swadner and K. Smith, eds. *The Routledge International handbook of young children's rights.* London: Routledge, pp 447-459

Moore, A (lead author)., Roche-Nagi, K, and Shaikh, H. (2020) Social Collaboration: Developing Community Engagement through fostering exploration, curiosity and resilience for learning for life. *In National Early Years Research Day Proceedings* Volume 1 Early Childhood Ireland, pp. 102-104

Year: 2015

Organisation	Title of Conference	Title of Presentation
Worcester University	Sharing Research	Poster
Association for Professional Development (TACTYC	Children's and Practitioners' experiences of early years care and education: Advocating for young children through research & Practice	How can child's voice be effectively heard and facilitate change within a locality of Children's Centres in England? (Moore, 2015)
European Early Childhood Education Research (EECERA)	Innovation, Experimentation and Adventure in Early Childhood	How can child's voice be effectively heard and facilitate change within a locality of Children's Centres in England? (Moore, 2015)

Year: 2016

Organisation	Title of Conference	Title of Presentation
Queens University Belfast	Children's Rights Based Participation Summer School	How can practice be changed to ensure the voice of the child is more effectively heard in the creation of an open listening climate across teams in Children's Centres? (Moore, 2016)
European Early Childhood Education Research (EECERA)	Happiness, Relationships, Emotion & Deep Level Learning	Changing practice in Children's Centre Teams: How to create an open listening climate respecting the voice of the child (Moore 2016)
Birmingham City Council	Good Practice Event Children's Centres	Changing practice in Children's Centre Teams: How to create an open listening climate respecting the voice of the child (Moore 2016)

Year: 2018

Organisation	Title of Conference	Title of Presentation
British Early Childhood Research (BECERA)	Creativity & Critical Thinking in Early Years	Changing practice in Children's Centres: How to create an open listening climate respecting the voice of the child (Moore, 2018)
Liverpool Hope University (Special Interest Group EECERA)	Debates in Children and family well-being	Improving pedagogy in Children's Centres: How to create an open listening climate respecting the voice of the child (Moore, 2018)
European Early Childhood Education Research (EECERA)	Early Childhood Education, Families and Communities	Positionality in Research: An ethical perspective on the insider-outsider continuum (Moore, 2018)
BASPCAN for Child Protection Professions	Annual Conference for BASPCAN West Midlands	Changing practice in Children's Centres: How to create an open listening climate respecting the voice of the child (Moore, 2018)

Year: 2019

Organisation	Title of Conference	Title of Presentation
Early Childhood Ireland	Providing Leadership to the first 5	Everyone has a story to tell: Parents' perceptions of child voice through a community engagement model (Moore, 2019)
University College Cork/Barnardos Ireland	Circle time, Selfies, Friends and Food: Researching Children's Voices in Early Years Settings	Understanding Child Voice through Parent Life Stories (Moore, 2019)
OMEP Ireland	Relationships Matter: What Matters in Early Years Relationships	How to create an open listening climate: Using the Lundy Model of Child Participation with Adults (Moore, 2019)
7th Children's Rights Research Symposium	Children's Rights Research: Pushing the Boundaries!	How to create an open listening climate: Using the Lundy Model of Child Participation with Adults (Moore, 2019)