

**Leading or Following Children's Learning?
A critical review of contradictory
discourses in the role of early childhood
educators**

Julie Arline Fisher

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of
Doctor of Philosophy by published work awarded by
Oxford Brookes University

Submitted September 2019

Word count, excluding Abstract, Table of contents, Appendices and References:
14,611

Acknowledgements

Engaging in the process of writing a PhD by published work is like a journey where one analyses the routes taken having already arrived at one's destination. Revisiting past papers and engaging once again with the text of my books has involved finding threads to my work and also to my thinking of which I was not, at the time, necessarily aware. What has been so rewarding has been the discovery of new theoretical perspectives which I am unlikely to have encountered without this challenge to delve into the wider literature.

This body of work would not have been achieved without the enthusiasm and contribution of the countless early years educators with whom I have engaged in research over the years – I have respect and affection for them all. But I also acknowledge those who have taken me on my long and at times difficult journey from being a writer to being a researcher, notably Professor Keith Postlethwaite at the University of Reading; Professor Kathy Sylva at the University of Oxford; Professor Kathryn Ecclestone at Oxford Brookes University and Professor Elizabeth Wood at the University of Sheffield.

Finally, I want to give grateful thanks to my supervisors, Professor Mary Wild and Doctor Susannah Wright for their constant encouragement and expert help and guidance in seeing this research journey through to its completion.

Abstract

Eight publications are presented with this thesis, with the first published in 1996 and the last in 2016. Three of the publications are books and five are peer reviewed journal articles arising from the research underpinning the books. Together, the publications constitute a coherent programme of research seeking to navigate contradictory discourses surrounding the role of early childhood educators in England since the introduction of regulation concerning early childhood education. The publications, which are both empirical and conceptually grounded, highlight increasing tensions for early years educators between an escalation in government prescription of early years curriculum content and an established early years pedagogy espousing child-led, play-based enquiry.

The research programme is framed around three action research projects which gave rise to and informed the submitted publications. Whilst the first project focused on the practice of one Reception teacher the other two involved large numbers of early years educators working across different age-phases and across different types of provision. Each project addressed practitioner concerns at the time, about the introduction of policy frameworks that appeared to demand changes to existing pedagogy and practice. The iterative processes within action research encouraged scrutiny of policy, analysis of current practice, engagement with relevant theory and reflective discussion. Being engaged in a 'community of researchers' was found to be particularly empowering for early childhood educators who sought to find ways through seemingly contradictory discourses in order to see them as complementary rather than in opposition.

This thesis, and the body of work submitted with it, offer empirically based strategies for balancing contradictory discourses surrounding the role of early childhood educators whilst also offering insights into changing educational practice through practitioner-led research.

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8. **Peer reviewed articles included in this submission:**

NOT INCLUDED IN ELECTRONIC VERSION FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS. Links added and functional as at 06.02.2020

- Article 1: 'Acknowledging Children as Competent Learners' (3 pages)
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0957514940140204>
- Article 2: 'Reflecting on the Principles of Early Years Practice' (10 pages) [No link available as at 06.02.2020]
- Article 3: "'We used to play in Foundation it was funner": investigating feelings about transition from Foundation Stage to Year 1' (15 pages) <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575140802672576>
- Article 4: 'Building on the Early Years Foundation Stage: developing good practice for transition into Key Stage 1' (12 pages)
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2010.512557>
- Article 5: 'Changing educational practice in the early years through practitioner-led action research: an Adult-Child Interaction Project' (16 pages) (Co-authored with Elizabeth Wood)
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2012.715400>

Introduction and Overview

The research programme outlined in this thesis has represented an ongoing response to the concerns of early childhood educators over the intensification of government regulation surrounding early learning in England during the twenty year period from 1996 to 2016. It is an exploration of the impact of policy frameworks over time as well as a positioning of new ways of understanding established concepts such as child-centred learning and 'teaching' as they apply to the early years. The principle focus throughout the research programme has been the changing role of early years educators in responding to, assimilating and accommodating changing views of children, childhood and the purposes of early education.

My life as a researcher began in 1994 whilst a novice university lecturer. This coincided with announcements by the British government signalling their intention to introduce, for the first time, universal outcomes for the education of children aged 3-5 years (resulting in DfEE/QCA 1996). Over the twenty years that followed, policy intervention has intensified, demanding a constant repositioning of the role of early childhood educators. Policy frameworks have increasingly narrowed this role towards one that 'helps children towards the knowledge, skills and understanding children should have at the end of the academic year in which they turn five' (DfE 2012:2). Such purposes appear contradictory to and at times in conflict with the established and frequently deeply-held beliefs of those trained to work in the early years. Beliefs arising from a discourse espousing 'each child is born unique because of 'nature's gifts' and he or she needs a unique environment to maximise them' (Brierley 1984: 38 see also Blenkin and Kelly 1994, 1997; Edwards and Knight 1994; Anning 1991). Whilst recognising the challenges, my research programme has sought to question whether these discourses have to be seen as contradictory, suggesting in fact that it is potentially problematic for children – and their educators - if they are. Evidence is growing that the more persistent adult-focused policy messages become, the less room remains for that 'unique child' (Miller and Pound 2011; Lea 2013; Brogaard Clausen et al. 2015; Wood 2019a, 2019b). Nevertheless, with policy continuing to move in the direction of increased prescription, ways need to be found for early childhood educators to develop pedagogy that accommodates both adult-led and child-led agendas and to see them as complementary rather than continually seeing them in opposition.

The research that for many years has underpinned early childhood education sits within models of constructivist and socio-constructivist theory. It has been argued that there are contradictions in messages emanating from the work of two of the major figures of influence within these fields: the Swiss biologist and psychologist Jean Piaget (1886-1980) and the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). However, my research programme has interrogated and recalibrated the relationship between these two key theorists and their theoretical frameworks and seen how both can and should be drawn on to maximise the learning and development potential of young children.

This thesis records three action research projects concerning the changing role of early childhood educators and the research base, both theoretical and empirical, that underpins them. The publications presented form a coherent body of work that traces the tensions between curriculum content regulated within policy frameworks and established early years pedagogy. The original contribution made by my published work is that, whilst others (e.g. Ang 2014; Moss 2015; Heimer and Klefstad 2015; Chesworth 2018; Wood 2019b) have insightfully identified these tensions, each project and publication within my research programme has offered early years educators ways through these competing discourses, offering theoretically and empirically based suggestions and possible solutions.

My experiences during the past twenty years have challenged many existing assumptions and required compromise. But if the conclusions from research findings such as mine are to have an impact on practice then they must reflect the everyday world of practice. The ever-changing landscape of early childhood education has demanded reflection on and accommodation of fresh thinking. Along the way, as well as developing my research skills, feedback suggests that this research programme has supported and impacted on the thinking, not only of the practitioners involved in the three action research projects, but countless others who have read about, or heard me speak about my research.

Chapter 1: Description of the overall programme of research, its aims and context

1.1 Introduction

This submission for a PhD by published work is based around three action research projects that culminated in three books and five peer reviewed journal articles. The work in question spanned a time period from 1996-2016 and embodies a theoretical, empirical and practical analysis of the changing role of early childhood educators in England, since the introduction of universal outcomes for children's learning in the early years. The research underpinning the published work has been primarily concerned with easing tensions between traditional early years pedagogy and practice, influenced by the early childhood 'pioneers' (Bruce 1987; Nutbrown and Clough 2014) prevalent at the start of this research period, and the seemingly contradictory discourse arising from increased government regulation and policy frameworks since 1996 (see Appendix A).

The publications are theoretical and empirical and contribute to a reconceptualisation of early years pedagogy and the role of early childhood educators as they address and strive to accommodate shifting power structures and increasingly restrictive curriculum frameworks. The first project, *Starting from the Child?*, revisits the principles of early years practice that have underpinned the role of early childhood educators since early in the last century, amidst concerns of a perceived threat to planning a curriculum based on children's needs, interests and patterns of learning (Athey 2007; Nutbrown 2006; Hedges 2014). The second project, *Moving On to Key Stage 1*, identifies specific tensions, identified by practitioners themselves, between the ways of working with which they were familiar and those demanded by new policy frameworks concerning the transition of children from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to Key Stage 1 (KS1) (DfEE 1998, 1999; DfES/Sure Start 2006). The final project, *'Interacting or Interfering?'*, analysed the role of early childhood educators engaged in 'sustained shared thinking' (Sylva et al. 2004; Siraj-Blatchford 2009). It examined the shift from the more traditional role of 'following' children's self-led learning to one responsive to a more prescriptive agenda where it becomes necessary to be 'leading' much of children's learning in order to achieve defined goals and outcomes.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the research

The aim of my research has always been to respond, alongside the practitioners with whom I work, to the intensification of regulation concerning early childhood education. Each stage of the research programme has interrogated the impact of the introduction of standards for young children's learning on the role of those responsible for educating them. Over the past twenty years, changing and increasing government regulation and documentation has demanded a constant repositioning of the role of early childhood educators (Nutbrown and Clough 2014). Many messages within successive government agendas have seemed at odds with established early years pedagogy (Miller and Pound 2011) and the aim of my research programme has been to examine the contrasting discourses surrounding the purpose of early education and to find ways for practitioners to view them as complementary rather than contradictory.

Research Aim

To critically review and appraise the contradictory discourses impacting on the role of early childhood educators and to formulate possible responses to changes in the role over time.

Objectives

In working towards this aim the following objectives have been pursued:

1. to review the principles underpinning early years practice in the literature and their impact on the role of early childhood educators
2. to investigate the impact of policy frameworks, government initiatives and research programmes on early years pedagogy and the role of early childhood educators
3. to research pathways through perceived tensions in these contrasting discourses and find ways of understanding them as complementary rather than contradictory

1.3 Structure

- Chapter 1 identifies the scope and context of the research and sets out its aims and objectives
- Chapter 2 lists the submitted publications, outlines their relationship to each other and the place of each in the overall programme of research
- Chapter 3 reviews the literature in the field and sets the published work within the context of this wider literature

- Chapter 4 is an analysis of the research methodology used within the three action research projects
- Chapter 5 highlights the contribution of the programme of research, including the ways in which the submitted publications have extended knowledge and understanding in the field of early childhood education. It also outlines future directions for this research programme.

1.4 References to the literature

This thesis follows a thread of ever-changing views of children, childhood and the role of early childhood educators. The three projects which form the bedrock of the work submitted took place at differing points within that history. Consequently there are times within the thesis when it is necessary and appropriate to reference publications which were relevant and pertinent at the time and other occasions when references are more recent to acknowledge the views, theories and perspectives that govern current research and policy in the field of early childhood education.

1.5 Research context

The research context of the body of work presented is within the early childhood education sector in England. England has a long and proud tradition of early childhood education rooted in the theories of 'pioneers' in the field, working across a number of countries and a number of contexts. Figures such as Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925), Maria Montessori (1870-1952) and Susan Isaacs (1885-1948) have influenced and still influence the work of early childhood educators in this country (e.g. Isaacs 2010; Bruce 2012). Whilst the regulation of early education in recent years has been experienced across the globe (Smidt 2013; Heimer and Klefstad 2015; MacBlain et al. 2017), it is argued that in England, in particular, policy initiatives and frameworks have been at odds with established pedagogy (Faulkner and Coates 2013; Moss 2014).

From 1996-2016, the British government shifted the status of early childhood education and care in England from 'indifference to high priority' (Moss 2015: 226). Nutbrown and Clough (2014:17) describe an 'explosion of activity' within the sector during this time period when 'at least 25 major new policies (an average of one per year) have changed the shape and status of Early Childhood Education and Care almost beyond recognition' (see Appendix A). These policies

were part of a programme of social reforms aimed at wider societal problems such as unemployment and poverty (Moss 2014). Part economic and part social, the policy aspiration was that a focus on early education and childcare would 'improve educational outcomes for children' (DfES 2002:5). Despite some altruistic underpinnings, some commentators suggest the early years policy agenda has nonetheless been 'accompanied by the dominance of one discourse, a discourse of control' (Moss 2015:231). MacBlain et al. (2017:150) agree that the price for recognition within the sector will be control 'by the political reasoning behind the initial desire for it'. Policies initially increased the supply of services and levels of attendance at early years settings (Faulkner and Coates 2013), but there followed a mantra (Moss 2015:229) of improving 'quality' and ensuring value for money. Administration and policy-making were unified; responsibility for all early childhood services was located in the Department for Education, culminating in an integrated Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Unit. Subsequently, the regulation of all early childhood services (including schools) was concentrated within a single national inspectorate, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). Detailed standards and outcomes for early childhood education (DfEE/QCA 1996, 1999, 2000) were issued by the central administration and their application monitored by Ofsted. The precise application of those standards and outcomes was further regulated through a national system of assessment, the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP), rating children in the final year of the EYFS on achieving or working towards the prescribed Early Learning Goals (DfES 2008).

A tension has consequently been perceived between these policy drivers of 'quality' (e.g. DfEE/QCA 1996, 2000) and the principles embedded in the long tradition of early childhood education within early years literature which prioritised 'starting from the child' (e.g. Blenkin and Kelly 1987; Bruce 1987; Dowling 1988; EYCG 1992). Miller and Pound (2011) and Wood (2014, 2019a, 2019b) are amongst those who see control within early childhood education being wrested away from children, and their educators, and placed in the hands of policy makers intent on defining the means by which 'quality' will be achieved. Writing before the introduction of regulation, Dowling (1988:56) espoused the principle that 'young children need to become agents in their own learning', a view reaffirmed by Whitehead some years later (2012:8) that the control offered to children 'is fundamental to children developing confidence in their abilities'. But an educational programme that advocates 'the importance of the growing child's ability to organise his (sic) own behaviour, to set, pursue, realize and achieve his (sic) own purposes' (Katz 1977:23) is at odds with a government

discourse which, according to Moss (2015:236) is 'focused intently on predictability, certainty and closure of predetermined goals achieved'.

Government initiatives, universal goals and the standards agenda have impacted, inevitably, on the role of early childhood educators. Miller and Pound (2011:165) comment that:

'external pressures from government guidance...lead practitioners to focus on curriculum 'delivery' or 'coverage' as the main focus of their practice. Such a view would have been an anathema to the foundational theorists...but in England it has become a feature of the Early Years Foundation Stage'.

1.6 Concluding observation

This chapter has set out the aims of my research programme in the context of significant policy interventions in early childhood education. It has highlighted the issue at the heart of each action research project: that early childhood educators face contradictory discourses, dominated by issues of increasing control over and regulation of the sector, including interventions in matters of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. These discourses give rise to wider questions, such as: Whose purpose should early education serve? Wherein does the power lie? Is there any longer room for child-centred pedagogical approaches when faced with the increasing control of policy frameworks? Within this context, the research presented makes a sound contribution to these debates, based on action research projects situated in the practice of early childhood educators.

Chapter 2: The publications and how they fit into the overall programme of research

2.1 Introduction

The overall programme of research submitted covers three separate action research projects. Each project led to the publication of a book, based on empirical research findings, but also offering links between theory and practice, a feature of research that is sometimes seen to be missing (MacNaughton et al. 2001) and which reviews of my books often highlight as a strength (see Appendix C). Associated articles were also published, five of which are peer-reviewed and pertinent to this submission.

The cycle of research, reflection, writing and publication for each project followed a similar pattern. In order to clarify my thinking and emerge from what Schön (1983:3) likens to being in a cognitive 'swamp', the findings from each project were firstly written up for different periodicals for early years professionals. This afforded opportunities to disseminate the messages from the different research projects to practitioners who had not been involved. From this followed peer reviewed articles (Fisher 1994, 1996a, 2009, 2011; Fisher and Wood 2012) which shared the research findings with an audience who would critically review and respond to the methodology, findings and conclusions. There then followed an extensive training and conference programme (see Appendix B) where the research findings were shared with practitioners across the country (and internationally) and the research messages honed until I felt that they were clear, relevant and accessible. Only at this stage did I write up the underlying theory, research findings and practical implications into books (see Section 2.2 below).

2.2 Summary of publications

Date & author	Publications	Journal or publisher
Project 1: '<i>Starting from the Child?</i>': balancing a traditional 'child-led' agenda with the demands of new 'adult-led' regulations		
1994	'Acknowledging Children as	<i>Early Years</i> , Vol.14, No.2. 21-

Fisher, J.	Competent Learners'	23
1996a Fisher, J.	'Reflecting on the Principles of Early Years Practice'	<i>Journal of Teacher Development</i> , Vol.5, No.1, 17-26.
1999b Fisher, J.	<i>Starting from the Child?</i> (1 st edn)	Buckingham: Open University Press
2002	<i>Starting from the Child</i> (2 nd edn)	Buckingham: Open University Press
2008	<i>Starting from the Child</i> (3 rd edn)	Maidenhead: Open University Press
2013	<i>Starting from the Child</i> (4 th edn)	Maidenhead: Open University Press
<p>Project 2: 'Moving On to Key Stage 1': promoting learning experiences that 'build on' the EYFS in a climate moving increasingly towards 'readiness' for KS1</p>		
2009 Fisher, J.	"'We used to play in Foundation, it was more funner": investigating feelings about transition from Foundation Stage to Year 1'	<i>Early Years</i> , Vol. 29, No.2, 131-145.
2010 Fisher, J.	<i>Moving On to Key Stage 1</i>	Maidenhead: Open University Press.
2011 Fisher, J.	'Building on the Early Years Foundation Stage: developing good practice for transition into Key Stage 1'	<i>Early Years</i> , Vol.31, No.1, 31-42.
<p>Project 3: 'Interacting or Interfering?': investigating the changing role of the early childhood educator as they move between 'following' children's learning and 'leading' children's learning</p>		
2012 Fisher, J. & Wood, E. (75%	'Changing educational practice in the early years through practitioner-led action research: an Adult-Child	<i>International Journal of Early Years Education</i> , Vol.20, No.2, 1-16.

contribution)	Interaction Project’,	
2016 Fisher, J.	<i>Interacting or Interfering?</i>	Maidenhead: Open University Press

2.3 Project 1: *Starting from the Child?*: balancing a traditional ‘child-led’ agenda with the demands of new ‘adult-led’ regulations

Starting from the Child? (Fisher 1996b) grew from the concerns of one reception teacher mentoring students from the University of Reading where I was lecturer at the time. These concerns centred on the introduction of the first statutory outcomes for young children’s learning (DfEE/QCA 1996) and the perceived threat to the teacher’s child-led philosophy (Curtis 1986; Lally 1991; EYCG 1992). Because of the close collaboration required, the teacher became both ‘informant and fellow analyst’ (Tacchi, Slater and Hearn 2003) and our project led to articles analysing the principles, values and pedagogy that underpinned our joint beliefs (e.g. Fisher 1996a) and the first edition of *Starting from the Child?* (1996b). The training and conferences which followed, and the concerns that mounted as government scrutiny intensified (e.g. Dahlberg et al. 1999) led me, six years later, to review the use of the question mark in the book title and to write ‘I am no longer questioning whether one should, or can, begin an education starting from the child. It is an imperative’ (Fisher 2002: xiii). This book is now in its fourth edition and a fifth has been commissioned. Its continued relevance demonstrates that tackling the contradictory discourses between personally held beliefs and government requirements continues to be a pertinent area for research.

2.4 Project 2: *Moving On to Key Stage 1*: promoting learning experiences that ‘build on’ the EYFS in a climate moving increasingly towards ‘readiness’ for KS1

The project *Moving On to Key Stage 1* involved around 25 schools in one local authority trying to meet the challenge set by government statutory guidance for the EYFS to build on best Foundation Stage practice as children made the transition into KS1 where the agenda had been set very differently (DfEE 1998, 1999; Ofsted 2004; DfES/Sure Start 2006). Headteachers as well as teachers raised concerns that neither primary school teacher training nor, until that time, government guidance had prepared teachers or senior leaders to develop a KS1 pedagogy that continued the early years tradition and that the gap between the

two phases was too 'abrupt' (Ofsted 2004:2). The first phase of the project examined the feelings of children, parents and Reception class teachers leading up to transition into Year 1 (Y1) (Fisher 2009). The findings revealed much anxiety from children: 'We used to play in Foundation, it was more funner'; and teachers: 'I just know in my bones that what the Year 1 children are getting isn't right for their stage of development'; and parents: 'Quite honestly I'm dreading it. His brother hated every minute of Year 1' (Fisher 2009:138-140). The second phase involved a 'nested' action research project, where I co-ordinated the individual action research projects of teachers in the 25 project schools (Fisher 2011) whilst also researching my role as researcher, identifying the difficulties in establishing a methodology with regard to power relations between researcher and 'researcher participants' (Bath 2009:218). The findings revealed that adjusting the role of KS1 teachers to accommodate child-led activities alongside traditional adult-led learning had the impact of raising standards in SATs tests at the end of KS1 and of leading to greater teacher satisfaction in their role (Fisher 2010). I am now drafting a second edition of *Moving On to Key Stage 1* and am conscious that the political context has shifted. Recent policy guidance (e.g. Ofsted 2017) says little about 'building on' the Foundation Stage but rather emphasises getting 'ready for' KS1.

2.5 Project 3: *Interacting or Interfering?* : investigating the changing role of early childhood educators as they move between 'following' children's learning and 'leading' children's learning

The project that led to the publication of *Interacting or Interfering?* (Fisher 2016) arose from concerns following judgements made by local authority advisory staff about the quality of interactions in the 640 early years settings in the local authority for which I was responsible as lead Adviser. Adult-child interactions had become a major indicator of quality in local authority self-evaluation schedules following the publication of the findings of the *Effective Provision of Preschool Education* Project (Sylva et al. 2004) which identified 'sustained shared thinking' as a feature of practice in those settings deemed to be 'excellent' (see Chapter 3 for further detail). Over a four year period (2010-2014) twenty practitioners from settings in Oxfordshire, working in baby rooms through to Year 2, explored what - in their view - made an 'effective' interaction between young children and their early childhood educators (Fisher 2016). This action research project examined how 'effectiveness' is influenced and defined by those who are making judgements: their values, beliefs and experience. It was found that 'effectiveness' alters according to whose purpose is being served by the

interaction. The project considered how the role of educators alters when the purpose of an activity belongs to the child (child-led learning) and when it belongs to the adult (adult-led learning). This clarification of the roles of early childhood educators offers a contemporary theory of classroom pedagogy, combining constructivist and socio-constructivist theories about children's learning.

2.6 Concluding observation

The papers outlined offer a coherent programme of study on the changing role of early childhood educators over the past twenty years since the introduction of government regulation into the early years sector. The books and papers submitted navigate a research journey over that period covering three major action research projects. The work develops from a focus on one Reception class practitioner seeking to find ways of balancing a traditional 'child-led' agenda with the demands of new 'adult-led' regulations through to a community of early years professionals seeking to delve deeper into whether and how the role of the adult changes when supporting these two differing purposes of learning. The research programme offers practitioners ways through the competing discourses that caused many to express anxiety about how government initiatives might impact on their existing early years practice.

Chapter 3: Literature Review – placing the submitted work in the context of the literature

3.1 Introduction

In reviewing the relevant literature in the field of early childhood education and the role of early childhood educators that has influenced and accompanied my research programme it is striking to note that, prior to 1996 (the publication of the first English regulatory document concerning early education), the literature was rooted in an eclectic mix of philosophy, ethics, psychology and educational theory. However, as will be seen, from 1996 onwards the major influence on early years practice has come from government policy and documentation, with established research and theory providing contrasting discourses (Miller and Pound 2011; Lea 2013; Wood 2014, 2019a, 2019b; Brogaard Clausen et al. 2015; Scott 2017, 2018; Hedges and Cooper 2018; Moylett 2019). Although my own values, beliefs and pedagogy have been influenced by a range of theoretical perspectives, my research programme has been responsive to and reflective of policy and its literature.

Neaum (2016:245) suggests the early years is 'required to exist within...two distinctly different discourses, and these discourses...demand very different pedagogical approaches'. My analysis of the need of early childhood educators to 'exist within' these contradictory discourses includes an examination of theories surrounding young children, childhood and early learning and the impact of changing perspectives on the pedagogic role.

3.2 A brief summary of historical changes to views of childhood and the role of early childhood educators

The role of early childhood educators is, and has always been inexorably bound up with society's views about children as learners (Neaum 2016; MacBlain et al. 2017) which, in turn, have been influenced by society's views of children and of childhood (Dahlberg et al. 1999; Smidt 2013). This historically complex journey and its transitions are traced by Pound (2011) and Nutbrown and Clough (2014), revealing the many and varying manifestations of the educator's role. However, not until the start of the 1990s in England was this role directly affected by government regulation. This regulation has resulted in tensions between the principles of early childhood education and the demands of policy frameworks,

resulting in views about early childhood education becoming increasingly polarised (Urban 2010; Ang 2014; Wood 2014, 2019b; Chesworth 2018).

My first year as a teacher was in 1975, ten years after the Plowden report made the famous claim that 'At the heart of the educational process lies the child' (CACE 1967:7 para 9) and my practice as a teacher and headteacher was firmly rooted in the belief that children are agents in their own learning (CACE 1967:7 para 13). In embracing this perspective, early childhood educators at the time were urged to reject a transmission model of teaching and adopt what Rowland described as an 'interpretive' model, demanding 'the teacher's attempt to understand the child's growing understanding of the world' (Rowland 1984:4). The role of the adult was to facilitate and support in whatever ways were appropriate (Lally 1991), but what was 'appropriate' remained uncertain, and there was uncertainty even as to whether 'teaching' was an appropriate word to use in the context of early childhood education. As Whitebread recalls (2012:126), it was claimed that when teachers attempted to teach children something, they simply 'deprived children of the opportunity to discover it for themselves'. Alexander (2010:95) sums up the conflict by asking whether the educator's role was to 'develop a child or watch a child develop'.

3.3 The impact of constructivist and socio-constructivist theory on the role of early childhood educators

At the beginning of the last century two major figures emerged to impact on the thinking and practice of early childhood educators across much of the western world. The theories of Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) challenged the prevailing dogmas of behaviourism and psychoanalysis (Pound 2011) and influenced, and are still influencing, contemporary theory and practice. Of pertinence to this thesis, Piaget saw learning as an active process evolving 'as the result of children interacting with the environment' (Nutbrown and Clough 2014: 59). Vygotsky's work (e.g. 1978; 1986: translated and published posthumously) posited an alternative perspective of learning as 'a social exchange' (ibid.56) with young children learning essentially through interaction with other children and adults. Piaget's contribution to constructivist theory led early years practitioners to be more aware of the impact of the environment in stimulating children's natural curiosity (Pound 2011:90) and to engage in naturalistic observation of children as they explored and investigated the world (Nutbrown and Clough 2014:59). Vygotsky's socio-constructivist perspective foregrounded 'a more proactive pedagogic role for teachers than Piagetian constructivist models' (Roberts-Holmes 2012:32) and his concept of a zone of

proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky 1978:84) has impacted not only on classroom practice (e.g. Schwarz et al. 2009) but subsequently on policy frameworks (e.g. DfES 2007).

Other theorists have, in turn, criticised their work (e.g. Donaldson 1978; Matusov and Hayes 2000), compared and contrasted their work (Smith 1996; Tryphon and Vonèche 1996) and extended their work. For example, contemporary theorists such as Athey (2007) and Nutbrown (2006) have expanded understanding of Piaget's 'schemas' (Piaget 1959, 1969) and the patterns in young children's thinking. Jerome Bruner (1990) reconfigured Piaget's developmental stages by defining his own modes of thought or representation. Bruner and colleagues also contributed to socio-cultural theory by developing the notion of 'scaffolding' (Wood et al. 1976) whereby educators provide sufficient support to children in the initial stages of learning something new; and Rogoff (1990) elaborated on Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by developing a theory of guided participation where children are 'apprentices in thinking' alongside more skilled members of their society (ibid.7).

It was increased expectation for that more 'proactive pedagogic role' that led to the research underpinning *Starting from the Child?* (Fisher 1996). This research project addressed the inclusion of an external, regulated agenda (DfEE/QCA 1996) within the prevailing early years pedagogy of one Reception class, based on deeply embedded expectations about play and active learning (Roberts-Holmes 2012) and the child as agent of that learning (Goswami 2008).

3.4 The impact of longitudinal studies on early childhood policy

Influenced by the findings of longitudinal studies in the USA of the impact of early childhood education on later achievement (Reynolds 1998; Schweinhart et al. 2005) the British government of the day commissioned the first major European longitudinal study into the effectiveness of early childhood education. The *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project* (DfEE 1997) investigated a national sample of young children's development between the ages of three and seven years and the effects of the pre-school education they attended. Of relevance to this thesis, the pedagogy which formed the basis of the American longitudinal research stated at its outset that 'High/Scope teachers create settings in which children can set goals, choose the materials and means to achieve them, and follow through on their plans' (Hohmann and Buckleiter 1992:ix). The EPPE research did not align itself with one pedagogical model but

initially used an American observational measure (Harms, Clifford and Cryer 1998), to describe the characteristics of the settings studied before devising an additional measure - the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-E: Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart 2003) - which was seen to be more appropriate for English settings.

The EPPE researchers evaluated both the quality of the environment (still considered a major component of high quality provision) and the quality of teaching (the role of early childhood educators) in drawing up the project's findings and conclusions. Of relevance to the theoretical underpinning of Project 3 in my research programme was the concept of 'sustained shared thinking' to extend children's learning, described by Sylva et al. (2004:36) as occurring 'when two or more individuals "work together" in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity, extend a narrative etc'. This spotlight on interactions in determining the quality of an early years setting was the impetus for the early childhood educators in Project 3 to study what, in their view, constituted an 'effective' interaction and what contributed to this effectiveness.

Of pertinence to my research also, was the suggestion in the EPPE report that settings should 'work towards an equal balance of child and adult initiated activity' (Sylva et al. 2004:vi). Whilst this view chimed with my belief that a pedagogy embracing both child-led and adult-led learning was necessary for the role of early childhood educators in the 21st century, the notion of 'an equal balance' seemed simplistic, taking little account of the need to move flexibly between children's different ways of learning at any particular point within the learning cycle (Fisher 2013).

3.5 The role of the early childhood educator in government policy documents

Political interest in the early years as a moral as well as a financial imperative (Bown et al. 2009) continued to spawn a whole new 'literature' of its own. Nutbrown and Clough (2014:17) noted an 'explosion of activity' from 1998 to 2013, when the early years workforce were challenged to respond to over 25 major new policies: 'an average of one per year'. In 1996 the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) alongside the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) published *The Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning (DLOs)*, a set of goals for children to achieve by the time they reached statutory school age. Within this document, the only reference to the role of early

childhood educators was that 'Approaches to teaching include recognition of the value of providing first hand experiences, of giving clear explanations, of appropriate adult intervention and of using play and talk as media for learning' (DfEE 1998:6). When the *Early Learning Goals (ELGs)* (DfEE/QCA 1999) replaced the DLOs some three years later, it was stipulated that achieving these goals required 'practitioners who understand and are able to implement the curriculum requirements' (ibid.4). Here then, for the first time, a British government determined that the role of early childhood educators was to deliver a specific, externally determined agenda. Whilst practitioners were encouraged to remember that planning had to be undertaken 'considering both children's needs and achievements and the range of learning experiences which will help them progress' (ibid.7), other more prescriptive words, such as 'carefully structured'; 'well planned and organised'; 'purposeful' became increasingly common in policy documentation.

Whilst Rogers (2011:8) celebrates the EYFS as a 'long awaited and distinctive educational phase', Anning (2009:68) suggests that the core EYFS principle of 'the unique child' (DfES 2007: 8) was (and remains):

'in direct conflict with policy imperatives based on 'universality', 'standardisation' and the measurement of 'quality' using schedules that finally reduce all judgements of both children and workers in pre-school settings to crude numerical outcomes'.

3.6 Transition from the Early Years to Key Stage 1

Whilst the introduction of the EYFS was bedding down, it became apparent that another government initiative was having a significant effect on children moving into KS1. Just as Reception teachers were readjusting to inclusion within the Foundation Stage, with its requirements to maintain child-led learning alongside that which was adult-led (DfEE/QCA 1999) the pedagogical approaches of Year 1 teachers were being more closely prescribed, particularly by the National Strategies for Literacy (DfEE 1998) and Numeracy (DfEE 1999). Although non-statutory in their requirements, these two national strategies laid down what should be taught during daily literacy and numeracy sessions and, more significantly, how content should be taught. Consequently, children moved from the EYFS where, despite increased levels of prescription, it was still statutory that 'learning and development must be implemented through planned, purposeful play' (DfE 2012:6), to a more formal, adult-led pedagogy in Year 1 where learning (according to the National Strategies guidelines) was controlled by the

teacher. It soon became apparent that many children were not coping with these differences, especially summer-born children and those with special educational needs (Alexander 2010). In 2004, Ofsted produced a report entitled *Transition from the Reception Year to Year 1* (Ofsted 2004). Its findings suggested that insufficient consideration was being given to the relationship between the curricula in the Foundation Stage and in Year 1 and that transition to more formal approaches in Year 1 was sometimes too 'abrupt' (ibid.2). This report was swiftly followed by another, commissioned by the government's Sure Start Unit at the DfEE and conducted by researchers from the National Foundation for Educational Research. *A Study of the Transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1* (Sanders et al. 2005) identified the biggest challenge to transition as being posed by the move from a play-based approach in the Foundation Stage to a more 'structured' curriculum in Key Stage 1.

Two further national reviews highlighted their own proposals to improve transition to Key Stage 1. The *Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum* (DCSF 2009), commissioned by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and led by Sir Jim Rose, recommended that advice be written about 'how best to support those children who need to continue to work towards the early learning goals and build on the learning that has taken place in the EYFS' (DCSF 2009:23). Following this, the independent Cambridge Primary Review led by Professor Robin Alexander published a report entitled *Towards a New Primary Curriculum* (Alexander 2010). This report identified the 'top-down' pressure of not just the primary curriculum but also the secondary curriculum on the early years of education and made the assertion that: 'whatever they have separately achieved, the expansion of pre-school provision and the KS1/2 standards agenda have made this vital point of transition increasingly fraught' (Alexander 2009:23). Subsequent research into the experiences of nursery and primary school headteachers reports teachers feeling 'pulled in different directions by the EYFS and the subject-based National Curriculum' (Roberts-Holmes 2012:38).

These tensions were identified by teachers and headteachers in the local authority where I was then lead Adviser for the early years. My research began by surveying the feelings of children, their parents/carers and their teachers as they prepared for the move to Y1 (Fisher 2009). This led to the action research project detailed in Chapter 4, where around 50 teachers established what they believed to be developmentally appropriate practice (Bredakamp & Copple 1997; Robinson 2008; Doherty and Hughes 2009) for children aged 5 and 6 years and how this might be implemented in Y1. The outcomes of this research concluded

that the role of the educator in KS1 was seen to be most effective if, like their EYFS colleagues, a pedagogy was developed that incorporated both adult-led and child-led experiences in balance (Fisher 2010).

3.7 Messages from school readiness literature

Just as many schools and local authorities were investigating different ways of making transition from Reception to Key Stage 1 more coherent there was a change of government and a change of message. The new government espoused an alternative purpose for early childhood education (Neaum 2016). Previously an important and enduring principle was that early childhood education was the foundation on which children build the rest of their lives, 'not just a preparation for the next stage – (but) vitally important in itself' (EYCG 1992). But, influenced once again by policy in the United States, a 2011 report by Graham Allen MP, claimed the primary objective of the foundation years from birth-five should be 'to produce high levels of 'school readiness' for all children regardless of family income' (Allen 2011:xviii). This brought about a change of tone in subsequent government documentation (e.g. Ofsted 2014) and the terms 'school readiness' and 'ready for school' began to appear in ministerial speeches and the direction of policy, once again, altered course (House 2011; Pound and Miller 2011; Miller and Hevey 2012; Moss 2013; Ang 2014).

Based on a review led by Dame Claire Tickell (DfE 2011), the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* was revised (DfE 2012) and stated that the standards set within the document 'promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's school readiness' (DfE 2012: 2) and 'what providers must do....to promote the learning and development of all children....and to ensure they are ready for school' (ibid.4). The Framework did suggest an autonomous role for the educator in bringing these two agendas together, noting the need for an 'ongoing judgement to be made by practitioners about the balance between activities led by children and activities led or guided by adults' (ibid.6). However, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) cautions against what it terms as 'schoolification', arguing that early education is at risk of being driven by 'an instrumental and narrow discourse about readiness for school' (OECD 2016:219).

3.8 The impact of literature from Ofsted

The regulation of early childhood education, alongside the intensification of regulation for schools in general, led (in 1992) to the establishment of a regulatory body overseeing the inspection of schools for children of all ages. Since then, Ofsted has issued a number of documents relating to the education of children within the EYFS and KS1 which have impacted practice. Whilst Ofsted asserts 'Inspectors do not tell teachers and practitioners how to teach. They do not have a preferred method' (Wilshaw 2015), Ofsted's 'guidance' has had immense impact not only on early years educators, but on those who manage and lead the learning of this age group (Roberts-Holmes 2012). In 2014, Ofsted conducted a survey with the intention of alerting schools to 'how the most successful early years providers ensure disadvantaged and vulnerable children are better prepared to start school' (Ofsted 2014:1). Entitled '*Are You Ready?*' one of the survey's 'Key Findings' notably emphasised that 'without exception, we encountered adult-led discrete sessions for groups of children in all settings' (ibid.5).

In June 2015 Ofsted included a definition of 'teaching' in its inspection handbook for schools (Ofsted 2015b:63) that recognised the diverse elements of the role of the early childhood educator, a recognition that was warmly welcomed by practitioners. However, in the same year, Ofsted problematised this complexity by publishing a document entitled *Teaching and play in the early years – a balancing act?* (Ofsted 2015c). Designed to 'address the recurring myth that teaching and play are separate, disconnected endeavours in the early years' (ibid.6) this document reflected prevailing government discourse, implying that 'play must contribute to intended outcomes or goals' (Wood 2019a:3).

The research underpinning the publications concerning '*Interacting or Interfering?*' (Fisher and Wood 2012; Fisher 2016) was concerned with this 'balancing act' and concluded that unless educators thought about the different purposes of adult-led and child-led learning, their role might not be adequately altered to support these differing learning scenarios (Fisher 2018a). As the project participants explored their own definition of an 'effective' interaction, it became clear that greater awareness was needed about whether an activity was adult-led or child-led. Whilst there was indeed a 'continuum' of practice (Ofsted 2015c:6) the increased prescription in (particularly) Reception-class practice meant that the continuum in question was one of control. Early childhood educators have moved along a continuum from adult-inspired, to adult-initiated

to (in certain curriculum circumstances) adult-insisted experiences and consequently, unless clear about the purpose of the differing experiences they have planned, may not adopt the right role at the right time (Fisher 2018a).

3.9 Concluding observation

The role of early childhood educators continues to be buffeted by the winds of political change that impact directly on matters of pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and learning. Contradictory discourses have challenged educators to be flexible and adaptable and to find their multiple 'selves' in order to meet the needs of the individual, diverse young learners in their care whilst, at the same time, meeting the growing demands of external goals, targets and expectations. Prior to 1994, the lack of agreed pedagogical and curriculum approaches left the door open to differing policy ideologies. In particular, the discourse of educational effectiveness became a counterpoint to the eclectic approaches underpinning pedagogy and fuelling moves towards standardisation. As these competing discourses continue to battle it out in political and educational arenas, it seems crucial that early childhood educators remain clear about the purpose of the different agendas they have to meet. Knowing when to be a 'leader' of learning and when to be a 'follower' may be the answer to bringing seemingly contradictory discourses together.

Chapter 4 Analysis of the research methodology

4.1 Introduction

The genesis of my research programme has been the identification, by practitioners, of concerns about incorporating government policy, initiatives and documentation into their current practice. The practitioners involved throughout the programme have been concerned with moving their practice from reflection-in-action to reflection-on-action (Schön 1983).

4.2 Research Methods

The first table gives an overview of the methodology underpinning the three research projects within my research programme. The second table highlights elements of the action research process within each project.

Table 4.2 (i) Research Project Overview

	<i>Project 1: Starting from the Child</i>	<i>Project 2: Moving On to Key Stage 1</i>	<i>Project 3: Interacting or Interfering?</i>
Role of researcher at the time	University lecturer and student tutor	Lead Early Years Adviser for a local authority (LA)	Lead Early Years Adviser for a local authority (LA) and then freelance adviser
Funding	University time	Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	Individual school and researcher's own time (when freelance)
Project question	"Can I incorporate external outcomes for young children's learning into my planning without compromising a pedagogy starting from the child?"	"How does knowledge of child development challenge us to plan developmentally appropriate practice in KS1?"	"What is our definition of an 'effective' interaction between an early years educator and a young child? How is it achieved?"
Numbers involved	One Reception	50 + teachers.	14 early years

in research	class teacher	(At least) 2 from each of 25 schools. In pairs - Reception & KS1. Final year, detailed observation (including filming) of 4.	practitioners working with children 6 months to 6 years in schools in the maintained and private sectors
Duration of time of project	Two years	Three years originally (Phase 1). Plus an additional year (Phase 2)	Four years. Three years filming and analysing. One year refining research materials for wider dissemination
Sampling strategy	Teacher self-selected	Schools self-selected within one local authority Each school sent their Reception and Year 1 (2) teacher	Purposeful. Practitioners nominated by headteachers and LA advisory staff
Primary source of data collection	Observation	Phase 1: observation Phase 2: video	Video recording
Literature search	Initiated by researcher. Teacher contributed after observation phase	Initiated by research co-ordinator. Teachers then contributed from own review of relevant literature	Initiated by research co-ordinator. Practitioners then contributed from own review of relevant literature

Table 4.2 (ii) Action Research Process

	<i>Project 1: Starting from the Child</i>	<i>Project 2: Moving On to Key Stage 1</i>	<i>Project 3: Interacting or Interfering?</i>
Ethnographic phase: (Bath 2009) 'Experimenter impact' (Thomas 2013)	Researcher immersion in classroom culture in order to reduce experimenter impact	Phase (2) only: time spent in each classroom with video camera so children became accustomed to being 'filmed'.	Time spent in each setting for children to become accustomed to being 'filmed'.
Observation phase: researcher	Researcher as participant observer, recording aspects of teacher's current practice over one term	Phase (1): no observation by researcher, data collected via discussions & diaries Phase (2): filming of four teachers to scrutinise 'developmentally appropriate' strategies in each Y1 classroom	Filming of each practitioner once every term to capture interactions taking place between practitioner and their child/ren
Action phase: teacher	Diary of practice and reflections	Teachers kept research diaries in order to share emergent thinking. Four teachers in Phase 2 engaged in post-observation analysis of DVD episodes filmed in their classrooms	Research diaries kept to capture emergent thinking. Practitioners engaged in post-observation analysis of all DVD episodes recorded in their setting
Iterative phase: Meetings and	Weekly meetings. Joint reflection on	Termly meetings. Joint reflection on	Termly meetings. Joint reflection on

discussion	diaries; observations and developing theories	diaries; sharpening of research questions; sharing of emergent themes by research co- coordinator. Phase (2) observation and 'stimulated recall' (Calderhead 1981) of DVD episodes	diaries; sharing of emergent themes by research co- coordinator. Observation and 'stimulated recall' (Calderhead 1981) of DVD episodes
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4.3 An action research paradigm

Every phase of this research programme sits within an action research paradigm (MacNaughton and Hughes 2009). At the heart of the typical model of action research is a transformative cycle of action and reflection to bring about change (Carr & Kemmis 1986; Roberts-Holmes 2014) a cycle simplified by MacNaughton and Hughes (2009:1) into a process of 'think – do - think', whereby 'thinking informs our practice; and practice informs our further thinking'. Action research is accepted as particularly appropriate for early years research as its reflexive nature enables the "practitioner-as-researcher' to occupy a central position as 'interpreter-of-practice" (Bath 2009:215). This process provides the opportunity for the early years educator to reflect and interpret their own thoughts and feelings about issues which they consider, rather than the researcher considers, to be pertinent (Howard-Jones 2010) and about which they care deeply (Bleach 2013). The outcomes from each of the three projects submitted as part of this thesis demonstrate the strength of collaborative, iterative processes (Fisher and Wood 2012) in (i) researching the challenges faced by early childhood educators in accommodating universal regulation into a traditionally child-led pedagogy and (ii) offering empirically-based strategies for finding ways through the contradictory discourses surrounding their role.

Action research is not always carried out primarily by a practitioner but, as in the three projects in this research programme, can lie in the hands of a researcher who is a visitor to the environment. Bath (2009) contends that in this case it is

necessary to plan for an introductory ethnographic period when immersion in the culture of the early years environment and the collaboration and planning that goes on prior to any 'action' leads to an ethnographic phase not present when a practitioner conducts action research alone. In Project 1, this ethnographic phase enabled me to immerse myself in the Reception classroom culture. This setting up period was seen as 'part of the action in action research' (Frankham and Howes 2006:620) in order to reduce any feelings of anxiety on the part of the teacher caused by being so closely observed, and also to establish a relationship with the children so that they could accept me 'as someone they can "be themselves" in front of' (Guest et al. 2013:76). In Projects 2 and 3, this ethnographic phase was also created in an attempt to ensure both educators and children were as comfortable as possible with myself and the camera in order not to distort the data collected (Rolfe and Emmett 2010).

It is noted by some (e.g. Frankham and Howes 2006; Bath 2009) that researcher participation can lead to challenges around the power relations between researcher and subject. This was particularly an issue in Project 1 where only one teacher was involved. It was critical from the outset that the teacher identified the principles that she wished to protect (as she saw it) in order to ensure the project outcomes did not end up being 'claimed' by me, enabling her to reflect on her practice but 'removed from the front-line of the classroom' (Bath 2009:218). However, issues of power and the dynamic between researcher and researched permeate all three projects. These issues are foregrounded in recent innovations in action research. Pascal and Bertram's (2012) developing theory of praxeological research suggests that a participatory paradigm, in which reflection and action is carried out in conjunction with others, needs a more astute awareness about power. Others (e.g. McNaughton et al. 2001; Kemmis and Taggart 2017) describe 'fourth generation research' which is expected to demonstrate greater decision-making and participation on the part of all involved.

Research into one's own practice can entail 'destabilisation risks' (Day 1993:271) to both personal and professional self-image and self-esteem, so it was crucial to me, as Ely stresses (1991:229), to avoid:

'seeing and treating participants as passive objects and instead working with them so they become increasingly knowledgeable, active, responsible and, therefore, liberated'.

Because a key feature of the action research cycle involves choosing an aspect for change, the project participants in my research programme were given

agency through that choice being personal to them and their setting. Even when there was an overall research question for a project (as in Projects 2 and 3), individual schools and practitioners were able to select an aspect on which they wanted to focus. In addition, the iterative process within these projects ensured that the participants' voices – in discussions; research diaries; post-observation analysis – remained strong and steered both project conclusions and aspects of project dissemination. In the final phase of Project 3, for example, project participants were involved in designing the training material and selecting the DVD clips that would be used in dissemination to other early childhood educators.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

4.4 (i) Experimenter effect

The first ethical consideration impacting on all three projects was my relationship with the project participants. In each case I was known to those with whom I conducted the research in a professional capacity. In Project 1, as a university tutor working alongside a teacher student mentor. In Projects 2 and 3 as the lead Adviser for Early Years in the local authority in which both research projects took place. In the first project, experimenter impact was reduced due to the teacher instigating the research proposal. Our relationship was one of 'comfortable collaboration' (Day 1993:271) where we jointly constructed and scrutinised the evidence and emerging theories, and where neither was seen as 'the expert' nor in a position of power making judgement over the other (Bath 2009). The teacher and I already had a good working relationship where she was used to me being in her classroom, but it perhaps took her longer than the children to behave totally naturally when I was in class observing her, rather than observing a student.

Project 2 provided a different scenario. The 25 schools and their early years teachers were all known to me through my professional relationship with them. Consequently I had to be cognisant of the potential influence on project outcomes arising from my beliefs (well known to those for whom I was Early Years Adviser) that the EYFS should be extended to the end of KS1. This potential 'experimenter effect' (Thomas 2013:141) was inhibited to a great extent because I was not involved at all in Phase 1 of the project in classrooms. My role was to co-ordinate and draw together the findings of 25 separate action research projects, the focus of which and the findings from which were identified by the schools individually. Nonetheless, my relationship with the schools in my authority would undoubtedly have influenced whether or not teachers (and their heads) chose to be part of the research. In Phase 2 of the project, when I

focused on and filmed the four individual Year 1 teachers, my research relationship altered and become very similar to the relationship with the lone teacher in Project 1.

In Project 3, the challenges of Thomas's (2013) 'experimenter effect' became more apparent. Every practitioner recommended was known to me personally and had expressed a wish to be involved in the Project. However, my relationship with these practitioners was as a senior Adviser and, whilst they may have wanted to work with me on issues about which we shared values and beliefs, our relationship had previously been one where I was either seen as 'expert' (training, briefings, conferences) or as 'inspector' (making monitoring or moderation visits to nurseries and classrooms). Because I was to film practice in each of the participating schools, the necessity to be seen as supportive and non-judgemental was paramount. This was mainly achieved at the outset by agreement that I would not make evaluative comments during the post-observation analysis. The evaluation was to be controlled by the practitioners, including when to pause and comment on the video recording. In this way the relationship was respectful and supportive rather than judgmental and, as a result I believe, succeeded as far as was possible in blurring the distinction between researcher and research subjects (Khanlou and Peter 2005) and promoting that sense of teacher agency (Priestley et. al. 2015) which I valued highly.

4.4 (ii) Informed consent / assent

Researching with young children is 'shot through with issues of power' (Nutbrown 2018:171). Indeed Coady (2001:64) suggests that due to their relative powerlessness 'children are heavily represented among victims of research', where power easily shifts from 'benefit to the child to benefit to research' (ibid.65). When I began my research work there were expectations that parents be consulted and that parental permissions be obtained, but respect for children as 'agents and architects' in their own right (Nutbrown 2018:71) was a perspective only beginning to gain ground (Brooker 2011). The origins of a 'new sociology of childhood' (Gray and MacBlain 2015:7) can be traced to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) which established children's rights, amongst other things, to protection and participation and which changed the way children were viewed by social researchers. In 1993, when my first Project began, the teacher received consent from parents and carers in the class for me to conduct my observations and for notes on the children and their activity to be noted, but the children's consent was not sought. The children were

simply told that I would be in class a little more than usual, watching what was happening and writing about it.

By 2005, when Project 2 commenced, the new sociology of childhood (James and Prout 2003) was more firmly embedded in action research methodology. However, whilst the children in the project were informed about their possible participation in the research and given the option of opting out either at the beginning or at any point during the research process (Lancaster and Broadbent 2010) there was no attempt to ask them to help formulate the research 'because we believe them to be the experts' (Nutbrown 2018:171).

Each school approached its parents/carers for written permission for children to be involved in the project and for permission for findings from the individual research projects to be shared with other professional communities. For Phase 2 of the project, parents of children from the four Y1 classes where the additional research was undertaken were separately asked for written permission for their children to be filmed and for that filming to be used for research discussions in the first instance and for professional training purposes in the future. Where parents declined to give permission children were excluded from filming or, if they inadvertently came into shot, that piece of filming was destroyed.

Because Project 3 involved the filming of children as well as their practitioners over a substantial length of time (three years), the children's assent (Thomas 2013) was critical. The filming of young children poses particular ethical concerns (Thomson 2008; Nolan et al. 2018), particularly in this case because permission was being sought (from parents/carers and practitioners as well as children) to use the video footage for future training material as well as research data. The children were given as much information as possible explaining the purpose of the research, asked for their ideas about what they might want to know at this stage and as the research proceeded, and given the opportunity at this stage, or at any stage in the future, to opt out of being filmed.

Parents and carers were informed by letter about the uses to which the video material would be put, who would see it, where the footage would be stored and for how long (Willan 2004). For Project 3 this permission was sought every term when new children joined the project settings. With regard to using the video recordings for purposes beyond the project, each participant practitioner signed a project 'Commitment' which was countersigned by the manager or headteacher of each setting and which included an agreement that the outcomes - transcripts,

video material and comments in diaries - could be shared with other practitioners for staff development purposes. Parents and project participants were assured that all material used for a wider audience e.g. as training material or in publications, would be anonymised.

4.5 Using video data as a research method

Video is increasingly the data collection approach of choice for researchers interested in the multimodal character of social interaction (Jewitt 2012:2). It has the opportunity to be a more 'reciprocal' process than non-recorded observation, by engaging participants in decision-making about what is filmed and what is analysed (Thomas 2013:224). Nevertheless the methodology is not without its critics. Rolfe and Emmett (2010:323) found that using videos was highly intrusive, the closeness of the camera distorting events beyond usefulness. The data can be very time intensive – to collect, review and analyse – and because of this, there is a danger that analysis can tend to focus on short segments at a micro-level and fail to examine longer time frames (Jewitt 2012:5). In addition, the data is not as 'naturally occurring' as is sometimes suggested, because video footage is shaped by decisions in the field about camera position, length of filming, and the impact of the process of filming on naturally occurring events (ibid.8).

The use of video data collection was introduced in Phase 2 of Project 2 of my research programme and became the cornerstone of data collection for Project 3. The more detailed scrutiny of the four Y1 classrooms in Phase 2 of Project 2 seemed well suited to the multimodal opportunities afforded by the analysis of video data. Whilst the four teachers and I all maintained research diaries of our individual reflections, the use of video footage of life in these four classrooms could be studied in a more collaborative, participatory way through the shared critique and conversations following the review of episodes filmed in each classroom. As well as becoming more aware of the advantages and disadvantages of using film to gather data, I learned a great deal about the necessity of using equipment that was of sufficient quality and flexibility to gather the fine-grained nuances of interactions between early childhood educators and their children in busy, active settings where children flowed freely both indoors and out.

Because of the success of using video footage for data collection and analysis in Project 2 it was utilised in Project 3 from the beginning. The focus of this project

was on the interactions between early childhood educators and their children and, therefore, footage afforded large amounts of rich data detailing gaze, expression, body posture and gesture (Jewitt 2012:6) alongside what was actually said by the educators, how it was said, and what impact this had on the responses of children with whom they were interacting. Each of the 14 educators were filmed nine times across nine terms of the project, leading to opportunities for both micro-analysis of each episode as well as the cumulative, iterative cycle of analysis at a macro level over time.

In recent years most young children have become used to digital methods in the documentation and assessment of their learning, and often participate in these methods. However, I spent time in each setting before the first period of filming setting up and 'using' the camera without any filming actually taking place. The length of time spent filming was adjusted according to the age of the children and the timetable of the setting or school. The data collected was determined by the day and time of day when filming was arranged, and also influenced by the position of the camera. The microphone worn by the educator was attached via a wire to the camera and although it was long enough for both adults and children not to find my presence overly 'intrusive' (Rolfe and Emmett 2010:32) there is no doubt that the educators, in particular, did not always engage in 'naturally occurring' exchanges with the children. The naturalness increased over time. After the first series of video data collection there was much talk in project meetings about how educators perceived they sounded, or looked, or how much they talked. Only after three or four sets of filming did those being filmed report that they began to relax with the camera around.

A significant outcome of the use of video data was an increase in the educators' willingness and capacity for self-reflection. It became apparent very quickly that, during post-video observation analysis, an understanding of practice and, particularly, the impact on the educators' words, gestures, tone, body language on the child or children with whom they were interacting were immediate. These episodes of individual analysis seemed to bring about a level of understanding that might be missed in the narrative description of an observation undertaken by the researcher on the research participant (Salmons 2017). Because video data is a durable, malleable and shareable record (Jewitt 2012:6) it was invaluable not only for individual reflection and analysis but also proved invaluable in project group discussions when used to refine and focus thinking. The data in Projects 2 and 3 were returned to many times and these multiple

viewings were significant in building our research agenda and emergent analytical frameworks (Goldman and McDermott 2009).

4.6 Concluding observation

Several aspects of development can be seen in my role as researcher during these projects. Firstly, an understanding of how to best support the research of others, particularly how to motivate, engage and keep participants focused on their own action research questions. Secondly, an awareness of how ethical considerations should be at the forefront of research methodology and particularly how to embrace the voices of children and give their participation authenticity. Finally, an appreciation of the advantages and disadvantages of employing video filming as a primary means of gaining and collating high quality data in the complex environments of early years settings.

Chapter 5: Original contribution to knowledge, reflection and future direction

5.1 Introduction

The research programme submitted within this thesis has tackled the challenges faced by early childhood educators over the past twenty years in accommodating government, largely adult-led, regulation into a traditionally child-led pedagogy. Whilst others (e.g. Ang 2014; Moss 2015; Heimer and Klefstad 2015; Wood 2014, 2019a; Chesworth 2018) have identified insightfully the tensions between the two discourses, each project and publication within my research programme has offered early years educators ways through the tensions, attempting to see what aspects of the differing discourses are complementary as opposed to contradictory.

One consistent thread within my work focuses on issues of agency and power. Traditional early years pedagogy has foregrounded agency with children (Donaldson 1978; Dowling 1988). However, many early years researchers have pointed out that high quality early learning 'cannot take place without high-quality and appropriate teaching' (Athey 1990:7). But it is the definition of 'teaching' within an early years context that has presented many of the problems identified here. Few early years practitioners would deny the importance of the role of the educator to listen to, play with, observe and assess children (Rose and Rogers 2012) but recognition of Rose and Rogers' 'plural practitioner' (ibid.3) has been drowned out by more insistent messages within documentation and initiatives from government and their agencies (e.g. Ofsted 2014, 2017) placing control of children's experiences increasingly with the educator rather than the child (Miller and Pound 2011; Lea 2013; Wood 2014, 2019a, 2019b; Ang 2014; Brogaard Clausen et al. 2015). My research programme has consistently addressed this shift in agency and power, supporting early childhood educators to use their pedagogical autonomy in researching ways to find synergy between child-led and adult-led learning.

5.2 Contribution to early childhood pedagogy

Child development literature emphasises that children in their early years are far more curious about and motivated by what interests them, rather than what interests their educators (Robinson 2008; Hedges 2014, 2018; Hedges and Cooper 2016; Renniger and Hidi 2016; Chesworth 2018). My empirical studies of

nursery and primary classroom practice suggest that adult-led learning requires far greater energy on the part of the adult than the child, in order to encourage the child to engage with an agenda set by someone else (Fisher 2018c:28). In order for early childhood educators to be able to focus this energy on adult-led learning with a small group of children, then more attention needs to be given to what the 'rest of the class' are doing (Fisher 2013:79). Since the introduction of regulation and inspection in the early years and primary years of education, there has been an increased focus on the role of educators and teaching and less emphasis on children and learning (e.g. Ofsted 2017). What my research programme has evidenced is that when independent and collaborative learning ('the rest of the class') is of quality then children learn many skills and come to many in-depth understandings that do not arise in adult-led activity (Fisher 2016:88). At the same time, because of children's involvement and engagement in such activities, educators have greater opportunity to 'lead the learning' of the group with whom they might be working because the 'rest of the class' are learning independently and with purpose. Despite Christodolou's assertion that 'Independent learning suggests a reduced and sometimes non-existent role for the teacher' (2013:38), I would argue that 'independent learning is not abandoned learning' (Fisher 2013:96) and the quality of what the 'rest of the class' are doing is brought about by educators' skill in preparing an appropriate, enriching environment and then giving time, attention and support (at the appropriate time) to every classroom activity in order for children to perceive that they all have equal value.

My research findings relating to transition from the EYFS to KS1 revealed that when the learning opportunities children experience are predominantly adult-led they frequently lose interest and motivation; become over-reliant on the educator for the 'right answer' and, particularly for those who are still very active and physical as learners, start to dislike school (Fisher 2009; Fisher 2016). Contrary to fears expressed by some headteachers, research findings from Project 2 revealed that when children had the opportunity for a learning day that included child-led as well as adult-led learning standards rose (in SATs tests results at age 7), in every school involved in the Project (Fisher 2010:104). Findings from across the research programme have demonstrated that a balanced approach is valuable for different types of children at different stages of development. The child who thrives in child-led activity and has the opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do in these learning situations is more willing to engage in adult-led learning when the time comes (this was a finding in schools rather than early years settings). Likewise, the child who thrives in adult-led situations,

often because of more advanced skills in literacy and interpersonal relationships with adults, might be challenged when asked to think for themselves and be creative in child-led situations (Fisher 2013:89).

My original contribution to pedagogy has been to establish clearly the differing benefits of adult-led and child-led learning, to see them both as valuable and, often complementary. The findings from my research programme have given early years educators empirically based strategies for accommodating these different purposes within their learning environments with the theoretical underpinning to justify the inclusion of both.

5.3 Contribution to the role of early childhood educators

The thread of agency and power continues within my original contribution to the role of early childhood educators. Despite acknowledgement of the crucial role of educators in young children's learning and development, Ailwood (2011) challenges any simplistic notions of a co-constructed curriculum arguing that there is a problematic exercise of relational power where adults have greater access to institutionally sanctioned control than children. It is this 'institutionally sanctioned control' arising from increased government regulation that has caused tensions for early childhood educators over recent years as they aim to find ways through competing discourses.

An evidence-based pedagogy espouses children's self-initiated thinking, inquiry and knowledge building, with children developing their personal 'working theories' (Hedges 2014, 2018; Hill and Wood 2019) through 'observing, listening, doing, participating, discussing and representing' (Hedges 2014:37). A policy driven pedagogy often foregrounds the role of the adult in driving more formal learning, especially during the Reception year when schools are exhorted to 'make sure they give reading, writing and mathematics in their Reception classes sufficient direct teaching time every day' (Ofsted 2017:4). My research programme has sought to investigate how this shift in control from children to adults affected the relationships and interactions between 'teacher' and 'learner'.

Empirical findings from Project 3 in particular, highlighted firstly that early childhood educators are focusing more time, attention and planning on adult-led learning than they were prior to regulation (Fisher 2013, 2016). It was also apparent that many are not consciously discriminating between their role in supporting adult-led learning and their role in supporting child-led learning

(Fisher 2016:91). It was assumed by the project participants that differences between their roles as educators would be noticeable when they engaged with children of different ages – for example in the baby room as opposed to Year 2 classrooms. This proved not to be the case. The main differences were identified when analysing the educators' role during activity planned for adult purposes and activity where the purpose was planned by the child.

In adult-led activity, practitioners adopted a role which focused children's learning on something specific; steered and guided them towards the planned (adult) outcomes and was 'effective' (in the judgement of the practitioner or those in judgement over the practitioner) if what was planned was what was learned. A consequence of the sociocultural paradigm I would suggest has been an over-emphasis on the role of educators in determining what is of value to children's learning and development, positioning adults once again as the more powerful agents in the learning process (Löfdahl and Hägglund 2006) and thus privileging the adult-led agenda. Daniels (2016:67) makes a useful contribution here by challenging the Vygotskian concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as a space of transmission from more knowledgeable to less knowledgeable members of society. Daniels suggests that in the hands of children rather than adults, the ZPD gives agency to children to make decisions about what knowledge *they* deem to be important, thus revealing 'what is proximal for them' (Hill and Wood 2019 in press). In Project 3, when children were engaged in their own self-led, self-directed activity the role of the (sensitive) early childhood educator was seen to change. This sensitivity was judged against Project 3 participants' definition of an 'effective' interaction being one where the child 'gains something positive from the interaction that they might not otherwise have gained' (Fisher 2016:175). In child-led activity, the unpredictable and idiosyncratic nature of children's learning meant that the role of the early childhood educator was not conceived until time had been spent observing the activity taking place and trying to understand what children were aiming to achieve in their exploration or play. The project findings encouraged practitioners to 'wait, watch and wonder', before intervening in any independent or collaborative learning, a mantra that has been identified more often than any other in training evaluations that practitioners will 'take away' with them. The 'wait, watch and wonder' mantra was to show respect for the learning that had already been taking place and to acknowledge the challenge of working out what children were trying to achieve in order to decide whether an interaction at that moment would, in fact, amount to interference. Scrutiny of the DVD footage highlighted two particularly important features. Firstly, children's actions can be

deceptive and that educators were more likely to tune into children's intentions if they focused on their thinking rather than their activity (Fisher 2016:79). Secondly, timing is crucial. When, as well as whether, to intervene determined whether an interaction became interference (ibid.80).

My original contribution to this field has been to highlight the differing roles of early childhood educators in learning contexts that are becoming increasingly polarised. As the gap between child-initiated and adult-*insisted* learning (Fisher 2018a) becomes pedagogically ever wider, I would contest the notion that it is sufficient for educators (particularly in schools) to see their role as one involving 'interchangeable processes' (Rose and Rogers 2012:9) according to who is initiating the learning. Whilst it is true that there are many strategies employed by early childhood educators that are appropriate along the continuum of children's learning from 'unstructured to highly structured' (DCSF 2009:5), I would argue that clarity about the different purposes of learning determines quite specifically who is leading the learning and who is following and, therefore, what the primary role of the educator should be (Fisher 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d). Whilst Ofsted (2015c:6) claims that 'those (schools) we visited found it unhelpful to think of their work as either teacher-led or child-initiated', I would contend that the polarised purposes and desirable outcomes of children's differing learning experiences make it crucial that early childhood educators are sensitive to these differences and the impact they have on their role.

Researchers have consistently sought to capture the complexity of interactions between child and adult using varying analogies. Trevarthen's (1974) 'dance'; the Hanen project's 'scales or seesaw' (Weitzman and Greenberg 2002); Lois Malaguzzi's (1992) 'ball' that is passed along; and most recently Harvard University's 'serve and return' (NSCDC 2009). Whilst finding these analogies interesting, it seemed to me that none captured the intricacy, sensitivity and responsiveness required for an interaction to be truly effective. My contribution is the notion of 'interaction as improvisation' (Fisher 2016:173) 'when a practitioner's contribution enhances the learning of a child and, frequently, vice versa'.

5.4 Contribution to action research methodology

My research programme is rooted in the complexities of every-day practice whilst offering strategies for the development of pedagogy grounded in empirical study. The iterative process that comes from mixed-method studies of young children

has consistently empowered the early childhood educators with whom I have worked to reflect on and interpret their own thoughts and feelings about issues which they considered to be pertinent and of value (Howard-Jones 2010). It has proved to be particularly suited to reflection on a range of perspectives – child development, pedagogical theories, language development, policy documentation – all of which need consideration when trying to accommodate these perspectives into a coherent pedagogy for day to day practice in early years settings.

Whilst always aiming for clarity and accessibility, my work is empirically grounded in order to give it the authenticity and rigour necessary for early childhood educators to use it in advocacy of good practice in their various professional situations. The different projects in which I have engaged have refined my action research methodology, for example, by foregrounding the ethical sensitivities of research concerning young children. They have also enabled me to make a contribution to methodology in the field because the impact of changes in practice e.g. in Project 2 where teachers introduced a more balanced approach between adult-led and child-led learning, brought about improved outcomes (SATs results at age seven), an outcome of inevitable interest to senior leaders in schools. Such outcomes can be used by early childhood educators and others in the field as an influential justification for their preferred pedagogy. In addition, engagement with a number of practitioners, in both small- and large-scale research projects, has enabled me to develop an approach to action research as a paradigm, suited to the field of early childhood education.

This meta-analysis has been possible due to my consistent role as a co-researcher and reflective partner in the process of change and development. Because of the long-term nature of these projects I have been able to record, systematically, changes in practitioners' thinking and behaviour brought about by the iterative 'bi-directional relationship between theory and practice' (Fisher and Wood 2012:2). Each of my projects combine theoretical and research-based enquiry alongside consideration of policy requirements to inform changes in practitioners' knowledge, beliefs and practices. These projects reflect the work of Borko (2005) who has argued that research is needed into what and how teachers learn from professional development projects.

My meta-analysis of action research as a methodology for early childhood educators within the three projects of my research programme, makes three key contributions to this paradigm:

- (1) action research empowers early childhood educators in particular where they can be the only early years 'voice' on a staff and where collaboration with a 'community of researchers' can give a strong sense of agency. As one teacher said:

"I have never felt better able to explain why I do what I do. I feel much more able to silence all those voices in the staff room that say 'all you do is play'"

(Research log YR teacher)

- (2) a 'community of researchers' enhances the iterative process of action research through its combination of methods, its flexibility in approach and the status it gives practitioners as 'interpreters of practice' (Bath 2009:215), a status often lacking in the early years workforce (Nutbrown 2012)

"Really enjoying being part of a group. Working with the others has really sharpened my thinking. It's easy to say 'I believe in...' something but not be able to justify it. Now because of discussing things with X (research buddy) and reading much more I feel there is a weight of authority behind me and it's not just 'me'.

(Research log Y1 teacher)

- (3) the filming of practice, and the subsequent stimulated recall, are highly effective research methods for bringing about change in early years practice. Whilst being filmed was initially a challenge for many project participants, the long-term nature of the projects made this methodology less of a threat over time. When, during a typical 'professional dialogue', I have been asked to appraise the quality of teaching and learning, it has sometimes proved difficult to explore practitioner thinking and beliefs. However, during the stimulated recall, because the educators could see themselves in action and had control over the commentary and analysis of what they were seeing (see Chapter 4) there were more moments of critical self-awareness. I have since recommended the use of filming to all schools and settings where I believe senior leaders have a desire to improve practice.

"I knew I talked a lot but hadn't realised how much it stopped children from thinking. B hasn't had time to look at those tubes before I'm putting something else in his hand. I really will try to watch more closely to ensure the children have finished with their train of thought before I introduce something new'

(Stimulated recall interview: Nursery practitioner)

The methodologies developed through my research programme have appeared in journal articles, in my books and during training and conferences. Advisers from other local authorities, as well as some independent researchers, have asked for more information about the processes used and the pitfalls from which I have learned. I have been invited to speak at a number of conferences to 'celebrate' the outcomes of longitudinal research projects stimulated by my work.

5.5 Impact of original contribution

The impact of my contribution to the field stems from the iterative processes of teaching, writing, researching and speaking. Each aspect of my role as a professional has been impacted on, and improved, by the others. Reviews and citations (see Appendix C) of my work speak of clarity and insight, but these come from values and beliefs that are rooted in theory and empirical study as well as every-day practice.

5.6 Future Directions

The three books and five peer-reviewed articles that form this submission are part of a wider body of work (Appendix D) which has focused on the changing role of early childhood educators as the professionals involved in accommodating new government regulation into established approaches to early years pedagogy. The material is a coherent body of work that represents twenty years of exploration of early childhood education at a time of unprecedented change. And the change goes on. My contribution to the areas of early years pedagogy and the role of the educator in both the EYFS and KS1 continues within a context where most practitioners in the field were not trained or in post when this research programme began. As the specialist training of early childhood teachers, in particular, has become shorter and less theory based, it would not be unreasonable to speculate that the influence and impact of government policy and initiatives on early years practice will become increasingly dominant over time as practitioners have less knowledge of and commitment to the pedagogical approaches in which early childhood education has been rooted. I am, therefore, engaged in further research projects to add to this submitted body of work as follows:

(1) A scrutiny of the empirical evidence from the project on *Interacting or Interfering?* analysing the questions asked by educators and the questions raised

by children. This project identified that early childhood educators ask many closed, direct questions of children that do not enhance their thinking (Fisher 2016: 155). It is my proposition that questions raised by children in early years settings are the greater indicator of curiosity and engagement, both of which, in turn, are recognised as indicators of deep level learning (Piaget 1926; Tizard and Hughes 1984; Paley 1986; Laevers 1994; Chouinard 2007; Hedges 2014, 2018). Teachers in a group of schools are currently recording the situations which cause children to ask questions with the aim that this may refocus practitioners' attention on children's questions rather than their own (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2008).

(2) Continuing research with a small number of focus schools keen to investigate 'leading' and 'following' children's learning. These schools recognise the necessity of complying with government regulation but have leadership equally determined to have the central tenets of theoretically-informed early years pedagogy at the core of their practice. The teachers are pursuing the issue of 'purpose' and whether focusing on this as a determinant of how to respond to and support learning is more helpful than focusing on whether an activity is 'adult-led' or 'child-led'.

(3) I have been commissioned to write a second edition of *Moving On to Key Stage 1*. This is particularly timely because of current policy pressures to get children 'ready for' KS1 in increasingly formal ways, rather than 'building on' the Foundation Stage and its mix of child-led and adult-led approaches which was the situation when the first edition was written. In order to provide up-to-date empirical data for this second edition, a group of schools are once again researching moving the principles of the EYFS into KS1, and recording the benefits and the barriers. A large-scale questionnaire is currently being circulated asking teachers where they perceive barriers lie to this way of working. The headteachers of 12 schools already encouraging a pedagogically smooth transition are scheduled to be interviewed in the Autumn term 2019 to identify the principles underpinning their management decisions in order to compile messages to those headteacher colleagues who feel a balanced (child-led as well as adult-led) approach to learning after the Reception year is inappropriate.

5.7 Concluding observation

Each of the research projects within this submission has built incrementally on the others in their findings about the role of early childhood educators. Each

project revealed the complexity of the role (Rose and Rogers 2012) and the subtlety and flexibility necessary to be the right adult at the right time (Fisher 2016). The different projects have all, in their different ways, tackled how early years educators can balance a child-centred pedagogy (EYCG 1989, 1992), still prominent in the early years literature, with an externally imposed government agenda that favours adult-led teaching (Ofsted 2014, 2017). In espousing a pedagogy balancing the role of the educator between 'leading' and 'following' children's learning, an examination of the prevailing literature and the research findings themselves suggest a slow but inexorable turn back towards an earlier discourse of the child as 'empty vessel' (Locke 1689) fit only to be filled with the knowledge deemed to be of value by adults and policy makers. This perspective had been eroded over time by a more emancipatory view of the child as strong, competent and with a sense of 'agency' (Malaguzzi 1997; Hedges 2014). Yet, in favouring a 'delivery' model of education, government policy is turning the tide once more (Scott 2017, 2018; Clark 2018; Moylett 2019). My ongoing research as to how the contemporary policy agenda can be aligned or juxtaposed with current literature, theories and research findings about how children learn will continue to drive the ethical and methodological orientations of my work.

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Appendix A: Literature from government and government agencies impacting on the role of early childhood educators from 1996-2016

Date	Document	Agency
1996	Desirable Learning Outcomes	DfEE/QCA
1997	Baseline Assessment (in Reception classes)	DfEE
1998	National Literacy Strategy	DfEE
1999	National Numeracy Strategy	DfEE
1999	Early Learning Goals	DfEE/QCA
2000	Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage	DfEE/QCA
2002	Birth to Three Matters framework	DFES/Sure Start Unit
2003	The education of six-year-olds in England, Denmark and Sweden	Ofsted
2006	Independent review of the teaching of early reading	DfES (author Sir Jim Rose)
2007	Early Years Foundation Stage	DfES
2008	Early Years Foundation Stage Profile	DfES
2011	The Early Years : Foundations for life, health and learning	DfE (author Dame Claire Tickell)
2012	Statutory Framework for the Early Years foundation Stage	DfE
2014	Are you ready?	Ofsted

Appendix B: Journal citations, book sales and training/ conference invitations

Date & author	Publications	Journal or publisher	Citations & Sales
Project 1: 'Starting from the Child?': balancing a traditional 'child-led' agenda with the demands of new 'adult-led' regulations			
1996a Fisher, J.	'Reflecting on the Principles of Early Years Practice'	<i>Journal of Teacher Development</i> , Vol.5, No.1, 17-26.	0
1999b Fisher, J.	<i>Starting from the Child?</i> (1 st edn)	Buckingham: Open University Press	0 recorded by OUP
2002	<i>Starting from the Child</i> (2 nd edn)	Buckingham: Open University Press	<u>Since 2006 only</u> 8671
2008	<i>Starting from the Child</i> (3 rd edn)	Maidenhead: Open University Press	
2013	<i>Starting from the Child</i> (4 th edn)	Maidenhead: Open University Press	
Project 2: 'Moving On to Key Stage 1': promoting learning experiences that 'build on' the EYFS in a climate moving increasingly towards 'readiness' for KS1			
2009 Fisher, J.	"'We used to play in Foundation, it was more funner": investigating feelings about transition from Foundation Stage to Year 1'	<i>Early Years</i> , Vol.29, No.2, 131-145.	44
2010	<i>Moving On to Key</i>	Maidenhead:	

Fisher, J.	<i>Stage 1</i>	Open University Press.	5819
2011 Fisher, J.	'Building on the Early Years Foundation Stage: developing good practice for transition into Key Stage 1'	<i>Early Years</i> , Vol.31, No.1, 31-42.	25
Project 3: '<i>Interacting or Interfering?</i>': investigating the changing role of the early childhood educator as they move between 'following' children's learning and 'leading' children's learning			
2012 Fisher, J. & Wood, E. 75% contribution	'Changing educational practice in the early years through practitioner-led action research: an Adult-Child Interaction Project',	<i>International Journal of Early Years Education</i> , 2012, Vol.20, No.2, 1-16.	20
2016 Fisher, J.	<i>Interacting or Interfering?</i>	Maidenhead: Open University Press	6418

Training and conference invitations

Project	Training since 2006 (when freelance)	Conferences since 2006 (when freelance)
<i>1. Starting from the Child</i>	75	24
<i>2. Moving On to Key Stage 1</i>	78	43
<i>3. Interacting or Interfering?</i>	168	59

Appendix C: Book reviews (a selection) and Lifetime Achievement Award citation

Book Reviews: from academic sources

(for *Starting from the Child*) 'Julie Fisher once again demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the history of early childhood education, and the enduring principles that continue to underpin practice. She has skilfully blended these principles with contemporary research and theory in order to provide readers with deep understanding of young children as capable, competent and eager learners. Julie draws on her extensive work with practitioners to present the everyday realities and complexities of their practice, and to sound welcome notes of caution about the ways in which policy frameworks are used'.

(for *Starting from the Child*) 'Her fourth edition does not disappoint. She delves in more detail, for example, into brain development and leads her readers further into the latest scientific thinking on how children learn. She is, as ever, insightful about how adults work with children...Her inclusion of her own latest field work ensures Julie's advice on early years practice remains rooted in the everyday, while making accessible a range of theoretical and scientific perspectives'.

(for *Moving On to Key Stage One*) 'This timely book will help teachers in KS1 to implement authoritative recommendations on transition from recent reviews of primary education....It's well-grounded arguments coupled with practical guidance will foster the development of principled and confident professional judgement'.

(for *Interacting or Interfering?*) 'Few people are able to write with such depth, clarity and authority on a subject of such critical importance to understanding Early Years pedagogy. Julie Fisher's reputation as one of our most influential and respected experts is further enhanced by this timely and significant book....Both theoretical and practical, it manages to combine a rich evidence base with a clear insight to reflective and impactful practice. I have no doubt this will become a seminal text for all those working with young children'.

(for *Interacting or Interfering?*) 'There are many strengths in this book that make it essential reading...(it) provides fascinating documentation of everyday events in early childhood settings. This documentation is used as a stimulus to provoke reflective analyses of the data to provoke the deep reflection that we know is essential to high quality interactions that support children's thinking, enquiry,

creativity and playfulness.... Julie supports her assertions with reference to sound scholarship, drawing on.... child development, pedagogical theories, psychotherapy, language, communication and literacy. She traces many of her ideas back to the original research to present a synthesis of key theories that are used as analytical tools in thinking critically about the data. This book is very real in that it presents the voices and perspectives of children and of practitioners as they grapple with important questions about their own practices and ECE policy'.

Book Reviews: from practitioner responses

"This is an interesting and insightful read and as well as drawing on key theorists from the past it also brings you up to date with the latest theories and practices surrounding the foundation stage.... It has remained a key text throughout my Early Childhood degree and will continue to be a well used resource way beyond university and well into my teaching career" (*Starting from the Child, 2013*).

"Julie Fisher's skill is in making clear how learning takes place in a child-focused play environment rooted in theory: she shows how this happens while at the same time giving the clearest and most inspiring ideas for providing and improving the environment (*Starting from the Child, 2013*).

"It's well-grounded arguments coupled with practical guidance will foster the development of principled and confident professional judgement" (*Moving On to Key Stage 1, 2010*)

"Your common-sense, authoritative, warm and inspirational words...remind me beyond doubt why I went into teaching" (Year 1 teacher) (*Moving On to Key Stage 1, 2010*)

"A brilliant helpful book showing the way forward for stick in the muds like me. Love the new thinking, can't wait to put it in practice" (*Moving On to Key Stage 1, 2010*)

"This book is very real, in that it presents the voices and perspectives of children and of practitioners as they grapple with important questions about their own practices and ECE policies" (*Interacting or Interfering?, 2016*)

“This book challenges the reader to consider different ways of thinking about the role of educator and offers support and inspiration to the converted who feel isolated in the system” (*Interacting or Interfering?*, 2016)

Lifetime Achievement Award 2017

***From Nursery World Education* “For her contribution to early childhood education”**

Extracts from Citation:

We must never forget that as early years educators working in the UK, we exist on the back of a long and esteemed tradition that by articulating, challenging and presenting ideas of early years pedagogy and leadership has constantly fought to reassert the importance and nature of how we work with young children. Within this tradition we have always had, and continue to have, our notable and recognisable champions, our advocates, our heroes – or, more accurately, our heroines. These are people whom we hold in affection and respect, in awe of their achievements and a sense of security that while they are here, still talking, still writing, still contributing, then we know that what we believe, what we know to be important, will continue to be said.

Among the Parthenon of living early years experts there are only a handful of names that fit this description, that consistently manage to unequivocally command a universal respect for their intellect, astuteness, vision and perception. Combined with the critical attributes of integrity, foresight and sheer determination, they take on the mantle of truly significant, influential and precious individuals.

Professor Julie Fisher is, without doubt, one of those names, and one of those people. She is undeniably an early years heroine and it is an honour to introduce her for this year’s Lifetime Achievement Award.

Julie has the knack of foreseeing and identifying the pedagogical zeitgeist of the day, and with her trademark intellect and natural articulacy, is always able to describe, present and challenge us all to reflect and understand what this means and why it is so important. This is an ambition many people may aspire to but very few manage to attain it with such success. Whether this be issues posed by the transition from Reception to Year 1, the nature of learning in the EYFS or how

we interact effectively with children, Julie's voice is unfailingly clear, accessible, informed and inspirational.

For me, part of the essence of Julie's work is typified by the title of one of her books, *Starting From the Child*, because as Julie herself might put it – where else would you start from? Although this is obvious to us who work with children, we are living in a time when this tradition of child-centred and child-driven pedagogy is under a real threat, and it is more important than ever to realise the need to protect and describe it. Julie's work empowers us to do that.

Her contribution to early childhood education in the UK has been immense; her writing, her training and her conference presence have inevitably inspired and emboldened generations of early years practitioners and leaders, and continually enable us to rediscover and reassert our confidence in, and passion for, what we know is right for young children.

Appendix D: Full list of published works

The following publications address the impact of government policy setting targets and goals for foundation stage children (age 3-5years) on the pedagogy of classrooms which were previously based on children's interests

Peer-reviewed Journals

Fisher, J. (1994) 'Acknowledging Children as Competent Learners', *Early Years*, Vol.14, No.2, 21-23.

Fisher, J. (1995) 'Planning a curriculum for the early years classroom', *Early Education*, Summer 1995, 4-5.

Fisher, J. (1996a) 'Reflecting on the Principles of Early Years Practice', *Journal of Teacher Development*, Vol.5 No.1, 26.

Books

Fisher, J. (1996) *Starting from the Child?* (1st edn), Buckingham, Open University Press.

Fisher, J. (2002) *Starting from the Child* (2nd edn), Buckingham, Open University Press.

Fisher, J. (2008) *Starting from the Child* (3rd edn), Maidenhead, Open University Press.

Fisher, J. (2013) *Starting from the Child* (4rd edn), Maidenhead, Open University Press.

Professional journals

Fisher, J. (1997a) 'The Early Years Co-ordinator', *Child Education*, August 1997, 48-49.

Fisher, J. (1997b) 'With One Voice', *Nursery World*, 9 October 1997, 12-13.

Fisher, J. (1998a) 'Seen & Heard: the art of observation', *Nursery World*, 5 February 1998, 26-27.

Fisher, J. (1998b) 'All part of the plan: setting goals for children's learning', *Nursery World*, 12 February 1998, 12-13.

Fisher, J. (1998c) 'For good measure: early childhood educators judging their own progress as well as the children's', *Nursery World*, 19 February 1998, 14-15.

Fisher, J. (1998d) 'A play policy for the early years', *Practical Pre-school*, Issue 10.

Fisher, J. (1998e) 'Starting school younger', *Arena Debate*, May 1998, Issue 1.

Fisher, J. (1999) 'Supporting Children's Play', *Practical Pre-school*, Issue 16.

The following publications refer to my critique of the use of the word 'foundation' to describe the new (1998) stage of learning for children in England age 3-5 years.

Peer-reviewed Journals

Fisher, J. (2000) 'The Foundations of Learning', *Early Education*, Summer 2000.

Book

Fisher, J. (2002a) *The Foundations of Learning*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

The following publications are concerned with my research into the developmental needs of children making the transition from Reception Year to Year 1 and how pedagogy and practice should build on, and not be separate from, one phase to the next

Peer-reviewed Journals

Fisher, J. (2006) 'Handle with care! Transitions in the early years', *Early Education*, Autumn 2006.

Fisher, J. (2009) 'We used to play in Foundation, it was funner': investigating feelings about transition from Foundation Stage to Year 1', *Early Years*, Vol.29, No.2, 131-145.

Fisher, J. (2011) 'Building on the Early Years Foundation Stage: developing good practice for transition into Key Stage 1', *Early Years*, Vol.31, No.1, 31-42.

Book

Fisher, J. (2010) *Moving On To Key Stage One: Improving transition from the early years foundation stage*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.

Professional Journals

Fisher, J. (2010a) 'Transitions: preparing children for the move to Key Stage 1, *Nursery World*, May 2010.

Fisher, J. (2010b) 'Transitions: the learning and developmental needs of five-and six-year olds, *Nursery World*, June 2010.

Fisher, J. (2010c) 'Transitions: Developmentally appropriate practice' *Nursery World*, July 2010.

These publications refer to my research into the effectiveness of interactions between early childhood educators and the children with whom they work aged 6 months to 6 years

Peer-reviewed Journals

Fisher, J. and Wood, E. (2012) Changing educational practice in the early years through practitioner-led research: an Adult-Child Interaction Project', *International Journal of Early Years Education*, Vol.20, No.2, 1-16.

Book

Fisher, J. (2016) *Interacting or Interfering? Improving interactions in the early years*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Professional Journals

Fisher, J. (2012a) 'Time to talk', *Nursery World*, 23 January-5 February 2012, 17-20.

Fisher, J. (2012b) 'In tune', *Nursery World*, 20 February-4 March 2012, 19-22.

Fisher, J. (2012c) 'Under control', *Nursery World*, 19 March-1 April 2012, 19-22.

Fisher, J. (2018a) 'The adult role: leading or following?', *Nursery World*, 28 May-10 June 2018, 28-31.

Fisher, J. (2018b) 'The adult role: follow the leader', *Nursery World*, 25 June-8 July 2018, 30-33.

Fisher, J. (2018c) 'The role of the adult: rise to the occasion', *Nursery World*, 23 July-5 August 2018, 28-31.

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** I carried out and wrote up the empirical work on which this article was based. I worked collaboratively with Elizabeth Wood to develop the theoretical framework underpinning the article. My contribution was 75%.