

**The positions adults take in the teaching and learning  
relationship with young children: a psychosocial  
perspective**

**Catharine Gilson**

**UCL Institute of Education**

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## **Abstract**

Early years education in the UK is characterised by diversity of provision and a workforce that includes people with different skills, qualifications and responsibilities. The role of the early years practitioner is thus often complex and challenging. This study aims to explore the roles that the adult takes in the teaching and learning relationship with young children aged between 3-5 years old in England. Both the methodology and analysis were informed by psychoanalytic perspectives on education, in particular the work of Klein and Winnicott. A stratified sample was used to get a broad range of perspectives including parents and practitioners from a variety of settings. Two interviews were conducted with each participant over a period of four months, a conventional semi-structured interview followed by an interview using film elicitation as a prompt for discussion. The eighteen interviews yielded findings which suggested that adults, particularly practitioners, invested in certain aspects of the relationship, such as the expression of rational thought through verbal interaction, and avoided other aspects, notably the emotional dimension of the relationship, especially difficult emotions such as frustration and loss. The study suggests that the privileging of certain aspects of the pedagogic relationship and the exclusion of others results in an unstable and fragmented view of the practitioner's role which does not take into account the complexity of the job and the emotionality of the pedagogic relationship for all adults involved, practitioners as well as parents. These findings have implications for the training and ongoing professional development of early years practitioners.

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**Declaration:**

I, Catharine Gilson, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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## **Reflective statement**

*We need disagreement in order to challenge what is taken for granted and to acknowledge that our expertise is provisional and tentative.*

(Vandenbroeck, 2009:169)

### ***Summary of learning over whole EdD***

When I started the doctorate in education programme five years ago, I had just taken up a post in the education department of a higher education institution, having worked before that for many years as a teacher, first as a secondary school teacher of modern foreign languages, and then, having retrained to teach in the primary phase, as an early years teacher.

Undertaking a doctorate was a requirement of my appointment as a lecturer, and while I was apprehensive about undertaking such a demanding programme as well as meeting the demands of a new and unfamiliar job, I hoped the doctorate would provide me with research training that would inform and enhance my day to day work. More than that, I hoped the doctorate would enable me to become a member of the academic community rather than feeling like a practitioner playing at being a researcher. At the end of the process, while I do feel that the programme has given me more confidence and skills to participate in the academic community, I have also realised that there are many ways to be a researcher, and that my previous



experience, both personal and professional, will have informed the kind of academic I have become, whether or not I intended it to. Looking back over the five years of study, I realise that my research interest seems to lie in looking at unacknowledged areas of tension in teaching and learning. In the sections below, I outline how this led me to unexpected discoveries, about education, and also myself, through the course of the programme.

### ***Overview of elements of course***

In the *Foundations of professionalism* assignment, I considered whether the now superseded Early Years Professional Status accreditation (CWDC, 2010) was a professionalising or de-professionalising influence on the early years workforce. In my critique of two aspects of the professional discourse (the standards approach to assessment, and the model of leadership) I aimed to expose the tension between policy and practice in early years education. The module provided me with a good introduction to academic literacy, and made me aware of the complexity and range of perspectives within any one discourse. I realised there were unexpected gaps between policy and research as well as policy and practice: the model of leadership without management advocated in the EYPS standards and guidance was unsupported by the established body of leadership and management literature, for example, which could perhaps explain why it was such a problematic approach to implement in practice.

In the first methodology module, *Methods of Enquiry 1*, I presented a research proposal to consider how beliefs and attitudes might shape the formation of professional identity in Early Years PGCE students using a questionnaire, a research question which I then explored further in the IFS. In particular, I was interested in looking at whether the early years students' apparent sense of difference stemmed from being tacitly ostracised by other primary PGCE students or a desire to see themselves as special and distinctive. In trying to design a questionnaire to explore the underlying antipathy between primary and early years PGCE students that I had experienced as an early years practitioner in schools, I realised the subtle intricacies of research design, and the limitations and lacunae of language to obtain answers to uncomfortable questions.

The specialist module, *Using psychoanalytic perspectives to make sense of education and educational research*, proved a seminal learning experience for me. The module introduced me to psychosocial research, and the premise that our unconscious influences everything we do, and is by definition, largely unknowable. This theoretical perspective radically re-cast and challenged notions such as the nature of learning and teaching, for example. This was evident in the assignment, where I considered the group behaviour of students on an Early Years Foundation Degree programme from a psychoanalytic perspective, drawing particularly on the work of Klein (1991a; 1991b) and Bion (2004). I chose this topic as I found this group particularly problematic to teach. Nonetheless the experience made me realise the dyadic nature of the learning relationship, and the way in which,

as teachers, we focus on the learner in order possibly to avoid focussing on ourselves, a theme which I returned to in the thesis.

Having been moved out of my comfort zone in the specialist module, I elected to stay out of it in the *Methods of Enquiry 2 module*, where I piloted film elicitation as an interview method, with a view to possibly using it in the fieldwork for the thesis, even though I found the capricious nature of the technology daunting. I was interested in using different interview methods in order to explore tangential ways of approaching a research topic that might elicit discussion of under-explored areas, such as underlying beliefs and attitudes to teaching and learning. In carrying out the small scale pilot study, I became aware of the emotional response that the film seemed to generate, and with it, the ethical considerations that had to be taken into account when designing the fieldwork for the thesis. Conducting the pilot study was also a salutary reminder of the messiness and unpredictability of fieldwork, and the difficulties involved in accessing willing participants.

While in the specialist module and MOE 2 I felt as if I was spreading my wings by exploring new theoretical perspectives and methodologies, in the IFS, I felt constricted. Somewhat naively, I had not expected to find researching in my own workplace to be so difficult: after all, the institution had required me to undertake a doctorate, and were ostensibly supportive, part sponsoring my study and reviewing my progress annually. However, at both an institutional and departmental level, I encountered both overt and covert resistance to my research project. At a procedural level, the stringent university ethics review panel regarded insider research unfavourably, and

required complicated arrangements to be put in place for me to research students on courses that I taught on, requiring the goodwill of already busy colleagues to administer the questionnaires. While investigating the professional identity of early years PGCE students was supported by my department as a useful topic, as they were seen as a problematic group of students who did not fit into the wider primary cohort, the theoretical approach, informed by psychoanalytic perspectives, was regarded with a mixture of incredulity and dismissiveness: though I presented the findings at the annual departmental research conference, I was told that it would be too sensitive to discuss the implications for practice at a leadership team meeting, as the study suggested changes for consideration in the running of the PGCE programme. This experience made me more aware of the political element of research, and the multi-layered and often conflicting nature of institutional cultures.

Looking back now, my response to an atmosphere I found restrictive was to focus on what would be acceptable to my workplace, which in turn possibly constrained the IFS. For example, I chose methods that I perceived to be uncontentious and an efficient way to gather data, using questionnaires and focus groups, which then sat uneasily with the psychoanalytic perspective. In particular, I found it very difficult to write up the study, and struggled to find a voice that I thought would be acceptable to both the institution where I worked and the institution where I was a student. At this point, I felt excluded from the academic community in my workplace, though from talking to other students in my EdD cohort in the supportive IFS and thesis workshops, I

realised this was not an uncommon position. However, in order to feel less constrained and conflicted, I chose to situate the thesis fieldwork in the community rather than in my institution.

The broad perspective of the thesis fieldwork, looking at the learning and teaching relationship from the viewpoints of both practitioners and parents, gave me an awareness of not only the participants' but also my own shifting positions. I realised that I had not stopped being a practitioner and become a researcher, but was now a researcher who identified herself as a teacher, and, to complicate matters further, also as a parent. This constantly fluctuating process of identifications made analysing the data more complex because of the tension between the different perspectives, such as between parent and practitioner viewpoints, for example. It also highlighted for me how intertwined our professional and personal lives are, however much one might wish to separate them out. The ease and speed with which I shifted identifications, and at times straddled contradictory positions, made me more aware of the ambiguities and contradictions in the transcripts and more open to the notion of research as provisional, contingent and nuanced. In terms of my professional development, the experience of learning to tolerate my own contradictory views as well as those of the people I interviewed has, I hope, made me more accepting of contradictory behaviour in the students I teach, such as those who express great anxiety about their assignments then fail to attend tutorials. I think it has also made me more willing to accommodate the tensions inherent between the research and teaching elements of my job,

and so try to integrate these aspects rather than seeing them as separate entities.

### ***Contributions to professional knowledge***

A key aspect of being able to integrate the research knowledge and skills I have learned from the doctoral programme into my teaching has been developing confidence as a researcher. The privileged opportunity to conduct a research study of my own choosing independently, as I was required to do for the thesis, seemed to provide the necessary space and time for me to become more confident in my abilities as a researcher. I am no longer apologetic with my colleagues about the theoretical approach I have adopted, for example, and more prepared to defend psychosocial research as an approach that can illuminate difficult areas of education. My greater awareness of the multiplicity of perspectives in any one issue has given me the confidence also to suggest that in Vandebroek's words 'Let us disagree' (Vandebroek, 2009) and to support the idea of an academic community where a range of views is tolerated, and indeed welcomed in the context of both research and teaching. In terms of my teaching, this approach has been reflected in the modules I have developed during the course of my doctoral study, which focus on developing an awareness of different perspectives in early childhood education, such as international and comparative education, for example. Similarly, two chapters I have contributed to an undergraduate textbook on early childhood have highlighted the multi-layered and multi-faceted nature of early years

education, aiming to encourage students to look beyond the rhetoric at the underlying debates on children's rights (Gilson, 2013a) and inclusive education (Gilson and Street, 2013).

Possibly one of the most valuable aspects of the doctoral programme for my professional development as a teacher of adult students has been being placed in the position of a learner. While doctoral study has expanded my knowledge of early years education, informing both my research and my teaching, it has also made me aware of how much I do not know. Thus paradoxically, at the same time as I have become more confident, I have also had to become comfortable with not knowing, or knowing just a little, particularly when confronted with the enormity of the field of psychoanalysis, for example. Frequently, I have also had to confront conceptually challenging material, and to be reminded that learning is hard work, however much we may desire it to be otherwise. I hope this awareness stays with me after the end of my doctorate, and enables me to be more perceptive and responsive to the students I teach.

## **Chapter One: Setting the scene**

### **Introduction**

The early years landscape in England that provides the context for this study presents a complex and confusing picture of a fragmented array of early years provision staffed by a disparate and equally fragmented workforce. Despite the apparent desire for an integrated, inclusive and holistic approach suggested by the curriculum, the field is characterised in research as well as practice by conflicting discourses relating to the role of the practitioner and a reluctance to discuss difficult issues such as the negative emotions involved in the pedagogic relationship with young children. Within this context, this study will look at the learning and teaching relationship between adults and young children from a psychoanalytic perspective, drawing on the theories outlined below, which will be expanded in the discussion chapters. I will explore under-researched areas such as the difficult emotions that are part of the learning and teaching relationship and, as part of that, the relationship between parents and practitioners.

The purpose of this chapter is to set the scene for the study, providing the focus and context of the empirical research that this thesis is based on. I first provide the aims of the study, the research questions and the rationale for the study. Then, eschewing the conventional literature review, I adopt the approach advocated by Wolcott (1990) of locating the research question in the relevant context, citing pertinent literature, a process Wolcott describes



as the 'nesting of the problem in the introduction' (Wolcott, 1990 :17). This approach then means that further theory and research is introduced and discussed in later chapters when relevant to the topic being discussed. In this chapter, then, I give the professional context of early years education that the research questions are situated in, including relevant theoretical background. The final section of the chapter outlines the key psychoanalytic ideas that are applied to this early years context and provide the underpinning theoretical framework of the study. In the section below, I give the aims of this research study, and outline how the focus for the research arose out of previous work I have done as part of the doctorate in Education.

### **Aims of the study**

This study focusses on the roles that the adult takes in the learning and teaching relationship with young children. This proposal has grown out of the research that I have done to date as part of the doctoral programme, particularly the Institution Focussed Study (IFS) and the Methods of Enquiry 2 (MOE2) module. In the IFS study, which investigated the formation of professional identity among early years Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) students in the institution where I work, the findings indicated that the students identified strongly with the caring and mothering aspects of the role of the early years teacher (Gilson, 2013b). I initially planned to explore the gendered aspects of the practitioner role further in this study, but decided not to pursue this aspect after the pilot studies, in which

gender did not prove a fruitful area for discussion. However, the emotional aspects of the relationship did prove a productive topic, and as a result, I focussed the research questions on this area.

In considering the emotionality of the pedagogic relationship, I look in more detail at under-explored areas of early years pedagogy such as difficult emotions in the learning and teaching relationship with young children. For example, it is hard to confess as an adult to feeling anger or frustration when teaching a young child, though similar feelings on the part of the child are recognised, often in the context of problematic behaviour that requires management and modification. In recent studies Vincent and Braun (2013) and Elfer and Dearnley (2007) comment on the lack of acknowledgement of the existence of difficult emotions in the pedagogic relationship with young children and related adults, and call for a safe space in which practitioners can be open about their feelings.

Having explored Initial Teacher Education (ITE) student perspectives in the IFS, in this study I focus on the perspectives of practitioners in a range of roles to reflect the diverse workforce, including teachers, nursery nurses and teaching assistants. This study concentrates on practitioners working with three to five year old children which corresponds to my previous professional experience as a practitioner and my current contact with settings as placement supervisor for students on the Early Childhood Studies honours degree course, where the majority of the placements are with children in this age range. Parental perspectives of the roles adults take in the learning and teaching relationship with children of this age are also included in order to

broaden the discussion and include their views, which research suggests are not always sought or heeded in early years practice despite the emphasis in the EYFS on the importance of parental partnership (Brooker, 2010). As parents are seen as an integral element of the teaching and learning relationship in early years policy (DfE, 2014) their perspectives are relevant, and one could argue, essential, in what is essentially a triadic relationship. In addition, I wanted to explore how being a parent or not might change the positions practitioners adopted. Below I detail the research questions and give a brief outline of the research project.

## **Research question and sub-questions**

### ***Main research question***

*What positions do adults take in the teaching and learning relationship with young children?*

### ***Sub-questions***

*a) What are the difficult emotions experienced by adult in the teaching and learning relationship?*

*b) How do these difficult emotions relate to the more rational aspects of the teaching and learning relationship?*

*c) How do these difficult emotions affect the positions that adults take up?*

It should be noted that the term 'position' can be used to refer to a discursive or sociocultural perspective (gender or class, for example), which contributes to a person's identity and the processes of identification shaping them.

However, the way in which I have interpreted the term 'position' in the research question is as an internal identification in a psychoanalytic sense. I have put more emphasis on psychoanalytic accounts of the 'internal world' in this study, rather than the sociocultural context, as I argue that these unconscious processes shape adults' professional responses to emotions experienced in the teaching and learning relationship with young children.

The three sub-questions all focus on what I term 'difficult emotions'. This term is drawn from Bibby's work on what she terms the difficult bits of education which she uses to refer to the strong emotions such as love, hate, fear, that teaching can engender (Bibby, 2010). I have used this term in the study to refer to emotions that appear to be difficult to accommodate within a given context, here the teaching and learning relationship with three to five year old children. These emotions tend to be strong feelings, and often, but not always, involve negative emotions. However, strong positive emotions can also be seen as problematic in that they too can disrupt the calm, ordered, rational dimension of the pedagogic relationship that policy and practice aspires to as a model of professional practice with this age group of young children. For example, two practitioners became tearful when talking about what they liked about working with three and four year olds as discussed in

chapter five. In this study, the emotions that emerged from the data as difficult to tolerate within the pedagogic relationship were predominantly negative emotions, in particular frustration, discussed in chapter five, and loss, discussed in chapter six.

### **Outline of study**

A stratified sample of nine participants, including practitioners and parents, was recruited from a range of early years settings in the state and private sectors, and included a children's centre with a nursery school and daycare provision, private nurseries providing education and daycare, and nursery and reception classes in primary schools. The sample of settings was opportunistic but reflected the diversity of early years provision that exists in England currently, often described as 'a patchwork quilt' (Sylva, 2010:207). Participants were interviewed twice over a four month period using two interview methods: a conventional semi-structured interview and a semi-structured interview using a film elicitation as a prompt for discussion. I piloted the interview method using a film clip as a visual artefact in the MOE2 study, where the findings supported research by Banks (2001) and Rose (2007), who suggest that the tangential interview method can be effective at eliciting beliefs and attitudes that may be hard to access by more straightforward methods. Both the methodology and analysis were informed by psychoanalytic perspectives on education and educational research. In the section below, I provide a rationale for the psychosocial approach taken in the research project.

## **Rationale for approach to study**

This exploratory study is informed by both psychosocial and interpretivist approaches, drawing particularly on the work of Klein and the British Object Theorists, especially Winnicott. The learning and teaching relationship between adults and young children is explored through a psychoanalytic lens, and is underpinned by the notion of the defended subject, as developed by Klein (Bibby, 2010; Hollway and Jefferson, 2002; Mitchell, 1986). This term encompasses the processes by which we develop defences to manage the unconscious anxieties arising out of the complicated business of living. From a psychoanalytic standpoint, this notion implies no criticism, but recognises that much human behaviour is driven by anxiety (Bibby, 2010; Frosh, 2002). It is hoped that this theoretical framework will offer a different perspective with which to explore the gap between the rhetoric of education and the reality of the classroom aptly described by Bibby who writes of 'the tension between the utter difficulty of being in the classroom and the calm rational responses of those writing about teaching and learning' (Bibby, 2010:1). Moore comments on how rarely the emotional charge of the classroom is acknowledged in education and argues that it needs to be recognised alongside the rational elements of teaching in order to fully understand our experiences as educators:

it is [...] precisely an overlooking of the emotional in classroom practice, in favour of an elusive and illusory rational, that often renders classroom

experiences and interactions so hard to understand or explain.(Moore, 2004:34)

Using psychoanalytic theory as a framework then, would seem to offer a lens through which to look at what Bibby (2010:3) terms 'the difficult bits' of education, such as the fears, anxieties, loves and hates that the occupation provokes. However it is important to recognise that while looking at a problem from a psychoanalytic perspective may lead to a better understanding of the issues through acknowledging their existence, psychoanalysis and education are regarded here as different undertakings (Bibby, 2010; Frosh, 2010). As Bibby writes:

Psychoanalysis cannot provide a prophylactic for education although it can provide tools and metaphors for thinking about education (Bibby, 2010:5).

In her stance that education and psychoanalysis are different endeavours, Bibby here upholds the Kleinian position that education and psychoanalysis cannot be combined, a position challenged by Anna Freud and her followers, who saw the possibility of a psychoanalytic education for children. These disagreements were aired in what became known as the Controversial Discussions (Britzman, 2003). In this study then, I support Bibby's stance, and use psychoanalytic theory as a framework with which to conceptualise and discuss tricky questions. In this way I hope not only to offer fresh insights into the problematic and under-researched issue of emotionality in the pedagogic relationship, but also to contribute a new theoretical perspective to the field of early years education.

The methodological perspective is similarly exploratory and located within an interpretivist paradigm as discussed in chapter two. This approach is compatible with both the research question and a psychosocial perspective, based as it is on the notion of multiple subjective realities. Two different research interview methodologies are used as the pilot carried out in MOE2 indicated that the different interview methods were likely to elicit different data (Gilson, 2012). Film elicitation was found to provide insights into problematic areas of the pedagogic relationship that are hard to obtain by more conventional methods as people are likely to employ defences to protect them from thinking or talking about unpleasant topics (such as anger and frustration), particularly in a staged conversation such as a research interview. The two interview methods are discussed in more detail in chapter two.

This study expands the range of methodological approaches used in early years research by taking an approach informed by psychosocial methodologies, and broadens the range of methods used in empirical early years research by using film elicitation as an interview method. It also contributes to the range of theoretical approaches adopted, given that there is limited work taking a psychoanalytically informed approach to either methodology or analysis in the field of early years. It will build on the modest body of work by current researchers such as Silin (2006a), O' Loughlin (2006), Price (2002) and Elfer (Elfer, 2012a; Elfer and Dearnley, 2007) who comment on early childhood seen through a psychoanalytic lens and so contribute to the diversity of perspectives in the field. It should be



acknowledged perhaps that a stronger legacy of Klein and Freud's interest in the psychoanalysis of young children is evident in the psychoanalytically informed approach to infant observation (eg. Magagna, 1997; Miller *et al.*, 1989; Stern, 1985). The study also opens up the debate on the learning and teaching relationship of adults with young children through interviewing a wide range of participants including parents as well as practitioners from a variety of early years provision.

In the section below, I give the professional context of this study, to which psychoanalytic theories are applied as a theoretical framework. I first outline the landscape of early years policy and practice in which this research project is located. I next problematize the conceptualisation of the pedagogic relationship with young children as this is a contested area and a key element of the research question. I then review with a critical lens pertinent literature on the key discourses in the early years pedagogic relationship, including theoretical influences where relevant. In the following section, I introduce the key psychoanalytic ideas that underpin the study, and are used to frame the learning and teaching relationship with young children in a fresh way. These two sections together provide the conceptual framework for the study.

### **Early years context**

Early years policy and practice in England is described as 'turbulent terrain' by Rogers and Lapping (2012:247). West (2010) critiques the notion of

choice offered by the market driven model of what he terms the 'mixed economy of provision' and the disparate nature of the early years workforce. Despite, or perhaps because of, this heterogeneity, the English early years curriculum, introduced in 2008 and revised in 2012 and 2014, is characterised by an apparent desire to unify and standardize the disparate elements of early years provision, by bringing them all under one statutory framework, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2014). This drive for homogeneity is evident in the way in which the term 'practitioner' is used as a unifying term to refer to the whole workforce, including teachers, nursery nurses, teaching assistants, nursery assistants and childminders, all of whom have widely differing levels of qualifications and pay (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010). In addition practitioners' terms of employment are very varied, as the EYFS is statutory for all state-funded, private or voluntary-funded settings that receive government funding for young children. This means that the EYFS is implemented in state and independent primary and nursery schools, pre-schools, private day care nurseries, children's centres, and by registered childminders, resulting in provision that Moss (2014) regards as fragmented and confused, and the result of a lack of planning over several decades.

This confusing picture is further complicated by the lack of clarity over what age range the early years covers: the United Nations (UN) (UN, 2005) defines early years as covering the age range from birth to eight years, but the EYFS (DfE, 2014) applies to all children aged from birth to five in Ofsted registered settings and schools in England. In practice, however, the EYFS

age range is often divided into the birth to three age range and the three to five age range. The latter is the age at which nursery education traditionally began in England, before the EYFS extended the curriculum and statutory framework in 2008 so that it began at birth. For the purposes of this study, I will be using the UN definition when talking about early years as a generic term. The fieldwork, however, was focussed specifically on three to five year old children, both for practical reasons as mentioned above, and also because the rate of young children's development is so rapid that the role of the practitioner working with babies, for example, will inevitably be significantly different from that of a practitioner working with four year old. In the study, I use the word practitioner to describe the early years educator, and talk about teaching as part of their role, though they may or may not be qualified teachers, as I consider all people working in the early years to be involved in a learning and teaching relationship with young children, as discussed in the section on pedagogy below.

### **The pedagogic relationship with young children**

The notion of a pedagogic relationship is value-laden, depending as it does on how pedagogy is conceptualised, which in turn determines the role of the adult and the child in the relationship. Within early childhood as well as more widely, Murray (2015) notes that pedagogy is a contested and complex term, defined and experienced in a multitude of different ways, resulting in an array of early childhood pedagogies rather than one coherent approach. These

include, for example, social pedagogy (Wall, Litjens and Taguma, 2015) family pedagogy (Catarsi, 2012), relational pedagogy , pedagogy for social justice (Hawkins, 2014), and the disputed pedagogies of play (Rogers and Lapping, 2012), which are outlined later in this chapter. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, given the difficulty of trying to conceptualise a complex notion such as pedagogy, there is no accepted definition of early years pedagogy (and in the view of Stephens (2010) limited attempts at articulation) though Siraj Blatchford's definition seems to be used to represent the English policy position as seen in a recent international report (Wall, Litjens and Taguma, 2015) where pedagogy is defined as:

That set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context. It refers to the interactive process between teacher and learner and to the learning environment (which includes the concrete learning environment, the family and community). (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002:28)

While Siraj-Blatchford's definition foregrounds the importance of interaction (discussed later in this chapter) and broadens the context of learning to include the wider environment, others have emphasised the importance of relationships and collaboration in early childhood pedagogy. Brooker, for example, describes learning in the early years as essentially relational and holistic, including parents in the pedagogic relationship:

Learning is now seen to be very much the outcome of relationships: between children and their friends and classmates, between children and the adults

that care for them in every setting, and between the professional educators and the families and communities who have provided children's earliest experiences. (Brooker, 2010:14)

Pedagogy is similarly broadly defined in the early years context by Moyles, who expands the role of the early years educator to include care, based on a notion of the adults and children learning with each other.

Pedagogy [...] connects the relatively self-contained act of teaching and being an early years educator, with personal, cultural and community values (including care), curriculum structures and external influences. Pedagogy in the early years operates from a shared frame of reference (a mutual learning encounter) between the practitioner, the young children and his/ her family. (Moyles, Adams and Musgrove, 2002:5)

I have used this relational notion of pedagogy to inform my interpretation of the teaching and learning relationship in this study. Thus the pedagogic relationship between adults and young children is considered holistically, as encompassing all aspects of the relationship between the learner and the teacher. The term is used interchangeably with learning and teaching relationship and in this context, all early years practitioners are regarded as teaching children, whatever their qualification. So, the pedagogic relationship includes all activities the adult and child are involved in whether the adult is showing a child how to put his or her coat on, sharing a story with them, watching them build a tunnel in the sandpit or talking about what they did at the weekend. This is in keeping with early years rhetoric which seeks to integrate early childhood education and childcare (ECEC), which historically

were seen as separate entities until the inception of the EYFS in 2008 (DCSF, 2008b).

This notion of relational pedagogy aligns with the continental notion of pedagogy which has a broader scope than pedagogical discourses in the UK where there tends to be a narrower focus on teaching, and the curriculum (Papatheodorou, 2009). For example, in some European countries such as Denmark, the term pedagogue is used to describe early years practitioners, who have a distinct graduate level training and a recognised area of expertise (OECD, 2006). They are not seen as teachers but as working within a concept of pedagogy where equal importance is given to the child's care, upbringing and learning. This conceptualisation of pedagogue carries with it a resonance of the holistic nature of the Greek pedagogues of antiquity who were men, often slaves, employed by wealthy families to live with their sons once they had grown out of their nurse's care, and bring them up. They were seen as the guardians of the child's welfare, responsible for both their physical safety, accompanying them to school each day, and also for their moral education and development (Yannicopoulos, 1985). In the section below I consider how the pedagogic role of the early years practitioner is presented in the literature and the policy. Two competing discourses dominate the literature: the practitioner as an educator, where the focus is primarily on verbal interaction, and the practitioner as a carer. I discuss relevant aspects of these two discourses below and then outline the psychoanalytic theories that are applied to this early years context, thus providing the conceptual framework for the study.

## **Competing discourses on the pedagogic role of the early years practitioner**

### ***Practitioner as educator***

Social constructivist perspectives on learning and in particular Vygotskian theory underpins research, policy and practice in the early years (Stephens, 2010). The early years educator is seen as a co-constructor of knowledge with the child, acting as a facilitator working through both the environment and predominantly through interaction (Rogers, 2011). The EYFS reflects the emphasis Vygotsky places on learning through social interaction though as a recent OECD review pointed out, the theoretical underpinning is not explicitly acknowledged in the curriculum (Wall, Litjens and Taguma, 2015). For example, the term 'scaffolding' is used in the EYFS to describe the way the early years educator can support a child's learning (DfE, 2014), alluding to the work of Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) who, building on Vygotskian theory, explored the notion of how adults are frequently seen to provide a framework, often instinctively, to facilitate the next steps in a child's learning. This notion has been developed further in Rogoff's work on guided participation within an apprenticeship model of the learning and teaching relationship (Rogoff, 1990).

The importance of the quality of the interaction between the adult and the child in the pedagogic relationship is strongly emphasised in the UK (Fumoto, 2011; Siraj-Blatchford, 2007; Sylva *et al.*, 2004): indeed, Fumoto (2011)

sees the pedagogic role of the early years teacher as defined by the responsive quality of their interactions. The term 'interaction' is frequently used in early years research and policy, but rarely defined, though a Vygotskian interpretation of the term seems to be commonly used, such as the definition offered by Smidt:

Where people are together in pairs or larger groups and exchanging thoughts, ideas, words and experiences. (Smidt, 2009 : 19)

Language, predominantly verbal, is regarded as the most important aspect of interaction and as such, a key element in all education and learning (Smidt, 2009; Stanley, 2011). As a result, interaction is often used as a shorthand term to denote verbal dialogue for a pedagogical purpose commonly between the adult and child but also between children.

In this study, I have used Smidt's definition of interaction (cited above) as this seemed to reflect the way the term is used in early years policy, and in the data by practitioners. I have used the term 'language' to refer predominantly to verbal language, again following the usage in early years policy and practice, though I discuss the use of the term further in chapter four, when I consider non-verbal modes of communication. Furthermore, as I mention in chapter four, in psychoanalytic literature a distinction is made between the verbal and the pre-verbal child (Phillips, 1988; Winnicott, 1960), again seeing language as denoting primarily verbal representation. It should be noted however that this binary split between discrete verbal and pre-verbal phases of childhood is challenged by recent research on emergent literacy in early childhood (see for example Gillen and Hall, 2013) , though this dichotomy



forms part of the psychoanalytically informed theoretical framework of this thesis.

Recent policy reflects the emphasis on skilled adult interaction with government-funded initiatives such as 'Every Child a Talker' (DCSF, 2008a) and the 'Early Language Development Programme' (DfE, 2012). It is interesting to note that though the importance of verbal adult-child interaction in early years practice is unquestioned in the UK, it is in fact a particularly anglocentric cultural practice found in the UK and US as illustrated by Tobin et al's (Tobin, 2009) comparative ethnographic study of pre-school in three cultures. This seminal study used a method described as 'a video-cued multivocal conversation' (Tobin, 2009:5) which involved early childhood educators in China, Japan and the US, discussing the same set of videotapes recording a day in a pre-school in each culture. The researchers report how Japanese teachers were mystified as to why the American teachers spent so much time trying to get the children to talk about what they were doing, and suggested that it could distract them from whatever it was they were learning. Gallas (2010) acknowledged how dependent she was on language when teaching children in a Navajo kindergarten in the United States, who not only spoke little English, but also came from a much less verbal culture, so communicated in a variety of non-verbal ways. Within Europe, the Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach of northern Italy, where children are encouraged to express themselves in what Rinaldi (2006:193) terms 'graphic languages' also throws into relief the strongly linguistic focus of the English pedagogical approach.

### *Verbal interaction and play*

Verbal interactions between adults and children then, are a central element of the English early years pedagogical approach, and take place in the context of play-based learning. Though play-based learning is accepted as integral to early years pedagogy in the UK, with the adult seen as the facilitator, enabler and provider of play opportunities, definitions of play are notoriously elusive, as Swarbrick (2013) points out. Indeed, Rogers and Lapping (2012) comment that play is not defined anywhere in the EYFS (DfE, 2014), though it is seen as central to learning. However, the lack of clarity and consensus over the role of play in early years pedagogy has led to it being a hotly contested area, focussing particularly on the balance between play and instruction in the pedagogical approach. Rogers (2010) suggests that in schools and early childhood institutions young children's self-directed play is often viewed as undisciplined and less important than didactic activities. The role of these institutions then is to 'control and sanitize play so that it reflects adult views of what is good play/ bad play' (Rogers, 2010:161). The debate exemplifies the tensions, highlighted by Rogers, that are inherent in a play-based child-centred pedagogy which is set within a formal target-driven educational system. These tensions are also reflected in the balance of child-initiated and adult-directed activities advocated as good practice in the curriculum. The tension between play and instruction is seen in the ambivalent approach to adult-child verbal interaction, where even in a child-initiated activity, the practitioner is expected to respond to the child and let them lead the conversation, but then at the same time, extend their knowledge (DfE, 2014; Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002).

Alongside the discourse of the early years practitioner as a skilled, interactive educator working within a prescriptive, target-driven curriculum, there exists the discourse of the practitioner as a carer that is modelled on the parental role and conceptualised rather differently. I consider this discourse below.

### ***Practitioner as carer***

The tension between the discourses of care and education is acknowledged in primary education but has been particularly debated in early years education. Writing twenty years ago Siraj-Blatchford (1993) saw care and education as integrated into an early years educator's work while Moyles (2001) sees the discourse of care elevated to a passion that drives the early years practitioner, and eclipses all other aspects of their role. The discourse of care has gained prominence since the introduction of the EYFS framework in 2008 (DCSF, 2008b), which formalises the conflation of education with care and extends the age range from three to five to birth to five. For example, the welfare standards which previously applied only to childcare provision now apply to all early years settings including schools, and have been incorporated into the statutory framework of the EYFS (DfE, 2014). Much recent research on the caring aspect of the role has focussed on practitioners working with babies and children under three in daycare settings, where there is a concern to improve the quality of provision and to professionalise the workforce (Bath, 2013; Taggart, 2011). Bowlby's attachment theory (Bowlby, 2005) dominates the studies on relationships practitioners have with babies and children under three (eg. Belsky, 2006;

Elfer, 2012b; Page and Elfer, 2013; Sigman, 2011) but also underpins the caring role of the adult for all children within the full age range of the EYFS and is encapsulated in the notion of the key person approach (Elfer, 2012b) .

### *Key person approach*

The parental aspects of the early years educator role are formalised in the EYFS (DfE, 2014) with the statutory implementation of the Key Person Approach (KPA). This way of working is based on Bowlby's theory of attachment between a primary carer, usually the mother, and the infant (Bowlby, 1953). Bowlby's attachment theory focusses on the emotional bonds established between parents, particularly the mother, and their infants and young children. This early attachment relationship is seen as essential to the child's healthy development in providing what Bowlby (2005) termed 'a secure base' from which the child can explore the outside world.

The importance Bowlby's theory accords to a primary carer inevitably poses uncomfortable questions for the provision of childcare for young children in Western countries such as the UK where children are frequently looked after in daycare settings from a young age rather than remaining with their primary caregiver. However, Rutter (1999) argues that children can form attachments with multiple caregivers, and current versions of the theory allow for this (Wild and Lloyd, 2013). Rutter is also highly critical of the unquestioning and simplistic way the theory has been adopted by practitioners working with young children (Rutter and O'Connor, 1999). This criticism was borne out by a recent study (Page and Elfer, 2013) which indicated that practitioners' lack of understanding of the application of the

theory in a nursery context led to fragile relationships forming with families. Page and Elfer found that practitioners failed to recognise the complexity of the relationship between the key person, parents and the child and tended to rely on their intuitive understanding of a maternal role rather than engaging with how the theoretical model can be applied in an institutional context. The complexity of implementing attachment theory in educational settings is reiterated by Geddes (2006) in her study of primary schools. Both Brooker (2010) and Elfer (2012a) have commented on the strong negative emotions practitioners express about their relationships with other adults such as colleagues and parents, though this appears rarely to be acknowledged in practice, policy and research. As parents are regarded as integral to the early years pedagogic relationship, which includes child, parent and teacher, then working in partnership with them is considered essential, as I discuss in the next section.

### ***Practitioners working in partnership with parents***

Brooker (2010) argues that a triangular relationship exists between the child, the parent and the practitioner, and that the relationship with the child cannot be considered without taking into account the relationship between the parent and practitioner, which is not always an easy one. Magagna (1997), who takes a psychoanalytically informed approach to infant observation, also talks of the importance of the relationship between the parent and the practitioner for the outcomes of the child. She sees the relationship of the two adults as shaped by the internal and unacknowledged fantasies of the ideal carer of

each individual. While both Brooker and Magagna report on research with babies and very young children, their approaches and findings can usefully inform this study, as the issues around the tricky nature of the relationship between parents and practitioners still remain with older children in the EYFS, as Cottle and Alexander (2014) recognise though there seems to be little acknowledgement of this in practice. In this study, I will explore the emotional labour, outlined below, of working with young children, including as part of the pedagogic relationship, aspects of the relationship between practitioners and parents or carers.

***Emotional labour in the early years pedagogic relationship: a missing element?***

Given the emotional complexity of sustaining a pedagogic relationship with young children, which includes potential tensions in the relationships with their parents as discussed above, it is perhaps surprising that the emotional dimension of working with young children has only recently been increasingly acknowledged in the early years literature (Osgood, 2010; Page and Elfer, 2013; Taggart, 2011). A tension between the discourse of professionalism and the discourse of care is identified by Taggart (2011) as the reason behind the lack of recognition of the emotional component of the early years practitioners' work, particularly with babies and very young children. In response to concerns around the professionalization of the workforce, some researchers have framed caring as an ethical responsibility (Bath, 2013; Taggart, 2011) that aims to distinguish the more formalised approach from

being associated with the maternal role, which is seen as undermining the professionalism and status of practitioners (Rabe-Kleberg, 2009). In the context of slightly older children, Price (2001) explores the notion of emotional labour in classroom teaching, using Hochschild's definition of it as the requirement 'to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (Hochschild, 1983:7). Hochschild sees this process as required by the terms of the job and involving an emotional cost for the individual. Though Hochschild's work, based on a study with flight attendants, has been challenged - indeed Price (2001) challenges the claim that emotional labour is always exploitative - it provides a useful notion with which to explore how difficult emotions are managed by the adults in the early years teaching and learning relationship. In their study with childcare students, Vincent and Braun (2013) question why only positive emotions were acknowledged, and call for the potential cost of practitioners having to suppress negative feelings about the children and other aspects of their job to be considered in more detail.

The pedagogical discourses in the teaching and learning relationship with young children discussed above might be said to be characterised by contradictions and complexity, with tensions within key concepts as well as between them. Discourses are often polarised one against the other (such as the educator and carer roles of the practitioner) giving rise to a sense of fragmentation rather than integration. In addition, there are murky areas that are uncharted and unspoken about, and so appear marginalised from the debates: adult emotions, especially difficult emotions are scantily

acknowledged, for example, and the complexity of the relationship between practitioners and parents is hidden behind the somewhat glib notion of 'parental partnership'. By using a psychoanalytic theoretical framework, which foregrounds emotions, and which provides a model for thinking about areas of experience that are difficult to talk about, I hope to find new ways of conceptualising these issues and to illuminate why they might be so problematic to consider. In the next section, I introduce key theoretical ideas that inform the study, and which are developed further in later chapters.

## **Key psychoanalytic ideas**

### ***The unconscious and the conscious mind***

As I have already discussed in my IFS study (Gilson, 2013b), all psychoanalytic theory is based on the premise that there is both a conscious and an unconscious part of the human mind. This radical notion has permeated post-Freudian culture to such an extent that it is widely accepted in most western cultures, and it is this notion that distinguishes psychoanalytic approaches from all other ways of looking at human psychology (Frosh, 2002). As I write in the IFS, 'the unconscious is by definition unknowable, and the only glimpses that are caught of it are in dreams, unintended actions and words, and free association' (Gilson, 2013b:14). Frosh describes the unconscious as a space of dynamic activity, rather than a place:



The unconscious is not a storehouse for unused thoughts, indeed, it is not a place at all. It refers, rather, to a type of idea, one which is hidden from awareness yet still active ('dynamic'), pushing for release. (Frosh, 2002:13)

An individual then exists in flux between the two dynamic states of the conscious and unconscious minds in what is termed a psychic reality (Frosh and Baraitser, 2008). Psychoanalysis, while acknowledging the essential inaccessibility of the unconscious, opens up the possibility of considering the interrelationship between the two states, accepting as it does that our conscious behaviour is influenced, whether we wish it to be or not, by our unconscious impulses. The Freudian concept of the unconscious was developed further by Klein, who saw the unconscious as consisting of 'sensations interpreted as relationships with objects' (Hinshelwood, 1991:468) in addition to instinctual impulses. This relational aspect of the unconscious put forward by Klein was developed further in the British object theorist tradition by theorists including some whose names are familiar to many early years practitioners and researchers such as Winnicott and Isaacs (Nutbrown and Clough, 2014). Though it is beyond the constraints of this study to discuss the many schools of thought that exist within the field of psychoanalysis, it is useful to note, as elucidated by Hinshelwood (1991), that the Object Relation School is distinguished from Freudian theory by the primary focus on the nature of the object and its relation with the subject, rather than on forces and drives.

### ***The defended subject***

A second key principle of psychoanalytic thought is that the constant interplay of the two states (conscious and unconscious), and our involuntary attempts to keep what is unacceptable out of our conscious mind, lead to humans constructing defences against thoughts or impulses that would be unbearable (Bibby, 2010). As Bibby points out, there is no pejorative connotation attached to the idea of having defences in psychoanalysis, rather they are part of the business of living:

Our defences develop as a way to manage anxieties provoked by the difficult experiences of living and processing life, the difficulty of managing our conscious and unconscious lives. (Bibby, 2010:8)

Another way of framing this is to see humans as defended subjects. In Kleinian theory, all humans develop defences to manage the anxieties that we all have (this term again when used in the Kleinian sense does not have any judgment attached). These anxieties develop from the infant's earliest experiences of relating to their mother, symbolised by their contact with her breast, which is the earliest object that the infant relates to. As I have detailed in the IFS, the infant seeks out their mother's breast as a source of food and comfort to replace the sustenance and closeness of the womb, but 'a baby's desire for an omnipresent and inexhaustible breast cannot be met so there is an inevitable tension in the relationship between the infant and the breast' (Gilson, 2013b:15). This is conceptualised in Kleinian terms as the baby feeling that a good breast and a bad breast exists. During infancy, the baby vacillates between love and hatred of the fantasised good and bad

breasts. This polarised position denotes that the mechanism of splitting has occurred, which is seen as a key defence to cope with anxiety. Splitting is described in more detail in the IFS and when it occurs, is described as the paranoid schizoid position by Klein (1986b). As the infant matures, it is hoped that the ego can accept the existence of both good and bad in the same object, so tolerating ambivalence, which Klein termed the depressive position. However, people move between these positions throughout their lives, achieving temporary resolutions of split feelings through movements into and out of the depressive position. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the paranoid schizoid position is problematic as it is seen as unstable and it is only in the depressive position, where both good and bad aspects of the object are integrated, that stability is temporarily achieved (Segal, 1973).

Other key defences in Kleinian theory include repression and projection, which are outlined briefly here, and developed in later chapters when relevant. Defences, as Frosh (2002) emphasises, are necessary, as unconscious wishes are disturbing and may threaten to engulf an individual. In a general sense, all defences involve repression, in order to keep the unconscious desires under control. When used as a psychoanalytic term, repression is seen as an active process, and in Kleinian theory, repression is seen as a secondary defence to splitting and is often linked to projection. So, for example, at a certain point in the child's development, all the good aspects associated with the breast may be located by the infant in the mother. Good qualities might include the capacity to be nurturing, endlessly selfless and accommodating. At the same time, all the negative aspects of

the bad breast may be repressed with regard to the mother but then projected onto the father, who may be seen by the infant as constraining, unresponsive and unkind. Mitchell describes projection as when 'the ego fills the object with some of its own split feelings and experience' (Mitchell, 1986:20). Conversely, introjection also occurs, where perceptions or experiences of an object are absorbed into the ego. Mitchell points out that all these processes occur in every infant, and often with each other rather than in isolation. So projection is a way of separating good from bad experiences by investing an object or person with the good or bad emotions and introjecting the opposite ones. However, both Bibby (2010) and Frosh (2002) caution against a simplistic approach to these processes and warn that a person may reject the feelings projected onto him or her, resulting in a breakdown in unconscious communication.

A further development of projection exists in Kleinian theory, namely that of projective identification, which is summed up by Segal:

Projection can be thought of as *perceiving* someone else as having one's own characteristics: projective identification involves a more active *getting rid of* something belonging to the self into someone else. Projective identification involves evoking in someone else aspects of the self which one cannot bear. (Segal, 1992:36)

Projective identification involves a deep level of splitting. Though it is often seen as an aggressive attack on the other person, it can be used in a more benign way to get rid of good feelings as well as negative emotions, as an

attempt to establish a resonance with the other person (Frosh, 2002; Segal, 1992).

### ***Identifications***

Psychoanalytic models are based on the notion of the mind as an open system, which involves a dynamic process of both taking in and getting rid of experiences and emotions. From this perspective an individual cannot be considered other than in relation to other individuals as we are shaped by our encounters with others from birth. In general terms, our identities are formed in this way. In psychoanalytic theory, the term identification is used to describe 'the process whereby an individual takes in attributes of the people with whom she or he is in contact with, and is transformed as a consequence' (Frosh, 2002:57). The process of internalisation is unconscious, and begins in infancy with the primary caregiver(s). As the primary caregiver is in our society usually female and the mother, this has raised questions in feminist psychoanalytic theory and beyond, about the different ways that mothers relate to their sons and daughters (based on their own identifications) and so the differing patterns of identifications that are established. The question of how identifications are formed is a highly complex and debated area, and Benjamin's view that individuals form multiple identifications, that are constantly shifting and fluid, offers a useful model to inform the analysis and discussion of the data in this study (Benjamin, 1998).

Identification of the mother with her infant was regarded by Winnicott as a key maternal function, and he termed the willingness of most mothers to devote themselves to understanding and responding to their baby, albeit temporarily, as 'primary maternal preoccupation' (Winnicott, 1965:15).

Through this process of identification, the mother can usually work out what her infant needs and so provide a suitable environment for them to flourish in. The purpose of what Winnicott (1965) termed 'the facilitative environment' provided by the primary caregiver was not only to make the baby feel secure through both physical and emotional holding, a concept explored further in later chapters, but also to enable the infant to move from dependency in tiny steps towards independence. Winnicott argued that this process generally happened naturally as mothers are usually good, but not perfect, at interpreting their child's wishes and needs so the child learns to tolerate the necessary frustration needed to take the next step towards independence, such as waiting a little while for a feed or a nappy change, for example. For Winnicott, over-identification as well as under-identification of a mother with her child, is problematic for the mother-child dyad, and impedes a child's journey towards independence.

### *Psychoanalytic influences on current early years policy and practice*

Elfer (2015) highlights the significant influence of Bowlby's attachment theory on current early years policy and practice in England. While Bowlby (2005) acknowledged the influence of Winnicott and Klein's theories on his thinking, he positioned himself outside the British Object Relations School. However, Bowlby's notion of a secure base (Bowlby, 2005) which underpins the

'enabling environment' of the early years curriculum (DfE, 2014) seems to echo Winnicott's notion of a facilitative holding environment in emotional terms, based as it is on the expectation that the environment will provide enough emotional support from responsive adults for the children to take risks and explore in order to learn. Thus, the Winnicottian theoretical framework I develop in later chapters of the study fits well with an early years context, and also broadens the range of psychoanalytic perspectives used in the field.

Bain and Barnett (1986) combined attachment theory with social defence theory (Menzies Lyth, 2000) in their pioneering study looking at organisational systems that hindered or helped attachment relationships focussing particularly on children under three. Their recommendation for assigned care workers no doubt paved the way for the statutory implementation of the Key Person Approach with the introduction of the (DCSF, 2008b). While the empirical research was conducted forty years ago in a very different context (in a day nursery in the then unregulated care sector which catered for deprived children, all of whom had suffered trauma or abuse), it is interesting to consider their findings relating to the emotionality of the practitioner role in the light of the contemporary early years context of this study, as I do at various points in the discussion.

## **Summary of chapter**

In this chapter, I have detailed how this study arose from my previous doctoral work and explained how it aims to make a contribution to the field of early years in several ways. Firstly, I focus in the study on the emotional dimension of the teaching and learning relationship with three to five year old children in contrast to the literature on this age group which emphasises the importance of verbal interaction and cognitive skills over the caring dimension of the role, which is aligned more with practitioners working with children under three. Secondly, I am widening the range of theoretical perspectives used to conceptualise early years practice by using a psychoanalytic theory as framework to inform the research project, and thirdly, I take an innovative approach to interview methods by using film elicitation as an interview method alongside a conventional semi-structured interview, thus expanding the methods used in early years research. The aim of these fresh methodological and theoretical approaches is to uncover the emotionality and in particular the difficult emotions that I contend are an integral part of the teaching and learning relationship with young children, but which are rarely acknowledged in practice, policy or research.

## **Outline of future chapters**

In chapter two the methodology of this empirical study is discussed and the methods reported. In particular the rationale for using a psychosocial approach is given and the methodological and ethical implications of the two



interview methods considered. Chapter three presents a snapshot of the findings and explains the conceptualisation of the discussion chapters. The findings are then explored in more detail alongside the discussion in chapters four, five and six, with each chapter focussing on an aspect of the pedagogic relationship related to the research questions that emerged from the data analysis. Finally chapter seven presents the conclusions of the study and considers the implications for future research and for practice.

## **Chapter Two: Methodological approach and methods**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explains the methodological design I used to carry out my research project. This design stems from the research questions and conceptual framework presented in the previous chapter. I first explain the methodological approach of this study considering the advantages and potential drawbacks of such an approach. I then refer to the research design and sampling strategies I devised before discussing the methods of data collection I selected for this study. I describe how the fieldwork was carried out, including the pilot studies, and then discuss ethical considerations in detail including particular issues that arose from this study.

The methodology is informed by a range of perspectives: it draws on visual methodologies in its use of film elicitation as an interview method. It also takes account of some aspects of psychosocial approaches to methodology in the design of the study and the conception of the interview, as discussed in more detail in the sections below.

### **Psychosocial approach to educational research**

Clarke and Hoggett (2009:3) argue that a psychosocial approach should be regarded as 'a cluster of methodologies' rather than a uniform approach. However, all are based on distinctive ontological principles informed by

psychoanalytic perspectives, which were outlined in chapter one. These are that each individual has a conscious mind and a dynamic unconscious that is largely unknown but which influences the conscious mind; that humans develop defences to manage the anxieties that arise out of the process of living; and that humans are psychosocial beings, in that the conscious and unconscious minds interact with, shape and are shaped by the society they exist in (Bibby, 2010).

Roseneil (2006) sums up a psychosocial approach as based on 'a psychoanalytic ontology of the non-unitary defended subject'. Thus while it can be seen that a psychosocial approach shares with constructivism the epistemological position of an essentially subjective reality, it should be noted that it is based on fundamentally different principles. As Roseneil makes clear, the subject is essentially 'non-unitary', so an individual may express contradictory views and the researcher's aim is to explore these areas of tension rather than try to construct a coherent picture out of them in the quest for a unitary subject. Central to a psychosocial approach is the concept of the defended subject, and this includes the researcher. It would seem pertinent here given the debate that exists in the community of psychosocial researchers, where a plurality of opinion exists as to the position of the researcher (Walkerdine, 2008), for me to clarify my position in this study.

### ***My position as a researcher in this study***

As stated in chapter one, I have approached this study as an educational researcher, and endorse the views held by Frosh and Baraitser (2008) that using psychoanalysis in a clinical situation is very different from using it in a research situation. In particular, I agree with the assertion by Frosh and Baraitser (2008) that the application of complex psychoanalytic concepts of transference and countertransference to the relationship between the researcher and the participant is potentially fraught with problems. Firstly, the researcher may be a non-expert, with no training in psychoanalysis (as is my case). Secondly, the premise of the research interview is very different from that of the therapeutic interview: whereas in a therapeutic situation, the patient or analysand seeks out the psychoanalytic treatment from the analyst, in a research situation, the researcher seeks out participants and requests their time and participation in a research study. This means the ethical basis of the two processes is very different and significant ethical issues would be raised if attempts were made to psychoanalyse individuals without their consent.

While other researchers such as Hook (2008) and Burman (2008) align themselves with Frosh and Baraitser's approach and highlight the perils of misapplying complex notions such as transference and countertransference to research and practice domains, it is important to acknowledge that there is also a strong body within the field of psychosocial studies who take a different position (eg. Hoggett, 2008; Hollway, 2008; Rustin, 2008). Hoggett (2008) for example argues that transference and countertransference are

affective aspects of human communication that cannot be expressed by language and cannot be avoided in any human encounter if one is taking a psycho-social approach. While I would agree with Hoggett that affect is an integral part of human communication, I would argue that as a non-expert with no training in psychoanalytic techniques, it would be presumptuous and foolhardy, not to say unethical, of me to attempt to use these terms when considering my emotionality as a researcher. Instead I have used the more conventional term of researcher reflexivity when considering the ethical implications of a psychoanalytically informed approach, such as guarding against wild analysis, which are discussed in the section on ethical considerations below. In my decision not to include researcher emotionality as part of the discussion and analysis of this study, I have taken what could be described as a hermeneutic, interpretive approach while recognising that unconscious and conscious forces mediate a researcher's interpretation. This approach aligns somewhat with the ethnographic approach taken by Woods (1996) of an emotion-oriented interpretivist approach, though supports Atkinson's more recent view that attention should focus on the participants rather than on the researcher (Atkinson, 2015). Within the field of psychosocial studies, the study takes a position similar to that adopted by Bibby (2010) and Frosh and Baraitser (2008) who adopt a more conventional approach to researcher emotionality, seeing it as part of reflexivity and not necessarily as a source of data to be analysed and discussed.

Thus my position as a researcher in this study is based on the premise that there is no intention on the part of the researcher or consent from the

participant that there should be any therapeutic input involved in the process. Equally, there is no intention to attempt to psychoanalyse the participants or the researcher either directly in the interviews or at one remove through the analysis. Instead, psychoanalytic principles are used as a theoretical model and applied to a problematic context in education to conceptualise it in a fresh way, in the hope of discovering new insights, as suggested by Bibby (2010).

The potential drawbacks of a psychosocial approach have been increasingly acknowledged by researchers. Frosh (2010) warns against both simplistic or over-interpretation of data, particularly when the study rests on analysis of one case. Equally Clarke and Hoggett (2009) caution against allowing thematic analysis of multiple cases to obscure the singularity of each individual case. Thus the researcher is strongly advised to take steps to increase reflexivity throughout the research process, including analysis as well as fieldwork (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009; Hollway and Jefferson, 2013). However, despite these potential hazards, advocates of a psychoanalytically informed approach argue that it is a worthwhile model to use. Frosh concludes psychoanalysis has 'a capacity to theorise subjectivity in a way that is provocative and unique, through reference to the unconscious' (Frosh, 2010 :36). While acknowledging the exploratory nature of any such attempt to take this approach in the research encounter, I would argue that the psychoanalytically informed approach of this study offers an opportunity to pay attention to areas of emotion and experience that are often excluded

from consideration in early years (such as desires and dislikes, anxieties and fears) and broadens the methodological spectrum of the field of early years.

## **Research design**

The research design for this study is determined by the research questions, as advocated by Robson (2011). As mentioned in chapter one, the main research question is:

*What positions do adults take in the teaching and learning relationship with young children?*

This question arose out of my previous doctoral study, in particular the IFS and MOE2. I identified three sub-questions which related to themes which had emerged in previous empirical research that I wished to explore in more depth. I hoped that these sub-questions would also help to focus the study, while also recognising that the questions might need to be modified during the research process, given the exploratory nature of qualitative research.

These sub-questions are as follows:

*a) What are the difficult emotions experienced by adult in the teaching and learning relationship?*

*b) How do these difficult emotions relate to the more rational aspects of the teaching and learning relationship?*

*c) How do these difficult emotions affect the positions that adults take up?*

The exploratory nature of the research question means that it is suited to an interpretivist approach and a flexible research design. As discussed above, I argue that a psychosocial approach fits well with a study that aims to investigate underlying emotions and attitudes.

In the hope of obtaining rich, detailed data that would capture something of the complexity of the behaviours and attitudes to be explored, I used in-depth interviews as the method of data collection, as access to observe classroom practice was not given by gatekeepers. While acknowledging the limitations in using interviews as the primary source of data highlighted by Flewitt (2014) I took steps to triangulate the data by having two separate interviews with each participant, using two different interview methods: first a conventional semi-structured interview and then a semi-structured interview using a visual artefact in the form of film elicitation as a prompt for discussion. A preliminary analysis of the first interviews was done in order to inform the topic guide for the second interviews. I anticipated from the pilot of the film elicitation interview method in MOE2 that the interview methods would elicit different data, and that film elicitation might yield insights into problematic areas of the pedagogic relationship that are hard to obtain by more conventional methods as people are likely to employ defences to resist thinking about unpleasant topics (for example, anger and frustration) particularly in a staged conversation such as a research interview. Thus, I provided the opportunity in the film elicitation interview for the pedagogic relationship to be observed by participant and researcher as a prompt for



discussing practice in a context that removed the potentially sensitive ethical issue of observing and discussing the participant's own practice.

One could argue that any research method is a socially contrived situation, and interviews have been heavily critiqued as a qualitative method in the social sciences, as summarised by Hammersley (2003) with considerable debate as to their validity and generalizability (Bryman, 2008; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011; Robson, 2011). My position in this contested area is that while I accept the widely acknowledged contingency of research interviews (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009; Flewitt, 2014) I agree with Hammersley (2003) that they can still be a fruitful source of data, providing a cautious and rigorous approach is taken with the interview design, data collection, analysis and interpretation. As with all qualitative data, positivist criteria of generalizability and validity are not easily applicable to interviews (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011) though Hollway and Jefferson (2013) have argued from a psychosocial stance, that some tentative generalisations may be extrapolated from detailed individual cases. I concur with the substantial body of researchers (eg. Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011; Robson, 2011) who advocate instead a focus on the trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative research design: to that end, I have conducted two in-depth interviews with each participant, using two different interview methods, both of which were piloted extensively to try and achieve internal reliability. I interviewed a purposive sample of nine participants, which included practitioners working with three to five year olds and also parents of young children, in order to get a range of perspectives on the research question,

thus triangulating the data further. In order to meet the ethical imperative to ensure that the data is as trustworthy as possible, the interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) and transcribed in full (Robson, 2011). I also kept field notes and a research journal of the interview and analysis process to try and increase reflexivity and reduce researcher bias, as discussed in the section on ethical considerations later in this chapter. The data from eighteen interviews forms the basis for this study. Below I outline the strategies I used to obtain the sample for the study.

### **Sampling strategies**

A purposive strategy was used in order to gather a stratified sample to give a range of perspectives on the research question. As Robson (2011) and Cohen et al (2011) comment, purposive sampling enables the researcher to build up a sample that satisfies the specific requirements in a project. Nine participants were recruited from schools or settings that provided early years education for three to five year olds, including both practitioners and parents, male and female in the following categories:

- a) Practitioners who were not parents (3: Louise, Matthew and Nick)
- b) Practitioners who were parents (3: Eleanor, Liz and Yasmin)
- c) Parents who were not practitioners (3: Esther, Pete and Rosa)

As is evident, I had three strata to represent the different perspectives and included practitioners who were also parents to explore how their parental

role might change their perspective as a practitioner. Recruitment proved problematic at first, and was driven by finding participants for each category of the sample, and not by the setting, though the range of provision represented reflected the wider landscape of early years. As can be seen from the table below, the settings the practitioners worked in encompassed one children's centre with daycare and a nursery school, two private nurseries providing education and daycare, one nursery class in a state primary school, and one reception class in a state primary school. The parents broadened the range of provision represented as they talked spontaneously about all the settings their child had attended, so included childminders and pre-schools which are not represented in the practitioner sample. One of the parents interviewed (Esther) did not have children at settings where the practitioners worked. Participants were recruited from predominantly urban locations in the south east of England, including London, though one private nursery was in a rural area (where Nick worked).

My zeal to recruit male practitioners, something that had proved difficult in the MOE2 and IFS, led to me recruiting two (Nick and Matthew). This means men formed a third of the six practitioners interviewed. While the percentage of males in the early years workforce in the UK is not routinely monitored, it was estimated to be 2% in 2006 (OECD, 2006), much less than the 30% in my sample. However, this could be regarded as what Cohen et al (2011) describe as boosted case sampling which is used in order to get a voice from a minority group. The cultural context for the majority of the sample was the United Kingdom though two participants had grown up and been educated

elsewhere, one in Ghana (Esther) and one in Kenya (Yasmin). Both had relocated to the UK as adults and compared the two contexts in their interviews. It is interesting to note that all the people who volunteered to take part were in the middle years of their career, and most had positions of responsibility (see table of participants below).

**Table of participants in study**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Setting</b>
Louise	Practitioner	0	Teaching assistant in daycare and nursery school Forest School leader	Daycare provision in children's Centre with nursery school attached
Matthew	Practitioner	0	Nursery class teacher EY co-ordinator SENCO Senior leadership team	State maintained primary school
Nick	Practitioner	0	Lead practitioner for 3 year olds (level 3) Deputy head	Private nursery school/daycare (rural location)
Eleanor	Practitioner/parent	2	Lead teacher for nursery school Senior leadership team Staff governor	State maintained nursery school in children's centre
Liz	Practitioner/parent	1	Reception class teacher SENCO	State maintained primary school
Yasmin	Practitioner/parent	4	Unqualified teacher as Kenyan teaching qualification not recognised in UK Manager (0.5)	Private nursery school
Esther	Parent	2	Education administrator Volunteer Sunday school teacher	State maintained primary school with nursery class Childminder
Pete	Parent	1	Freelance journalist	Daycare and nursery school in children's centre
Rosa	Parent	2	Management consultant Chair of PTA at nursery school Volunteer at primary school gardening club	Reception class in state maintained primary school State maintained nursery school Private daycare

In the next section, I discuss the methodology underpinning the interview methods used in the study: first I consider the interview from a psychosocial perspective and then the use of film elicitation as a visual prompt in an interview.

### **The psychosocial interview**

The interview methodology draws on Kvale's research on interview technique, including his study of the relationship between the research interview and the psychoanalytic interview (Kvale, 1999; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Though Kvale does not regard the research interview as therapeutic (which is the position adopted in this study as discussed above), the role of the interviewer is to listen as intently as possible and to say as little as possible, letting the interviewee respond to the question uninterrupted. Thus, the emphasis is less on co-constructing meaning through dialogue and more on eliciting and listening to the interviewees' responses, paying attention to verbal and non-verbal aspects of the encounter. The listening role of the interviewer is endorsed in the general literature on interview methodology (Gillham, 2000; Seidmann, 2006) but receives particular emphasis in psychosocial methodology, which borrows from the psychoanalytic tradition where the analyst does not interrupt the analysand.

Both of the interviews conducted were semi-structured, and so were directive rather than non-directive, using Robson's categorisation (Robson, 2011). I

support Gillham's argument that as the interview is a staged conversation, the interviewer always has a plan in mind, though it may be adaptable, and so all interviews are structured to some degree, even those that purport to be unstructured (Gillham, 2000). A topic guide was used to structure both interviews, with areas to cover and possible prompts using open questions (see appendices A and B) as recommended by Robson (2011) and Gillham (2000). Particular emphasis was given to asking participants to illustrate their views with examples grounded in practice to contextualise the comments.

The first interview adopted the conventional semi-structured interview approach with the conversation being shaped by a topic guide while the second interview used a film elicitation as a visual prompt at the beginning of the interview as well as a topic guide. I used two interview methods for two reasons: firstly, to triangulate the data to improve validity as discussed above, and secondly, because the study is addressing areas which are little talked about, such as difficult emotions in the pedagogic relationship, where the answers are not obvious, so could be described as insight research rather than factual research, to use Gillham's terminology (Gillham, 2000). While film elicitation has potential drawbacks as an interview method as discussed below, it is also recognised as a productive research tool that can yield insights that may not emerge in other methods (Banks, 2001). The film elicitation pilot study that I carried out for MOE2 (Gilson, 2012) lent support to this view in that the data from the film elicitation interviews was noticeably different from the one interview which was conducted as a semi-structured interview without the film clip when the computer crashed. In the film

elicitation interview the responses seemed more spontaneous and more emotionally charged whereas in the semi-structured interview the answers appeared more rehearsed and focussed on the curriculum. In the section below I discuss elicitation using images as an interview method.

### ***Using a visual artefact: film elicitation***

Elicitation using visual images is a way of creating interest and engagement in the interview (Flewitt, 2014) generating productive discussion that is often of a different nature from non-elicitation interviews in content and register (Rose, 2007). Collier (1957) noted that his photo elicitation interviews generated fuller, more detailed and specific responses than the non-elicitation interviews with the same participants. He also commented on the heightened emotional response elicited by the visual artefacts, an observation supported by Banks (2001) and Rose (2007). Collier suggests that the visual image (in his study, a photograph) is an abstract form that represents an aspect of life such that it can be observed in a fresh and arresting way, provoking a different response from a non-elicitation interview and thus enriching the dataset if both kinds of interviews are used. Using film as an elicitation device in this study allowed the nitty gritty issues in the pedagogic relationship to be observed and then discussed, in a way that was not possible in a conventional interview, and could have been problematic in a direct observation of practice.



Though the use of visual artefacts including film, as defined by Silverman (2006) is an established qualitative interview technique, film elicitation is much less commonly used than photo elicitation in social science research and is rarely found in educational research (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011). However, both methods use the visual artefact 'to invoke comments, memory and discussions in the course of the a semi-structured interview' (Banks, 2001 :87). While photos are eminently portable, films require a certain level of technological equipment to be used, which has limited its use to date. In addition, while the method can elicit rich data, it is considered to be an unpredictable medium for the researcher to manage as the technology can be unreliable (Banks, 2001). In the case of this study, though I experienced technological problems in the pilot film elicitation study in MOE 2, these were resolved before the main study was carried out. In ethnographic and anthropological research, a common practice is to use visual images selected by the participants or the researchers that have a personal or historical dimension to enrich the discussion (Banks, 2001). In contrast, I chose to use a clip from a commercially released documentary, which would be termed found data (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011), in order to locate the discussion outside the potentially sensitive arena of an individual's own practice and experience. I hoped thus to establish a certain distance from the personal so issues could be discussed in a less threatening way, while still being grounded in detail and practice.

The use of visual artefacts as a stimulus for discussion in an interview (such as photographs or film) provides an external shared focus for both

interviewer and interviewee, and has been described as similar to introducing a third party into the interview (Banks, 2001; Rose, 2007). One potential benefit of this method is that it may avoid the interviewee feeling pressured by the interviewer. Film, like any visual artefact, privileges the visual, and its effect is described by Rose thus:

In particular, film is a powerful means of structuring looking, both the looks between the film's protagonists but also the looks between its protagonists and its spectators. (Rose, 2007 :109)

However, it is important to recognise that visual media are not neutral, and that people respond subjectively to the artefacts (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011). As Jacqueline Rose writes, 'we learn to see in particular ways, and this is process that is reiterated every time we look' (Rose, 1983 :3). So we learn to look within our cultural and societal norms, and equally, we learn not to look at areas that are prohibited or uncomfortable to contemplate. The relationship between the artefact and the viewer is seen as mutually constitutive within a psychoanalytically informed approach to film, and this leads to a focus on the effect of visual images on spectators. Hall describes it thus:

Visual discourses already have possible positions of interpretation (from which they 'make sense') embedded in them, and the subjects bring their own subjective desires and capacities to the 'text' which enable them to take up positions of identification in relation to its meaning. (Hall, 1999 :310)

If we accept Hall's proposition, then multiple interpretations and subjective positions are possible in response to a visual artefact, such as film. The

potential for identificatory positions that visual images, and I would argue, film in particular, seems to offer influenced my decision to use film as an elicitation tool in this study as it is pertinent to the research question, and to a psychoanalytic approach. Yet film is a socially mediated visual medium, as discussed above, and so film elicitation as an interview method would seem to combine both psychoanalytic and social paradigms, thus fitting a psychosocial methodological approach well.

### ***Outline of film extract***

A five minute extract was used from the film, *Etre et Avoir*, a French documentary released in 2002 which received national and international acclaim (Philibert, 2002). A year in the life of a small, rural, one-class primary school (with children aged from four to eleven) is presented as an episodic story using a fly on the wall approach (see appendix G). Though the film is in French and subtitled, thus raising issues of cultural and societal difference, I decided to use a documentary as I thought it would have more credibility with the participants in the study if they were observing a teacher and a class of children, rather than actors. The clip used shows the teacher setting up a maths lesson at the beginning of the day with two tables: one for the older children and one for the younger ones. The older children have work to do independently and the younger ones have a lesson. The children are dropped off by the school minibus and enter the classroom and the day then starts with a spontaneous informal discussion with the younger children, aged between four and seven, about what they would like to be when they

grow up. The discussion is started by Jo-Jo who says he wants to be a teacher so that he can tell other people what to do. We then see a snapshot of the children practising writing the number seven on the whiteboard with comments from the rest of the group, and then the teacher goes round individually to help the children as they practise writing in their books. One of the youngest girls (Marie) either cannot or will not say the number seven when the teacher is crouched next to her chair, practising counting with her. After several attempts, the teacher sighs and looks to the rest of the small group, who offer their suggestions and whisper the answer loudly to Marie as the clip fades.

Initially I chose the clip for the pilot study (MOE2), having trialled several from the film, as it included within a short space of time the teacher with a large group, a small group and working one to one with a child. In addition, it showed the teacher following the children's lead, when he picks up on their discussion as he is getting his materials ready, as well as directing the task, when he teaches the number activity. I also thought that maths would be an activity familiar to all the participants, whereas some other activities in the film, such as taking the children tobogganing or dictation, seemed to be more culturally specific to the context of the school. Interestingly, none of the participants in the pilot study or the main study had seen the film before, though some had heard of it. However, the emotional response shown by participants in the MOE2 study made me aware of the power of film elicitation as a visual methodology to look at affective elements of an area such as education acknowledged by researchers such as Banks (2001) and Clarke

and Hoggett (2009). For this reason, I used the clip in this study in order to explore further the emotional dimension of the pedagogic relationship.

Furthermore, this clip was unusual in the film in uncovering negative as well as positive emotional responses, thus suiting the research question well.

### ***Piloting the interviews***

#### *Semi-structured interviews*

I piloted the semi-structured interview extensively to get a topic guide that suited both parents and practitioners in order to use the same questions for all interviewees, as recommended by Gillham (2000) though the subsequent prompts varied according to whether the interviewee was a parent, practitioner or both. In the pilot study, four interviewees were female and one male, and some were known to me professionally, which made the staged element of the interview harder to control. It was much harder, for example, to sustain a listening role rather than be drawn into conversation, and at times I was reluctant to probe as much as I would have liked. I trialled both interviews with all the pilot interviewees and found the interview harder to fit to parents as I was less experienced at interviewing them so used a parent for the final pilot.

#### *Film elicitation interviews*

I piloted film elicitation as a method in the empirical study I conducted for MOE2 with five primary practitioners who were also students, and then piloted it again as part of the dual interview process as described above. In

the MOE 2 study, the technology proved to be problematic, as indicated by Banks (2001) and I prioritised finding a way to show the film clip reliably for the main study as it would otherwise have been a disincentive to using this method. During the earlier interviews, timing was also a constraint as the interviews had to be fitted into the thirty minute lunch break the students had in the one day they were on campus. In the main study, I increased the time to fifty or sixty minutes as the maximum time it was reasonable to ask practitioners to give me in their working day. I kept a broad topic guide, but added more specific probes on areas that had not been addressed in the semi structured interview, particularly the tricky aspects of teaching.

In the MOE2 interviews, I found rapport difficult to establish in one short interview with participants I did not know, particularly as they seemed disconcerted by both the interview method and the film clip. This influenced my decision to use a semi-structured interview as the first interview in the main study to establish a rapport and then film elicitation in the second interview. However, different problems then emerged. While I did indeed feel that I had established a rapport in the first interview (not least in that they had agreed to come back for a second interview), the introduction of third party in the form of a visual artefact had the effect of destabilising the dyadic interview dynamic in the main study. Some interviewees were quite happy about this and interested in the different approach while others resisted it, and kept trying to invite me into the conversation, whereas I was expecting to listen and to observe them engaging with the film as participants had done in the MOE2 pilot study. The resistance was not evident in the pilot study of the

dual interviews, perhaps because the interviewees knew me and so there was a higher level of trust and co-operation.

While the film generated an emotional response in participants in both the MOE2 pilot study and main study, as mentioned above, I was disconcerted to note that one of the most interesting findings from the pilot study was not as strongly replicated in the main study. All participants who saw the film in the MOE 2 study spontaneously related the experience of the child who could or would not say number seven to their own experience of learning as a child while in the main study, the response was more varied, a finding that would be interesting to follow up further in a methodological study, as indicated in chapter seven. I discuss further how the film clip seemed to uncover the emotionality of the teaching and learning relationship in chapter five.

## **Ethical considerations**

The study complies with the BERA ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011) and has been approved by the ethics committee of the UCL Institute of Education, London. One of the main ethical considerations of the study concerns the issues raised by insider research, as though I am no longer working as an early years teacher, I could still have been considered part of the local early years community through my involvement with students on placements, and through teaching on postgraduate courses attended by practising teachers (Malone, 2003; Robson, 2011). This could mean that I had more credibility with the practitioners, as I was seen as 'one of them' and someone who

could understand their world. However, I was aware that I might also carry the stigma of having left the frontline of teaching, and moved to teaching adults not young children. This factor of being an insider researcher was taken into consideration in all aspects of the interview process, from recruitment through to analysis, as I discuss below.

### ***Recruitment***

I took an opportunistic approach to contacting gatekeepers such as headteachers of primary and nursery schools, contacting them by telephone and asking for their permission to send a participant information letter (see appendix C) to staff inviting potential participants to contact me by email if they were interested in participating in the study. Usually, I was invited to go and give a short verbal presentation during a lunchtime or an after school meeting and leave copies of the participant information letter in the staffroom so potential participants had talked to me in person as well as having email contact before the interviews. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I was more successful in gaining access to the field where I knew the gatekeeper through my current role working in a university department of education or my previous roles as a teacher and then an advisory teacher. I sent everyone who contacted me a copy of the participant information letter and also a consent form (see appendix D) electronically, and asked which category they fitted into (parent; practitioner or practitioner- parent). If they were practitioners, I asked them to let me know what their role was and what age children they worked with. From this information, I built up the sample on a first-come, first



served basis. Parents proved particularly challenging to recruit, perhaps because to them I was a researcher, and not known as a former teacher or a parent of young children, and so an outsider, though they were aware in several settings that the headteacher had endorsed my study. Through these gatekeepers, I was invited to PTA meetings, where I explained the study, handed out information letters and asked anyone who was interested to contact me.

In order to avoid anyone feeling pressurised to take part, particularly those practitioners who were aware of my links to the early years community, the right to withdraw at any time was made clear in the participant information sheet, the consent form and during the interview though no participants withdrew once they had attended the first interview. However, despite the ethical imperative to try and ensure participants are informed before they consent to the study, and feel free to withdraw at any point, it is also the case that consent can never be fully informed in qualitative research (Malone, 2003), as it is impossible to know in advance exactly the research process (in this study the interviews) will unfold as discussed below in the section on discomfort and distress.

### ***Confidentiality and anonymity***

Maintaining the confidentiality of the data is generally regarded as fundamental ethical principle in social science research (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012) and in this study several steps were taken to try and ensure

that all the data remained confidential. Participants were offered a choice of where the interviews took place: in their school or setting, at my institution or in another mutually agreed venue that provided a secure space in which the interview could be conducted in privacy. The names and all personal details of the interviewees including location and workplace were anonymised in all presentation of the data, and it was stored securely in line with the UCL Institute of Education University of London (IOE) guidelines. Anonymity was increased by using several locations for the fieldwork across south east England. Interviews were digitally recorded in full with the interviewees' consent to ensure transparency of data and the participants identified by a pseudonym on the transcript of the recordings. Participants were offered the opportunity to receive an overview of the findings at the end of the study and all of them requested this.

### ***Discomfort or distress?***

A key principle of ethical research is that it should not cause distress and harm to the participants (BERA, 2011). This study did not set out to research a highly sensitive topic requiring participants to divulge personal information. However, the interview dynamic is charged with emotion, as Clark and Hoggett (2009) point out, and it is easy to underestimate how apprehensive the interviewee may feel even when they are keen to participate. For example, one practitioner told me at the end of the first interview how much she had enjoyed talking to me, and how anxious she had been beforehand. However, she had specifically asked via the headteacher to be included in

the study as she was so keen to participate so it could be argued here that the discomfort is in some sense sought by the interviewee, as part of the research process, and so cannot be construed as harmful. Equally, the interviewer has no control over the responses of the interviewees, who may choose to talk about topics that they find upsetting, as discussed below.

In the first (semi-structured) interview one parent talked of how much he enjoyed being part of the nursery school community, having waited twenty years to have their daughter who was conceived through in vitro fertilisation. At this point in the interview, he lowered his voice and turned away from me, sitting hunched in his chair, arms and legs crossed, visibly distressed at the memory of how difficult that time had been. As the interviewer, I was concerned and disconcerted that he had decided to share clearly distressing personal information with me in the seemingly innocuous context of discussing his daughter's nursery education but he himself alluded to the confessional aspect of the interview, saying early on in the interview that as a journalist, it was unusual for him to be the interviewee rather than the interviewer, and that he was surprised at how much he talked. The participant in this case seemed quite comfortable with moving through a range of emotions in the interview, and I would argue that if we accept that the research interview process is full of affect, then inevitably the process may generate some emotional responses that disconcert or discomfort, but that this is not the same as causing harm. A case in point is that two practitioners (one male, one female) became tearful when asked to talk in the semi-structured interview about what they liked about teaching young

children, and expressed surprised at themselves for doing so, but again, that response could not possibly have been foreseen by either the interviewer or the interviewee. While I would agree with Jones (1998) that people have a range of motives for participating in research, I do not support his view that the research interview can be regarded as therapeutic when discomfort is experienced, and would not venture to suggest that this was the case in any of the examples discussed above.

The film elicitation interview similarly generated a range of emotional responses, from interest and enjoyment to dislike, and in several cases, strong expressions of disapproval of the teacher's practice in the film clip. I was aware from the pilot study that using film in an interview can generate a strong emotional response (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). As mentioned above, in order to mitigate the effect anticipated from the pilot study, I conducted the semi-structured interview first in order to establish a rapport with the interviewees before the film elicitation interview. This strategy resulted in participants seeming less disconcerted by the film elicitation interview, which was desirable from an ethical standpoint, though possibly diluted the power of the film clip.

### ***Researcher reflexivity***

While in qualitative research in the social sciences, researcher subjectivity is acknowledged and reflexivity encouraged (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011), in psychosocial research, the intersubjective dynamic is often

discussed using the psychoanalytic terms 'transference' and 'countertransference' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013). Frosh offers a useful layman's description of countertransference as 'the feelings one might have in another's presence. Especially when those feelings seem inexplicably strong' (Frosh, 1999 :98). However, this is a contested area of psychosocial research, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The position I have adopted in this study aligns with the views of Frosh and Baraitser (2008), who caution against the crude coding of the researcher's response to the interviewee using complex psychoanalytic concepts such as transference and countertransference as a potentially reductive and uninformed approach that does not take account of the very different constraints and purpose of the research and therapeutic interview. Thus, I have adopted the more circumspect approach of being aware of all aspects of the field, here the interview, including considering my emotional responses to the interviewees, while acknowledging the role the unconscious, which can never be fully accessed or known, will have played in shaping my reactions.

In order to increase awareness of my subjectivity, I kept field notes written immediately after each interview recording in as much detail as possible my impressions of the research encounter, and an ongoing research journal through the interview process, analysis and writing up phases. A key aim of this process was to uncover and consider researcher emotionality as part of increasing reflexivity as recommended by Robson (2011) and Knight (2002). Though as a doctoral student, I did not have access to an established research panel as advocated by Clarke and Hoggett (2009), I shared and

discussed data at regular intervals while analysing the data and writing up the study with individuals and small groups of colleagues to gain other perspectives on the data. For example, I was concerned that I found the male participants less straightforward to interview than the female participants, so shared extracts from these transcripts with a group of colleagues of mixed gender for their responses. As a result of the ensuing discussion, I concluded that I had taken a gendered stance to their data which was not reflected by the rest of the panel I shared the data with.

## **Summary of chapter**

In this chapter I have discussed the methodological approaches that informed the research design and methods of this project. I have shown how the study draws on both ethnographic and psychosocial research methodological approaches, taking an interdisciplinary approach that accords with the move towards blurring the boundaries between psychosocial studies and other disciplines advocated by Day Sclater et al (2009). I have explained how by using an unusual interview method in the form of film elicitation, found largely in anthropological and ethnographic research (Banks, 2001) alongside a more conventional semi-structured interview, I aimed to approach the research questions from a range of perspectives and thus generate rich, detailed data. In the next chapter, I first outline how I analysed the data, and present a sample of the data to give a snapshot of the findings.

I then explain how I conceptualised the data for discussion in chapters four, five and six, drawing on Winnicott's theory of the holding environment.

## **Chapter Three: A snapshot of the findings and conceptualisation of the discussion chapters**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this study is to explore the positions that adults take in the teaching and learning relationship with young children, taking a broad, holistic view of the pedagogic relationship as detailed in chapter one. My aim has been to consider the research question from both the parental and practitioner viewpoint, as both are involved in the pedagogic relationship with young children. Practitioner-parents, who had experience of both viewpoints, have also been included in the sample. To explore the overarching research question, I have focussed on three sub-questions: I look at what the difficult emotions in working with three to five year old children are considered to be, how these difficult emotions relate to the rational aspects of the relationship and how they relate to the positions adults take up. The study is informed by psychoanalytic perspectives and takes a psychosocial approach to the methodology, using two interview methods to explore the question from different angles.

In this chapter, I first explain the methods of analysis used. Next I give a snapshot of the findings in relation to the research questions using two contrasting vignettes to illustrate the richness and individuality of each interviewee's data. I have done this in order to give a more rounded picture



of the interviews, and to provide a context in which to orientate the specific aspects of emotionality and rationality discussed in detail in chapters four, five and six. I then explain how the process of conducting the two sets of interviews, and analysing the very different responses, led me to conceptualise the three discussion chapters that follow, building on the psychoanalytic theoretical framework outlined in chapter one, and drawing particularly on the work of Winnicott.

### **Methods of analysis**

All the interviews were transcribed in full, as is recommended when working with qualitative data such as interviews (Silverman, 2013). To supplement the verbatim transcripts, which recorded non-verbal communication such as laughter or long pauses, the field notes I wrote after each session included my immediate recall of the interview answers, and recorded body language that could not be audio-recorded that seemed of significance to me at the time. The transcripts were coded using a combination of approaches: I did a preliminary analysis of the semi-structured interview transcripts manually, in order to inform the questions for the second set of interviews. I then completed the preliminary coding of all the transcripts manually, before re-reading the transcripts using NVivo to streamline the numerous codes into a more coherent set of codes and themes (see appendix E) and write analytic commentaries. At this point, I went back to analysing and manually coding individual interviews rather than using NVivo in order to respect the

individuality of each participant's transcripts, and balance the cross case analysis as advocated by Clarke and Hoggett (2009).

My approach to the analysis could perhaps be described as a holistic or *gestalt* approach as described by Hollway (2002). I started with what the participants talked about (the topics they brought up, the language they used) in order to approach the data with as open a mind as possible and to avoid the pitfall highlighted by Brown (2006) and Mintz (2011) of fitting the data to a pre-determined structure by imposing *a priori* psychoanalytic categories. I used a mixture of inductive and deductive coding as recommended by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). I initially coded the data inductively with an open a mind as possible. I then grouped the codes into themes using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as it is a flexible approach which can be applied within different theoretical perspectives (see appendix E). At this point, the analysis became more deductive, as it was influenced by the literature I had read and the relation of the codes to the research questions. I then re-read the data to frame it from a theoretical psychoanalytic perspective. For me, perhaps because I am not an trained psychoanalyst, this did not grow out seamlessly out of the descriptive coding and thematic analysis, but involved a shift of gear to thinking about the data in a different way, considering the silences as well as what was talked about, and possible interpretations for this. I used the memos I wrote on key themes to explore possible psychoanalytic interpretations of the data (see appendix F), and returned to the psychoanalytic literature as well as to the original transcripts.

I explain how I arrived at my conceptualisation of the discussion chapters later in this chapter.

Though as discussed in chapter two, I did not specifically apply the notions of transference and countertransference to the data collection or analysis, I was aware of the emotionality of the researcher, and the need to be as reflexive as possible (Frosh and Baraitser, 2008). I was also aware of the need to guard against what Brown (2006) has called 'wild analysis'. In order to mitigate against this, I implemented as many of the checks and balances advocated by Clarke and Hoggett (2009) as possible within the constraints of the study: while I did not have access to an ongoing research panel, I discussed dominant themes with my supervisor, and presented them, including extracts of data, to various panels of colleagues where I work for discussion as part of research seminar sessions while analysing data and writing up the thesis. This process allowed my interpretations to be challenged by others from a range of backgrounds in educational research, and afforded me the opportunity to reflect and refine my analysis, returning to the raw data as part of the iterative analytic process before and after the seminar sessions, and again, repeatedly, when writing up the thesis. Alongside this process, I used my research journal to explore and chart this process of evolving analysis.

The eighteen hour-long interviews generated a considerable amount of rich, detailed data. In order to try and capture the breadth and diversity of the data succinctly, I decided to use vignettes, described by Miles and Huberman as 'a focused description of a series of events taken to be representative,

typical or emblematic in the case you are doing' (Miles and Huberman, 1994:81). Below, I have presented two vignettes to address the sub-questions of the overarching research question. I have followed the practice in the vignettes and in discussing the data in chapters four, five and six, of focussing primarily on an individual's data, but where pertinent, I have indicated when the issue being discussed occurs in other transcripts. I have done this in order to make the process of selecting what to include in the discussion chapters as transparent as possible, while maintaining a balance in favour of individual case analysis rather than cross-case analysis as recommended by Hoggett (2008).

### **Vignette of Esther, a parent**

*The following vignette has been chosen to illustrate what difficult emotions arise for the adult in the teaching and learning relationship and how these difficult emotions affect the positions that adults take up.*

Esther had two children and worked as an administrator. Having been educated in Ghana, she then moved to England and when choosing an early years setting for her children, she looked for a place that had 'different kinds of people, different cultures', along with friendly teachers who provided a welcoming environment to both children and adults. Her voluntary work as a Sunday school teacher gave her a keen awareness her of the travails of working with large groups of young children, in particular frustrations inherent in disciplining them, managing the health and safety requirements and also

their parents. Esther thought that the most difficult aspect of teaching young children was managing the frustration when they did not want to learn:

It's hard, isn't it? It's hard to determine whether this is a mood, or disobedient or you know, or just you don't want to bring your mind there. So I sympathise with teachers how they will be, because imagine it's more than one person behaving like that then you might, you might spark some anger or get frustrated after trying and doing your best and they are still not getting it.

Esther's use of the word 'mood' suggested a recognition of the complex mix of emotions that children bring to the learning relationship that contradicted the view of young children as uniformly eager to learn presented in practitioner transcripts. Esther recognised the emotionality of the relationship for the adult also, yet while acknowledging that they might feel frustrated or angry when a child did not want to learn, at the same time, like all participants, she invested in the idea that there is always a strategy to enable a child to learn and it is just a question of the teacher finding it.

So maybe all children are not the same, maybe this one is slower to get it, and then you get all these points in your head and maybe it will help you to calm down, because you were getting frustrated with a child. And then you come back, or maybe use another method, to teach her. Because say so many times, or use it as a song for her, and maybe she will get it.

The repetition involved in repeatedly trying again to teach a child constituted in itself a frustration of teaching young children that Esther recognised, commenting that 'people are so lovely, doing it over and over again'. This

view was endorsed by practitioners, four of whom brought up the issue of repetition as one of the frustrations of teaching young children.

Esther highlighted the emotional labour involved in masking difficult emotions: she was one of the few participants who acknowledged that adults may like some children better than others, astutely summarising the dichotomy for the practitioner between the idealised view of the rational, detached professional versus the emotional experience of teaching young children:

But as to how to manage that, I wonder, because when you are a professional you have to treat everybody equally, but then we are humans, so it will be there within you, if you like the child or not, even if you are not supposed to show it.

Esther did not appear to offer any resolution to this polarity for the practitioner here. Rather, her transcripts gave an impression of constantly shifting identifications moving between the perspectives of parent, practitioner and child that are often contradictory. While she had sympathy with the challenges practitioners faced, as a parent, she wanted her children to be taught by friendly teachers, who did not get angry. The child's perspective emerged when Esther likened the teacher in the film clip to the strict teachers she found intimidating as a child and recalled the fear of being 'disgraced' that she felt with a maths teacher when she was eleven, an interesting finding that I discuss in more detail in chapter five. Esther could be seen to be vacillating between polarities of the relationship: children can be frustrating from a teacher's perspective, but they can also feel vulnerable and

disgraced from a child's perspective, for example. This fluid process of oscillation was seen by Segal (1957) as a form of splitting that she regarded as creative. And indeed, the dynamic process seemed to enable Esther to accommodate something of the complexity, emotional charge and fluidity of the relationship, in a way that contrasted with the more static position of Eleanor, as outlined below.

### **Vignette of Eleanor, a practitioner-parent.**

*The vignette below has been chosen to illustrate how difficult emotions relate to the more rational aspects of the teaching and learning relationship.*

Eleanor was the lead teacher in a children's centre nursery school, and a parent to two children. She talked of the impossibility of combining the roles of parent and practitioner having tried unsuccessfully to have her son in the nursery where she worked. The difficulty she had adjusting to being a parent as well as a practitioner, and accommodating the often conflicting perspectives that the dual role introduced, suggested that she found it difficult to integrate both roles, and so split them.

It took a long time to refocus really, or to be able to be in two places, and be two different people, but I can remember thinking that I, what would I like for my own child, how would I want an adult to talk to my child?

For Eleanor, the roles seemed to be polarised into the caring emotional aspect of the parent, and the rational, more detached approach of the teacher. As a parent she described herself as:

Irrational and emotional with my own children, basically, you know, you have all of that, and that's me, my character, I know some people are able to be much calmer and more patient and more whatever they are, you know, but I feel like I have an emotional relationship with my children, and that's the first thing that we have really.

By contrast, her role as a practitioner was defined by emotional restraint and a strong commitment to providing a facilitating environment in which children were able to be independent:

Hopefully...LAUGHS...I'm interested, enthusiastic and caring, but enabling, I really feel that one of the things I don't do is have children who end up being dependent on me.

Given the prevalent discourse of care and mothering in early years education, it was interesting that Eleanor seemed to distance herself from any parental role as a teacher of three year olds, suggesting that she might be defending against the emotional dimension of working with young children. Yet despite her attempts to split the two roles, they seemed inextricably linked, causing her to feel dissatisfied both as a parent and as a practitioner.

As a parent, she was unhappy with her own children's experience, commenting:



And I always felt like I was settling for second best with both of them, which is a bit arrogant to say, but because I know all, you know, the staff might have changed a little bit, but I have such confidence in our team of staff and how we are with children all the time, how professional, how caring, and how much we think about our interactions, and I know that's not the case everywhere.

For Eleanor, the quality of the interactions of the staff with the children was extremely important, as is suggested here, and she was very aware of this as a parent (see above 'how would I want an adult to talk to my child?') and as a practitioner. She saw the tension between the roles as irreconcilable, commenting that as a practitioner 'I feel as if I give parents time but, you know, I was given the same amount of time but didn't feel that was any time at all', suggesting that the parental perspective complicated rather than enriched her role as a practitioner. In her transcripts, a fragmented picture of the pedagogic relationship emerges, with a stark division of the relationship into aspects that are valued and aspects that are denigrated or ignored. This splitting of the relationship suggests a resistance to engaging with difficult areas of the relationship, such as the co-existence of strong positive and negative emotions, for example, or the challenges of being both a parent and a practitioner.

In the section that follows, I explain how the contrast in the emotionality of the semi-structured and film elicitation interviews intrigued me, and how reflecting on this marked difference led me to conceptualise the way I addressed the research questions in chapters four to six, developing the psychoanalytic theoretical framework introduced in chapter one.

## **Conceptualisation of the discussion chapters**

In the interviews, participants preferred to focus on the child in the pedagogic relationship, so resisted talking about any of the topics raised by the research questions as they applied to adults. In particular, I encountered reluctance, especially from practitioners, to discussing the difficult emotions in the teaching and learning relationship. However, the film elicitation interview seemed to provoke more spontaneous and multi-layered responses particularly around the question of adult emotions in the relationship. In the film elicitation interview, I was interested by how disconcerting some participants, particularly practitioners, found it to observe the teaching and learning relationship from the outside, from the perspective of an onlooker. I began to speculate that this might be because the film clip confronted the participants with precisely the areas of the pedagogic relationship that they would have preferred to ignore, in particular, the emotional dimension of the relationship. Participants seemed troubled by the constantly shifting emotional dynamic between the adult and the children that gave a much more complex and nuanced picture of the learning relationship than a mere transcript of the words that were spoken would have done. The discomfort that the film clip provoked was reflected in the tenor of several of the interviews which flowed less smoothly than the semi-structured interviews: while some participants appeared intrigued by the film clip, particularly the parents, as they were not usually afforded a fly on the wall view of a teacher with his class, some practitioners were aggravated by it. Eleanor's first

comment was 'That's quite uncomfortable', an adjective she used several times in the interview while Louise talked of the film clip making her 'cringe'. This was in contrast to the semi-structured interviews, where three participants said how much they had enjoyed talking to me. Liz, for example, commented at the end of the interview 'I could sit here all afternoon and talk to you'.

I was intrigued by the contrast in the emotional climate in the two interviews, and found Phillips' notion of composure (1994), which draws on Winnicott's theory of holding (outlined below) helpful when problematizing the issue. The term seemed to capture the air of poise and self-assurance that participants exhibited when they talked about affirming aspects of the pedagogic relationship, and which was disrupted when considering negative aspects, such as emotion, particularly in the film elicitation interview. Phillips describes composure as a quality that makes its presence known by its loss rather than by its acquisition:

It's something we lose but tend not to find: we think of composure, like confidence, as something we regain. (Phillips, 1994:40)

For me this resonated with the consternation some participants appeared to experience when they were discomfited by the emotional and dyadic nature of the pedagogic relationship evident in the film clip, suggesting that their composure had been ruffled. In the section that follows, I outline Winnicott's theory of holding and explain how it helped me to conceptualise the focus for the discussion chapters.

### ***Winnicott's theory of holding***

Winnicott developed his theory of holding (Winnicott, 1960) from Klein's theory of splitting outlined in chapter one. To recap briefly, in Kleinian terms, splitting denotes the polarising of aspects of an object into aspects that are loved and aspects that are hated (represented as good and bad breast). It results in an unstable position, veering from idealisation to disillusionment, unable to tolerate good and bad aspects in one object (Bibby, 2010).

Drawing on Klein's theory, Winnicott saw the infant as needing a holding environment in order to be able to feel safe enough to experience and tolerate frightening emotions, such as hate (of a breast that does not produce milk on demand, for example) and gradually move towards a situation where ambivalence and conflicting emotions can be tolerated (a breast that can provide sustenance as well as a breast that at times is empty and unavailable, for example). The mother is the first person usually to hold the baby physically and this then takes on a metaphorical sense of holding as the infant grows into a child when the holding is in the sense of holding a child in the adult's attention. This may be initially by being in the same room (holding in their gaze) and progress to being further away. The mother as well as providing a holding environment, and indeed as part of it, provides just enough frustration for the child to tolerate so that they move from being dependent to less dependent, and can survive on their own, rather than with their mother beside them. Winnicott describes this process as weaning (Winnicott, 1964).

Though the emphasis is on the development of the child within a holding environment, Winnicott draws attention to the dyadic nature of the relationship, and to the variability of the mother's ability to provide an adequate (the word he uses) holding environment. He comments:

Mothers who have it in them to provide good enough care can be enabled to do better by being cared for themselves in a way that acknowledges the essential nature of their task. Mothers who do not have it in them to provide good enough care cannot be made good enough by mere instruction.

(Winnicott, 1960 :592)

Implicit in this statement is the assumption that an adult must feel secure in themselves, so be able to self-hold, in order to be in a stable enough position to hold someone else. Winnicott also acknowledges that it can be hard to match the pace of the progress from dependence to independence so that it is comfortable for both mother and child (a mother who is keen to wean her infant off the breast, for example, faster than the infant appears to be ready for) and allows for the possibility that at times, with the best will in the world, the mother will misinterpret her infant's demands. However, the identification of the mother with her child is usually so strong, that the holding environment tends to be good enough for the child to develop and progress from dependence towards relative independence.

Phillips (1994) suggests that the holding environment we all wish for is one in which we are recognised and understood, so would not need to self-hold. While we might long for such an environment, where the mother anticipated an infant's every need correctly, it would be too good from a Winnicottian

perspective as it would not allow the infant to develop through learning to tolerate frustration through misrecognition of their need (Winnicott, 1960). Paradoxically, Winnicott argues that alongside the desire for recognition, humans also desire to keep part of themselves unknowable, which is allowed to happen when the mother does not always interpret a child's needs accurately (Winnicott, 1958) or may act according to her own wishes rather than the child's (Phillips, 1994).

The tension in Winnicottian theory between wanting both to be recognised and to be opaque is reflected in Phillip's conceptualisation of composure as 'self-holding and self-hiding' (Phillips, 1994:46). This phrase helped me to conceptualise the way in which participants appeared to value and devalue certain aspects of the pedagogic relationship and to understand why the film clip may have been unsettling for some participants. If certain aspects of the teaching and relationship are valued because they help sustain a holding environment in which the adult can feel secure, then it follows that aspects that threaten the holding environment will be devalued, and that every attempt will be made to hide them. Thus, the unease participants displayed when confronted with the dyadic and emotional nature of the pedagogic relationship in the film clip suggests that these are aspects of the relationship that are usually kept hidden, as they constitute a threat to the adult's holding environment. In the discussion chapters that follow I have left aside the notion of composure as it constricted rather than enriched the argument, but have used the binary notion of 'self-holding and self-hiding' along with Winnicottian theory of the holding environment to explore the dichotomous

nature of adult perceptions of the pedagogic relationship. In the first discussion chapter, I consider what aspects of the adult role are privileged by the adult as they constitute a self-holding environment, focussing on the emphasis placed on rationality, and in particular, verbal language. In the second discussion and third discussion chapters I consider what aspects are hidden (by being denied, denigrated or ignored, for example) as they destabilize the holding environment for the adult. In these two chapters I consider the emotional aspects of the relationship, predominantly frustration and loss. In the third chapter I broaden the discussion to encompass the dyadic (or triadic nature) of the relationship, and consider the relationships between adults, here practitioners and parents.

## Chapter Four: The rational practitioner

### Introduction

In the three discussion chapters that follow (chapters four, five and six), I consider the data in relation to the research questions, drawing together the data, theory, and relevant literature. The proposition of these three chapters is that early years teachers have to create a facilitating environment in which young children feel secure enough to be able to tolerate the frustrations involved in becoming more independent. For Winnicott (1965) the aim of nursery education before formal schooling began was to provide a facilitative environment that acted as a bridge between the home environment and formal schooling. Winnicott (1965) referred to the home and nursery environments as 'adaptive' as they were tailored to the child whereas he regarded the school environment as 'non-adaptive' as the child was expected to fit into predetermined routines and expectations. Winnicott saw the purpose of the adaptive environment that was created first by the parent and then by a nursery environment as providing an adequately supportive holding environment in which the child felt secure enough to tolerate small doses of frustration, so that gradually they become able to self-hold and manage without the adult's constant and reassuring physical presence. As discussed in chapter three, in order to be able to provide a



secure emotional environment for a child, the adult has to feel adequately secure in themselves, in other words, they have to be able to self-hold.

In chapters four, five and six, I suggest that the adult (here, the practitioner) invests in aspects of the role which they find reassuring, which in this study appeared to be the rational, knowable, predictable aspects of the role. I also contend that adults seek to maintain this supportive, self-holding environment by excluding aspects of the role which have the power to disrupt it, thus hiding them from themselves and others. In this study, these aspects involved the emotional aspects of teaching, particularly negative emotions. I use Phillips' dichotomous term 'self-holding and self-hiding' (Phillips, 1994 :45) to explore how certain aspects of the pedagogic relationship are valued and others are devalued and ignored. In chapter four I look at the self-holding environment as it appears in the transcripts, in other words, what is valued by the adults in the teaching and learning relationship. This chapter focusses on the importance given to rational thought and in particular to its expression in verbal language, addressing the research question that considers how these rational aspects relate to emotional aspects of the pedagogic relationship. Chapters five and six relate to the research questions that ask what the difficult emotions in the teaching and learning relationship with young children are, and consider how they affect the positions that adults take up. In chapter five, I look at the self-hiding aspects of the relationship, in other words, what is devalued and disavowed by the adult. This chapter focusses predominantly on negative emotions, in particular frustration. I consider why the complex range of emotions talked

about in the interviews might be considered so disruptive, and argue that the threat they pose stems from a sense of loss. I explore the notion of loss further in chapter six, and consider how this emotion affects the complex relationship between child, practitioner and parent.

In establishing a relationship between the data, theory and relevant literature, I have adopted Wolcott's approach (Wolcott, 1990) mentioned in chapter one of introducing new theory and literature when it is relevant to the point being discussed. This means that at times, I expand a theoretical point, citing pertinent literature, and at others, I discuss the data in relation to the literature, or exemplify a theoretical point from the data. The aim of this approach is to allow complex theoretical points to be discussed as they arise in the development of the argument so that they can then be used to illuminate the data while they are still fresh in the reader's mind. When discussing the data, I have for the most part focussed on an individual's transcripts. While I am aware, as mentioned in chapter three, of the recommendation in psychosocial research to balance the data in favour of individual analysis and treat cross-case analysis with caution (Hoggett, 2008), I have at times referred to other participants' data. I have done so for two main reasons: the first is when I want to illustrate the richly nuanced nature of the data, which refines the argument. The second reason is when I think it is relevant to know the degree to which the theme I am discussing prevailed in the transcripts, in order to be as transparent as possible and guard against claims of wild analysis (Brown, 2006).

In this chapter, I consider the aspects of the early years practitioner that are valued in the teaching and learning relationship with young children. These emphasise the importance of rational thought and the conscious and rational directing of learning, which is brought to the level of conscious thought through the privileging of language. In the sections that follow, I consider the importance given to reason in the pedagogic relationship, and focus in particular on the importance of language as the instrument of reason, as that emerged as the most valued aspect of the learning and teaching relationship with young children from the transcripts. I first consider how the data seems to reflect the influence of the Enlightenment, particularly in the foregrounding of language as an expression of rational thought, relating the data to early years literature on the Enlightenment and language acquisition. I then consider language from a psychoanalytic perspective, presenting relevant theory in this contested area, before going on to discuss how the verbal, or rational, elements of the teaching and learning relationship relate to the non-verbal, or emotional aspects with regard to the data and literature.

### **Enlightenment teacher, Enlightenment child**

The portrayal of the practitioner, as presented in the transcripts, embodies the virtues of the Enlightenment teacher. Central to the Enlightenment is the notion of man as rational, operating as an autonomous, self-sufficient adult in a knowable, ordered world that can be explained by science (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007). The notion of Enlightenment teacher is premised on the

notion of an Enlightenment child, who is seen to have an innate capacity for reason, which will develop in a suitable environment (Jenks, 1996). The role of the educator, then, is to develop the child's natural capacity for reason, and enable them to make the transition from the irrational world of childhood to the rationally determined world of adulthood.

Central to the notion of the Enlightenment child, alongside their immanent rationality, is the perception of children as essentially innocent until corrupted by the adult world, a reversal of the traditional Christian doctrine of original sin, whereby children were seen as evil until reformed by religion (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). The discourse of the innocent child, which Jenks (1996) argues underpins contemporary notions of child-centred learning is evident in the transcripts, along with the sense of childhood as a lost Arcadia, a repository of all that is good about mankind. This is illustrated in Nick's description of qualities he liked about young children:

I just love a child's natural kind of intrigue and wish to explore and investigate, and the fact that you know, they are a bit of an empty canvas, just their innocence, and honesty and just their unbound creativity and expression and knowing that it will at some point be lost to ready meals and television and video games, and that's disappointing. (Nick, practitioner)

Nick's evident enjoyment of young children is accompanied by an awareness that the innocence and honesty he loves about young children is lost as they grow older. The sense of impending loss, which I explore further in chapter six, gives a particular poignancy to his words, conveying an impression of the fleeting and precious nature of early childhood.

The sense of a lost Arcadia is also evident in the emotionality of early childhood, which Jenks (1996) argues, adults conceptualise as a time of happiness above all. Nick illustrates this in his desire to see 'smiles more than anything else, positivity, happiness' when he walked into a setting. Later in this chapter, I explore further the problem that negative emotions, such as those manifested by a crying child, pose to the practitioner and suggest that the emphasis on the rational, verbal aspects of the pedagogic relationship might be seen as a defence against the anxiety that the expression of negative emotions by young children provokes in adults. As such, they could be seen as constituting the self-holding aspects of the teaching and learning relationship for adults. In the next section, I outline briefly how the Enlightenment focus on scientific knowledge and reason underpins the whole approach to early childhood education and so shapes the role of the practitioner.

Dahlberg et al (2007) argue that Enlightenment Philosophy influences the modern education system so that it is defined by the pre-eminence of reason, a sense of order and a belief that the world can be explained scientifically. One manifestation of this scientific approach is that developmental norms dominate early years rhetoric and practice. Thus developmental psychology can map each stage of a child's development against normative criteria, for example, and is used to measure a child's progress, particularly during the first five years of life. For example, babies' weights are regularly monitored from birth, all two year olds now have a developmental assessment of their physical and cognitive abilities, and children are currently assessed at the

end of the EYFS against criteria drawn from these developmental stages (DfE, 2014). Knowledge of these norms of child development, which are so widely used and accepted in health and education that they are rarely questioned, underpin current early years education in England and form part of what Brooker (2005:117) terms 'the nursery inheritance'. Brooker sees this inheritance as a fusion of Enlightenment philosophy mediated by early years pioneers such as Isaacs and Froebel combined with developmental psychology and argues that the pervasiveness of the ideological tradition is such that the premises are rarely challenged. While it is to be expected that participants would reflect this 'nursery inheritance', it is also the case that any canon of early years practice is contingent on the context, which is determined by cultural and historical factors. I suggest that there is merit in looking at a situation from another angle at times, and questioning accepted principles and practice. Thus my comments on the data that follow in the discussion chapters are in no way intended to be critical, rather they are made with the intention of illuminating our understanding of practice by challenging accepted views.

One sees the Enlightenment belief in the child as innately rational and a naturally scientific and curious learner, reflected in the emphasis on Piagetian theory that dominates early years education, as Wild (2013) signals. Piaget's influence is evident, for example, in Eleanor's response when asked what she enjoyed about working with children.

It's a cliché, but I do find young children really interesting. I think the way that they understand their world and try to explain it and try to categorise and figure things out is amazing. (Eleanor, practitioner-parent)

Children are presented here as little scientists, categorizing, problem solving and verbalising to make sense of their own particular world, seen as separate from the adult world. Eleanor focusses here on the cognitive aspects of children's learning: they are trying to understand their world through reason, categorising and explaining it, which implies using language to make sense of their experiences. Language of some form, then, is associated with the expression of rational thought: most commonly this is verbal language, though some scientific theories may be more easily expressed in mathematical symbols. In the study, talking was the activity that appeared to be most highly valued by practitioners and parents alike in the study, as a sign that children were productively engaged, and so presumed to be learning. Rosa, a parent, for example, liked 'to see that children are interacting, that they are doing things, that there are toys'. For Matthew, talking was the key element of the pedagogic relationship:

For me, it's all about the relationships with the adults and the children. I have to see noise, for a start, talking, really really important.  
(Matthew, practitioner)

In the next section, I look at the way in which language is used as the vehicle by which children learn and are taught to make sense of the world in a rational way and so is viewed by adults as the passport to the adult world.

## **The privileging of verbal language**

The investment of adults in the rational aspects of the pedagogic relationship was seen most clearly in the way in which practitioners privileged verbal language in teaching and learning. The prism through which children's learning was viewed by the participants in the study was that of language acquisition. Though the term 'interaction' was used, particularly by practitioners, the focus was almost exclusively on the verbal communication, with non-verbal communication ignored, as I discuss later in this section. As highlighted in chapter one, the importance of verbal interaction is a dominant discourse in early childhood education. Nonetheless, it was surprising the degree to which language was focussed on in the transcripts to the exclusion of other aspects of early years teaching. The role of the teacher seemed to be defined by verbal communication to the extent that talking could be seen to embody the multi-faceted nature of teaching young children, as illustrated by the examples below from Eleanor, a practitioner-parent.

Eleanor reflected the policy and curricular emphasis on verbal language as the prime medium of learning for young children along with the importance of the environment in facilitating interaction (DfE, 2014). Along with other practitioners in the study, she saw the most important role of the early years practitioner as stimulating children to talk and achieving this through the environment they had created, as well as through their conversations with the children:

I want to see an environment that seems ordered and organised and inviting, that looks as if the staff have spent time thinking about the things that



children like to play with, and the things that will stimulate their curiosity, stimulate conversations and interactions between children.

(Eleanor, practitioner-parent)

For Eleanor, talking seemed to be the lens through which she viewed teaching young children. Of her own team, she commented:

I have such confidence in our team of staff and how we are with children all the time, how professional, how caring, and how much we think about our interactions. (Eleanor, practitioner-parent)

Similarly, in the film clip interview, her first comments on the teacher's practice were a careful analysis of his verbal interactions with the children. Since becoming a parent, she talked of how she had become more sensitive to the way teachers treated children, embodied in the way they spoke to them: 'what would I like for my own child, how would I want an adult to talk to my child?' Talking seemed to embody the essence of working with young children, both in terms of being a benchmark of good practice, and also to represent other aspects of the job, such as the exhaustion felt at the end of a long day, when she recounted 'I would have to go home and sit by myself for a while, because I couldn't talk, just got to a point where I didn't want to have any more interactions really'. Eleanor subsequently changed to working part time to accommodate her own family commitments, but was debating a move back to full time at the time of the interview. What is interesting here is not so much that Eleanor was tired of talking and repeating herself, something several practitioners identified as a negative aspect of the job, and indicative of the emphasis placed on talking as a hallmark of good practice in England,

but that other wearing aspects were not mentioned, such as the sheer physicality and emotionality of the work.

### *Verbal language and play*

The desire of adults to instruct children through the medium of talking was evident in the way play was colonised by practitioners as a vehicle for learning language. Yasmin talked of how play was seen as not only the way young children learn naturally, but also, possibly more importantly, as a context for language teaching by the adult:

I think play fits in everywhere, because that's the natural ability of the child, even if it's learning letters and sounds it has to be through play. In my nursery class yesterday we were talking about the farm, and I had just put in water, and I put in white paint, and they made milk, and then I used gloves, so they were pulling like an udder, so they learnt so much, and some of the children who are learning the letter C and the cow and all that, came in through that rather than just, you know, this is the letter C, cuh and whatever, So play is definitely language, vocabulary, all that, yes.

(Yasmin, practitioner-parent)

One can see in the imaginative way Yasmin used paint, water and rubber gloves to represent milk coming from cow's udders how children's capacities for symbolisation were being developed through the way in which the symbolic play and language development were integrated, illustrating Segal's thinking based on Kleinian theory (Segal, 1957) that words form part of the process of symbol formation that is used in communication, creativity and self-expression.

### ***Practitioners' view of language as a specialist mode of communication***

Eleanor's detailed advice to student teachers on how to interact to support children's learning suggested that communicating with young children was a specialised and contrived process that had to be followed carefully:

My first bit of advice would be come down to the children's level if they are playing on the floor, make yourself stationary, still, and watch and look interested. Wait, don't say anything, children if they want you to become involved will speak to you, invite you in. I would advise them to not ask too many questions but to, you know, if the children seem to be hinting that they want you to take on a role, to take it on but not to become a lead in the play, but to listen to children and wait for them to suggest, you know, what will happen next, you know, and the questions you ask need to be genuine because you want to find out more about something, not because you are checking their knowledge. So if you are having a conversation my bit of advice for students is to be as respectful and as interested and as genuine with a child as you would be with an adult when you are talking.

(Eleanor, practitioner-parent)

Despite the intention to treat the child with as much respect as would be shown in an adult conversation, interacting with a child is portrayed as very different from interacting with an adult here. It could be considered patronizing for a tall adult to make sure they were on the same eye level as a shorter adult, and socially inept having initiated the interaction by moving physically towards a person, then to decline to speak but sit and look interested until talked to. This counter-intuitive way of communicating reflects the emphasis in the literature (eg. Fisher, 2016; Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*,

2002) that there is a particular way of talking to young children, and that early years practitioners have the specialist skills to do this and so support their learning.

The idea that early years practitioners have expertise in a skilled, specialised way of communicating with young children could also be seen as a self-holding mechanism. It is reassuring to have a manual of how to do things, even if it does not always go according to plan, as it creates an illusion of control and predictability. Eleanor's detailed and practical advice creates an illusion of a scientific approach to talking which mitigates against the uncertainty of how children will respond and also whether they are learning anything in the process. The emphasis on talking to young children as a carefully planned, almost technical activity also enables the practitioner to distance themselves from the emotional component of the interaction, thus obscuring the affective aspect of the pedagogic relationship.

### ***Parents' conversations with children***

These practitioner accounts of planned, staged interactions contrasted with Pete's account of his surprise at how much he enjoyed talking with his daughter (aged four at time of the study) which he described as 'a real source of joy and fascination'.

I never imagined that I'd be able to have the conversations that I have, and have had with Amy not exactly since she was talking, but for the process, it's been a constant source of amazement that I actually have conversations. I

just assumed that it would be me telling her things, you know, and either doing them or not doing them. I never understood that it would be this constant process of interaction, and that in there would be genuine conversations. I've never had to rationalise, from an adult perspective, the conversation because I've always been wholly engaged because it's been a genuine conversation between two individuals rather than a parent and two year old. (Pete, parent)

For Pete, talking to his daughter is intrinsically interesting and enjoyable, and the opposite of a rational, contrived activity. He talked in the interview of how he thought he would have to learn how to speak to little children 'a bit like when I'm trying to talk French when I'm on holiday, right I have to translate it into two year old' but discovered that he did not, and that there was 'a fluency in our conversation and relationship that's genuinely engaging'. One might speculate that the engagement and fluency that Pete talks of comes from the emotionality of the parent child relationship, which is far closer and more enduring than the practitioner child relationship.

Pete's account was also unusual in the study because it acknowledged that several people are often present within a conversation or interaction in an early years setting, whereas interactions were presented as one to one conversations by other participants. While this situation might occur more frequently in a home environment, as Flewitt's study suggested (Flewitt, 2005), a seminal study by Siraj Blatchford et al (2007) indicated that individual conversations between adults and children occur very rarely in settings where most interactions take place in a group context and are instructional rather than exploratory in nature. It is interesting to consider

whether in presenting the pedagogic relationship as based on one to one interactions, practitioners are presenting a model of unattainable perfection knowingly, to fulfil parental and societal expectations encapsulated in the curriculum of teaching each child according to their individual needs.

Alternatively, it is possible that the illusion is sustained by adults (teachers and parents) as a defence against the uncomfortable reality that practitioners have little one to one contact with children in a busy setting. This is an interesting point given the improved, statutory ratios introduced with the EYFS (DCSF, 2008b) as recommended by Bain and Barnett (1986) who saw inadequate, unregulated ratios as a key factor in the lack of close relationships between staff and children. In the section below, I consider some of the debates on language acquisition, particularly from a psychoanalytic perspective.

### **Language from a psychoanalytic perspective**

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the acquisition of language represents the transition from the non-verbal world to the verbal world though as noted in chapter one, researchers such as Gillen and Hall (2013), writing on emergent literacy in early childhood, have cast doubt on dichotomous terms that suggest discrete phases of pre-verbal and verbal childhoods. Winnicott (1960) defines the ability to verbalise as what distinguishes infants from children, and points out that the Latin root of the word 'infant' means 'not speaking'. The importance and status attached to learning to speak was

evident in the findings from my IFS study (Gilson, 2013b) where student teachers (including some parents) did not consider that the child was a proper person until they could speak and were mobile, supporting Qvortrup's assertion that very young children are considered to be 'human becomings' rather than human beings (Qvortrup, 1994).

However, language acquisition is a contested area within psychoanalysis and beyond. While Winnicott sees verbal language as just one aspect of communication between the child and their mother, who in infancy communicate without words (Davis and Wallbridge, 1981), Phillips argues that more widely, language is seen as a bastion of civilisation. He contends that 'nothing terrorizes people more in our culture than the refusal of food and the refusal of words' (Phillips, 1988:43). Phillips is highly critical of Anna Freud's unquestioning acceptance of wordlessness as a deficiency of infancy and challenges her assumption that the purpose of the nursery school, as reflected in this study, is to improve the children's language so that they do not resort to non-verbal means of communication (Phillips, 1988).

Phillips takes a polarised position to Anna Freud, highlighting the sense of loss that is involved in making the passage from the unspoken world to the spoken world:

The child at nursery school is at the age when he or she is making for the first but not the last time that fateful transition - that can never be complete, that can never be whole-hearted because the renunciation, the loss of the unspoken self, is too great - to joining the language group, to participating in the community of apparently competent speakers. (Phillips, 1988:39-40)

Part of learning to talk is learning what can and cannot be expressed by words, and so learning to speak involves learning also to be silent about some areas of life (Phillips, 1988). Children learn that some experiences in life defy speech, either because they are feelings that are socially unacceptable to acknowledge in words, or because they are experiences too difficult to try and capture in language. Such moments or situations often involve extremes of emotion, both positive and negative. Thus paradoxically, acquiring language is, as Stern points out, 'a double edged sword [...] it drives a wedge between two simultaneous forms of interpersonal experience: as it is lived and as it verbally represented' (Stern, 1985:162).

Anna Freud's emphasis on the importance of verbal language could be seen to reflect the cultural and historical importance that has long been attached to learning language in the UK. The current emphasis on privileging language in the pedagogic relationship could be attributed to an over-adherence to Vygotskian theories of the role of language in learning through social interaction that dominate early years pedagogy (Wild, 2013). It could also be attributed to a desire to have some evidence that the children are learning, in a climate where accountability is ascertained constantly through measurable outcomes (Roberts Holmes, 2015). While older children can produce written language which is used to demonstrate understanding and learning, young children are not able to record their language in writing: thus, the only source of tangible evidence could be seen as their spoken language. However, by considering only one dimension of learning, namely language development, others are ignored as Flewitt (2005) contends in her observational study of



the way that three year old children make sense of their world in early years settings and home environments. She argues that by looking at how children learn only through a linguistic lens, other ways of making meaning such as through facial expression, gaze and body movement, are not recognised. Her study indicates that while young children may have more recourse to non-verbal ways of communicating, particularly when in an early years setting, both adults and children used these strategies in the pedagogic relationship, as part of the business of interacting (Flewitt, 2005). While I have not taken a Lacanian perspective in this study, it is worth noting that for Lacan, the subject is defined through language, resulting in the subject both finding expression through the medium of language yet at the same time, being imprisoned within the confines of the linguistic framework (Celdran, 2002). Part of the subject will always elude linguistic expression (Roseboro, 2008), thus verbal expression in Lacanian theory implies a quest for what has been lost, which includes the pre-verbal stage of human development as well as non-verbal elements of communication. In the section below, I consider how non-verbal communication was viewed in the study.

### **Non-verbal communication**

Non-verbal communication is an integral though often unacknowledged part of interaction particularly between adults and young children (Flewitt (2005). Grumet (1988) sees the teacher's gaze as fundamental to the pedagogic relationship. She comments, for example, on 'the glare of discipline'

(Grumet, 1988:112) that is used in teaching, and the way the look is used to repudiate touch in schools. In terms of a holding environment, being held in an adult's gaze is often the first step away from being physically held (Winnicott, 1960). Both touch and discipline were sensitive issues in the interviews, often provoking an irritated response, as if these were not suitable areas for discussion of early years practice. This was evident, for example, when discussing the film clip, for example, where some practitioners took exception to the physical proximity of the male teacher to the child he was working with individually, and to the teacher's insistence that the child responded to his question. Though they could not find fault with his words or tone of voice, they disapproved of his facial expression, when he looked into the mid distance for a moment and sighed. My contention is that adults, particularly practitioners, did not want to recognise the non-verbal aspects of interaction because they conveyed the parts of the relationship that were considered unacceptable within the pedagogic relationship, specifically here the emotional component of the relationship, such as anger or affection. I look at this in more detail in the next chapter and argue that the film clip disconcerted several participants precisely because it forced them to look at aspects of the relationship that they would have preferred to disregard.

### ***Non-verbal communication in the transcripts***

The only participant to acknowledge the complexity of interaction in the study was Pete, a parent, who provided spontaneously a detailed and nuanced observation of his daughter, Amy, giving it as an example of the sophisticated

way in which she negotiated the completing demands of her friend and her friend's father in the park. I have selected extracts here of the much longer account. Pete was very aware of his subjective interpretation of the data, and described the scene thus:

So what I thought I saw, and I might be completely wrong, her friend was following her around, they were playing in the park and chasing around, and her dad said to his daughter why don't you lead and Amy will follow you? [ ...] And I think Amy understood that they were going to swap roles, and I she understood why he was doing this, she understood he was saying to his daughter see if you can do this. And then so Amy followed her, and her friend did this for, you know, took the lead and then very quickly forgot all about it, and just ran off into the distance, forgetting she was supposed to be leading this two person train. So Amy tried to follow her, and then she looked again at me and her friend's father, and she looked back at her friend, and ran after her a little bit and then called her and said - why don't we go this way? [...] I was thinking was she trying to, she was trying not to perhaps, I interpreted it as she was trying to encourage her friend not to disappoint the expectations of her friend's father. (Pete, parent)

The importance of gaze and body movement here as part of the interaction is emphasised: indeed if you took them out of the observation, the account would be meaningless. Pete also acknowledged the undercurrents of expectation that influence every interaction. Here he conjectured that Amy was trying to help her friend meet her father's desire to see his daughter display the ability to lead as well as follow her friend. This desire to see Amy as highly perceptive and astute could of course be fulfilling Pete's own

expectations of his daughter, and he acknowledged that he was only offering an interpretation of events. Amy led her friend off to the sandpit in the distance, where the two sat side by side playing happily alone, out of earshot of their parents, which could be interpreted as helping her friend not to disappoint her father's expectations by diplomatically sidestepping the issue, or an assertive move to escape both sets of parental gaze and direction.

### ***Language used to hide the emotional turbulence of classroom life***

In the study, there was a sense that language was used to paper over the cracks in classroom life, full of disappointments, desires, emotions and conflict. Liz viewed the caring aspect of her job through the prism of verbal expression, saying 'if we are going to do nurturing we do it through talking'. She went on to give an example of how this was done in circle time, where children had to find something positive to say about a child who regularly hit them.

There was [a] child with some quite severe behavioural problems, but we did child of the day every day religiously, and you know, everybody, when it was this child's turn, he might have been beating people up at playtime, but you know, everybody had to find something positive to say [...] and they became a very well bonded group of children. They never, you know, he was quite difficult and he could be really disruptive and throw chairs around, and you know, ruin people's work and all those kind of, a really unhappy child, but none of the other children ever got cross with him, they were always really supportive of him and looked after him. (Liz, practitioner-parent)

It is hard to believe that these children did not feel anger or fear towards a child who was violent and destructive towards them, though fear could have led them to be as accommodating as possible of him in the hope that they would be spared his wrath. For this reason, they might have been a cohesive group, united by a common threat to their security. Liz's desire to disregard the negative emotions that were likely to be present among the children by allowing only positive comments to be made in circle time suggests a possible idealisation of children in her class as exceptionally tolerant and indirectly, an idealisation of her teaching, as the person who could inculcate this response. The child in Liz's example above who expressed himself through physical gestures such as hitting and throwing chairs rather than in words illustrates the threat alluded to by Phillips (1988) that such a refusal to participate in the civilised, verbal community of the adult world can present to the self-holding environment of the practitioner trying to maintain an ordered classroom in which children feel safe enough to learn.

Language then, seemed to be used as a straitjacket, to edit out the unsayable, the unthinkable, the socially unacceptable. As Silin comments, 'words are notorious for the ways in which they conceal and transform as well as tell the truth' (Silin, 2005:91). Language appeared to be used here as a screen to obscure the tangle of emotions behind it. As well as learning considerable emotional restraint, the children were learning that language can be used disingenuously to deny feelings as well as express them, arguably devaluing the emotion by superimposing the supremacy of

language over it. They were also learning what, within the culture of their classroom, could be articulated and what had to remain unspoken.

### ***Crying***

The requirement for a child to be happy emerged strongly from the transcripts as mentioned earlier in this chapter. At one level, happy children are taken as sign that children are being adequately provided for by the environment the adult creates. In this study, as in the IFS study (Gilson, 2013b), while non-verbal behaviours indicating positive emotion in children such as smiling were encouraged, non-verbal behaviour such as crying, signifying unhappiness, was not. Indeed, crying was seen as one of the greatest disruptions to teaching and learning, and as such was strenuously avoided by adults. Yet Winnicott emphasises that the process of growing up is not easy:

In fact, the main thing to point out to people about infants and children is that life for infants and children is not easy even if it has all sorts of good things about it, and there is no such thing as life without tears, except where there is compliance without spontaneity. (Winnicott, 1964:125)

From this perspective, expecting children to be happy all the time is illusory. Tears are an inevitable part of the emotional range of childhood, and of the weaning process of dependence to independence. Below I explore further the threat that crying posed to the pedagogic relationship, and to the adult's capacity to self-hold.

*The vet corner: rationality versus emotionality*

Though in the transcripts the practitioner was presented as making a rational, conscious decision to support children's language development and so their learning, examples from practice presented a rather more complex picture at times. Eleanor talked of how that morning she had intervened in the role play area set up as a vet's surgery to model how to use a stethoscope properly as she noticed the children were putting them on each other's heads and feet.

So I put the stethoscope on and you know, showed, said I'm going to put it on Mickey Mouse's heart, let's listen and see if his heart's beating regularly and I said ba boom, ba boom, ba boom ba boom, for a little while, and then we yes, his heart's fine. Now Mickey, I'd like you to take some deep breaths, Mickey was very cooperative and I was able to say that his chest was clear. And then after that I noticed that they were using the stethoscopes in a way that was more kind of like the way that doctors use them.

(Eleanor, practitioner-parent)

Rather than wait to be invited in to the play, as she advocated in her advice to novice teachers quoted earlier, she described how 'I plonked myself in there this morning', and then demonstrated how adults use a stethoscope and importantly, what phrases and language went with using one. However, later in the interview it emerged that the original motivation for going into the vet corner was in fact to occupy a child who was on her own, crying because

she wanted her mother, so Eleanor decided to distract her by taking her into the vet's corner.

So I said I know you want your mummy, and acknowledged what she was feeling, and then said let's go and see what's happening in the vets, so that's the point at which I went in. (Eleanor, practitioner-parent)

This incident suggests that an emotional response to a crying and solitary child might have been the catalyst for Eleanor to go into the vet's corner, rather than primarily a desire to model appropriate language to the children.

A crying child is a clear indication to a practitioner that they are not providing an adequate holding environment for the child. It collapses like a house of cards the illusion of an ordered, rational learning environment in which children operate independently like little adults, and exposes the vulnerability of young children. Crying demands an emotional response: seeing a person crying at whatever age is distressing as it forces us to acknowledge the essentially emotional nature of humanity, and reminds us of our own vulnerability. For this reason, it is also potentially very disruptive in a nursery classroom context, as when other young children hear crying, they may remember that they miss their mother and start crying too, at which point a storm of grief can suddenly sweep across the nursery which only abates after considerable adult effort.

Phillips (1988) suggests that children's inarticulacy reminds adults of their unspoken selves, and allows them to engage with vestigial aspects of their own childhood selves. One could also argue that young children's



inarticulacy and modes of non-verbal expression such as crying may result in adults defending against such vestigial memories as they evoke painful thoughts of the harsher side of childhood that we are keen to ignore, including difficult emotions. Furthermore, in the context of teaching and learning, crying as a non-verbal, irrational expression of negative emotions reduces the rational, verbal adult to impotence, and effectively closes down the pedagogic relationship, excluding the practitioner, illustrating the potential of emotions to disrupt rationality. In chapter six, I explore further this notion of rejection.

### **Concluding thoughts**

While adults may try to sustain a self-holding illusion of a rational, linguistic pedagogic relationship with three to five year old children, practice as reflected in the transcripts pointed to a rather different experience: Eleanor was keen to avoid a crying child, Liz worked hard to make sure that the children only said nice things about a physically violent child. These responses suggest that the teaching and learning relationship with young children can be charged with difficult emotions. The privileging of language and rational thought could indicate a reluctance to acknowledge other aspects of the relationship, particularly here the emotional dimension. From this position, one could argue that the emphasis on developing children's reason and language might be a defence against the emotional force and unpredictability of the early years teaching and learning relationship. It could

be argued that the learning environment is in fact designed to hold the adult as much as the child, suppressing as it does the emotional component of the pedagogic relationship, and privileging the rational components. The desire to view learning and so teaching as a controllable, rational activity, takes no account of the emotional basis of thinking and knowing that is fundamental to psychoanalytic theories of learning (Salzberger-Wittenberg, Williams and Osbourne, 1983). As Bibby writes:

All thinking and knowing have their genesis in emotional responses. The emotional responses do not come second, they come first. For psychoanalysis, emotionless thought is an impossibility, a rationalist dream. (Bibby, 2010:104)

In the next chapter, I look further at the nature of learning and at what is devalued in the pedagogic relationship, particularly the emotional aspects of the relationship which may be avoided because they belie the 'rationalist dream'.

## Chapter Five: The emotional practitioner

### Introduction

In the last chapter, I looked at the privileging of the rational, verbal aspects of the adult role in the pedagogic relationship and considered how they related to the emotional, non-verbal aspects of the relationship. I conceptualised the relationship using Winnicott's theory of a holding environment (Winnicott, 1960) used by Phillips in his writing on composure, which he presented as 'self-holding and self-hiding' (Phillips, 1994:45). I argued that participants valued rationality expressed largely through verbal language as the most important feature of the pedagogic relationship because it enabled them to create a self-holding environment. While language is undoubtedly a key aspect of the teaching and learning relationship, it could also be argued that by privileging one aspect of the relationship, other aspects may be ignored.

In this chapter, I look at what the difficult emotions for the adult are, and how they affect the positions that adults take up. Using Phillips' phrase 'self-holding and self-hiding' alluded to above, I look at what is hidden and devalued by adults in the pedagogic relationship with young children and suggest that this could be because it threatens to destabilize the self-holding environment. In the transcripts, this centred round negative emotions, particularly frustration. In the sections that follow, I first consider the emotional nature of the learning and teaching relationship. I then look at how the transcripts suggest that all emotion is tightly regulated in the pedagogic

relationship with young children, and at how negative emotion, here frustration, is disavowed. I explore how the adult's unconscious and shifting identifications and disassociations within the teaching and learning relationship seemed to provoke an emotional and unguarded response so destabilising their self-holding environment. I also consider whether that the frustration inherent in the pedagogic relationship might have been defended against by some participants because of the threat of disruption that it poses to the relationship. My argument is premised on the notion that teaching and learning has an emotional as well as a cognitive component, and in the next section, I outline theories relating to the emotional nature of teaching and learning.

### **The emotional nature of the learning and teaching relationship**

The separation of the rational and the emotional in the pedagogic relationship in the transcripts runs counter to theories of psychoanalytic theories as applied to education by Salzberger-Wittenberg et al (1983) and Greenhalgh (1994) which emphasise the emotional nature of learning and teaching.

Price states that:

A psychoanalytic perspective describes all learning as 'emotional' principally because of the idea that the learning subject has a dynamic unconscious relationship to the process of learning. (Price, 2002:305)

The relational aspect of learning and teaching also inevitably involves emotion, for as Biesta (2013) points out when writing about risk in education,

the pedagogic relationship is an encounter between human beings not robots. Phillips takes the view that the pedagogic relationship is essentially unpredictable as both learning and so teaching are subject to our unconscious desires and own particular history, so unknowable in advance of the event:

People can learn but they can't be taught; or at least they can't be taught anything of real significance. And that is partly because no one - neither student nor teacher - can ever know beforehand exactly what is of personal significance; that is, exactly what a person will find significant, select out to dream with, to remember or to forget; to work on. (Phillips, 1988:57)

Given that learning and so teaching from a psychoanalytic viewpoint are therefore beyond our control, and can only be rationalised retrospectively if at all, then it is not surprising that the pedagogic relationship has considerable potential for frustration, for both learner and teacher.

### ***Frustration in the learning and teaching relationship***

Winnicott recognises the frustration inherent in the pedagogic relationship and sees the role of the adult as twofold: they should be able to tolerate both the frustrations of the child as a learner, and the frustrations inherent in teaching:

Good teaching demands of the teacher a toleration of the frustrations to his or her spontaneity in giving, or feeding - frustrations that may be felt acutely. The child, in learning to become civilized, naturally also feels frustrations

acutely, and is helped in becoming civilized not so much by the teacher's precepts as by the teacher's own ability to bear frustrations inherent in teaching. (Winnicott, 1964:202-203)

Frustration is according to Winnicott an integral part of learning and teaching. Interestingly, he suggests that the adult creates the facilitating or holding environment in which the child can learn to tolerate their own frustration by modelling to the child how to self-hold and tolerate their own frustrations. These arise from the tricky business of teaching the child, which Winnicott likens to feeding: like feeding and weaning a child, not only has the teacher to judge what level of frustration the child can tolerate, they also have to contend with the possibility that the child will reject the learning opportunity the adult is offering, just as a baby may turn his or her head away from a spoonful of food.

The presence of strong negative emotions are acknowledged by Winnicott (1975) to be part of the mother child relationship and it is notable that Winnicott also sees them as part of the pedagogic relationship here, in the form of frustration. However, in education, as Moore (2004), Bibby (2010) and Grumet (1988) assert, it is more common for the fantasy of the perfect mother to prevail. Taubman (2006) regarded child-centred pedagogy that underpins early childhood education as modelled on a vision of maternal selflessness. Thus the teacher is construed as the embodiment of maternal virtues but none of the flaws, such as frustration and impatience. The transcripts seemed to reflect this selective use of maternal virtues: while frustration was recognised as part of the parental experience of bringing up

young children, it was not readily acknowledged as part of the adult's experience in the pedagogic relationship.

In Greenhalgh's view (1994), the resistance to acknowledging negative emotion as part of the pedagogic relationship constitutes an ineffective holding environment for the child as the anxieties present are not dealt with by being recognised and so held. For the adult, as I explore in this chapter, the desire to hide the presence of negative emotion from themselves as well as others seemed to result in an unstable self-holding environment that was easily unbalanced by emotion welling up. Participants appeared reluctant to talk about negative emotions, some denying that they ever felt frustrated, and others disavowing the emotion, employing a range of defences that are discussed in more detail below. Emotion of any kind disrupts stasis and so is viewed in the transcripts as having the potential to cause 'chaos and mayhem', to use one practitioner's term (Louise) for what she most disliked about working with young children. Therefore both positive and negative emotion appeared to be tightly regulated, resulting in a curiously bland and emotionally muted portrayal of the early years pedagogic relationship, as I explore in the next section.

## **Regulation of emotion**

Adam Phillips writes of the emotional exuberance of young children thus:

Anyone who spends time with nursery-age children knows the sheer scale of their emotional impact; how they both experience and arouse - often with

daunting speed and fluency - the most passionate and therefore puzzling feelings (Phillips, 1988:47).

Given this view, which accords with my own experience of working as an early years practitioner, it was surprising then that this emotional charge did not emerge in the transcripts, other than in occasional accounts of regulating emotion, including positive emotion. However, this was perhaps to be expected in the context of a staged interview. In the transcripts, paradoxically, adults wanted the learning environment to be fun and exciting for children, full of stimulating activities, but were understandably also keen that the children did not get over-excited and unruly. For example, Liz, a practitioner-parent, talked of a singing activity that had gone well that morning commenting that 'there was every opportunity for them to be rowdy and silly in the song, and they've just behaved perfectly'. Liz's comments point to the emotional work involved for the practitioner of walking the tightrope between fun and excitement on the one hand, and disorder and chaos on the other. It could be argued that this balancing act is particularly precarious when teaching very young children as they are still learning the conventions of how to behave in an institution, and as part of a group.

A glimpse of the emotional charge of the teaching and learning relationship with pre-school age children was also evident in the transcripts when, two practitioners, Eleanor and Matthew, became tearful while talking about why they liked working with young children. Their responses emphasised the power of crying, as non-verbal communication, to disrupt rational and verbal expression, even when it is expressing positive emotions such as joy rather



than negative emotions, such as sadness, as was explored in the last chapter in the account of the little girl who Eleanor took into the vet's corner because she was crying. Matthew, for example, verbalised his love of teaching using the experience he provided in his nursery of seeing butterflies coming out of their chrysalis also as metaphor for the children's development, but emotion overwhelmed him momentarily, breaking through his composure and pointing to the inadequacy of language to hold the experience adequately.

It's the playing, it's the joy of seeing children exploring and finding out, the same thing that you do every year, with the butterfly coming out of the chrysalis, but it's new for that child, and that is the joy, to see that, and to give them that opportunity to learn that. I'm going to cry now. LAUGHTER.

(Matthew, practitioner)

Matthew's use of the word 'joy' points to the extremes of emotion that Phillips (1988) argues are engendered when working with young children. Within this rollercoaster of emotions, it is understandable that while positive emotions are recognised, negative emotions, or what are sometimes termed 'the difficult bits' (Bibby, 2010) are not so readily acknowledged. The predominant negative emotion that was discussed in the study was frustration, and in the next section, I look at how this emotion was dealt with.

## **Negative emotion: 'We don't talk about that'**

Practitioners regarded the negative aspects of the job, including frustration, as something that was not talked about and showed considerable resistance to doing so. As Matthew commented 'but you never tell the negativity, that's the thing'. Their reluctance echoed the resistance to talking about difficult emotions noted in primary and secondary school contexts by Jackson (2008) and Hanko (1999). The subject of difficult emotions in the teaching relationship came up in both the semi-structured and film elicitation interviews, but was approached in a different way in each set of interviews to try and overcome the resistance to talking about the subject. In the semi-structured interviews, I asked participants to talk about the good aspects of the working with young children, and then the tricky aspects. Participants, both parents and practitioners, seemed dumbfounded by the second question and often had very little to say in response. They were adept at deflecting the topic: for example, when I asked Matthew to talk about the tricky aspects of the job, his first response was to refuse, saying 'We don't talk about that'. When I pressed him, he acknowledged everyone has bad days sometimes:

Bad day for me is the annoying child who keeps doing the wrong thing, and I'm lucky in that I have a really good team around me who will go 'you are being too hard on that child today, give it a break, stop saying that name' – all those kind of things, it just gets under your skin, but that's OK, we all look out for each other, and every day is different, and we all have odd days like that. (Matthew, practitioner)

Matthew's comment illustrates the way in which staff supported each other to manage their own difficult emotions and thus positioned themselves in relation to other adults as well as children in the pedagogic relationship. It is a tacit recognition also of how the emotionality of the relationship can affect the positions adopted. However, the film clip in the second interview offered a different way of looking at the pedagogic relationship that seemed to generate a more unguarded and more emotional response from participants. There is not time within the constraints of this study to explore the methodological implications of this difference, which I will consider in more detail in a subsequent paper. However, it is useful to consider here what it was about the film clip that participants seemed to find disconcerting in relation to the expression of difficult emotions in the pedagogic relationship as a way of shedding light on what these emotions were and how they affected the positions that the adults adopted.

### ***The film clip: a different way of looking***

Rose (2007) argues that film offers a particular way of structuring looking, as mentioned in chapter two, and this assertion seemed to be borne out by the different ways in which the pedagogic relationship was viewed in the two interviews. In the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews, participants talked about the pedagogic relationship from the inside, from the perspective of an adult looking at the child, focussing their attention entirely on the child and presenting the teacher as a shadowy, neutral figure in the background. In the film clip, however, participants viewed the relationship from the outside

as observers. Thus they were forced to acknowledge the dyadic and dynamic nature of the teaching and learning relationship, which involves two people, not just one. The film clip made it impossible to ignore the complex and constantly changing range of emotions experienced by both adult and child in the pedagogic relationship. It offered an unusual fly on the wall view of an everyday slice of classroom life that took participants by surprise: Eleanor commented that it was different from the carefully staged training videos she had taken part in that were 'a bit more contrived really, it doesn't just kind of happen that somebody catches me for ten minutes, you know when it's coming'.

The elements of the film clip that participants reacted strongly to were those that related to the emotional component of the relationship, and in particular, to the frustration inherent in teaching. These were largely communicated through non-verbal interactions, such as gaze, touch, tone of voice, which the film exposed for the viewers to see in close-up detail, whether or not they wanted to. Participants did however home in on certain interactions and did not comment on others: though the five minute film clip contained a range of scenarios including an informal and spontaneous discussion with the younger children about what they wanted to be when they grew up, a small group planned teaching session on learning to write the number seven, and working one to one with a child, all the participants focussed on the one minute individual teaching sequence where the teacher is trying to get one child to recognise and say seven. This was the one section in the film clip where the teacher's equanimity seemed to waver slightly, as he looked momentarily

nonplussed and frustrated that the child could or would not say the number seven.

Participants appeared particularly troubled by the non-verbal elements of the teacher's communication, objecting to the way he gazed into the mid distance and sighed momentarily when the child could not or would not say the number. Liz, for example, described this sequence as 'a little bit shocking' and described the teacher thus:

And then he, you know, he looked like he was getting quite cross then because I looked at the, you know, his forehead was quite wrinkled and then it wasn't, you know, and he said wake up, and then rolled his eyes and huffed and puffed, and the child didn't know that it was seven. Um...so that was a little bit scary really, don't know...I don't know why he was doing it.

(Liz, practitioner-parent)

In this excerpt, it is notable that it is the non-verbal aspects of communication that are focussed on. The teacher's facial expression and gestures are highlighted: the wrinkled forehead, rolling eye movement and sighing ('huffing and puffing') seem to communicate most powerfully the emotionality of the pedagogic encounter and the sense that the teacher is cross. The emotional impact of the film clip on Liz was indicated in the interview by her tone and manner, which became more agitated and emotional, and this is reflected in the transcript in the way that the syntax becomes disrupted and fragmentary (even allowing for extempore speech being more hesitant and disordered than considered written prose) and in the repeated use of fillers, such as 'and' and 'you know'. In the first sentence, Liz appears to be recalling the

extract by reliving it before describing her response to it in the second sentence.

The teacher's use of touch in conjunction with his facial expressions was also problematic for some participants though there was a wide range of responses to his physical proximity to the child. The way the teacher was crouched down near to the child and had his arm along the back of the child's chair was described as 'threatening' and 'quite disgusting' by Louise, a practitioner, for example. However, it was seen as unproblematic by others and as positive by Esther, a parent, who described the gesture as 'fatherly' and Matthew, a practitioner, who described it as 'sheltering'. These very varied responses here could be seen as an example of the way in which we each bring our own unconscious desires and personal histories to each pedagogic encounter that Phillips (1988) speaks of, quoted earlier in the chapter. The strength and unpredictability of the responses also suggests that participants were identifying in different ways with both the child and the teacher in the film clip, as is discussed in more detail in the section later in this chapter on identifications. In both the semi-structured and film elicitation interviews, participants appeared to go to considerable lengths to resist acknowledging the existence of difficult emotions, such as frustration, in the pedagogic relationship. This was particularly evident in the film elicitation interview where the issue was presented in a way that made it very difficult to ignore. This key methodological finding from the study has implications for policy and practice that are considered in chapter seven.

In the next section, I look at the ways in which many of the participants disavowed the frustration inherent in the pedagogic relationship. It is possible to conjecture that they did this as a way of managing the threat that the emotion poses to the self-holding environment, such is its potential disruptive force. I first outline the notion of disavowal in psychoanalytic literature, and then discuss the data in the light of this theoretical perspective, considering the ways in which participants appeared to distance themselves from the idea that teaching young children can be a frustrating business, which could be seen as a form of self-hiding.

### **Disavowal of frustration**

Taubman uses the Freudian term of disavowal to denote 'a situation where something is both known and denied at the same time' (Taubman, 2012:18). He describes disavowal as a process of defensive splitting in response to threatening knowledge whereby we believe and do not believe in something at the same time. He gives climate change as an example where we know there is scientific evidence to support the theory, but continue with our carbon-heavy lifestyles as if we did not believe it was happening. In this way, people paradoxically appear to hold contradictory beliefs, though one is disavowed. Taubman (2012) argues that knowledge that is too threatening is disavowed as it cannot be acknowledged without destabilizing the holding environment. Thus in the context of the study, frustration was recognised as being part of parenting young children, but not of teaching them, despite the

fact that elements of the teaching and learning relationship in the early years are modelled on the mother-child relationship (such as the key person approach, for example) and several participants recounted memories of angry teachers from their childhoods. Taubman (2006) argues that frustration is as much part of the pedagogic as parental relationship, and warns that in idealising the relationship between teacher and child, the aggression is not dissipated, but displaced and will emerge elsewhere. In the examples that follow, I explore the various ways participants disavowed frustration, from denying that they ever felt frustrated to locating the emotion in another person, including another version of themselves (when newly qualified, for example).

### ***Locating the frustration elsewhere***

The strategy of locating the frustration elsewhere seemed to be used by some participants as a form of disavowal, by distancing themselves from association with the emotion. This strategy could be seen to suggest that splitting was being used to divide emotions into those that were valued and so owned by the individual, and those that were feared and devalued, so disavowed by being located elsewhere. The most obvious example of this were the negative views that participants, particularly practitioners, expressed about the teacher in the film clip where all practitioners were united in their view that the teacher was to blame for this unsuccessful pedagogical encounter. The word 'failure' was used by several participants. Yasmin, a parent practitioner, for example, used it repeatedly, saying 'I think



he felt a failure, he felt he was failing or didn't understand where he was failing'. Eleanor thought the teacher's frustration at the child's lack of learning was a sign of his arrogance.

He was frustrated wasn't he, he was really frustrated, and he didn't, he could hardly believe that she couldn't remember and couldn't link it together, and you know, I've just taught you, so you should be able to know this, you know we've just done this, why haven't you remembered. You know he was a bit ... a bit arrogant really I think. (Eleanor, practitioner-parent)

Matthew, while acknowledging that it was easy to get cross initially with the child who was not learning, maintained that good teachers always realised it was their fault.

I think if you are a good teacher, it's frustration with yourself, but it's really hard not to focus that on the child, in the moment when you are with the child, really when you go away and think about it, it's always about your fault isn't it. It's always you not teaching the right way, but actually when you are in there with the child it's about the child not learning. Yeah, it's the most frustrating thing in the world, we do it every day. (Matthew, practitioner).

By qualifying his statement, making it clear that good teachers accept the blame if a child does not learn, Matthew made it acceptable to acknowledge the frustration inherent in the job. His comments suggest that all responsibility for learning is invested in the teacher, a view that does not recognise the complexity of the learning process and the impossibility of forcing anyone to learn that is emphasised by Phillips (1988) and Winnicott (1964). Matthew's view that the blame lay with the teacher was echoed by

the other practitioners, who saw the child as blameless, in need of protection and a more resourceful and patient teacher. In their somewhat unforgiving stance towards adults here, practitioners seemed to be using splitting as a defence, polarising the pedagogic relationship by locating all the negative features of the relationship in the teacher and all the positive features in the child.

Interestingly, less than half the participants considered the possibility that the child might have been refusing to speak, and as such, could be seen as a powerful player in the pedagogical encounter rather than defenceless and in need of protection. The consternation that the child's mute response provoked in both the teacher in the clip and the participants watching it is a salient reminder of how threatening adults find it when children refuse to participate in the speaking world, a point highlighted by Phillips (1988), and discussed in the last chapter. Her silence is a potent way of getting the teacher's attention: notably only one practitioner, Nick, qualified his criticism of the teacher by commenting 'that frustration shows that he cares, he's not just saying oh well, let's leave it'. The practitioners' disapproval of the teacher appearing momentarily jaded in the film clip could be seen as a form of disavowal of the emotion, by effectively hiding it in the teacher. One could conjecture that this defence in turn made it possible for them to maintain their self-holding belief that good teachers did not experience even momentary frustration that might manifest itself in a sigh, a frown or a gaze across the room during the course of a day.

### ***Frustration located in another version of oneself***

Frustration was often disavowed by being located in another practitioner as with the example of the teacher in the film clip above, though some practitioners also attributed it to another version of themselves. Eleanor, for example, acknowledged that she used to feel frustrated sometimes as a newly qualified teacher, but as an experienced practitioner, denied feeling frustrated and thought her knowledge and expertise equipped her to remain emotionally impartial.

I don't feel frustrated with children, not about things I want them to learn [...] so I think it is probably about training and about understanding children's emotional needs and understanding that you know, if they are kicking off because something hasn't worked out the way they wanted to it's not you they are having a go it, it's the experience and frustration that they are experiencing, it's not something to take personally.

(Eleanor, practitioner-parent)

Yasmin, a practitioner parent, associated feeling frustrated with her role as a parent, but not her role as a teacher.

It's funny, let me tell you this. I feel more frustrated with my own children than children I work with, and I've often reflected at that and my children tell me, they say, Mum you are never angry with your children at work.

(Yasmin, practitioner-parent)

At first, she said she was never frustrated at work, only at home, then acknowledged that:

Well, I feel frustrated that I, maybe time factor, you know, being a manager and giving like I have some key children, and that time, you know, that I'm torn apart between the two, and I leave my paperwork for the children. I always say that I can do that at home. (Yasmin, practitioner-parent)

In her frustration with paperwork which took her away from the children, one can see the emotional cost of trying to balance the different elements of her job as a practitioner and manager. It is also possible to conjecture that any frustration that Yasmin might feel with the children might be focussed on the paperwork, rather than on the children, exemplifying Taubman's argument (2006) that if frustration is not acknowledged as an integral part of working with young children, it emerges in other areas. So here Yasmin feels frustrated as a manager and as a parent, but not as a practitioner.

### ***Parental views on practitioners' frustration***

Parents, perhaps unsurprisingly, given their awareness of the frustrations of parenting young children, acknowledged more readily that teachers were likely to feel frustrated at times though the two mothers felt that teachers should mask their feelings. Rosa, for example, thought that teachers had less reason than parents to get frustrated because they had 'a lot more tools and tactics to hand'. She saw teachers as more patient and more inscrutable than parents and so was disappointed in the teacher's parental reaction in the film clip, which compared unfavourably to the demeanour of her child's teachers.

CG: So in terms of the teacher, what did you think of him as a teacher?

Rosa: He was good, but he had ...his facial expressions when the child wasn't answering the question were very readable. I was thinking that's how I would react .LAUGHS. For God's sake I just taught it to you.

CG: How do you think he was feeling at that point?

Rosa: You bloody child! LAUGHS. We've gone through this whole lesson, why aren't you observing it? That's why he said wake up, you could tell a mile off he was frustrated, which I don't think they do in Elise's school, I get the feeling they are very measured, they must be so cross inside but they know they cannot jeopardise their confidence.  
(Rosa, parent)

Rosa's confidence in her own child's teachers' emotional restraint suggests a subtle form of disavowal, where she chose to believe that her own child's teachers never displayed their feelings, unlike other teachers outside her personal sphere, because they were committed to fostering her child's confidence. Disavowal, as Taubman (2012) points out, is a form of splitting and Rosa's response here could be interpreted as such, by idealising her daughter's teachers, while expressing her disapproval of other teachers who were not so adept at hiding their emotions. It could also be seen as a form of self-holding: in order to entrust her child (who had just started school and was in the reception class) to the school, it is possible that Rosa needed to believe that her daughter would not be experiencing frustration from the practitioners she came into contact with. Her words imply that emotions are

controllable and that we can make ourselves opaque, ignoring the power of non-verbal and unconscious communication. They also suggest that children are less sensitive at reading emotions than adults, which is a form of disassociation that I discuss later in this chapter.

Four participants had a particularly strong emotional response to the film, expressed as an aversion to the teacher in the film, who they found 'scary', 'intimidating' 'uncomfortable'. The fact four individuals had this marked reaction seemed to me noteworthy, and prompted me to look further at their transcripts. Their responses suggested that there was a fluid process of unconscious identifications with the child taking place during these interviews that could indicate that the participants' own experience was influencing their reactions. In the next sections, I revisit and develop the notion of identifications from a psychoanalytic perspective that is outlined in the first chapter, and consider how this is reflected in the transcripts of the film elicitation interviews, exploring what insights this sheds on the positioning of adults in the pedagogic relationship.

### **Identifications in the pedagogic relationship**

The process of identification, as outlined in the first chapter, is an unconscious process by which 'an individual takes in attributes of the people with whom he or she is in contact with' (Frosh, 2002: 57). In his theory of holding, as mentioned in chapter one, Winnicott saw a mother's capacity to

identify with her child as an essential pre-requisite to the provision of an adequate holding environment:

The important thing, in my view, is that the mother through identification of herself with her infant knows what the infant feels like, and so is able to provide almost exactly what the infant needs in the way of holding and in the provision of an environment generally. (Winnicott, 1960: 594)

It should be noted, though, that Winnicott sees the mother as providing 'almost exactly what the infant needs', allowing the space between meeting their needs perfectly and almost meeting them to exist, so the infant can learn to tolerate frustration in manageable amounts. Mothers, then, need to be good enough rather than too good and Winnicott sees it as problematic if the mother over-identifies with her infant so meets their needs without them ever experiencing frustration as this does not enable them to be weaned and to develop independence.

Anna Freud (1949), who considered identification to be an essential element of the pedagogic relationship between adult and child, also saw over-identification as a hazard: in a lecture for parents and teachers, she cited the example of a female teacher who took a post teaching three boys, where the middle son was behind in his studies and very different from the other two. The governess devoted herself to this child who made excellent progress, earning the approval of his parents, but once he had this, and she was no longer indispensable to him (even though he was very fond of her) she could not bear it and left the post, finding him troublesome. As Anna Freud wrote:

Success, when it came, destroyed this identification. It made the pupil an independent being who could no longer be identified with her own life.

(Freud, 1949: 106)

She argued for greater awareness of this process of identification to protect the teacher, and crucially, the child, from troublesome pedagogical encounters like the one she recounted. Britzman and Pitt succinctly encapsulate the problem:

The problem, as Anna Freud argues, is when the repetition of transference dynamics is not analysed and hence resists insights into what it is that structures the teacher's desire for the pedagogical.

(Britzman and Pitt, 1996:117)

Britzman refers to the process of transference, a term which is used to denote an unconscious experience when past conflicts are projected onto the present, influencing the individual's response. So, an adult may respond negatively to their line manager, because they are unconsciously re-enacting the conflictual relationship they had with authority figures as a child such as their teacher or father, for example. However, in my comments on the transcripts, I have used the term 'identification' as that is the term used by both Winnicott and Anna Freud in their writing.

Britzman and Pitt (1996) highlight the unpredictability and potential disruptiveness of the process of identification and disassociation in the pedagogic relationship. It is impossible to know what it is that triggers an individual's unconscious memory (a gesture, tone of voice, some indefinable feeling, for example) and so it is not possible for teachers to try and predict or



control how they may react to the disruption the process can cause. Rather, they need to be attentive to the presence of strong emotions, and to the possibility that these might arise from unconscious identifications, and unresolved conflicts in their own psychic past. Benjamin(1998) concurs with the view that we have no control over our unconscious identifications and comments that the only choice is whether to recognise them or repudiate what we cannot bear to own. She writes of what she calls the see-saw effect that can be generated through identification, when an individual can constantly shift position between polarities. Benjamin suggests that this oscillation between positions in response to shifting identifications could be seen as a creative form of splitting that is the first step in developing the capacity to take up antithetical positions and a precursor to the depressive position, where contradictions can be tolerated within an object or experience, even temporarily. Thus for Benjamin, splitting only becomes problematic when it results in a static congelation of positions, that does not allow for a fluid, dynamic process of shifting identifications and accompanying disassociations to take place. This process of unconscious identifications, then, in the teaching and learning relationship shapes the positions that adults take up with regard to the emotionality of the relationship, including difficult emotions such as frustration, for example, which may be difficult to bear and so is not readily owned, as the preceding sections of this chapter have illustrated.

Recognising the notion of identification means tolerating the unsettling thought that, to use Taubman's evocative phrase, 'all our relationships are

haunted by ghosts of older ones' (Taubman, 2012:55). From a psychoanalytic perspective, as adults we are in a relationship with our own childhoods as well as the childhood of the child in front of us. As O'Loughlin suggests, 'are we not always speaking or avoiding speaking to the child within?' (O'Loughlin, 2010:209). His words are a reminder that the unconscious is not bound by the linearity of time and thus identifications from our childhood may surface seemingly out of nowhere to impact on our response to the present experience. O'Loughlin comments on how crowded his consulting room as a psychoanalyst is, 'full of shadows of past-into-present and present-into-past' (O'Loughlin, 2006:188). This observation could equally be applied to the teaching and learning relationship with young children where adults, both parents and practitioners, will inevitably be bringing desires and anxieties from their own childhoods into the pedagogic relationship with their own child, or pupil. Teachers also need to be aware that the child will also bring their own history of identifications and disassociations to the pedagogic encounter, thus complicating the relationship further, as Britzman and Pitt (1996) and Anna Freud (1979) point out. In the film clip, the participants are cast in the role of outside observers of the pedagogic relationship, thus offering the double possibility of identifying not only with the child, but also with the teacher. In the examples from the transcripts below, I explore how in some interviews, there are suggestions that a process of identification (and disassociation) was taking place, often shifting, giving rise to conflicting feelings and responses.

## ***Identifications in participants' responses to the film clip***

### *A parent's response*

All four participants who had strong emotional responses to the film clip seemed to identify with the child in the extract and view the teacher in a negative light. Along with almost all the other participants, they were critical of his moment of frustration and this moment appeared to colour their whole perception of him as a teacher and a person: he was described variously as 'a control freak', 'arrogant' and 'too strict' and none of the three parents in this group would have been happy for their children to be taught by him.

However, what these participants seemed to be identifying with were the feelings of humiliation and fear that the frustration of the teacher provoked in them. This is seen in Esther's response to the teacher, who she found too formal and strict, reminding her of teachers from her childhood.

I prefer to have an informal relationship with my teacher. LAUGH. And feel at home and I won't be scared. In my days if you got a question wrong you were scared that you were going to be punished, or you feel he is going to talk to you harshly, and be disgraced, and you feel bad, but if you get the answers wrong the way that he would comment about it would indicate for you that fact. (Esther, parent)

It is interesting to note the shift in the tense from the past when talking about her childhood to the present mid-sentence as Esther talked about her fear of being disgraced, a pattern that recurs when she talked later in the interview about her maths teacher, who she found intimidating as a child.

Yes, once the teacher like that, my maths teacher was like that. LAUGHS.  
Especially when we were doing mental maths, he wants you to say straight away, and if you didn't, so the teacher will come and then your heart will be beating and you wish you won't have that subject that day. (Esther, parent)

In this example the shift from the past tense to present and then to future ('your heart will be beating') conveys powerfully the sense of dread that Esther felt as a child when waiting to be singled out to give an answer she could not provide by the teacher. Esther could of course be using the historic present (and future) in these extracts to bring her account to life, but another interpretation is that the use of shifting tenses in her language unconsciously reflects the potency and immediacy of the memory for her. The trigger for the memory seemed to be the fear of humiliation, illustrating the assertion made by Dartington (1997) in the context of healthcare workers that memories associated with fear are long-lasting.

Esther was eleven when she had this maths teacher suggesting that it was the unpleasantness of the emotion that the memory evoked that is remembered, in this case the humiliation and fear, rather than the age and stage of the child. It is also an example of the timelessness of the unconscious, which, as Bibby (2010) points out, does not recognise linear constructions such as time, even though as adults we may impose such boundaries in an attempt to rationalise a difficult situation. It is interesting to note that while acknowledging her own sense of humiliation as an eleven year old child, Esther did not think the child in the film clip felt humiliated, saying that the child was too young to feel embarrassed. She commented 'I

don't think she felt bad that she, because she's too young to feel that she still can't get it'. She thought children developed a sense of shame around six or seven. It is interesting to conjecture whether Esther's view stemmed from the belief that if children cannot articulate their feelings verbally before this age, the feelings do not exist, or whether it is that as few people have conscious memories of being three or even four, they assume that they did not have those feelings then. This view is contradicted by the Kleinian notion of 'memories of feeling' (Klein, 1991b:228), a term she used to describe the pre-verbal emotions that reside in the unconscious and which may arise in the transferential relationship.

The desire to see the child as immature and therefore emotionally impervious to the subtleties of communication that work at both a conscious and unconscious level could be interpreted as a defence for the adult to protect themselves from identifying any further with the child's vulnerability. As Benjamin (1998) points out, we often repudiate what we cannot bear to own, citing vulnerability as one such example. In particular, Esther here seemed to be defending against the anxiety that children might experience difficult emotions such as fear and humiliation in the pedagogic relationship by rationalising that very young children, who are particularly vulnerable, are not in fact mature enough to experience these negative feelings. Another way in which distance from difficult emotions seemed to be maintained was through a pattern of shifting identifications which resulted in a constantly changing position, as illustrated below.

### *Identification with vulnerability*

There was a sense in the transcript that Esther moved between responding as a parent and as a child in the transcript, and reconciled the two through splitting, seeing her educational experience (and the teacher in the film clip) as negative, and her children's as positive in order to preserve a self-holding environment. The teacher in the film clip reminded her of her education in Ghana, characterised by strict and at times intimidating teachers who provoked fear and humiliation in her as a child. She contrasted these negative emotions with the more positive emotional experience she thought her children were getting in their English schools where the pedagogical approach was more informal and friendly, which she much preferred. The polarity that she established between her educational experience and her children's could be seen as a way of disassociating herself from the uncomfortable memories that the film provoked. It also enabled her to adopt a position that allowed for the possibility of reparation, in that as a parent, she was able to give her children a more positive experience than she had, which might serve, through identification with her children, to make her own memories more tolerable. Klein writes of the restorative power of reparation, describing making reparation as 'to make good the injury' (Klein, 1986a:93). Esther's desire for reparation here could be seen to reflect the common parental hope for their children to have better lives than they themselves have had. I consider the role of reparation for practitioners in the pedagogic relationship in more detail in the next chapter. In the extracts below, I look at an example of how a practitioner who was not a parent identified with the film clip.

### *A practitioner's response*

Louise, a practitioner, seemed to vacillate between responding as a practitioner observer, and responding as she would feel as a child. She acknowledged the fact she identified very strongly with the little girl who could not say number seven:

Louise: If that was me, if I was the child, I kept thinking, if I was the child, I wouldn't remember, and I'd be so nervous I couldn't remember it anyway, so I was feeling for that small child, yeah.

CG: How do you think she felt?

Louise: Well I would have felt humiliated, scared and a failure actually, yeah.

However, Louise was aware that her reactions were not the same as the child's responses that she observed, commenting:

She didn't seem too nervous by it I don't think. No, I didn't think she minded very much. I think I minded more. (Louise, practitioner)

The way in which she responded in the first person, saying how she would feel when asked how she thought the child would feel, suggest that the emotional response provoked by the identification with the conflictual situation was much stronger than her observation that the child did not seem particularly bothered by the teacher's response. Like Esther, Louise seemed to identify with the humiliation that she felt the teacher's frustration engendered, and projected this onto the child. Her attempts to analyse why she did not trust the teacher seemed to exemplify Britzman and Pitt's

comments (1996) on the unpredictability of the process of identification and disassociation, in that we never know what will trigger a response:

But his face, because I always like to look at people's faces and try and read their emotions, his face didn't look scary. I concentrated more on his arm, I thought that was a bit threatening in the end. (Louise, practitioner)

Having initially been comfortable with the teacher's arm along the back of the child's chair, she decided eventually that must be what she found threatening. There was the sense that she was trying to rationalise her mistrust to hold in check the destabilizing emotions of fear and humiliation that the film clip provoked in her. In the next section, I look at the fear that any manifestation of frustration engendered.

### ***Fear of the disruptive power of frustration***

The fear of the threat that frustration posed to order and stability if unchecked was a recurrent theme in Louise's transcript, and was echoed by almost all the other participants.

With the situation, I think, or I hope, he very soon would have come to a realisation that it couldn't carry on. You know, something would have to stop, either the child would have to run off crying or he'd have to go. You can't keep doing the same thing like that, yeah. (Louise, practitioner)

Her words seemed a strong response to the minimal level of frustration (he sighed and looked into the mid distance) that the teacher appeared to



communicate momentarily in the one to one session, and could perhaps be seen to indicate the emotional power of the process of identification taking place, and a fear of the disruptive potential of frustration. It is notable that Louise imagined the child might run off crying, which as discussed in chapter four, was a response that practitioners seemed keen to avoid for themselves or the children, as it signified that the rational, verbal environment had been disrupted by an outburst of emotion, and that the adult was not providing an adequate holding environment for the child.

Louise recounted an example of what could happen if a teacher did not remove themselves from a frustrating learning situation, describing the incident thus:

Louise: [...] a female teacher, and [who] ended up screaming in the child's face, yeah, with a five year old, right close up to their face.

CG: Right, how difficult.

Louise: And the child ended up crying.

CG: What was that over?

Louise: It was in a classroom, I think...and then the teacher ripped up the book as well, the page in the book.

The incident again shows how emotion can disrupt the rational, verbal environment, reducing both adult and child to non-verbal communication. Indeed, the aggressive acts of screaming in someone's face and ripping up a book are testament to the seismic levels of frustration teaching young

children can provoke, which is rarely acknowledged in primary education as Bibby (2010) points out, though countless small acts of adult aggression can be observed through a school day (Bibby gives a graphic example of a teacher squashing a clay head). Richards (2002) points out that for Winnicott (1975) hate was as fundamental as love in the supremely important holding relationship the mother provides for her child. She sees this dynamic applying also to the classroom, and like Taubman (2006) regards difficult emotions such as hate and aggression as an integral part of the teaching and learning relationship with children for adults. Louise's account suggests that difficult emotions such as frustration and anger are feared in the pedagogic relationship, because if unchecked, they can erupt with volcanic force and cause a breakdown in rationality. The fear of the volatility and force of negative emotions was such that Louise seemed very concerned with the teacher in the film clip that any sign of frustration should be stopped as soon as it surfaced by the teacher removing themselves from the pedagogic encounter ('because it couldn't carry on'). Thus she appeared to adopt a position where any hint of negative emotion had to remain hidden from sight, in order to preserve the self-holding notion that the adult maintained at all times a rational, ordered, emotionally restrained learning environment.

### **Concluding thoughts**

The problem with disavowing frustration is that it leaves the individual with a self-holding environment in which difficult emotions such as frustration have

no place. Thus, when feelings of frustration, anger or irritation arise, as proponents of psychoanalytic theories such as Winnicott (1964), Taubman (2006) and Bibby (2010) would contend they are bound to do in the teaching and learning relationship, it could be argued that there will not be any strategies in place to accommodate these negative emotions and allow them to exist alongside positive emotions as part of the kaleidoscopic range of emotions generated by working alongside young children. Untrammelled, negative emotions mitigate against rational thought and behaviour and at times disrupt them entirely, as illustrated by Louise's example of a teacher she had worked with previously who ripped up a child's book, thus losing all the child's work as well as upsetting them. Only one participant, Pete, a parent, viewed the teacher's moment of apparent frustration in the film clip more tolerantly, commenting 'from a non-teacher point of view, you just think, yeah, we've all been there mate, well done for not shouting'. His use of the word 'mate' raises the possibility that, though he chose to emphasise his perspective as a parent rather than a teacher, he identified with the teacher as a male of a similar age rather than viewing him as an idealised professional. Pete's perception that 'nobody seemed to be upset or damaged by it, and it's just one of those little micro parts of the day' contrasted with the consternation expressed by both parents and practitioners in the examples above, and suggested a more stable holding environment where he tolerated the existence of frustration as part of the fluid range of emotions present in both his own relationship with his daughter and also the teacher's relationship with the children. Pete commented that the teacher's frustration felt 'very familiar' and interestingly, again in contrast

to the examples discussed above, he was sure that the child sensed the teacher's irritation, saying:

So I have no doubt that his exasperation, fleeting as it might have been, was picked up by... you could see the child not quite withdraw, but go, oh I don't care. (Pete, parent)

Pete's view that the child might not care raises the radical notion that the child might be indifferent to the adult's exasperated efforts to teach them, effectively rejecting what the adult was offering and thus sabotaging the pedagogic relationship. In the next chapter, I consider the notions of rejection and loss further as part of looking at the dyadic nature of the teaching and learning relationship.

## **Chapter Six: The learning and teaching relationship - a facilitating environment?**

### **Introduction**

In chapter four, I considered the rational aspects of the teaching and learning relationship, looking at the way in which practitioners constructed a self-holding environment based on the adult as a rational facilitator, operating primarily through the medium of verbal language. In chapter five, I explored the difficult emotions in the relationship, conceptualising these as the self-hidden aspects of the adults' holding environment. I looked at how emotions appeared to be tightly regulated because of their potential to disrupt rational, verbal expression, and at how negative emotions, particularly frustration, were disavowed in the pedagogic relationship. Taubman (2012) argues that knowledge is disavowed, using the term in the Freudian sense of being acknowledged yet denied at the same time, because of the threat it poses to an individual's holding environment. In this chapter, I consider how these difficult emotions, specifically frustration and loss, affect the positions that adults adopt in the teaching and learning relationship. I contend that frustration is disowned because of the threat of loss it poses to the adult's self-holding environment in the pedagogic relationship. The frustration itself could be seen as a defence against the loss as we can get angry if we are frightened of something as opposed to sad. A parent whose child runs across the road narrowly missing being knocked over by a car will often

manifest anger rather than relief towards the child immediately after the event because of the fear of the loss of the child they have just experienced. At a more mundane level, the teacher in the film appeared momentarily irritated because the child would or could not learn the number seven and her refusal to speak effectively shut down the pedagogical encounter. Winnicott warns that teaching carries with it the prospect not only of frustration, but also of rejection:

The teacher's frustration does not end with the recognition that teaching is always imperfect, that mistakes are inevitably made, and that sometimes any teacher may act meanly or unfairly, or may actually do bad things. Worse to bear than all this, the teacher's best teaching will sometimes be rejected.

(Winnicott, 1964:203)

Rejection implies the loss of the relationship, even temporarily. In this chapter, I explore what losses are involved for the adult in the teaching and learning relationship with young children, and the ways in which this sense of loss is defended against to preserve the adult's self-holding environment. I first recap Winnicott's theory of the facilitative environment in which the pedagogic relationship with young children is situated and outline his notion of weaning. I then discuss the data in the light of this theory, considering some of the losses for adults that are an integral part of this transitional environment, and how they might affect the positions adults adopt in the triadic relationship between practitioner, child and parent.

## **Nature of the facilitating environment in the pedagogic relationship**

As explained at the beginning of chapter four, Winnicott saw the purpose of nursery education, which traditionally covered the three to five year old age range, as facilitating the transition between the home environment and formal schooling (Winnicott, 1965). He regarded the home and the nursery environments as adaptive, in that they aimed to accommodate children's individual needs, in contrast to formal schooling, which he regarded as a non-adaptive environment that required the child to fit into the structures of school life. Winnicott (1965) saw nursery teachers, then, as continuing the work of parents in providing a supportive holding environment that enables the child to tolerate the frustration inherent in moving gradually from dependence to independence, so that eventually they are able to self-hold without the adult's constant presence. The capacity to self-hold is seen as positive by Winnicott, and an integral part of the maturational process. He termed the process of judging the degree of frustration or disillusionment a child can tolerate 'weaning', as outlined below.

### *Weaning*

Winnicott saw the process of weaning as having a much wider application than than the weaning of an infant from the mother's breast milk to solid food.

So, there is a wider aspect of weaning – weaning is not only getting a baby to take other foods, or to use a cup, or to feed actively using the hands. It includes the gradual process of disillusionment, which is part of the parents' task. (Winnicott, 1964:84)

Winnicott's words remind us that judging the pace of weaning is further complicated because a child moves constantly between ages and stages:

It is necessary to think all the time of the developing child. This is always a helpful approach, but it is especially important in the case of the under-fives, since each child of four is also three, and also two, and also one, and is also an infant being weaned, or an infant just born, or even an infant in the womb. Children go backwards and forwards in their emotional age.

(Winnicott, 1964:179)

Weaning is complex affair, then, as the nature of the secure holding environment required for weaning to take place required will vary for each child depending on their emotional stage at that moment, and will also vary, it should be added, for each individual child. Winnicott (1965) talks of each child needing their own 'enclosure', or particular manner of holding. The process is compounded by the fact that weaning takes place within a holding relationship, and so involves two people: the child and an adult, both of whom bring their own emotional history of desires, hopes and frustrations to the relationship.

Winnicott brings to our attention the reciprocal nature of the relationship between adult and child, in which both have to tolerate frustration and the possibility of rejection. He likens the position of the teacher to the position of the mother weaning her infant thus:

The teacher has to tolerate being doubted or suspected, as a mother tolerates her children's individual food fads, and the pupil has to be able to



tolerate not immediately or reliably getting what feels acceptable.

(Winnicott, 1964:202)

There is a suggestion of exhortation in Winnicott's words here, that is perhaps an acknowledgement of just how upsetting many mothers find it when their children reject the food that they offer them. From infancy, babies can refuse food in a multitude of ways, such as throwing it on the floor, spitting it out or turning their face away so that the spoonful goes into their ear. Similar to the baby that does not want to eat is the child who does not want to talk, listen or engage with what the teacher has to offer, and so rejects the adult's offer of attention and with it, the possibilities of learning. Winnicott comments that the more enthusiastic the teacher is, the harder they can find it to bear this refusal, to the point where it interferes with their capacity to teach, 'for this keenness can make them unable to tolerate the children's sifting and testing of what is offered to them or their initial reaction of rejection' (Winnicott, 1964:202). The frustrations inherent in weaning have to be tolerated by both child and adult if the child is to move from dependency gradually to independency. Winnicott makes it plain that this is not an easy process for anyone involved: he comments that 'growing up is not all honey for the child, and for the mother it is often bitter aloes' (Winnicott, 1965:39).

Waddell (1998) sees weaning as a central feature of growing up, and the prototype for all future separations and losses, stemming from the loss of the infant's exclusive and utterly dependent relationship with their mother. The process of change that is an integral part of growing up involves loss as well

as developments. So, in terms of a baby being weaned off the breast and onto solid food, as well as being able to experience the exciting new tastes and textures, there is also nostalgia and mourning for the loss of a previous state of being that can never be recaptured. Even eagerly awaited developments for the adult, like a child's acquisition of verbal language, also represent a loss of a previous pre-verbal state that can never be regained, or indeed, expressed in words (Phillips, 1988), as is discussed in chapter four. Working with young children brings us into daily contact with the weaning process, providing a reminder of the loss of our own childhood (O'Loughlin, 2010). In the section below, I explore further the ways in which loss and rejection permeate the teaching and learning relationship with young children, and consider how adults defend against these losses.

### **Loss in the teaching and learning relationship**

Silin (2006b) writes evocatively of the myriad of little losses that occur in a school day as a nursery teacher, describing how he missed the familiar physical contact with a child who had just learned how to do up his coat buttons himself. His observations highlight the sense of loss that accompanies all change, however eagerly anticipated. In this context, the teacher is no longer needed quite as much by the child, as they have learned how to manage their coat themselves, or do up their shoes, or write their name. Alongside these bittersweet losses that are a hidden feature of every little step of a child's development and progress, signalling a move, however

gradual, towards independence, there also exists the possibility of a more painful kind of loss, namely that of rejection. The adult's sense of rejection seems to arise when the child does not wish to engage with them: Louise, a practitioner, for example, commented on how rejected she felt when some children had not wanted her to play with them:

I was out there playing and the child said to me – actually we don't want you to play. I was shocked. I felt hurt as well. I'd never heard that before. And I took a step back and thought about it, and thought actually, no, you don't need me. But to be told that at that time, when all I thought was, you know, adults do have to play, it was such a shock, so it was a huge learning experience for me. (Louise, practitioner)

Louise attributed her sense of shock to her lack of experience and training, and defended against the hurt she experienced by framing the rejection in terms of the children's needs, rather than desires or wishes, for example.

### ***The challenge of the disengaged child***

The practitioner transcripts conveyed an expectation that young children would be naturally interested in what the adult has to offer, and keen to engage with them. If they were not interested, Eleanor believed the adult was to blame as 'the children will walk away if you've got it wrong'.

Engagement was seen as an attractive feature of working with young children, and a disincentive for working with older children. Liz, for example, when asked whether she found any children difficult to teach, described the

'teenage' behaviour of two boys who were not interested in doing the activities she had planned:

Yes, I've got a couple at the moment who, they do a lot of shrugging of shoulders, which I find a bit disappointing actually, in a four year old, if I'm perfectly honest. More of a teenage thing to just do that. But they seem to be really lacking in confidence, so they are not prepared to have a go at things, and I find that, you know, they say things like I can't write, I can't write, and I find that really sort of tugs at my heartstrings really. And I think those children need lots of nurturing. (Liz, practitioner-parent)

Liz's example hints at the loss that disengagement threatens adults with in the teaching and learning relationship, and could be interpreted as showing the influence of the Enlightenment in the conceptualisation of young children as naturally eager to learn (Sobe, 2010). Liz appears to defend against her initial response of disappointment by rationalising the children's behaviour as a lack of confidence. Her desire to support these children, who she describes as tugging at her heartstrings, is a reminder of the considerable emotional investment teachers make in trying to facilitate children's learning, and consequently perhaps goes some way to explaining why the thought that children might not wish to engage with what the adult has to offer might be difficult to bear.

While attentiveness, more commonly termed engagement nowadays, has long been valued by educationalists since the Enlightenment as a desirable quality for children to demonstrate (Sobe, 2010), it is worth considering why some adults find it so hard to tolerate children who are disengaged or bored.

Phillips, writing on boredom, comments that 'it is one of the most oppressive demands of adults that the child should be interested, rather than take time to find what interests him' (Phillips, 1994:69). While children's interests may be largely determined by the menu of activities offered to them in any one context, it is also the case that a child may choose to debate or reject the menu offered to them. This lack of engagement disturbs adults, according to Phillips, who conversely sees boredom, or tolerating the period of waiting to be interested, as part of developing a capacity to self-hold. One notable aspect of the perception of children in the transcripts was that they should be productively engaged all the time, suggesting fear of the notion of children being bored. For example, Louise, a practitioner, like to see 'busy people, busy children, busy adults, yeah, a kind of busyness' when she walked into an early years setting. Liz, a practitioner-parent, looked for 'busy, engaged children' as a sign of a good setting. Esther reflected this view from a parental perspective when she explained that she had chosen her children's school nursery class because there were 'a lot of activities to keep them busy, get them thinking, and engage them'. I contend that the bored child poses a threat to the adult in the pedagogic relationship as it signals a rejection of whatever the adult is offering, and thus a breakdown, however transient, of the relationship. The resultant sense of loss results in a collapse of the holding environment for the adult, which is premised on the notion that the young child seeks the adult's attention all times. The emphasis nearly all participants placed on children being 'busy' as a key sign of a good early years setting would seem to me to represent a defence against this threat: if children are busy engaging in the activities organised by the adults, then they

provide reassuring evidence that the environment, or sustenance offered, is to their liking. By engaging with what the adult is offering, either directly or at one remove through the environment, the child enables the adult to feel attended to, and if we feel held in someone's attention, 'we feel reassured that we exist as a separate, knowable entity' (Salzberger-Wittenberg, Williams and Osbourne, 1983:10). In the next section, I explore the sense of loss that occurs when practitioners feel forgotten, and as if they have never existed for the child.

### ***The loss of not being remembered***

Salzberger-Wittenberg et al contend that teachers often do not find endings any easier than the children they teach, but comments that 'in view of the painful emotions aroused by partings, it is hardly surprising that most teachers simply avoid thinking about the subject' (Salzberger-Wittenberg, Williams and Osbourne, 1983:143). In the transcripts, two practitioners spoke of their sense of loss when the children left, and in particular, at not being remembered by the children they had taught. Nick, a practitioner, brought up the subject in both interviews, and in both cases, his sadness seemed to be linked to his enjoyment at seeing the children develop:

You can see the change in children in front of your eyes, and you can see how they grow and develop. I mean it's both very rewarding and also disappointing when you see a child three or four years after they've left you and they don't recognise you. And in many ways it's heartbreaking, but in many other ways it's really nice, because it means that kind of they've got

on, they've got on with things and they aren't stuck at that age, and it means they've experienced things. (Nick, practitioner)

Nick's use of the word 'heartbreaking' conveys the acuteness of the sense of loss he felt, and shows very clearly the dual-edged emotions involved in change, emphasised by Greenhalgh(1994). His pain at not being remembered supports Salzberger-Wittenberg et al's analysis (Salzberger-Wittenberg, Williams and Osbourne, 1983) of the fears that partings can engender in teachers, including fears of wasted effort and concerns over a lack of proof of achievement. Demonstrating the value of early years education is notoriously difficult to account for in terms of tangible proof, such as exam results or certificates, and the arid descriptors of the Early Years Foundation Stage Early Learning Goals (DfE, 2014) are unlikely to reassure most teachers that their efforts have been worthwhile. It seems that like most early years teachers, Nick here was looking for some evidence that he had been a significant adult in the child's life for a period of time, and by being forgotten, there was not only no proof of his achievement, but no indication that he had actually been an important part of the child's life for a while. Being remembered by someone confirms that they hold you somewhere in their thoughts. While one would not expect to be held in another person's attention all the time, to realise that you are invisible questions whether you were ever present at all.

### ***Nostalgia for childhood***

As well as the loss of being forgotten, Nick also seemed to mourn the loss of the transitory state of being a young child, and in so doing, the passing of his own childhood. As O'Loughlin (2010) argues, the allure of Peter Pan, who defied growing up, is perennially strong. This interpretation is supported by the way in which Nick spoke of his sadness that children had to grow up to become adults:

It's one of the things that makes me saddest in life, is I see these children and their wonderful outlook on life, and as I say their honesty, their creativity, their sheer belief that anything is possible, the escapism we lack as adults, and knowing that at some point it's lost, really makes me sad.

(Nick, practitioner)

The idealisation of childhood, presented in Nick's words as a time of innocence and freedom, can also be seen as a kind of nostalgia for a lost Arcadian world. Winnicott writes of nostalgia as belonging to 'the precarious hold that a person may have on the inner representation of a lost object' (Winnicott, 1971:30). It is possible to conjecture here that not only the idealisation of childhood, but also Nick's liking for the very traditional nature of the school he was working in, where three year olds had to call him Mr Hall, and the importance of what he called 'traditional values' such as manners were emphasised, represented a nostalgic yearning for a semi-illusory childhood now past. Indeed, nostalgia is evident in much early years practice, as adults try to create an illusion of wholesome childhoods that we like to imagine existed when we were young. This is seen in the songs



children are allowed to sing in nursery, for example, where traditional nursery rhymes are favoured while songs from popular films such as 'Frozen' are not part of the musical repertoire of early childhood education, which Young (2007) regards as retrospective and increasingly anachronistic. Taking refuge in creating a nostalgic 'early years education' version of childhood can also be seen as a defence against the inevitable loss of our own childhoods that working with young children provides a frequent reminder of. Another way to defend against the pain of the present moment is to invest in hopes for the future, a defence I consider below.

### ***Hopes for the future***

Greenhalgh (2008) argues that hopes as well as fears are particularly acutely felt at times of uncertainty such as beginnings and endings, and Nick's words would seem to illustrate this. His sense of wonder at young children's rapid development is itself a projection of hope for the future, and reminiscent of the way in which adults tend to comment on how much a child has grown, as if to reassure themselves that the child is progressing satisfactorily towards adulthood. His amazement at the speed of change ('You can see the change in children in front of your eyes') is also suggestive of an element of envy, for as Salzberger-Wittenberg et al (1983) point out, there is no admiration without envy. It is not unusual for adults to envy children their youth, dynamism and future potential, even though as here, it is often channelled into expressions of optimism for their future. Nick's pleasure at the thought that the child has moved on and developed could be seen both as a solace

and also as a defence against the loss that he felt at not being remembered. Yet the fact Nick talked spontaneously about his feelings of sadness and loss in both interviews suggested that he remained unconvinced by his own arguments, and that he found the loss troublesome. Greenhalgh (1994), drawing on Winnicottian theory, proposes that adults such as early years teachers are transitional objects for children, and as such, are discarded, rather than forgotten, when they are no longer needed, a feature of Winnicott's facilitative environment that I outline below.

### ***Teachers as transitional objects***

Winnicott (1971) developed a theory of transitional objects, which children use to enable them to self-hold away from the reassuring presence of their home and their mother, for example. This theory has gained considerable currency in wider society in the form of the 'security blanket' that some children carry around with them (or another symbolic object such as a precious teddy) until the child feels secure enough to manage without the transitional object, at which point it is discarded. The term used by Winnicott is 'decathected', in other words, the transitional object ceases to have any use because it no longer has significance for the child who can now self-hold without that reassurance. Greenhalgh (1994) argues that early years teachers are themselves transitional objects and so are very important figures to young children, until they adapt to the change they are being prepared for, like formal schooling, for example, at which point they too become decathected. This theory might explain why even a few months after

children have moved from the reception class into year one, they sometimes refuse to acknowledge or recognise their reception teacher, despite remembering them. As Winnicott states, the transitional object 'is not forgotten and is not mourned. It loses meaning' (Winnicott, 1971:7). This rejection inevitably can be distressing for the early years teacher, who feels discarded. It is another possible interpretation for why the children Nick taught did not choose to remember him: he was no longer needed in their holding environment.

Though the relationship between the child and the transitional object tends to be presented as exclusive (the child who cannot bear to be parted from their teddy, for example), in fact the parent is implicated in the relationship, because the transitional object helps to bridge the gap for the child between the secure holding environment provided by the parent and the unfamiliar surroundings the child is negotiating on their own. Similarly, the early years teaching and learning relationship, which can itself be seen as a transitional object, was presented in the transcripts by practitioners as existing exclusively between teacher and child, but in fact includes teacher, child and parents. O'Loughlin, writing from the perspective of a child psychoanalyst, argues that anyone working with young children is in fact working with their parents as well, commenting that 'children's desires are inextricably constructed in the matrix of parental desires' (O'Loughlin, 2006:188). He comments on the complexity of the dynamic, populated as it is by not only our adult selves, but also our past childhood selves that are invoked by the contact with the child in front of us, as discussed in chapter five.

Brooker (2010) endorses the view that the pedagogic relationship between teacher and young child has to take account of the relationship with the parents also. Though Brooker's somewhat reductive description of the relationship as triangular does not perhaps capture the intricate entanglement of the relationship, she uses the findings of an empirical study in a setting for babies and children under three to illustrate the dissonance and complexity of the relationship, beset by poor communication and mismatched expectations between the adults. Her study exposes the gap between the challenges of establishing positive working relationships between practitioner and parents in practice and the aspirational rhetoric emphasising the importance of working in partnership with parents found in the curriculum (DfE, 2014) with little guidance about how to achieve this aim. The uneasy relationship between parents and practitioners Brooker observed in a setting for babies and very young children is echoed in certain aspects of the practitioner-parent relationship in settings for three to five year old children that emerged in the transcripts, as discussed below.

### **Parent and practitioner relationships**

If we accept the notion integral to a psychoanalytic perspective, that in working with children we are also working with their parents, then parents have to be considered an essential party in the pedagogic relationship. It follows therefore that any attempt, albeit unconscious, to exclude the parents will have negative implications for the child, as well as for the adults involved

in the relationship. In the following sections, I consider the different positions adopted by parents and practitioners in the teaching and learning relationship, both in relation to the child, and to each other. I consider how difficult emotions are managed in the relationship between adults, and how practitioners who are also parents respond to the often contradictory perspectives.

### ***Parental perspectives***

Though parents were generally positive about their children's early years teachers, on some occasions there were indications of tensions beneath the surface of the seemingly benign partnership between parents and teachers that suggested a rivalrous rather than a collaborative relationship. In many ways, this is not surprising: Salzberger-Wittenberg et al (1983) draw attention to the potential rivalry between teacher and parent at all stages of education, and this would seem to be particularly acute when the child is young and still very dependent on adults, as demonstrated by Magagna (1997) in her observational study on the potentially difficult relationships between nannies and parents in a home setting. One could argue that this rivalry is a defence against the loss of the exclusive relationship with the child, a loss that is particularly acute for parents of young children, who may be unused to handing their child over to another adult's care for long periods of time. Though seldom acknowledged, Youell (2006:131) highlights what she terms 'the huge leap of faith' parents have to make to entrust their child to a teacher. Even when the parent has made that leap of faith, the ongoing

relationship is fragile and volatile. The example below from Rosa demonstrates how easily the trust and respect can be lost between parent and practitioner.

Rosa, a parent, talked at length at the end of the second interview about how she and husband felt excluded from the pedagogic relationship by their daughter's reception teacher (and nursery teacher before that). Until this point, Rosa had been very positive in both interviews about her daughter's teachers in terms of how they treated her child. However, in response to a question about the relationship between the parent, practitioner and child, she talked about her dissatisfaction with the way that early years teachers gave feedback to parents on how their children were progressing. Rosa saw this as due to lack of training in how to deal with adults, and in no way the fault of individual teachers. She briefly interrupted the interview to invite her husband, Ben, to join the interview, asking him to come in from watching the football in the next room as he had been present at one parent teacher interview when she had been travelling. Rosa and Ben then took it in turns to express their unhappiness with the way in which their daughter's nursery and reception teachers appeared to be unwilling to share information about their child's progress openly with them.

Rosa and Ben's comments centred on the fear and frustration they felt that the early years teachers were withholding information about their child from them, thus shutting them out from the pedagogic relationship. Rosa described herself as 'quite shocked' by the feedback from the nursery practitioner:

I remember being quite shocked with how Ms Robbins was feeding back, because she did the first one, and she was this is their book, they had like a learning book, this is their book, tell me about Elise. And it was as if she couldn't tell me enough about Elise, and I thought, but you teach her every day. (Rosa, parent)

They were unhappy at the lack of specificity of the feedback comments, and in particular, the reluctance of the reception teacher to say anything negative about their daughter, which they felt as parents they needed to know in order to support her.

We don't really need to focus on the stuff she can already do, because we know that, you know, we want to know what is she struggling on, because as parents we both feel well that's our parental role at the moment, is that's where you support and help the school as well as Elise to move on that scale. If you can be supportive parents and help that then helps everybody, but we had to kind of push to get that out. (Rosa, parent)

By their own admission, Ben and Rosa could be seen as 'pushy parents', but interestingly, despite putting considerable pressure on the reception teacher to be more forthcoming about their daughter's progress (such as choosing the last appointment so they could talk for twenty minutes rather than the allocated ten minute slot), the teacher would not give them any more detailed feedback.

Both Rosa and Ben also felt frustrated that the teachers were refusing to share their knowledge and expertise of the way in which young children learn

with them so they could help their child at home and so feel involved in the pedagogic relationship, as Rosa's words illustrate:

It comes back to an earlier discussion when I said when we get frustrated with things and whereas a teacher has different tools in their toolbox to be able to know that situation, and we don't, because we are parents, not teachers, and so I suppose we are digging deeper because we also want those tools to be able to support our child when we are getting frustrated that they are not getting things which we know they've got to meet certain targets within the school. And that's what I suppose you are trying to get out of the teacher. Well how can I help my child? You've got all the tools, but I want them as well, because I want to help support my child, but I also want to help her in the context for you as well, to help you kind of grow her that bit more.  
(Rosa, parent)

There was a sense that the teacher and the parent were both competing for ownership of the child's learning, and like young siblings, were finding it difficult to share the object of their desire, here the child in a reversal of the sibling competition for parental attention. Rosa's frustration that the teacher will not share their 'toolkit' of teaching strategies with her is conveyed by the use of direct speech addressing the teacher ('you've got all the tools, but I want them as well'). Coles, writing on sibling rivalry, suggests that 'there is a tendency in us all to wish that we could be the only child' (Coles, 2003:1) and comments on the intense jealousy that fear of displacement provokes.

There are resonances too of the conflictual, ambivalent nature of the sibling relationship in Rosa's desire to believe that nonetheless, the teacher had her



daughter's best interests at heart. When I asked her why she thought the teacher acted in this way, she thought it was in order to protect the child from overly high parental expectations that might result in a loss of confidence for the child:

They are protecting the child, because it kind of comes back to the confidence issue. If the parents then knows that that's the thing they are not doing successfully parents can deal with it differently, and it might be that they go back to the child going you are failing. (Rosa, parent)

Rosa's words illustrate the way in which adults position themselves in relation to other adults as well as the child in the triangular pedagogic relationship envisaged by Brooker (2010) consisting of child, practitioner and parent. Here Rosa accorded the teacher a protective role towards the child, acknowledging that parents, in their desire to support their children, might inadvertently undermine their confidence.

Rosa had to get used to the idea that her children's teachers would know her child in a way that she would not, and so she would lose that dimension of her child. Unless parents home-school their children, they all at some time have to tolerate this loss. Rosa's defence against this sense of loss, echoed by her husband, seemed to be a pronounced fear that her daughter would not learn and progress, particularly as she was young for her year:

But we were literally, I felt like we were digging. Because we were trying to get to the bottom of how is Elise doing compared to her peers? Because we were always, you know, and we'd said this quite early on to Ms Jones, we were worried about Elise because Elise is one of the youngest in the year.

So we've very much got this fear she's going to get left behind, and that's going to kind of propagate all through her years, she'll always get left behind.  
(Rosa, parent)

Rosa and Ben's worry that Elise would get left behind could be seen to represent their own feeling of being left out of the relationship between the teacher and their child. The emphasis on their daughter's young age could also be seen as an expression of their feeling that that she was too young to be taken away from them in this abrupt way, indicating their sense of loss. In Rosa and Ben's case, this sense of exclusion seemed to result in negative emotions of frustration and loss that illustrate how difficult it is to get the pace of weaning right for adults and children alike, as Winnicott (1964) points out. Their experience is also a reminder of the complexity and emotionality of the relationships between parent and practitioners in which parents as well as their children are adapting to the transition from home to school via the mediation of the facilitating pre-school environment.

### ***Practitioner perspectives***

The tension and dissonance in the parental responses discussed above when discussing the relationship between practitioners and parents was reflected in some teachers' responses about parents. A somewhat asymmetrical relationship was portrayed, not one of equals where parents were acknowledged as the first educators of the child as Matthew's comments below illustrate.

I think we build a relationship with parents before children, so we have a series of parent meetings before the children come into nursery, to get the parents used to things like where the coat pegs are and all that kind of thing, and what the expectations of behaviour are. And then we go out to home visits, so the children see us talking with the parents, and the whole idea of them is that it's all about the child watching us. We don't need to know the information they are telling us at these home visits, we know it already, but actually, you know, it's about the child seeing that we are the same level as the parent, in terms of authority. (Matthew, practitioner)

Matthew's comment suggesting that the purpose of the parental meetings was to show them where the coat pegs are could be interpreted as patronizing, or it could be seen as a flippant comment in the context of a staged research interview with a researcher who he knew had also been an early years practitioner. The same caveat has to be applied to his statement that practitioners did not need to know the information that parents told them on home visits as they knew it already, otherwise this comment might be interpreted as suggesting that parents were not valued as an integral part of the teaching and learning relationship. However, it could also be the case that Matthew's apparent lack of desire to communicate with parents meaningfully supports Brooker's finding (Brooker, 2010) that practitioners did not seem interested in parental views on supposed best practice, such as home visits, but implemented them regardless, despite some parents finding the experience intrusive.

There was a sense in these comments from Matthew echoed by other practitioners that parents and practitioners had different concerns about the

child, and that parents did not appreciate the practitioners' perspective. Eleanor, for example, expressed impatience that parents wanted to talk about things she considered insignificant such as 'the quality of the sausages in the canteen, or [*laughs*] whether the honey in Forest School is organic'. Louise echoed the sentiments of other practitioners when she talked about how parents did not always understand the value of aspects of the curriculum, such as outdoor learning, or play, though she welcomed the chance to share her knowledge with them by taking them to Forest School:

Parents come on the first visit. I personally quite like it, I don't feel nervous with the parents there. I kind of feel it's a privilege really to allow them to see what Forest School is about. (Louise, practitioner)

Despite Louise feeling comfortable sharing her knowledge of Forest School with parents, her insistence that she did not feel nervous hinted at the level of scrutiny that practitioners can feel under when observed by parents engaging in a teaching and learning activities with children, again suggesting a lack of trust in the relationship. Her use of the word 'allow' suggested that the parents were also privileged that she was prepared to admit them into this secret world, unlike her predecessor, who refused to take them to Forest School.

It is worth considering why some practitioners in the study expressed impatience with parents and appeared unwilling to include them in the pedagogic relationship, to the frustration of parents such as Rosa. One possibility proposed by Salzberger-Wittenberg et al (1983) is that both parents and teachers can be jealous of each other's relationship with the

child, as illustrated by the example from Rosa above, where the teacher's refusal to share information with the parents suggests that she too was engaged in the rivalrous relationship, reminiscent of the competitive relationship between siblings. Sibling rivalry stems from the loss of an exclusive relationship with the mother (Coles, 2003) and here, one could conjecture that the parent and practitioner both crave an exclusive relationship with the child. However, while it is understandable that the parent of a young child may find it hard to relinquish the exclusivity of the relationship that they have had with the child since birth, it is harder to comprehend the teachers' reluctance to view the parents as an integral part of their teaching and learning relationship with the child. One interpretation would be that though rationally, practitioners accept this notion, at some level emotionally they are defending against the losses of their own childhoods, and in particular, the loss of the symbiotic maternal relationship. It could be argued that our encounters with young children can engender a primitive response to that universal loss, resulting in the adult seeking to replicate the exclusive mother-child relationship within the pedagogic relationship.

Lucey (2010) in a study of two sisters comments on the way in which the siblings emphasised their differences as learners, though there were many similarities they shared. Similarly, in this study, practitioners tended to emphasise the differences of perspective between practitioners and parents, rather than aspects of experience that they shared, resulting in a relationship presented as competitive rather than collaborative, as seen in the examples above. A competitive relationship is premised on exclusivity, where only one

winner gains the prize, here the relationship with the child, and it could be seen as a defensive position against the loss or failure of that relationship. The findings of my IFS study (Gilson, 2013b) indicated that practitioners had a similarly territorial attitude to other adults who became involved in the pedagogic relationship, professionals such as educational psychologist, for example. Student teachers talked of experienced practitioners' hostility towards other professionals as they resented interference with their relationship with the child, who, they felt, they knew better than any other professional. Practitioners' underlying desire for a one to one relationship with the child seems in both these studies to undermine any wishful notion of collaborative partnership between adults in the pedagogic relationship, which is dependent on mutual trust and respect, including acknowledging different perspectives. The resulting polarisation of the parental and practitioner roles also created a potential conflict for the three practitioner-parents, as discussed below.

### ***Practitioner-parents' perspectives***

Three decades ago, Bain and Barnett(1986) recommended recruiting more practitioners who were parents, on the assumption that this would inevitably enhance practice. The findings from this study suggest a more nuanced picture. Two of the three practitioner-parents appeared to find it difficult to resolve the conflict between their roles as both a practitioner and a parent, and so split the roles off from one another. This resulted in Liz and Eleanor being dissatisfied as parents with their children's teachers, and impatient as

teachers with the parents of the children they taught. For Eleanor, the two roles seemed to interfere with each other in an unhelpful way: after trying unsuccessfully to have her son in the nursery school where she worked, she felt she had 'to settle for second best' with the pre-school he then went to. Her teaching background also made her critical of her family: she comments that:

As a parent I can remember getting really cross with my husband, who's got nothing to do with education at all, you know, not reading a book in a right way. (Eleanor, practitioner-parent)

Eleanor summarised eloquently the contradictory positions she straddled:

I feel as if I give parents time but, you know, I was given the same amount of time but didn't feel that was any time at all, because the only thing you can talk about is oh they're a bit tired, or they haven't been for a poo yet, or grandma's picking them up. And they're just functional conversations. (Eleanor, practitioner-parent)

The dual perspective seemed to make Eleanor's role as a practitioner more complex, as she was aware of the conflict between what as a practitioner, she offered parents, and what she remembered wanting as a parent of young children. Her apparent wish as a parent to have more than 'just functional conversations' with the teacher indicates the desire that parents (particularly of young, inarticulate children) have to be privy to the detail of pedagogic relationship at nursery to mitigate against the loss of knowing nothing about their child's day other than details of their sleep patterns and toileting. Yet her words also highlight the impossibility of having enough time (and

emotional energy) as a practitioner, to have extended and meaningful conversations with each parent on a regular basis. Obholzer (1994) argues that splitting the two roles of the personal and professional selves is a protective defence mechanism against having to tolerate contradictions in a given situation that results in the loss of a wealth of personal experience being brought into the professional arena. However, an alternative to the seemingly irreconcilable positions of parent and practitioner is offered by the example discussed below of Yasmin, who seemed to be able to integrate the two roles more comfortably, and in so doing, found the relationship with parents offered the possibility of reparation.

### **Loss and reparation**

Loss and rejection is an intrinsic element of a facilitative, weaning environment on many levels, and so is an integral part of the pedagogic relationship. If loss is acknowledged and can be tolerated, the possibility for reparation exists. Indeed, Hinshelwood (1991) sees Klein's notion of reparation as based on the acceptance of loss: if an object is to be repaired or restored, then we have first to acknowledge that it has been damaged, and cannot be regained in its original form. It is interesting to note that the two practitioners (Nick and Yasmin) who expressed the sense of loss they felt in the pedagogic relationship were also the ones who seemed to find reparative possibilities in the relationship with parents.



Yasmin, for example, enjoyed sharing her personal experience as a parent in her professional life with the parents and children that she taught. This was partly perhaps because she was a parent of four children before she trained to be a teacher, so being a parent was integral to her identity as a teacher, or because she came from a culture where younger parents looked to their elders for advice on rearing their families. However, it was also notable that she seemed able to see the similarities between parents and practitioners rather than emphasising the differences. As a parent, when she came to the UK, she was very unhappy with the lack of attention and sensitivity shown to her daughter when she started school:

The first day she went to school they asked her to change in front of everybody. Being Muslim she couldn't so she cried and cried, and she came home and didn't want to go to that school anymore.

(Yasmin, practitioner-parent)

As a result, Yasmin changed her daughter's school to one where she felt more confident that her families' culture would be respected. Subsequently, as a practitioner, she was very aware of the fragility and complexity of the pedagogic relationship, including the parental dimension.

I like to be sensitive to cultural, you know, because I know when I first came to the country, and how my daughter I told you found it difficult to adjust, I would like to cater for that because young children, they don't know, they are very sensitive. Parents sometimes, whatever education level they come, may not tell us everything about them, so it's nice to learn from the children and make partnership with parents. (Yasmin, practitioner-parent)

Here we see how Yasmin integrates her negative experience as a parent into her role as a practitioner, thus taking up in Kleinian terms, a depressive position that can accommodate both negative and positive aspects of an object (Klein, 1986b), here the experience of a young child starting school. In this way, it could be argued that she was able to make reparation for the loss of confidence she felt her daughter suffered when she came over to this country, embodied in the experience of her daughter's first day at school. This incident could also be seen as embodying a much bigger process of transition and loss, as Yasmin and her daughter left the rest of their family behind in Kenya. By treating other families as she would like to have been treated, one could contend that Yasmin was trying to lessen the pain of her own experience. In accepting the loss inherent in her personal life, as well as her professional life, she appeared to integrate her roles as practitioner and parent in a way that allowed her to acknowledge the complex and multi-faceted nature of the pedagogic relationship, and as a result, enhanced her practice.

Obholzer (1994) points out that in order to help someone, and so make a reparative gesture, you have to be able to understand their feelings, here their loss. If this process of alignment is too painful, the dominant defence may be to emphasise difference rather than shared experience. Yet despite the difference of roles and perspectives, practitioners and parents both experience from the shared perspective of adulthood the loss of childhood through the children they have contact with, though in different ways. For practitioners to acknowledge their own sense of loss involves acknowledging

their vulnerability, through exposing the emotional and personal dimension of the pedagogic relationship, as illustrated by Yasmin's example above. It also involves tolerating the negative as well as the positive elements of the relationship. However, in so doing, Yasmin was able also to recognise and accept parents' sense of loss, and so acknowledge the reciprocity of their shared experience. As Bibby (2010; 1994) suggests, not to acknowledge the losses inherent in the teaching and learning relationship is another loss in itself. And paradoxically, if the painful experiences of weaning, with all the frustration and loss involved for adults as well as children, can be shared between adults, then that is in a sense a celebration of the difficult act of letting go of our children as they grow up and move away from us into their future lives.

### **Concluding thoughts**

In exploring the notion of the learning and teaching relationship as a facilitating environment, it has become apparent that weaning, while an inescapable part of an early years educational environment, involves tolerating losses, so it can be a tricky and painful process for adults as well as children. The examples discussed here suggest that adults do not always find the learning and teaching relationship a facilitating and supportive environment in the three to five year old age range when their children are making the transition from an adaptive, home-based environment to a non-adaptive school-based one. In a sense, parents as well as their children are

being weaned from a dyadic parent child teaching and learning relationship and introduced to a triadic relationship where the practitioner plays an increasingly important role in the education of their child. While it may not be possible to adjust the pace of weaning so that all parties find the environment facilitating, it would seem beneficial to acknowledge the reciprocity and complexity of the relationships between adults as well as between adult and child in the pedagogic relationship. In the conclusion that follows, I consider the implications for practice of the points raised in the three discussion chapters (chapters four, five and six).

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This study set out to explore the positions that adults take in the teaching and learning relationship with young children, focussing in particular on emotionality, how it relates to rationality within the relationship and how it affects the positions adults adopt. Important work in this area can be found in the body of psychoanalytic literature that increasingly informs early years policy and practice in the UK, yet the existing literature has significant limitations which this study seeks to help address. First the existing literature draws predominantly on attachment theory with some limited recognition of psychoanalytic approaches to infant observation (Elfer, 2015). This study makes a distinctive contribution to the field by using Winnicott's theory of a holding environment to conceptualise the pedagogic relationship with three to five year old children.

Secondly, studies of emotionality in the pedagogic relationship are largely focussed on babies and young children under three in daycare. As a result, while there is a growing acknowledgement of the emotional labour involved in working with babies and very young children (eg. Colley, 2006; Elfer, 2015; Vincent and Braun, 2013), little attention has been given to date to the complex emotional dimension of working with three to five year old children. Indeed, in the early years literature on this age group, emotionality tends to be overlooked in favour of emphasising the need to develop the children's verbal and cognitive abilities in order to prepare them for the requirements of

formal schooling as discussed in chapter one. These are tellingly called 'the pre-school years': the focus of literature, policy and practice appears to be on developing young children's rational capacities, expressed predominantly in verbal language, so that they are able to meet the demands of the prevailing educational system. However, the findings of this study indicate the importance of emotionality in the pedagogic relationship with three to five year old children for all concerned, children, practitioners and parents, and highlight difficult emotions such as frustration and loss.

I contend that the investment in a holding environment that privileges the rational, verbal dimension of the relationship, and silences the emotional dimension suggests, as several researchers (eg. O'Loughlin, 2006; Silin, 2005; Taubman, 2006) have argued, a reluctance to confront the powerful and often difficult to bear emotions experienced by the adults in the relationship. While acknowledging the importance of developing children's linguistic and rational capacities, this study argues that focussing only on the rational aspects of the teaching and learning relationship leads to a type of tunnel vision, as though by zooming in on rationality within the relationship, our depth of field is reduced and we are unable to gain any kind of comprehensive understanding of the relationship. Similarly, this study's findings suggest that when we beam a spotlight on the rational, verbal interactions between child and practitioner, the emotional aspects of the complex triad of child, practitioner and parent are cast into shadow and overlooked. Using Winnicott's notion of a holding environment (Winnicott, 1960), I have suggested that in foregrounding rationality to the exclusion of

emotionality in the teaching and learning relationship with young children, adults create a fragile self-holding environment that does not readily accommodate difficult emotional such as frustration and loss, and which thus may be destabilised by often unexpected and contradictory affective elements of teaching young children. In Kleinian terms, this suggests adults are splitting the relationship into good and bad aspects, here rationality versus emotionality, thus adopting a paranoid schizoid position rather than a more stable depressive position, where ambivalence can be tolerated, allowing both positive and negative elements to co-exist within an object or situation. This study therefore supports the recommendation for more attention to be paid to the emotionality of working with young children (Elfer and Dearnley, 2007), arguing that this approach should include the older end of the birth to five age range covered by the EYFS. In addition, the study's findings highlight the negative emotions that can arise between adults, here practitioners and parents, that are counterproductive in the effort to provide a supportive, facilitative environment for the child as well as the adults concerned.

This was a relatively small-scale study. The qualitative methodology used and the modest sample size mean that any generalisations from the findings have to be proposed and regarded with circumspection. Furthermore, while the study succeeded in surveying a wide range of perspectives by using a stratified, purposive interview sample, the diversity of the sample meant that the transcripts tended to provide a snapshot of each of the three sampled groups (practitioners, parents and practitioner-parents) rather than a

comprehensive investigation of the subject. It could be worthwhile to follow up this study with a larger study of just one of the sampled groups, such as parents, for example. That said, a key advantage of the methodology of this study was that the in-depth interviews made it possible to get beneath the surface and uncover issues that are not often discussed such as negative emotions like frustration and loss. The rich data generated by the use of two different interview methods raised a range of topics, not all of which could be fully explored within the constraints of this study, so will be followed up in future publications.

Both the methodology and findings suggest promising avenues for future research. Film elicitation is a little-used method in recent educational research but it proved a productive tool in this study, prompting discussions that differed markedly from those generated by the conventional semi-structured interview. It was particularly fruitful as a way of uncovering the emotional dimension of the teaching and learning relationship, and it sat well with a psychosocial methodological approach. This suggests that film elicitation could usefully be developed further as a research tool in the field of psychosocial studies, within education and other disciplines. In the course of piloting the film elicitation interview method I used it both with individual participants as the sole interview in MOE2 and as part of a two stage interview process in this study. I also used the film clip with a large group as part of presenting my research to a group of education students at IOE at an early stage of the study. Subtly different effects were obtained, which suggests that, although beyond the scope of the present study, it would be



valuable to investigate this method further, so as to better understand the factors that influence the dynamic of the interview, including the size of the group, the nature of the film clip and the interview schedule including the timing of the clip. The use of film elicitation as an interview method within a psychosocial paradigm could also usefully be extended so as to explore in greater depth certain aspects of the study's findings that are currently under researched in the early years, such as the difficult emotions that can arise between parents and practitioners in the teaching and learning relationship with children in the three to five year old age range.

This research has a number of significant implications for policy and practice, some of which are directly relevant to my professional role, as discussed below. First, the study calls attention to the emotionally taxing nature of working with young children in a teaching and learning relationship that is suffused with frustration and loss as well as enjoyment for the adult. As such, the study provides support for recent work in this field (Elfer, 2015; Vincent and Braun, 2013) arguing that greater attention should be given to the emotional demands of working with young children and their families in the early years workplace and to ways of making those demands manageable. Elfer (2012a) has suggested creating a safe space for practitioners to offload strong feelings about other staff, but this study suggests such spaces could be useful as a forum for the exploration of the wide range of emotional issues raised by the pedagogic relationship, including the children, their families and the wider community. Creating safe spaces to talk, finding people to listen and the time to do so, are costly

measures, but it behoves us to consider these and other steps in order to create a culture in the early years workplace that is able to acknowledge the full complexity of the teaching and learning relationship with young children and the significant emotional burden that it places on the adults involved, so that strategies can be considered as to how to manage the difficult parts of the job.

Secondly, the study also raises awareness of the emotional toll for parents in supporting their children to make the transition from a home-based environment to the rigours of formal schooling via early years provision such as nurseries and reception classes. Winnicott (1965) saw the main aim of the adaptive, pre-school environment as facilitating this transition. However, one could debate whether this weaning function extends not only to the children, but also to their parents. In that case, it is worth asking, given the level of fear and anxiety expressed by some parents in the study, whether we are expecting too much of early years practitioners to provide a holding environment that can adequately support both children and adults, and whether more consideration needs to be given to ways of managing the relationships between adults so that they are mutually supportive of each other as well as of the child.

Thirdly, this thesis is relevant to my professional role in higher education in several ways. In terms of the practice element of my job, where I am preparing students for the workplace, this study has made me aware that more attention needs to be paid to giving students a better understanding of the complex relationship in the early childhood education learning

environment between 3-5 year old children, practitioners and parents. In particular, there needs to be greater awareness of the emotionality of the relationship for all adults involved so that students can start their placements with perhaps more realistic expectations of themselves as well as of other adults and children. Early feedback from disseminating the findings of the study in my institution has indicated that staff are keen to have my input on the relationship between practitioners and parents included in the training of early years ITE students next year. The study also suggests that film elicitation could be a useful strategy for seeking to prepare students for practice, since the film clip was found to provide a different perspective on the pedagogic relationship, allowing the relationship to be seen from the outside as an observer rather from within, as a participant. Early trials of using the film clips as a teacher education tool with students support this suggestion, provided that adequate resources including time are made available. In terms of the research element of my professional role, the doctorate has introduced me to an eclectic range of methodological and theoretical approaches, and given me the opportunity to try some of these out during the programme. As a result, I have become more confident, adaptable and resilient as a researcher in my workplace. Finally, the creative tension between being a research student in one higher education institution and a lecturer in another has given me the intellectual freedom to reflect on how I teach students in my workplace and provided fresh insights. Thus the thesis has had and will continue to have a significant impact on my professional development both externally in terms of influencing early years practice through the students I teach, and through research I undertake, and

also internally, within the organisation where I work and on an individual level of being a learning professional.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Topic guide for semi-structured interview

Date:

Interview guide:

1. Involvement with children? In your life at the moment, what kinds of contact do you have with children? *Parent /practitioner/ voluntary contact/ extended family etc, present or past.*
2. Role of the environment? *When you walk into an early years setting, what do/ would you like to see? What kinds of activities would you like to see? How do you see a home environment compared with an EY setting? Ideal environment? Inside/ outside?*
3. Roles of adult? Practitioner: what do you see as the role of the adult? Can you give me an example? Parent: What do you think an adult in an EY setting should be doing? How should they be behaving? *Support/ facilitate/ guide/ lead? Child led or adult led? Multiple roles? Discipline? One to one, group of children?*
4. Role of play? Practitioner: What does a good teaching and learning relationship look like? Parents: How about adults playing with children? *Play versus instruction: balance – how does it vary? Context? Learning through play? Age specific?*

5. Variable roles? Do you think there are factors that impact on the way adults interact with young children?
6. Enjoyable aspects of teaching and learning relationship? *Good things about being with young children? What makes it worthwhile? Favourite activities? Thinking of a child you know (preferably not your own) what might make them enjoyable to teach?*
7. Tricky aspects? *Demands - from child, other children, other circumstances eg cooking supper if a parent, paperwork if a practitioner, pouring rain for both? Frustration? Impatience? Anger? Fatigue? Least favourite activities? Thinking a child you know (preferably not your own) what might make them tricky to teach? Change and loss?*
8. Last question – other people involved in the teaching and learning relationship? Thinking of your child/ children ( or the children you work with) who else is involved with their learning? In the classroom? At home? *Parents, carers, siblings, grandparents? Extent of teaching and learning relationship eg. beyond nursery school? Similar? Different?*
9. Anything else you would like to add?
10. Thank you. Make arrangements for the next interview?

## Appendix B: Topic guide for film elicitation interview

Date:

Interview number:

1. Explain pattern of interview: Introduce film. Seen film? Speak French?
2. Show film: *Etre et Avoir*, chapter 7: Six, Seven (40.00 – 45.00).
3. First impressions? *Anything that surprised you? Interested you? Struck you?*
4. Perspective of child? *What do you think it would be like to be a child in that class? How did you think the children felt in the clip? (whole class, small group, one to one). What were they learning, do you think? Do you think the little girl could not or would not say number seven?*
5. Classroom environment? *What did you think of the classroom (Atmosphere?) How would you describe the learning and teaching relationship between the teacher and the children we saw?*
6. Perspective of teacher? *What do you think of the teacher? If you were observing him, what feedback would you give? What do you think are the challenges he faces in his job? What keeps him coming to school every morning, do you think? What might be his frustrations? What do you think are the ups and downs of his job?*

7. Perspective of parent? *How do you think parents view this teacher? Do you think they are happy with him teaching their child? Why/ why not? ( Parents – would you be happy with him teaching your child? Why/ why not?) Discipline if it has not come up, learning.*
8. Follow up from previous interview
9. Anything else you would like to add?
10. Thank you very much – and would you like to be sent critical findings in due course?

## **Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet**

**Researcher:** Catharine Gilson

February 2014

EdD student, Institute of Education, University of London

Contact: [cgilson@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:cgilson@brookes.ac.uk)

Telephone: 01865 483167

**Project title:** An exploration of the roles of the adult in the learning and teaching relationship with young children.

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

The study is for the research I am doing as part of my doctorate in Education at the Institute of Education, University of London. I am exploring the roles an adult takes in the learning and teaching relationship with young children. I am carrying out the study in several early years settings between February and July 2014.

The aim of the study is to develop a better understanding of how adults perceive the teaching and learning relationship with young children aged between three and five. I would like to interview a range of people including teachers, practitioners and parents. If you decide you would like to be part of this research project, you will be invited to take part in two face to face interviews over a 5 month period. The interviews will take 50 – 60 minutes and with your consent will be audio recorded. The interviews will be arranged so that they are at a convenient time and in a convenient location for you. I may contact you for a follow up interview by telephone if there are any points I would like to clarify after the second interview.

Taking part in the study is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. There are no direct benefits to you of taking part though you may find the interviews give you a chance to reflect on early childhood education on a personal and/or professional level. I hope the findings will inform and improve early years teacher education courses at Oxford Brookes University, and so have an impact on early years practice in settings.

All information collected about individuals will be treated as strictly confidential. Names, institutions and localities will be anonymized in the transcription of the interview recordings. Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the storage and publication of the research material and all data collected in the course of the research project will be kept securely in accordance with the requirements of the Institute of Education, University of London.

The findings will be reported in a thesis to be submitted as part of a doctorate in Education and may also be used for articles to be submitted to academic journals. The study has been approved by the ethics committee of the Institute of Education, University of London.

Please contact me if you have any further questions or queries about this study at [cgilson@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:cgilson@brookes.ac.uk) / tel: 01865 483167. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Catharine Gilson

Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education, Oxford Brookes University

## Appendix D: Consent Form

**Project title:** An exploration of the roles of the adult in the learning and teaching relationship with young children

**Researcher:** Catharine Gilson  
Contact: [cgilson@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:cgilson@brookes.ac.uk)  
Telephone: 01865 483167

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

**Please tick box**

Yes

No

4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded

5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

Name of participant

Signature

Date

Name of researcher

Signature

Date



## **Appendix E: NVivo codes**

### *Negative emotions*

Anger/shouting

Exist but are not talked about

Failure of child/teacher

Fear

Feeling pressured by policy and targets

Frustration

Humiliation

Impatience

Isolation/loneliness

Keeping it fresh

Loss

Weariness from physical demands including toileting

Weariness from repetition

Withdrawal ( back away teacher)

### *Environment*

Busyness and noise

Child-centred pedagogy

Control

Culture – place and time

Group behaviour

Interaction

Voice

Role of adult

Caring

Good bits of teaching

Like/dislike of children by adults

Like/dislike of adults by children

Maternal/paternal

Negative attributes of teacher

Physical closeness

Positive attributes of teacher

Practitioner/ parent relationship

Practitioner v. parent role

Tricky bits of teaching

Identifications

Memory

## Appendix F: Extract from analytic notes on frustration

### ***Pete (parent): Film clip interview***

Was the most forgiving of the teacher's moment of frustration.

*It didn't strike me as a negative aspect, or a... my assumption watching it was that she just sort of not quite lost interest, but, you know, I can't remember, don't care, who cares? ...And again you just notice the sort of exasperation, with the teacher saying we've just done this, haven't we? Who cares about the six and seven. Just a very slight hint in his expression, or in his voice, oh we've just done this haven't we? (P. 4 Nvivo extracts).*

Interesting how different his perception is to Liz's 'huffing and puffing' description (check her language). Again notion of child detaching, losing interest, not being bothered with what the teacher wants her to learn – child's will seems much more readily acknowledged by the parents rather than the practitioners, even the parent practitioners (though Eleanor and Liz mention it but the teacher tends to be held responsible for this lack of engagement). Rosa acknowledges for example that her daughter might well not comply with this teacher (And Esther). Issue of child losing interest here – mutual attention within relationship? Holding environment – might adults feel rejected if a child does not want to be held (in physical terms, think of a squirming baby). In emotional terms, very difficult to talk to someone who does not want to listen to you, child or not – so holding environment for adult as well as child depends on being attended to. Links to feeding and weaning here (Winnicott) – again, feel rejected if baby or child refuses food, and here child apparently refusing to speak/ engage – see below for Phillips comment.

Pete volunteers that the teacher's response was very familiar.

He gives an example (p.4 NVivo notes) of how there is less conflict now over his daughter getting dressed, possibly because she is sleeping better and so her parents are too, so he no longer has 'that feeling of despair' and is able

to go through the discussion that his daughter at times still requires before she will get dressed. Again, advocates a sense of distance, or perspective, I guess:

*And actually just having that, being able to step back, as I think the teacher... just to look into the middle distance and think OK. You know because in the long run even on a practical basis, you think it would be quicker for us to go through this process that have an argument about it.*

Not quite sure what he means here in relation to the teacher. Is the process the conflict? It certainly gets a very silent child some attention even if it is negative in part. Child is withholding speech – think of Phillips, Beast in the Nursery, talking of how language is a bastion of civilisation, and how refusing food or refusing to talk is seen as a huge threat to the adult world.

Really interesting comment:

*perhaps as a parent with no teaching experience you are looking at probably focusing on the children, because you are thinking actually this is a story about children at school. Whereas perhaps if you've got a teaching background you are thinking this is a story about a teacher with a class.*

Interesting perspective of a parent.

Interesting because I think it is more complicated than that for a teacher watching the film clip and that the process of identification is more subtle and nuanced – and unpredictable. In fact, in terms of identification, Pete seems to identify with the teacher here (see below) more than many of the practitioners, who seemed to be more negative about the teacher, and identify more strongly with the child. (Reminded of O'Loughlin and how we are always addressing or avoiding the child within – reparative purpose of caring professions, Dartington?)

*It makes me smile and think well done, instead of saying for God's sake sit! Whereas from a teacher point of view I'm sure you are thinking there's processes and coping experiences, and you know, but from a non-teacher point of view you just think yeah, we've all been there mate, well done for not*

*shouting. And also I don't think the child, the child didn't look at him as though to say, you know, didn't really react. Although the child sort of withdrew slightly. So the nuance, constant amazement, the level of subtlety and nuance that children pick up on. So I have not doubt that his exasperation, fleeting as it might have been, was picked up by... you could see the child not quite withdraw, but go oh I don't care.*

(NVivo extract p.5)

*Nobody seemed to be upset or damaged by it, and it's just one of those little micro parts of the day. But I guess the guy's thinking, I've got outcomes to achieve, and, you know, but that's the fascinating thing about learning, isn't it? (NVivo extract p.5)*

Gender aspect – are men more forgiving of other men? Does that make the identification with the male teacher stronger/ easier?

Interesting that Pete is quite sure that children are very sensitive to emotion, unlike the other parents who did not think the child picked up on his frustration (Esther because child too young to understand, and Rosa because child did not see teacher's face). Might this desire to see child as impervious to adult sensitivities of emotion be because it would be too painful to tolerate the thought that the child did pick up the teacher's perceived frustration, and might therefore feel as humiliated as they remembered feeling? Denial? Splitting? Schizoid position. P. by contrast seems to be able to accommodate both child and adult perspectives and to identify with both – depressive position?

## **Appendix G: DVD of Etre et Avoir**

For film clip, see chapter 7: *Six, seven* (40.00 – 45.00)