

**AN INVESTIGATION OF**  
**THE DECONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION PROCESSES WITHIN**  
**THE CONTEXT OF REFLECTIVE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE AND**  
**WITHIN THE CONTENT OF PLAY**

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**by**

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Dedicated to Mum,  
in memory of Dad

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## INTRODUCTION

*This has been a complete challenge to everything that I have ever thought about to do with early education. It's just made me stop and think and question everything I do.*

*I've always been open to other avenues of thought . . . actually being a part of the group and hearing different opinions and perhaps agreeing or not agreeing, just the whole thing has been so challenging to my practice and to the way I think about how children learn. I've got more knowledge. I've changed practice in the nursery and I've got so much more confidence in my knowledge in what I do. I think my knowledge has really grown. I don't think I knew anything before. I've got more knowledge . . . Pedagogic knowledge. Pedagogic knowledge - knowledge of children, what they do, how they play, how you can intervene.*

(Pauline, early years practitioner)

During the course of the research, the processes within reflective practice have been interrogated through examining the values, beliefs and understandings of a group of early years practitioners.

The project in which they were engaged and their commitment to developing a playful pedagogy provided the focus for the investigations into reflective practice.

Their story is told here. It 'deconstructs' the processes which they claim '*tore them apart*' yet later resulted in the 'reconstruction' of pedagogy with confident, knowledgeable, articulate practitioners able to proclaim: '*I've got more knowledge . . . pedagogic knowledge*'.

Two key issues are embedded in this early years practitioner's statement regarding the overall development of a teacher's pedagogical knowledge:

- the overall process of reflective practice and the inevitable challenging, questioning, agreeing, disagreeing, changing and re/establishing levels of confidence and competence. Engaging in reflection demands a sensitive route between critical appraisal and celebrations of existing practices (Van Manen, 1995). Adopting a reflective approach to practice also implies articulating fundamental beliefs and exploring the theoretical foundations of practice. Tensions can be heightened if peda-

gical thinking is spurned - for the actions of reflective practice are based on thoughtful, articulate, pedagogical discourse (Simon, 1999).

- the existing knowledge and understanding of the content and implementation of the curriculum – in this case, an early years curriculum - for young children based on play.

These two issues formed the basis of this research. They are briefly discussed in this Introduction to set a context for the overall research on which this thesis rests.

Too Busy to Play (TBtP), a funded research project, provided the context for this research. Chapter One, which follows, briefly presents the background to this project and its relationship to the thesis.

## **PLAYFUL PROCESSES**

Within the context of early childhood education there is evidence that practitioners have difficulty relating theories to practice, articulating their own values, beliefs and understanding and supporting a play based curriculum (Jensen et al, 1997). In particular there is scant evidence of how early years practitioners might engage in reflective processes that enable them to accommodate existing or new understandings of how children learn through play (Wood and Attfield, 1996). In spite of an enthusiastic and continued commitment to the ideology of play few practitioners appear to be able to teach directly through play and consequently to make provision for children to learn through play. During her research on the nature of early years curriculum practices, Sylva (1992) reports that the most frequent occurrence was for children to sustain a diet of very formalised teaching sessions, interspersed with opportunities for unsupported, free play.

It appears that whilst literature suggests ways in which practitioners might support children's learning through play (Moyles, 1989, 1994; Bruce, 1991; David, 1998; Anning and Edwards, 1999; Wood 1998), in reality this does not often occur even in nursery settings which are often less formally structured (DES, 1993; Moyles and Suschitzky, 1997). A developmentally appropriate curriculum for young children is

frequently advocated even though existing curriculum guidelines do not explicitly promote learning through play or indicate ways in which learning might be congruent with development (Boyden, 1997; Abbott and Pugh, 1998; Wood, 2000). Early years continues to be marginalized by curriculum policies and practitioners' attempts to promote learning through play remain problematic (OfSTED, 1993; Wood and Attfield, 1996).

There is a body of literature which suggests that play is an appropriate means for children's learning (Bee, 1995; Bennett et al, 1997; Bredekamp and Copple, 1996; Abbott and Pugh, 1998). This is supported, for example, by High/Scope and Reggio Emilia approaches (Hohmann, 1979; Malaguzzi, 1993, 1996). Theories of play in all contexts and approaches continue to be varied and undefined. Garvey (1991) suggests a definition of play continues to be elusive especially as children typically make many varying and changing responses in their play. Playful learning is not predictable and cannot be neatly categorised. Consequently, accommodating the spontaneity and idiosyncratic nature of play within a formalised and predictable curriculum context creates many tensions and contradictions for practitioners. It is difficult, for example, to make provision for the spontaneity of play when practitioners are expected to plan and assess predicted outcomes for children's learning as occurred following the introduction of the Education Reform Act in 1988. Such tensions leave practitioners considering whether it is sufficient for children to be self-sufficient in play, especially in educational settings.

In spite of these difficulties and unresolved dilemmas, early years practitioners appear to proclaim play as the most appropriate way in which children learn. However, if practitioners are to realise their ideals that children learn through play, then such beliefs must be substantiated. Wood and Attfield (1996: 11), exploring the relationship between play and the early childhood curriculum, note the formal influences of the National Curriculum on practitioners' thinking and emphasise the need to clarify 'what it was they were hanging on to and defending'. It is also difficult to determine what informs practice if practitioners are unsure, for example, of the relationship between play and cognitive development. Wood and Attfield (1996) argue that practi-

tioners need a more conscious, clearly defined basis to their pedagogical knowledge that makes explicit the links between play, teaching and learning. Blenkin and Kelly (1998) warn of the dangers of teaching without a secure theoretical base and insist that theory must inform teaching and learning. Wood and Attfield (1996) present evidence of early years practitioners requesting in-service courses that reflect their pragmatic concerns whilst also supporting their own development through reflective and critical enquiry. This implies that practitioners appear to acknowledge their own need to relate theories to practice and to assess their own theories in the light of others. Yet defining ways in which reflective practice may be fostered continues to challenge (Goodfellow, 2000).

#### ADOPTING A REFLECTIVE APPROACH TO PRACTICE

The process of interrogating theories can be a useful tool in helping practitioners to define and construct pedagogical understanding. However for theory to impact practice and vice versa, Mackinnon (1987) suggests existing understandings must be modified in the light of emerging insights. He represents this as a reflective cycle between theory and practice which must culminate in practical resolutions. The cyclical relationship, one informing the other, can be dynamic especially if charged by practitioner's contributions to the development of new theories (Dahlberg et al, 1999). Ghaye and Ghaye (1998: 18) also suggest that linking theory and practice is a creative process in which practitioners 'construct meaningful theories-of-action' the result of 'reflective conversations and actual teaching episodes'. They suggest that retrospective considerations, i.e. reflecting on previous practice also provides opportunities to associate theory with practice.

Dahlberg et al (1999) suggest a forum be created in which new understandings may be determined and co-constructed through the relationships between pedagogy, practitioners and children. Enriched understanding must be accompanied by a reflective approach to practice. With support, challenge and pedagogical insight, critical reflective practice might enable practitioners to extend practice so that new evidence and under-

standings of how children learn will continue to inform how teachers teach. Yet, it appears that developing a reflective approach to practice is problematic for many. In the opening quotation, Pauline laments *'I've always been open to other avenues of thought, but you don't actually get to meet many people to discuss these things'*. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998: 122) insist that engaging in reflective practice through meaningful, reflective conversations can 'sustain and nourish' professional thinking. This raises questions, for example, about the content and effectiveness of reflective conversations, especially if values, beliefs and understandings are deeply embedded or if practitioners exist in a culture, which does not promote reflective dialogue and the surfacing of tacit beliefs (Goldhammer, 1966).

It is within this uncertain context that the research examined:

- what constitutes sustained levels of reflective practice that lead to a

*Challenge to everything that I have ever thought about to do with early education?*

- in what ways might personal and professional values be subjected to scrutiny and potential change, yet allow practitioners to sustain self-respect and esteem?

Returning to the earlier premise, additional questions regarding play are raised:

- why does it appear to be so problematic for practitioners to make provision for children to learn through play?
- on what basis do practitioners claim that learning through play is effective and desirable?
- why are practitioners committed to something they feel potentially unattainable or difficult to understand, other than in a romantic, unrealistic way (Wood and Attfield, 1996). Tizard et al (1988) and Bennett and Kell (1989) both revealed discrepancies between practitioners' aims and practice, which raised questions about the strength of pedagogical practice and understandings.

Pursuing these and other emerging questions has been, and continues to be, a dynamic and exhilarating process. . *'a complete challenge'*. . in which all participants have gained deeper *'pedagogical knowledge'*.

## THESIS OUTLINE AND PLAN

This research was approached through considering these questions with a particular emphasis on practitioners' pedagogical perspectives. The questions outlined are subsumed in the main aim:

**To investigate the deconstruction and reconstruction processes within the context of reflective pedagogical practice and within the content of play.**

This exploration, outlined below, has involved examining the conditions under which a reflective approach to practice might be promoted. In particular, this has involved developing ways of supporting a group of nine practitioners in pursuit of playful pedagogy – the pursuit of teaching and learning through play.

This research took place in the context of a funded project. Working as research assistant for the TBtP project provided the context for this research. Consequently, references to 'the project' refer to incidents which have occurred in the context of TBtP. References to 'research' relate specifically to the research, which was undertaken in the TBtP project.

The background to the project and the practitioners who were involved in these processes are introduced in Chapter One. Throughout this thesis, the teachers and nursery nurses in the project are referred to as practitioner-researchers, rather than interviewees or informants, in an attempt to convey the active involvement and sense of equity in keeping with the spirit of the project (Seidman, 1991). The practitioner's voice, taken from the interview transcripts, is represented in italics.

For the purpose of this thesis, the practitioners and project director are referred to as practitioner-researchers, abbreviated to P-R unless references are being made, specifically, to practitioners. For ease of communication, no distinction is made between nursery nurses and teachers apart from occasions when specific references are made to the two discrete roles.

Chapter Two presents a synthesis of the literature relating to reflective practice. This influence of early theories, in particular Schön's investigations, provides the background for examining recent understandings. In keeping with the underpinning purpose of this research, the relevance of reflective practice to practitioners is highlighted.

A synthesis of reflective practice is followed, in Chapter Three, by a study of recent understandings of play and the context in which early practitioners pursue their work. Early years practitioners operate in an environment of contradictions and tensions, for although play is celebrated as the way in which children learn, these values are not upheld by curriculum frameworks. Nonetheless, practitioners continue to remain committed and enthusiastic to a playful pedagogy, even though its application remains problematic. The theories introduced in this chapter are interrogated by the practitioners as they embark on a process of reconstruction of their values, beliefs and understanding of play.

Grounded theory, a significant aspect of the research is discussed in Chapter Four together with its impact on the emerging methodology, processes, relationships and outcomes. Grounded theory allows core problems, realities and processes to emerge through the data. Familiarity and theoretical sensitivity to situations allow unexpected theories to 'blaze a new theoretical trail into an untouched area of inquiry' (Glaser, 1978: 10). This had a significant effect on the process and direction of the research when it emerged that early understandings of practitioners' orientation to change, challenge and furthering practice, were unsubstantiated. Consequently, the purpose of the project (introduced in the following chapter) was modified, the aims of the research changed.

Chapter Five describes and discusses the methodology and research methods used. The research was conducted in three phases, each one identified by a round of individual in-depth interviews. The main findings emerged through these interviews. The analysis of the interview transcripts provide evidence of changes and progress in pragmatic aspects, i.e. levels of use, and affective domains, i.e. stages of concern experienced as practitioners studied, confronted and considered changes to theories and practice (Hord et al, 1998). These findings were triangulated with evidence obtained from observations and documentation contributed to the project by the practitioners. They confirmed and on occasions disconfirmed findings from the interviews.

The findings of the research are presented in Chapter Six which identifies ways in which children's entitlement to learn through play might be promoted through reflective practice. The implications of the findings are discussed in Chapter Seven.

Of particular relevance to practitioners is the development of a framework of children's entitlement to learn through play, which was developed during the process of the research – a result of developing a reflective approach to practice and a result of the collaborative relationships, which were developed, between researchers and practitioners. These, and related ethical implications, are considered in Chapter Seven.

The summary and conclusion in Chapter Eight, includes a review of achievements and processes within this research in the light of the researcher's critical reflection on the research. Ethical dilemmas were encountered at each stage and are a recurring theme throughout the research. They continue to be examined.

This research into the values, beliefs and understandings of nine early years practitioners has provided insight into the processes of reflective practice. It has been disturbing to realise the extent of the dilemmas and tensions, which face early years practitioners. It is hoped that in grounding the research in their realities, the processes within this thesis and the outcomes represented in the training materials entitled *Statements of Children's Entitlement to Learn through Play*, (Moyles et al, 2001) are accessible and relevant to practitioners and researchers alike.



## CHAPTER ONE: TOO BUSY TO PLAY? AND THE RESEARCH.

*I'm not suggesting that that I reflect on my practice more than I did,  
but I reflect in a different way.*

(Gail, Interview 2)

This thesis is the outcome of research undertaken with the Too Busy to Play? (TBtP) research project, funded for two years by the Esmée Fairbairn charitable trust and sustained for a further year by its participants. The purpose of the TBtP project was to investigate the knowledge, understanding and values of nine early years practitioners regarding children's play and development, and their application in day-to-day practice. However, it became evident that rhetoric, generated during the early phase of the project, belied deeper understandings. Lengthy opportunities to talk within practice about children's learning through play became the catalyst for promoting reflective practice. TBtP changed from its initial objective to explore practitioners' understandings of play and produce training materials, to one in which practitioners' understandings were explored, challenged, developed and new understandings used as the basis for training materials based on children's entitlement to learn through play.

It is not unusual for research studies to be undertaken within a funded project. This chapter clarifies the ways in which the latter, the Too Busy to Play project, provided the context for this research into reflective practice (Brown, 2000).

### RESEARCHING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

During the early stages of working with the group of practitioners, it became apparent that they faced difficulties in making provision for children's learning through play. These difficulties were related to endeavours to conceptualise pedagogical principles and adopt a critically reflective approach to their practice. The insight gained from the raw findings of Phase One confirmed the focus of the research. The research was a result of combining an interest and commitment to:

- reflective practice and the ways in which practitioners can be supported and empowered to further their practice;
- developing an understanding of the roles and realities of practitioners and researchers, linking theories and practice;
- children's entitlement to learn through play (Moyles et al, 2001).

In the opening statement to this Chapter, one of the practitioners, Gail, suggests that being involved in the project has resulted in changing the way in which she reflects on her practice. The process of changing approaches to reflection has involved exploring practitioners' pedagogical knowledge, going beyond their beliefs and practices through pursuing personal constructs of being a teacher (Banks et al, 1999). It has been found that developing a reflective approach to playful practice requires considerable time, differentiated support and a willingness to challenge and confront implicitly held values, beliefs and understandings of how young children learn. Values, in this context refer to practitioners' enduring beliefs which influence their work related actions and decisions, teaching and learning (Rokeach, 1973).

Deepening the levels of thinking from recalling events to more critical appraisal of teaching and learning '*reflecting in a different way*' provided the basis for these investigations. Reflecting on playful practice provided the means by which practitioners embarked on a process of deconstruction, in which they:

- recalled practice;
- articulated deeply embedded understanding;
- questioned their beliefs and the ways in which practice was informed;

and reconstruction, in which they:

- acquired new pedagogical information;
- explored the relationships between child development, teaching and learning;
- identified links between playful learning and the curriculum;

- investigated ways in which this might be applied to practice;
- developed training materials;
- through writing, began to communicate their newly reconstructed pedagogical knowledge to other practitioners.

The processes involved in the deconstruction and reconstruction of values, beliefs and understanding, became the focus of this thesis.

During the first round of interviews, one practitioner was asked how useful it was to be involved in the play project:

*Practitioner: It's quite useful to actually think about something . . .so I'm writing about the cameos. So it is, actually, it's really nice to be able to write about these things, because in your every day work you just don't think these things (pedagogical issues). You don't think, really. You just do all the time.*

*Interviewer: So, what informs your doing?*

*Practitioner: Practice, previous practice, I think really.*

*I mean you just carry on, don't you?*

*I mean I was in college a long time ago now, and they always said they were training us for ten years' time because we'll all probably have babies.*

(Pauline, Interview 1)

Day (1999a) suggests that the value of critical enquiry and reflection is now well established, although complexities within the various levels of reflective practice are not yet fully understood. Whilst reflection in and on action may be effective at a technical level (Schön, 1983), it appears that deeper conceptualisation and examination of implicit pedagogical values remains problematic.

Multi levels of reflective practice are influenced by its context, foci and purposes, as well as the cognitive and emotional selves of practitioners who engage in the process (Ricard-Fersing, 1999). Hargreaves (1998) suggests that the role of practitioners' affective and emotional responses, within reflective practice, have not been fully acknowledged. Practitioners who are willing to confront professional and personally

held values and beliefs require support at both friendship and organisational levels. When the TBtP project began there were few structures in place to support early years practitioners seeking to engage in sustained, critical reflective practice. Convery (1998) expressed his frustration that current literature about reflection did not necessarily support the application of theories to practice. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, the Literature Review.

Collaborative research between practitioners and researchers implies both parties are committed to such work whilst accepting that their experiences and purposes may differ (Zay, 1999). It also has the potential to enhance the understanding of both practitioners and researchers as well as developing competencies for practice. Zay (1999) discusses the contradictory expectations among different partners engaged in research studies and states the importance of negotiating a contractual agreement before any joint research begins. This avoids tensions through unrealistic expectations by both partners. Zay (ibid) also advises the use of instruments to facilitate partnerships, for leading and evaluating activities in order to explore and extrapolate understanding through periods of 'co-reflection' (Schulz et al, 1997: 482, Adams et al 2000). The instruments used in this research are discussed in Chapter Five.

The ethical dimensions and their related considerations continued throughout the research. Issues of confidentiality, informed consent, responsibilities, accuracy of interpretations, personal care and concerns were interrogated throughout the process.

## INTRODUCING TOO BUSY TO PLAY?

The project commenced with ten practitioners, three nursery nurses and seven teachers. During the first two terms, half-day meetings were held every fortnight. One teacher, male, left after four meetings, following a promotion from class teacher to deputy head teacher. He felt additional responsibilities and training required to support his own professional development were incompatible with the emerging and increasing demands of the project. One nursery nurse also left after two meetings, due to changing personal responsibilities and was replaced by a teacher colleague from the

same school. She joined the project at its fifth meeting. Two researchers, consisting of the project director and research assistant, worked with the practitioners throughout this period and were responsible for providing the organisation and resources required to sustain the project.

The practitioners involved with TBtP had been recommended by their head teachers because of excellent classroom practice. They were also experienced practitioners so it was likely that they would be more inclined to learn from being involved in the project than, for example, novice practitioners. Novice practitioners are likely to be at a stage of deliberately establishing routines with deeper understanding not yet established. Experienced practitioners possess a bank of experiences on which to reflect upon whilst novice practitioners may be dependent on outside sources for creative or objective thinking. Additional statements written by the group during early meetings confirmed they were eager to continue the process of professional development and learning within the framework of the project. The following is typical of comments made by all the practitioners:

*Discussion, where we reflect on practice . . . finding out more of the theoretical background to what I am doing. . . I think it can be difficult at times, to justify play and I think any tool that aids you, the better. .*

(Interview 1)

The P-Rs wrote brief autobiographies to introduce themselves to the TBtP group (Appendix 1). In order to conceal their identity in this thesis, their names have been changed and the names of all schools deleted.

The practitioners arrived at the first meeting with an air of buoyant confidence, eager to talk about their practice, about individual children and the events of the day. Their sense of self-efficacy, the expectation that they are able to promote learning, was high, confirming the impression that this was a group of confident, reflective practitioners prepared to be challenged (Ross et al, 1996). The TBtP project was funded for two years but continued for a further year beyond the period funded by the trust, due to the continued commitment of the group members. A similar situation occurred with

the project for enhancing Effective Early Learning (Pascal and Bertram, 1997; Mitchell, 1999). During the final phase three, a training pack, the outcome of the project, was developed and written (Moyles et al, 2001). The process of researching teacher values and beliefs and developing a reflective approach to practice continued whilst the group of P-Rs were writing the training materials. The research concluded with the final group interview in February 2000.

Whilst the aims of the project were originally agreed with the practitioners, these aims were modified when raw findings indicated the planned nature of intervention was inappropriate. The context and content for this research was grounded in the responses of the practitioners and researchers established during the early stages of the TBtP project.

A collaborative relationship was developed between all participants as the complexities of reflective practice were identified and investigated. Initially the deconstructive processes of reflective practice were researched. McIntyre (1993) argues that change is only likely to occur through reflective practice in which intuitive understandings are surfaced and examined. In the opening statement, Gail claims that she has learnt to '*reflect in a different way*'. A synthesis of the literature relating to the dynamic aspects, the many '*different ways*' of reflective practice is presented in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEWING THE LITERATURE: AN INTERROGATION OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

*To begin with, I thought I did know. I think I thought I knew a lot about practice, but I didn't really have the underlying knowledge or I had forgotten a lot of it.*

*I think we all probably started thinking we were practising well in play, but we've had to question ourselves and how we approach it and what we assume, what we don't assume . . . I have to keep on that reflecting, and to keep this communication, this bouncing of ideas. I think now I feel prepared to be - I could be torn apart. And I think I would find it positive and probably at the beginning of the year, I might have found it a bit difficult.*

*It's nice to be able to stand back and reflect and see the advances that the children have made.*

(Pauline, Linda, Gail)

Consider the contradictions embedded in claiming to have adopted a reflective approach to practice whilst also resisting change, challenge and professional development. Consider also the '*different ways*', polarised perceptions of reflective practice represented in the above statements. Is it a '*nice*' experience? Under what conditions might '*torn part*' be considered a positive experience?

The complexities of reflective practice, its approaches and interpretations were apparent during the early meetings with the TBtP project. Consequently, a study of reflective practice sought to clarify the purposes and processes of reflective practice within the context of the research. This literature study has revealed diverse and overlapping definitions with many investigations identifying layers, levels, stages and phases of reflection. Its complexity is revealed in the numerous portrayals ranging from critical and enquiring to interrogative and conversational.

Common to many studies are indications that engaging in reflective practice requires support, challenge, and confrontation, which may lead to informed changes in practice (Goodfellow, 2000). Many investigations also propose developing a collaborative approach in order to benefit from other pedagogical perspectives (Lee and Loughran, 2000). Some investigations indicated it could be a solitary process although there may

a limit to the quality and nature of reflective enquiry especially if we are able to avoid the discomfort of being challenged or '*torn apart*' (Day, 2000).

There are extensive investigations into the concept of reflective practice (Schön, 1983; Russell and Munby, 1991; Zeichner and Liston, 1996; Grimmett and Erickson, 1998). In order to clarify the following synthesis within this chapter, three tables have been produced. These illustrate the key early studies and more recent enquiries, which have been influenced by Schön's investigations (1983, 1987).

An emerging pattern suggests that reflective practice is a highly complex process requiring problematisation. This involves seeing potential dilemmas within pedagogical concepts, leading potentially to deconstruction of practitioners' values, beliefs and understanding which may in turn result in their eventual pedagogical reconstruction (Dahlberg et al, 1999). These three stages are represented in Figures (1-3) and discussed respectively in the three following sections of this chapter:

- Figure 1 introduces the concept, with references to its aims, aspects of its processes and indicators of the levels of reflection that may occur. In order to avoid duplication in the tables, each item is only featured once.
- Figure 2 identifies the processes of deconstruction, focusing on the conditions required to support this process. It also indicates how reflective practice may occur and suggests some objectives for reflection.
- Figure 3 contains references to reconstruction again identifying when and how this may occur. Its final column indicates some procedures that may lead to enhanced understanding or specific outcomes.

FIGURE 1: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

| Definition.  | Aims.  | Nature of reflective practice.  | Levels.  |
|--|--|---|--|
| Dewey (1933)   |  | Active persistent consideration<br>Way of being   |  |
| Van Manen (1977)   |  | Levels of thinking (routine, rational, intuitive)   |  |
| Schön (1983)<br><br>Reflection-in-action<br>Reflection-on-action | On-the-spot problems<br>Analysing performance                                  |   | Technical;<br>Descriptive;<br>Dialogue;<br>Critical;<br>Intrapersonal  |
| Van Manen (1977)   | Technical / rational   |   |  |
| Calderhead (1988)  | Link theory with practice  |   |  |
| Bullough and Gitlin (1991)                                       | Enhance practice   | Values deeply embedded;<br>difficult to articulate  |  |
| Goodman (1991)   |  | Require focus,<br>3 levels: Practical, theoretical, ethical & political<br>Levels of thinking   |  |
| Systematic enquiry<br>Lucas (1991)                               | Change practice<br>Deepen understanding  | Approach, total engagement  |  |
| Berliner (1992)  | Builds on personalised, embedded knowledge                                     | Reflected upon classroom experiences  |  |
| McIntyre (1993)  | Change or development  | Requires experience and surfaced understanding  |  |
| Dadds (1995)   | Involves challenge, change and leads to new learning                           | Affective responses   |  |
| Jensen et al (1997)  |  | Recount anecdotes<br>Time – to locate voices  |  |
| Sachs, (1997)  |  | 5 key values  | Individual learning;<br>Ownership of cpd.;<br>Collaboration;<br>Co-operation;<br>Debate: moral issues.                               |
| Bain et al (1999)  | Systematic inquiry   |   | Report events;<br>Respond, no judgment;<br>Report and understand;<br>Reasoning and analyse;<br>Reconstruct, abstraction.             |
| Dahlberg (1999)  | Surface underlying knowledge<br>Create new boundaries of pedagogical knowledge | Multi-dimension process<br>Ongoing exploration<br>Understanding, making judgment, seeking agreement<br>Requires focus, time, problematisation, deconstruction, all with facilitator |  |
| Adams (2000)<br>Unpublished thesis                               | Confirmation and change of existing pedagogical understanding                  | Collaborative approach  | Articulation<br>Differentiated support & conceptualisation<br>Problematisation<br>Deconstruction and confrontation<br>Reconstruction |

## AIMS OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE, WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF PLAY

### **Reflective practice**

The first section of this chapter, illustrated in Table 1, presents a definition of reflective practice and its aims relevant to this research. This is followed by:

- an historical perspective, showing how contemporary understandings have been informed by earlier investigations;
- the nature of reflection, ranging from '*nice experiences*' to being '*torn apart*';
- a presentation of the complexity of reflective practice, evidenced in the many layers, levels, phases and stages, frequently advocated in many of the studies.

Many studies have attempted to encapsulate the concept of reflective practice claiming it to be a disposition to inquiry, an ongoing confrontation between theory, practice and new understandings which require collaborative, differentiated support (Bengtsson, 1995; Pollard, 1997). It appears that a definition of reflective practice continues to be elusive. Ghaye (2000) cites several papers, offering an anthology of suggestions ranging from providing a space, to succumbing to pedagogic fashion, to engaging in fuzzy practice (Ghaye and Lillyman, 2000; Anzul and Ely, 1988; Ghaye and Lillyman, 2000; Grint 1997; Rolfe, 1997).

Within the TBtP project the investigation of reflective practice is based on the principle that reflection is a systematic enquiry, aiming to deepen understanding (Lucas, 1991). It is an approach, a total engagement with pedagogical theory and practice, rather than an activity, which occurs from time-to-time. Through such total engagement, it is likely that practice is improved, although this appears to be a secondary function of reflection. The primary function is to develop critical thinking and an enquiring attitude to practice.

Furlong (2000) suggests that reflection is related to rebuilding professionalism, based on an attempt to re-conceptualise professional knowledge. Implicit in changes to pedagogical knowledge is the suggestion that practice is also subjected to change.

These were to be two key aims of reflective practice relevant to the research:

- deepen pedagogical knowledge;
- promote change.

Both supported:

- the aim of the TBtP project i.e. to aid practitioners in questioning and evaluating current practice and extend their pedagogical knowledge;
- the stated expectations of its participants to stand back, reflect and '*recall forgotten pedagogical knowledge*'.

The intention within the research was to interrogate the process occurring within reflective practice. This commenced with practitioners' expectations and constructs of reflective practice and supported their stated commitment to extend practice.

### **Reflective Practice: Deepening Pedagogical Understanding.**

The first aim of reflective practice is to deepen pedagogical understandings through encouraging an engagement with underpinning theories. This is considered a cognitive activity in which practitioners are encouraged to consider theory, engage in deliberations, reflect-in-action, resolve on-the-spot problems as they occur and later analyse those performances through reflecting-on-action (Schön, 1983). Goodman (1991) implies that reflective practice underpins all pedagogical thinking and responses rather than being an activity in which practitioners frequently or infrequently engage. The opportunity to reflect on practice was one reason all practitioners chose to be involved in the research. Vera's comment was typical: '*The whole idea of reflecting . . . I wanted to try and analyse myself and see why we were providing the play opportunities we do provide*'.

Pedagogical consciousness appears to be a primary characteristic of reflective practice. Berliner (1992) argues that practitioner knowledge is based on experience and suggests that expertise is developed after lengthy experiences of applying that knowledge, acquired through teaching in familiar contexts and students. It is inevitable

many tasks become embedded, that knowledge becomes intuitive, for a degree of automation (reflexivity) of repetitive tasks frees experienced practitioners from mundane, conscious responsibilities leaving them open to be more sensitive to student's unexpected responses. Berliner (ibid: 245) states that pedagogical content knowledge develops through these processes of teaching, often from 'reflected-upon classroom experiences'. These experiences provide a repertoire of personalised knowledge, which forms the basis of evidence for reflective practice.

### **Reflective Practice: Promoting Change.**

The second aim of reflection involves changing practice. There was no indication in the literature of any hierarchical structure within these two aims. Both fulfilled different functions; one was not necessarily considered superior to the other although the latter, change, would be enhanced by the former, pedagogical engagement.

According to Schön (1983, 1987), reflective practice involves seeing, recognising, framing and problematising aspects within practice. A consequence of this pedagogical awareness is the opportunity to discover new ways of framing practice, alternative ways of seeing and implementing solutions to dilemmas. This willingness to engage in reflection is, in part, a response to concerns experienced by practitioners when a degree of perplexity and disorientation prompts further exploration (Hall and Hord, 1987). In the TBtP investigations, reflective practice has been characterised by changes in the nine practitioners' thinking, use of pedagogical language and aspects of practice. These changes were preceded by a preparedness to respond to concerns about practice, and to engage with pedagogical theories. Lee and Loughran (2000: 70) suggest that in relation to reflection, concern 'may be defined as an impulse that drives one to reflect; and in this case to then reframe the situation'. The suggestion is that a pre-reflective state aroused by concerns, feelings, and considerations about a particular issue may prompt reconsiderations of the problem or seeing it in a different way (Hall and Hord, 1987). Inquiry and responding to problems within practice may lead to greater clarity of thinking and deeper understanding. This may then result in reconstructing the problem or identifying new ways of implementing solutions – leading to changes in practice. Change must be preceded by a willingness to re-frame the issue

(Mackinnon, 1987). In order to complete the reflective cycle, some action must occur, an appropriate resolution applied to the issue. This implies that reflection without change, is incomplete (Mackinnon, 1987).

On joining the TBtP project, the practitioners all expressed the intention to develop and improve practice, yet appeared to resist change.

Hall and Hord (1987: 6) insist 'Only when each (or almost each) individual in the school has absorbed the improved practice can we say that the school has changed'.

Day (2000: 125) argues that reflection has always tended to promote self-development and lifelong learners and is integral to successful practice:

To become and remain effective. . [practitioners] need to nurture their critical thinking and emotional intelligence through reflection. To continue to operate successfully requires them to constantly test what they know against what is happening.

Effective reflective practice is likely to deepen pedagogical understanding making it possible for practitioners to identify opportunities for change. However, pedagogical awareness alone is not sufficient to promote change. Dahlberg et al (1999: 106) closely examined the concept of reflective practice identifying three processes of engagement: understanding, making judgment and (possibly, but not essentially), seeking agreement with others.

Being involved in the TBtP project provided similar opportunities for reflection.

Calderhead and Gates (1993: 2) suggest whilst it is often presumed that reflection is intrinsically good and desirable, its aims imply a deepening pedagogical awareness that may promote or demand change. They suggest that reflective practice aims to:

- enable practitioners to discuss, analyse, evaluate and change practice;
- promote an awareness of social and political contexts of education;
- appraise the moral and ethical issues implicit in their practice;

- encourage greater responsibility;
- develop practitioners' pedagogical theories;
- empower and enhance autonomy.

Schwandt (1996) and Benhanbib (1992) suggest the various processes of reflective practice contribute to generating pedagogical wisdom particularly through more abstract levels of critical reflection in which emotions, responses and the accomplishments of learning are reconstructed. Dahlberg et al, (1999) elaborated this and identified conditions that may prompt reflection to occur. First, it demands an appropriate opportunity for critical inquiry such as, within the context of early years, challenging the construction of early childhood or development of a playful pedagogical philosophy. It can be seen from the list above that such considerations broaden the implications and application of reflective practice. The literature implies that reflective practice is more than '*thinking about what you do*', its aims more profound.

It was apparent during the early weeks of the TBtP project that the group held various constructs of reflective practice. In their studies on the processes of change Hall and Hord (1987) argue it is essential participants' perspectives are incorporated into procedural planning for intervention. Consequently, a study of earlier literature was used to provide insights into the various perceptions of reflective practice.

### **Historical perspectives**

The concept of reflection is not new. Dewey (1933: 9) argued that reflective action involved 'active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads'. This definition continues to be relevant even though further investigations into reflective practice have identified various additional orientations and refinements which serve to support practitioners' development in this field (Pollard, 1988, Calderhead and Gates, 1993).

Goodman (1991) acknowledged and developed Dewey's role (1933) in identifying the three attitudes associated with practitioners who engage in reflective practice. The

first attitude is an open-mindedness and willingness to question their own beliefs. The second, a sense of responsibility, being prepared to consider new understandings. Finally a wholehearted willingness and an enthusiasm and commitment to applying new beliefs to practice. Goodman (1991) suggests it is necessary to make provision for examining the underlying attitudes of practitioners for they are more likely to engage in the process of reflection in a climate of informed support and encouragement (Cooper, 1998). He also suggests that these underlying attitudes contribute to the development of an ongoing approach to practice and a key factors in practitioners' construct of teaching. Reflective practice is an approach rather than an occasional event which occurs in passing moments or when linked to specific projects (Goodman, 1991). An opportunity '*to have a chance to reflect*' was one reason practitioners gave for joining the TBtP project.

Schön's (1983) investigations into, and promotion of, reflection stimulated professional interest in the concept and was popularly accepted. It has been proposed that reflective practice needs a clearly defined focus and criteria for making judgments if improvement is to be achieved (LaBoskey, 1993; Zeichner 1992). Convery (1998) argued that, while various categories of reflective practice are attractive, they do not necessarily support the practitioner in the practical application of reflection. In particular, when engaged in this process for his Ph.D. studies, Convery increasingly found Schön's concept of reflection to be problematic and frustrating for although the principles were valued its application was problematic. This was particularly so when an attitude of open enquiry was unaccompanied by appropriate skills. He argued (ibid) that practitioners most often engage in the less critical reflection-on-action and that individual reflection tends to focus on the tangible, immediate issues rather than deeper conceptualisation. He also reasoned that language such as 'action' and 'practice' directs attention to teacher's activities, to the pragmatic, so encouraging a focus on the situational rather than the professional or pedagogical source of the problem, on pragmatic issues rather than deeper conceptualisation of the issues (1998: 199-201). Whilst confirming the value of reflection in furthering practice he acknowledges how easy it is for practitioners to neglect the deeper purposes of teaching when perpetually engaged in the short-term 'busy-ness' of practice. Within the TBtP group, re-

flective dialogue related to classroom organisation and the management of resources, rather than, for example the moral obligation to ensure 'equitable access to the best possible education for all children' (Calderhead and Gates, 1993; Zay, 1999: 215).

Practitioners' concerns about teaching and learning are embedded in the pragmatic. There are difficulties in applying these pragmatic concerns to the process of reflection without a framework to direct or support deeper conceptualisation. It appears that the rhetoric appeal of Schön's work diverts attention from the lack of appropriate practical examples designed to facilitate further, deeper effective reflection (Newman, 1999). It is not the intention of this research to disparage the value of the immediate, minutiae of daily activities for practitioners may possibly neglect the underlying purposes of teaching when they are perpetually engaged in the short-term busyness of practice. The tools of pedagogy are activities, so it follows that much of practitioner thinking is a reflection of actions.

Schön identified different forms of reflection including reflection on knowing in practice which involves looking back on actions and reflecting, i.e. reflection-on-action. Secondly, reflection-in-action occurs in the midst of action. Simple, gentle musing at an anecdotal, descriptive level frequently occurred during the early stages of the project, yet that alone is unlikely to lead to critical reflectivity (Newman 1999).

In exploring the literature, consideration was given to ways in which practitioners may have acquired understanding and training in reflective practice. Newman (1999) suggests that Schön's studies have been promoted in teacher education institutions, reaching beginning teachers more frequently perhaps than reaching experienced practitioners. At the time of the research, there was little evidence of ways in which experienced practitioners have been informed about reflective practice other than in small case studies (Goodfellow, 2000; Lomax, 2000).

Goodman (1991: 60) suggests that whilst reflective skills may be learned they also need to be accompanied by a 'dynamic 'way of being' in the classroom'. Attitudes such as open-mindedness, or an enthusiasm, a willingness to confront practice and

take risks may be encouraged in pre-service teachers yet changing attitudes is more complex for practitioners who are experienced and established in their practice.

### **Nature of reflection**

Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) insists that reflective practice is a complex process, blending practice with principles, an approach to practice, not an activity which occurs from time to time; it is a whole way of being.

In extending and developing Schön's theories, Zeichner and Liston (1990) propose four inter-related aspects of reflective practice:

- academic aspects focusing on the curriculum, subject knowledge, technical competence and the need for pedagogical knowledge. Consequently practitioners are encouraged to examine *how* to teach as well as *what* to teach (Shulman, 1987);
- thoughtful qualities of teaching strategies encouraging teachers to engage, deliberate and examine alternative strategies before making pedagogical decisions (Ross and Kyle, 1987);
- interpreting observations in order to identify the interests and developmental needs of learners (Duckworth, 1987);
- acknowledging the social and political context of education (Beyer, 1988). In this social reconstructivist model, practitioners scrutinise their own classroom practice while also considering the broader context of the institution and its wider community (Elliott, 1990).

Sparks-Langer et al (1990), on the other hand, advocate three approaches to reflection suggesting practitioners consider a:

- cognitive approach in which they focus on decision making and constructing new meanings and understandings;
- narrative approach in which personal experiences are surfaced and used to create meanings and principles. Holly (1989: 76) suggests that writing is a powerful means for exploring practice for it taps tacit knowledge – brings into focus the

taken-for-granted knowledge. She suggests that engaging in this level of reflection is challenging, in stating 'Cutting a pathway through a jungle takes courage and tenacity'. However, she continues to promote this as a means of celebrating and respecting the complexities of pedagogy. Through this, practitioners may be able to affirm ideas or transform perspectives.

- critical approach in which practitioners are encouraged to articulate their beliefs and examine, critically different methodologies and styles of teaching. Sparks-Langer et al (1990: 23) claim that proficient teachers seek out other opportunities to 'cultivate their own learning' for they are aware that experience alone is not always a good teacher; it is not sufficient for '*practice to inform practice*'.

Dadds (1995) introduces another dimension, which suggests why experienced practitioners find developing a reflective approach to practice so complex and challenging. Despite the relevance of reflection to continuing professional development, Dadds (ibid: 288) pleads for an additional acknowledgement of the affective responses within reflective practice and argues that practitioners may be at their 'most vulnerable' when considering their role as teacher for 'existing images of the professional self might be challenged, questioned, rethought and reshaped'. These cognitive processes are accompanied by affective responses, in which personal risks cannot be exaggerated. They are essential aspects of change. The opening reference, in this chapter, to being '*torn apart*' supports this statement. Day (1999b) also acknowledges that reflective practice which leads to change, is a highly complex process involving affective and cognitive responses of the individuals involved. In a later study, Dadds (1995) suggests that emphasis on a cognitive perspective of reflection lacks the subjective, affective dimensions. Her account of a study of practitioners' work in schools is reproduced here in full in order to capture the impact of the affective dimension:

The teachers' descriptions and accounts of their work bore little resemblance to the tidiness of the action research models. Good research planning sometimes failed. Serendipity often prospered. The teachers fretted, declared, delighted, cried, argued with colleagues, suppressed frustrations with their word processors and caretakers, left their wives and husbands in the pursuit of development and practical theories. Affective dimensions of the action research process were missing from the neat models but not from the teachers' untidy lived realities. I had a

daily urge to lift the flaps and corners of the action research arrows; to take a closer look at the embroiled underworlds below the clean theoretical diagrams. I had a need of additional and different action research discourses.

She provides evidence of the close relationship between affective and cognitive aspects of reflective practice:

There were other changes which affected [the teacher's] professional life. She alluded primarily to the development of confidence, . . . I have become far more confident', she acclaimed. Nor, she felt, was it groundless. It had its roots in increased knowledge. Its source lay in being 'more knowledgeable on educational matters' and, as a result 'being able to converse more effectively with other educationalists'. The knowledge had given her confidence. The confidence had underpinned and improved professional communications. This improved capability as a professional communicator fed upon itself and generated other cycles of confidence. 'This has given me more confidence in my job and this has spilled over into my personal development', Vicki claimed.

These links between relevant professional knowledge, communication skills and confidence had given rise to the changes.

(Dadds, 1995: 29)

These claims are not generalisable. They do nonetheless represent one person's reality and as such are acknowledged and valued. Although reflective practice is sometimes presented as a hierarchical model, there is no indication within the literature that one approach within reflective practice is necessarily superior to another, but more that each level is enriched by the presence of the other. Equally, a hierarchical model does not imply a linear, sequential, predictable, tidy development through stages of reflective practice. The following section examines its complexities.

### **Levels, layers, phases and stages within reflective practice**

There are many reflective strategies which may lead to deeper effective thinking.

The concept of levels of reflective practice, from the technical to deeper conceptualisation and considerations of political, ethical issues, recurs throughout this investigation. It is a highly complex, multi-dimensional process involving critical thinking characterised by practitioners who question (or deconstruct) the way in which they

view their professional world. With experience and clearly defined views of teaching and learning, expert practitioners may engage in ongoing exploration of contemporary views of pedagogy so ensuring their understanding benefits from new evidence of how children learn. Dahlberg et al (1999: 34) insist

that through reflection, opportunities are created within which 'alternative discourses and constructions can be produced and new boundaries created'. It may not be easy to distance from former constructs for they are unwittingly 'embedded in metanarratives and discursive practices', and place 'boundaries on our knowledge and our critical abilities, but it can be done. To do so, as pedagogues and researchers, we must first make visible – unmask – and problematise prevailing (and therefore usually taken-for-granted) discourses, and the constructions, practices and boundaries they produce. This unmasking requires us to enhance our reflexivity'. It was found that unmasking is a slow multi-layered process, although an essential pre-cursor to reflection.

Newman (1999: 99) suggests that opportunities for reflective practice may occur at various levels, often in social contexts which provide opportunities to engage in language-games such as 'doubting, explaining, giving reasons, reflecting, which all have their place within the particular social contexts in which teaching and teacher education are found . . . as a way of making explicit what has hitherto been implicit'.

The diversity of reflective practice theories are implicit within the various approaches and subtleties examined in literature (Babic et al, 1998). Goodman (1991) referring to Dewey's earlier work (1933) suggests three precursors to effective reflective practice used to inform the methods within the research (discussed more fully in Chapter Four).

Firstly, it is suggested that practitioners need a clearly identified focus. Van Manen (1977) identified three focus levels:

- practical, technological issues where practitioners consider, for example, the techniques required to fulfil learning intentions;

- theoretical principles and their relationship with practice, where practitioners may consider the implications and consequences of their teaching;
- focus level in which practitioners consider the broader, ethical and political issues and their relevance to the classroom.

These levels are not intended to be hierarchical but are closely interrelated. Van Manen also suggested that practitioners need a framework in order to connect the focused theories to the reality of the classroom so that reflection is enriched by contemporary theories as well as current practices.

- practitioners engage in the *process* of reflection. Earlier works have previously identified the critical, cognitive process of thinking within reflection (Dewey, 1933; Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Guilford, 1967, De Bono, 1970; Ornstein, 1972; Maslow, 1977). Three processes of thinking initially appear to be contradictory although the combination of all three may lead to reflective practice;
- the first is routine thought, almost thinking without thinking, where patterns of behaviour are determined by inherited routines;
- rational thought, carefully considered, logical and thorough;
- balanced by penetrating, intuitive thought. Goodman (1991) suggests that intuitive implies immediate insight, without reasoning, possibly perceptive thought which may lead to imaginative creative responses;
- practitioners adopt an attitude, disposition or approach, progressing to deeper levels of critical reflection.

The TBtP project provided a playful focus. As will be seen in Chapter Six, the group developed an ethos of reflection in which critical, penetrating dialogue was stimulated and valued although this did not occur immediately. Convery (1998) confirms that initially reflective dialogue might be conducted at a pragmatic level. Practical theories are more limited in their scope and precision; they become a reflection of the immediate experiences they represent which in themselves may lack breadth or scope. However even though these theories may be limited, practitioner knowledge does represent one reality, a framework for learning to be acknowledged, respected and incorporated

into the general body of knowledge about play. The TBtP practitioners' knowledge was used as the basis for developing a more critically reflective approach to playful practices.

Bain et al (1999) state that a reflective approach is characterised by a systematic inquiry which may occur along a spectrum ranging from

- reporting events;
- responding with no attempt to make judgment;
- relating an incident to prior learning in an attempt to gain superficial understanding;
- reasoning, where an attempt is made to analyse, conceptualise and explore the links between theory and practice, and finally
- reconstructing practice at an abstract level of thinking. This is an on-going process which continues to challenge at each level of reflection and throughout maturing practices.

Whilst practitioners in the TBtP project stated they valued reflective practice, its application and relevance to their practice appeared to be problematic. During the literature study, some opportunities for promoting reflective practice were identified:

- additional resourcing and training;
- development of collaborative support amongst practitioners.

#### **Reflective practice requires additional resourcing and training**

Day (1993a) argued that much lip service has been paid to the need for practitioners to engage in reflective practice. When the concept of reflective practice was promoted by Schön, there was relatively limited knowledge of the benefits and challenges within the various levels of reflection and little guidance on the conditions required to ensure reflective practice might occur (Copeland et al, 1991). For example, budgets and resource provision for in-service development were more likely to be short, quick-fix tips for teachers, especially in the context of frequent changes current at the

time. This presents practitioners with degrees of tension when professional development through reflective practice is encouraged, although little consideration is paid to the ways in which this might be facilitated or resourced, particularly at deeper levels in which change might be facilitated over extensive periods.

Whilst reflective practice is usually included in initial teacher training institutions Bullough and Gitlin (1991: 52) argue that reflective enquiry is often neglected by novice practitioners in hot pursuit of 'institutional survival'. They identify the challenge for practitioners whose values later become so deeply embedded that it becomes difficult to articulate early influences of training. They also raise the dilemma that exists when honouring practitioners' current reflexive knowledge, whilst also endeavouring to enhance practice through the challenging processes of reflective practice - an unexpected yet relevant source of information. Whilst practitioners are experienced in classroom teaching, it could be argued that in the context of reflective enquiry, they may be considered novice practitioners, for their attitudes and theories in action may be deeply rooted in habitual practices and so are barely accessible to the process of reflective practice. The dichotomy arises that novice practitioners have the skills but not the personalised, pedagogical content, whilst experienced practitioners have the repertoire of evidence but without readily accessible skills and attitudes to enable them to conceptualise the issues. The principles of reflective practice are relevant to all practitioners, both experienced and novices alike.

Laframboise and Griffith, (1997) advises that novices lack the experiential base from which they can retrieve alternative strategies to inform decision-making. They also lack the insight obtained through richer description of pupils' backgrounds and learning although these can be supplemented through literature, examples of similar contexts.

McIntyre (1993) argues that reflection is more relevant for experienced practitioners for three reasons:

- with experience, actions become fluent and intuitive, so an ongoing process and attitude of reflection is required in order to surface and articulate underpinning assumptions before any conscious changes or developments can be made. Novice practitioners on the other hand will have few established routines (Colton and Sparks-Langer et al, 1993) but will be consciously deliberating and establishing aspects of expertise;
- experienced practitioners have a rich repertoire of experiences on which to draw, offering opportunities for creative, critical reflection in and on their experiences for resolving dilemmas relating to, for examples, values; this might involve considerations of developing a sense of community, exercising care and compassion towards children, fostering a sense of pupil empowerment, respect diversity, children's rights, and professional demeanour – being committed, passionate, reflective, enthusiastic and trustworthy (Schön, 1983; Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998: 36);
- McIntyre (1993) claims that experienced practitioners are more likely to have had opportunities to develop the skills of reflective practice. However, while there is recent literature on training student teachers to develop skills for reflective practice (Moje and Wade, 1997), at the time of the research there was no evidence of the effectiveness of reflective practice training being offered to experienced, early years practitioners.

### **Reflective practice requires collaborative support**

Schön (1969) advocated a need to develop a culture of support for the process of change, a willingness to engage with teachers' own and other values and beliefs. He also suggested that at deeper levels of supported reflective practice, different value paradigms might be confronted. For example, Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) suggest that whilst there is a political assumption that all schools appreciate the purpose and value of having student teachers in school, (DfEE, 1998) the ways in which students are welcomed and supported varies considerably. Schön (1983) considered exploring the political context an essential aspect of RP especially where practitioners are embroiled in conflicting goals, purposes or faced with increased pressures for efficiency.

The current policy and curriculum framework in England is based on an outcomes-led framework which is at odds with the stated pedagogical values of the TBtP group (Wood and Bennett, 1999). Consequently, many of the discontinuities they experienced were related to the incongruities between the two paradigms – their own child centred values and those represented by the current curriculum (SCAA, 1996, 1997).

### **Summary**

Unmasking and unbounding embedded knowledge is a critical aspect of reflective practice. During one of the interviews in this research, one practitioner referred to the discovery of '*knowledge you'd forgotten from long ago*', but surfacing forgotten knowledge alone does not deepen pedagogical knowledge nor facilitate change. Reflective practice, involves an on-going process of enquiry, linked to cognitive and affective responses. As practice matures, the nature of challenge may develop from pragmatic concerns to deeper ethical and political conceptualisation. However, this demands time, support, focus, cognitive self-awareness and explicit pedagogical knowledge. In the context of the present research study, these aspects of reflective practice are significant and were born in mind when considering the process and methodology.

Unmasking, unbounding and being '*torn apart*' is part of the cyclical process of reflective practice. For clarity of communication, it is presented as a discrete phase – an essential component of reflective practice if pedagogical thinking is deepened and practice improved. This process of deconstructing values, beliefs and understandings is discussed in the following section.

## SUPPORTING DECONSTRUCTION

FIGURE 2: DECONSTRUCTION

| WHO                       | WHEN: conditional, conceptualisation   | HOW: process, confrontation   | WHAT: objective   |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|
| Schön, (1987)             | Begins at tacit 'knowing-in-action'  | Through shared dialogue   |   |
| Spodek (1988)             |  | Talking   | Surfacing invisible pedagogy  |
| Cole (1989)               | In context of trust  | Supported challenge with researchers / partnership                            |   |
| Simmons (1989)            |  | Dialogue  | Levels of pedagogical language;<br>Simple pedagogy<br>Conceptual<br>Principled<br>Conceptual  |
| Goodman (1991)            | With experience, encouragement and collaborative relationship  | A dynamic way of being  | Focus:<br>Practical<br>Theoretical<br>Ethical<br>Process<br>Routine<br>Rational<br>Intuitive<br>Attitude<br>Open-mindedness<br>Responsibility<br>Enthusiasm |
| Griffiths and Tann (1991) | Immediate/ instinct<br>Pause, procedural<br>Time out for hrs /days<br>Research - wks / months<br>Reconstruct - years |   |   |
| Dadds (1995)              |  | Involves affective and cognitive domain                                       |   |
| Boström (1997)            | In partnership with researcher   | Lack of uniform language & concepts.  |   |
| Jensen et al (1997)       | Experienced practitioners. Extend practice but non-judgmental  | Talk about, locate 'voices'. Fluency derived from discussing classroom events |   |
| Hord (1998)               |  | Use cameo (Moyles, Geddis, Merry). Deconstruct with sensitive support         |   |
| Dahlberg et al (1999)     | Through use of writing journals  | Talk, willingness to question & deconstruct                                   | Embedded theories inform practice   |
| O'Connell-Rust (1999)     |  | Spontaneous vignettes   |   |
| Qualter and Dean, (1999)  |  | Articulation & problematisation makes explicit 'taken for granted' pedagogy   |   |

The aims of reflective practice have been clarified and its multi-layers identified. This section now examines the early processes, which may lead to critical enquiry. An essential element of reflective practice is the ability, the disposition, the enthusiasm and willingness to question, or 'deconstruct' the ways in which practitioners view their practice (Dahlberg et al, 1999: 34).

This involves conceptualisation and confrontation, as follows:

- conceptualisation: identifying conceptual aspects of pedagogy, leading to problematisation. In particular, Dahlberg et al (1999) suggests that located within postmodernity, discourse of meaning making assumes multiple perspectives and voices. This may occur at a pragmatic level, for instance considering ways in which classroom organisation may support learning, promote development within a context of the preferred values of the school and its community. At a deeper level, this may include considerations of the multiple values and ideologies as frequently occur in early years curriculum and political contexts (Wood and Bennett, 1999). Conceptualisation involves a process of rigorous questioning, through interrogating pedagogical documentation, applying cognitive ability to hear practitioners' voices, encounters and dialogues, application of critical and reflexive thinking;
- confrontation: a willingness to confront potential dilemmas within practice. These two processes are examined in this following section.

### **Deconstruction through conceptualisation**

It has been established that articulating values, beliefs and understandings is problematic (Bullough and Gitlin, 1991; Jensen et al, 1997). Practitioners process pedagogical information as they work with children, their interactions and interventions informed by their perceptions of teaching and learning, however because these values are so deeply embedded surfacing an 'invisible pedagogy' merits further investigation (Spodek, 1988: 14).

### **Conceptualisation: through talk**

The value of talk as a precursor to reflective thinking is well documented. It is referred to as surfacing theories, locating voices, unrooting pedagogy, articulating tacit beliefs, seeking an invisible pedagogy, reflective conversations within situations and many others. These concepts and their related methodologies are discussed here.

Talking helps practitioners to surface their own theories, in order to reflect and transform ways of working with young learners (Johns and Freshwater, 1998) whilst careful listening, reflection and thoughtful informed responses enable them to see teaching in ways that are not available in the bustle of the school day. Jensen et al (1997: 863)

also suggest that through having opportunities to talk about practice or tell stories about their daily activities, practitioners begin to 'locate their voices and become more aware of their pedagogical intentions'. Dahlberg et al (1999) confirm this and suggest that unknowingly theories are embodied so that ideas, understanding and actions spontaneously and fluently inform theories. This may result in practitioners becoming so familiar with activities and their embodied theories, that theory becomes confused with realities. Consequently, this embodiment of experiences becomes such an intuitive response that surfacing these beliefs, the 'invisible pedagogy', is complex (Bernstein, 1975, Spodek, 1988: 14). The process of promoting articulation provides evidence of personal constructs that may be used in reflective action. Through talking about practice, focusing on the 'doing', describing what teaching looks like, defining what will be the evidence of children's learning, practitioners begin to recognise and understand the impact of their teaching on children's learning.

Reflective practice occurs at many levels, from an initial pragmatic level focusing on practical realities, anecdotal recalling of events, through to deeper critical enquiries in which values, beliefs and understandings are questioned, interrogated and deconstructed. Schön (1987) argued that reflective practice begins with focusing attention on current interactions and describing largely tacit knowing-in-action. This is presented as the simplest component of reflective practice where drawing on everyday practical, knowledge is revealed through practitioners' actions. When practitioners get together this often occurs spontaneously as they talk about the day's events, surfacing the multiple voices of their experiences and understandings.

Qualter and Dean (1999) suggest that the process of articulation and problematisation serves to make explicit the 'taken for granted' aspects of pedagogy. Practitioners are not always able to identify and articulate pedagogical values and beliefs, effective, successful aspects of their work and (Turner-Bissett, 1999). In order to support practitioners to locate their voices (Jensen et al 1997) they need opportunities and time, to recount the anecdotes and stories of the daily activities in which they are engaged. Discussing classroom experiences with each other promotes a fluency of discourse as

they present, listen and relate to each other's accounts. Provision was made at each meeting for talk – the articulation of values and beliefs.

Sparks-Langer et al (1990) state proficient practitioners are aware that experience alone is not sufficient to sustain good teaching; masterful teachers know the value of talking, observing, critiquing and writing in an attempt to develop a critical approach to practice although it must be noted here that the debate about what constitutes good teaching, good practice, masterful teachers, continues to challenge practitioners (Wood, 1999: 22).

Talking about practice develops into more focused exchanges, dialogue and reflective conversations. Hord et al (1998) suggest that various strategies are developed to support and promote more focused exchanges. This can be done through use of cameos and through collaborative discussions.

**Conceptualisation: through cameos**

Kroath (1989) suggests that practitioners provide their own examples of practice, through anecdotes or cameos. These stories illustrate practice and theoretical understandings in order to make explicit the implicit theories. In addition, within research projects researchers are advised to abstract raw findings from practitioners' dialogue. These initial findings can then be presented to practitioners and used, through discussions, to promote reflective practice. However, Kroath argued that implicit theories must be made explicit before any changes or modifications might be made to practice (Kroath, 1989: 68). He suggests that possibly one of the most important competencies of a facilitator would be to help individual practitioners develop a representational model for making implicit theories explicit a suggestion which was adopted in the TBtP project. During his research, project participants were asked to write simple anecdotes, where 'anecdote' is defined as being a short and simple story, relating to one specific incident (Van Manen, 1999: 20). Additional advice was provided to participants on writing anecdotes suggesting they remain close to the central idea of the story, include concrete details and quotations to illustrate key points, then promptly conclude the anecdotes as soon as key points have been raised. The resulting descrip-

tions were used to explore and analyse aspects of teachers and pupils in order to identify their own constructs of teaching and learning. Providing guidelines or offering a definition was essential in the TBtP project because the practitioners' difficulty in conceptualising issues resulted in their cameos being very detailed. They were written in order to give a detailed, accurate account of an event rather than being used to illustrate a concept or key point for discussion.

Carter (1995) suggests that personal narrative – telling stories - and camaraderie that develops through shared experiences, can become a starting point for personal and professional development. Story telling may reveal the conceptual nature of activities, which are often significant to practitioners. The collaborative processes involved in discussions may enhance mutual understandings of the different contexts, for practitioner and academics alike. This was one particularly important aspect and reason, stated by the group, for their continued participation in the project and research.

O'Connell-Rust (1999: 370) suggests that practitioners find understanding through their own 'spontaneous vignettes' sometimes simply triggered by over-hearing something said by someone else. When together, practitioners often engage in talk focused on classroom activities. These conversations, which contain their own 'theories in action', help practitioners make sense of the day-to-day actions, in a supportive, collegiate environment. In responding to other stories, practitioners recall similar episodes and promote further dialogue.

Using stories and illustrations in research provides opportunities to share knowledge and understanding, so that academics and practitioners learn from each other. Cameos are used to prompt practitioners recall specific actions and surface highly contextualised rationales. The use of cameos, scenarios and illustrations in literature about play (Moyles, 1995; Beetlestone, 1998; Merry, 1998) and in research projects (Geddis et al, 1998) can be similarly effective and contribute to illustrating the links between principles and practice whilst also supporting mutual understanding. Hord et al (1998) advocate communicating in concrete, practical terms suggesting that practitioners are unlikely to conceptualise issues during the early stages of considering change to prac-

tice. Using cameos in discussions results in communication that is more effective and reduces practitioners' resistance to changes in practice. It is also more desirable and more effective through illustrations and cameos, than through external pressures applied to sustain focused concentration and commitment to new methodologies (Hord et al, 1998)

Stories of individual children's responses recounted amongst practitioners serve to illustrate, add colour, texture and meaning to theoretical discussion (Huber and Whelan, 1999). In this way, the process of locating a professional dialogue may be promoted through collegiate support rendering theories accessible to practitioners.

#### **Conceptualisation through documentation**

Documentation, including journals can be used as a way of supporting practitioners' conceptualisation of classroom events (Dahlberg et al, 1999). Examining documentation, for example, planning for play, can promote reflection, providing an opportunity to reflect on one specific aspect of personal practice, distanced by time. Documentation provides a living record of pedagogical practice, which can be returned to, used to build on experiences, construct new theories and engage in the production of new knowledge. This was used extensively in the research and is detailed in Chapter Four.

#### **Conceptualisation through collaboration**

The value of collaboration within reflective practice was reported from as long ago as the 1940s by Lewis (1946) and Lippitt, (1949). More recently, it has been re-discovered and developed by Saphier (1982) and Cole (1989). Its contribution to reflective practice, with the symbiotic benefits of both internal and external perspectives on practice continues, according to Ruddock (1987), to energise, enrich and validate findings.

Collaborative reflection, co-construction of embedded beliefs, was applied by Spodek (1988) while working with a group of nine early years practitioners in order to determine the variability of their implicit theories. Through interviews and observations by the researcher, concepts underlying the practitioners' decisions were identified and

presented to each person for confirmation or contradiction, promoting further discussion and understanding of each other's perspectives.

Simply raising issues for discussion will not necessarily lead to reflective intelligence Goodman (1994). Practitioners need collaborative support in particular where reflective practice is promoted through partnership with researchers. The latter researchers hold particular responsibilities to provide appropriate levels of support and, as we have already seen, supported challenge. Schön (1987: 323) suggested that researchers and practitioners enter into a 'collaborative relationship' through which practitioners may reveal to reflective researcher partners the ways in which their thinking informs practice.

Exploring the relationships between theories of academia and practice are essential elements of reflection. Lather (1991) claims there are synergetic aspects within these relationships between the wider professional communities involving personal constructs and values, which may inform reflective practice. She suggests academics and practitioners explore the multiple perspectives of their professional communities in their pursuit of an 'empowering pedagogy'. Schön, (1983) reasons that outcomes from shared dialogue between practitioners and academics form the basis for reflective practice, enabling both to more fully comprehend, articulate and communicate the increasing number of different professional contexts for play.

The process of supported reflection, through collaboration, observation and discussion resulted in the TBtP practitioners beginning to understand some of the educational values they had acquired and internalised. They began to unroot theories that were found to be forms of personal, practical knowledge rather than 'technical knowledge of child development and learning' (Spodek, 1988: 27). Working with researchers added an additional dimension to the discussions as both contributed to the process of critical reflection. Day (1993) has emphasised the social dimension of reflective practice which emerges through planned opportunities to talk, helping practitioners to articulate and make explicit, implicit theories. The benefit of collaborative discussion, between practitioners and researchers, also serves to shift the focus from the immediate

to issues that are more fundamental. Focused talk is considered different from conversational exchange which occurs without planning or focus. This is not intended to negate the value of the immediate minutiae of the day, although it is easy for practitioners to neglect the underlying purposes of teaching when they are perpetually engaged in the short term busy-ness of practice. The tasks and activities of teaching are embedded in action, practitioners are engaged in *doing*, so it is not surprising that much of their thinking and language reflect those actions. It is possible that through working together in a collaborative process, practitioners and researchers begin to recognise the theories embedded within their personal narrative. Working together, it might be possible to recognize the principles within the knowledge that has emerged from talk, discussions, conversations and deliberations. As previously indicated, practitioners talk eloquently about the events of the day and relate pedagogy in anecdotal terms. It is inevitable that their reflections are grounded in the activities and responsibilities in which they are absorbed, but not necessarily desirable that they become restricted in their vision 'prisoners of their own experiences' (Convery, 1998: 327).

For Convery (1998), collaborative discussion with academics and practitioners was an essential element in advancing the focus from the immediate to more fundamental issues. An engagement with academic theory also served to focus on professional aspects as opposed to the situational - the conceptual as well as the pragmatic.

There are also opportunities to engage in collaborative reflection with colleagues who have similar experiences, adding an additional dimension to this process.

Calderhead (1988) argued that reflection provides an opportunity to link theory with practice, which invites practitioners to take a more active role in their own development (Holly, 1984, Ballantyne and Packer, 1995). Through encouraging practitioners to engage in reflective practice, professionalism is constructed by the application of theories to practice and reflection in action (Furlon et al, 1988: 203). For example while practitioners may be considering a practical issue within their classroom, the related theoretical principles may be explored and identified. The related implications might then be identified, explored and examined (LaBoskey, 1993). This provides a

model for practitioners, linking their pragmatic concerns to relevant theories providing more critical, questioning enquiry.

Deconstruction, the key component of reflective practice, requires conceptualisation. Hord et al (1987) suggest that change may be most successful if its support is planned to need the assessed needs of the individual users. Promoting conceptualisation of issues may be supported through talk, through contextualising issues in cameos, examples of play episodes and through collaborative dialogue. A second component of reflective practice is confrontation. This concept is explored in the following section.

### **Deconstruction: through confrontation**

The concept of confrontation implies disagreement, altercation, to be avoided at all costs (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994) yet Schön (1983) considered this to be an essential aspect of reflective practice, especially where practitioners are embroiled in conflicting goals, purposes or faced with increased pressures for efficiency. Schön (1969) advocated developing a culture of support, for the process of change involves a willingness to engage with practitioners' own and other's values and beliefs. Confrontation involves accepting challenges at theoretical and practical levels. At these deeper levels, different value paradigms may be confronted. However, confrontation requires sensitive handling. For example, in the context of the TBtP research, it was important that any questioning or challenging of practitioner-researchers was neither interpreted as a personal attack nor contained hidden value judgments on the quality of teaching (Kroath, 1989).

Dahlberg et al (1999: 106) affirm that reflective practice involves initially looking back at earlier practice, recapturing events and drawing on concrete human experiences. Reflective practice is concerned with the activities within classrooms, with the ways in which young children learn. In order to impact practice there needs to be engagement in rigorous confrontation, a response to challenge in which the reality and passion of prejudices and assumptions are acknowledged, the messiness and ambiguities of learning accepted (Cherryholmes, 1994; Toulmin, 1990). For example, there are inevitable conflicts within the frequently held social constructivist and construc-

tivist theories of learning. Both maintain the child is an active learner, although the former, promoting the co-construction of knowledge, places different demands on the practitioner from a constructivist approach. Identifying and exploring underpinning pedagogical theories requires an informed approach and a willingness to be challenged. Confrontation involves interrogating pedagogical theories and applying the results of interrogation to activities and situations in the classroom. Confrontation may occur through discussion. Bullough and Gitlin (1991) consider the implications of talk at a deeper conversational level required to support reflective practice for practitioners. Focused discourse, underpinned by mutual respect is characterised by a willingness to confront prejudices and tolerate differences, and a commitment to develop extended professionalism (Brubacher et al, 1994 Pollard and Tann, 1993, Evans et al 1994, Dahlberg et al, 1999). Confronting prejudices during the meetings was challenging and only possible in a context of trust and respect.

Jensen et al (ibid) raise the dilemma faced in encouraging practitioners to further develop practice, whilst also respecting existing knowledge. Without an established culture of extending practice, the concept of reflective practice could be interpreted by practitioners as a less than subtle indictment on existing practices (Bullough and Gitlin, 1991). The process of deconstruction may be introduced with sensitivity and appropriate levels of support (Hall and Hord, 1987). Challenging others also requires tenacity and courage.

#### **Confrontation: through accepting challenge**

Schön (1983: 43) also advocated descending to 'swampy lowlands', that is, engaging in an exploration of learning, accepting the discomfort of challenge, progressing from the pragmatic to theoretical where subjecting values and contradictions to scrutiny is more likely to lead to rigorous critical appraisal of practice (Handal, 1990). Confrontation involves seeing practice and facing conceptualised issues. Whitehead (2000: 93) enquires into ways of improving practice through applying originality of mind and critical judgment particularly during his interrogation and encounters with research methodologies and theories. He presents a taxonomy of methodology based on a reflective spiral which begins with expressing concern about certain values within his

practice, then imagining a way forward. These actions involve being confronted by the negation of values within practice then accepting its inherent challenge.

Hord et al (1998: 3) insist that change involves developmental growth which can be supported by 'change facilitators' who respond to practitioners' questions. Confrontation through challenge must be accompanied by differentiated individualised support. They suggest that during periods of confrontation practitioners will experience intense personal concerns although they may not be communicated in explicit terms. Confrontation without support will not lead to meaningful development in understanding or practice. Inherent in these complex processes of reflective practice are several constraints.

**Constraints: through sharing languages**

One difficulty in arriving at shared understandings between practitioner and researcher is the lack of uniform language used. Boström (1997) argues that both practitioners and researchers use different concepts and terminology in their discussions, so further dividing the different perspectives and understandings. Fluent, sustained discourse between these two groups is difficult to develop whilst there is little shared language. In addition, there are limited opportunities for practitioner and researcher understandings to be enriched by each other's experiences and knowledge. The complexities of reflective practice are further compounded when exploring theories of play – also a highly complex concept.

**Constraints: through celebrating pedagogy**

Hurst and Joseph (1998) raise concern that silenced pedagogy undermines the value of appropriate training for early years practitioners, reinforcing the 'Mum's Army' initiatives which advocated removing the requirement for training (DfEE, 1993). The argument to value and continue training for early years practitioners continues at a political and theoretical level, in a sensitive and accessible text. At the time of writing, there is no evidence within literature of a culture that applauds pedagogical talk within early years. Two references were provided to the group; these provided a basis

for discussion of the ways in which 'reinstatement of pedagogy' is essential for improving practice (Geddis et al, 1998: 95 – 106; Hurst and Joseph, 1998: 10 – 12).

### **Summary**

Practitioners need opportunities to engage in dialogue in order to make explicit their values, beliefs and understandings. This process can be assisted by use of cameos, narrative and literature and is likely to lead to a heightened theoretical awareness and deeper understanding of teaching and learning. Reflective practice requires conceptualisation of pedagogical issues – focused, sustained consideration within a collaborative, supportive relationship. Working in partnership does not necessarily promote reflective practice, but does tend to support its development (Zay, (1999). Developing a reflective practice, questioning one's view of teaching and learning leads to developing competencies. Practitioners need continued differentiated support if this process of deconstruction involving conceptualisation and confrontation, is to later lead to reconstruction of practices.

The following section explores the concept of reconstruction and its relevance within the literature for practitioners.

## PROMOTING RECONSTRUCTION

FIGURE 3: RECONSTRUCTION

| WHO                           | WHEN  | HOW  | WHAT   |
|-------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Hord 1997                     | Change takes many years to achieve,                               | With differentiated support                        |  |
| Kroath, 1989                  |   | Make implicit explicit                             |  |
| Geddis 1989                   |   |  | Scholarship of pedagogy, building collaborative communities of inquiry           |
| Simmons, 1989                 | In collaborative enquiry  | Through use of pedagogical language                |  |
| Schön 1983<br>Nias 1988       |   | Researcher responsibility to hear P's voices       |  |
| Holly 1989                    |   | Requires courage and tenacity                      | Reveal voices through journal writing  |
| Bullough and Gitlin 1991      |   | Structural changes required                        |  |
| Day 1993                      | Through a culture of enquiry                                      | With policy support at all levels                  |  |
| Cole (1997)                   |   | Skills must be defined                             |  |
| Hurst 1998                    | Through pedagogical enquiry                                       |  |  |
| Dahlberg, 1999                | Through problematisation  | Meaning making co-constructions                    |  |
| Gipps and MacGilchrist (1999) |   | Make explicit values beliefs and understandings    |  |
| Van Manen, 1999               | Through a pedagogical culture                                     | Through use of anecdote                            |  |
| Watkins and Mortimore (1999)  |   | Introduce acceptable concept of pedagogy           |  |
| Adams (thesis)                | Through differentiated, sustained, informed and extensive support | Requires framework grounded in current perceptions | Explicit pedagogy with critical application of theory and experience to practice |

### Reconstruction

Collaborative relationships provide researchers with privileged access to practitioners' lives leading to opportunities for reflective conversations, testing assumptions, formulating problems and deepening levels of reflective thinking (Schön, 1983, 1987). From this stems the potential opportunity to promote 'teacher growth' leading to construction of new understandings, an empowered pedagogy and restructuring practice (Kagan, 1990: 420; Lather, 1991; Schulman 1999).

Cole (1989) maintains that different perspectives – practitioners and researchers, the pragmatic and theoretical, the concrete and abstract, familiar and fresh routines all provide the bases for new meanings, and opportunities to understand familiar routines from different perspectives. New understandings are reconstructed through reflective practice and collaborative support. The accuracy of interpretations that result from collaboration is strengthened by continued, informed, supported challenge (ibid: 227). An intimacy is developed through the shared purposes of observation and reflection that enables both practitioner and researcher to provide mutual support through sharing strengths and expertise. However, since reflection includes exploring personal attitudes and the challenging process of surfacing previously buried values and beliefs, practitioners need an environment of trust and supportive challenge if effective reflection is lead to reconstruction.

This section examines the conditions under which reconstruction might occur. The previous two sections have identified the aims of reflective practice and explored the processes, which may lead to deconstruction. It is essential that this process be continued, particularly in the context of a research project. The related ethical issues, of potentially leaving practitioners 'hanging on to a precipice', are discussed in Chapter Seven (Wood, 2000).

Goodman (1984: 22) argues that raising 'substantive issues' is no guarantee that students will become reflective. This section examines the conditions required to support reconstruction of values beliefs and understandings, that is:

- pedagogical language;
- adequate time;
- differentiated support;
- new understandings;
- culture of reflective practice.

### **Reconstruction through pedagogical language**

Practitioners' values and beliefs are often held subconsciously; they are able to describe what they *do*, but do not possess the language to explain the rationale for their practice. Between researcher and practitioners, supportive dialogue may become difficult even when discussing similar conceptual issues. During communication, similar concepts may be referred to in substance if not in name and their beliefs highly contextualised. For instance, provision may be made for 'water play' but not also for 'exploration' or 'capacity' (Kagan, 1991). Often pedagogical issues are embedded in intuitive, subjective and personal responses; different levels of language inhibit deeper exchanges between practitioner and researcher (ibid: 1991). Understanding practitioners' level of language is used to support the development of reflective thinking between researchers and practitioners (Ross, 1989). A taxonomy is used to measure the nature of practitioners' spoken comments while reflecting or evaluating their experiences in the classroom (Zeichner and Liston, 1985; Hewson and Hewson, 1989; Krogh and Crewes, 1989; Neale and Smith, 1989; Peterson et al, 1989; Ross, 1989; Simmons, 1989; Kagan, 1990). The taxonomies indicate the relationship between thinking, language and practice, ranging from thoughts about practical, curriculum issues to ethical or political issues.

Simmons et al (1989) developed a Reflective Practitioners' Thinking Taxonomy identifying seven categories of teacher cognition - defined as practitioners' self reflections, their values, beliefs and understandings of teaching and learning and the ways in which they recall and analyse practice. The taxonomy is not designed to reveal the nature of deeply held beliefs which may be more effectively surfaced through other more complex procedures – it analyses the levels of reflective, pedagogical thinking, though examining the nature of language used as Figure 4 shows.

The taxonomy is based on the belief that dialogue plays an important scaffolding role in reflective practice and that pedagogical language is required to describe principles of pedagogy (Van Manen, 1977; Kagan, 1990). The categories, presented in Figure 4, illustrate the levels of language, linked to levels of reflective practice which are defined and include examples of typical statements This is discussed in greater depth in

Chapter Four on research methods, as this was also one instrument used to analyse transcripts of meetings and interviews held with the TBtP group. Although a very simple taxonomy requiring additional investigation, it serves to illustrate the often stark difference between practitioner and academic language especially if, for example, language remains at level 2, in which an episode within the classroom is described with one use of pedagogical language; at a higher level, reference may be made to the effect of pedagogical principles on practice, or make reference to moral, ethical or political issues.

FIGURE 4: REFLECTIVE PEDAGOGICAL THINKING TAXONOMY

| LEVEL    | DEFINITION  | EXAMPLE   |
|----------|---|---|
| Level 1  | No descriptive language. No description of an instructional event   | No statement  |
| Level 2  | Simple, layperson description. Description of an instructional event without any use of pedagogical language as concept labels for what occurred  | 'She used groups'   |
|          | <b>PEDAGOGICAL LANGUAGE (CONCEPT) LABELING BEGINS</b>   |   |
| Level 3a | Events labels with appropriate terms.<br>Simple: - description of an instructional event with one use of pedagogical language as a concept label for what occurred  | 'She used co-operative groups'  |
| Level 3b | Complex: Same as Level 3, Simple, but with more than one use of pedagogical language as a concept label   |   |
| Level 4  | Explanation with tradition or personal preference given as the rationale. Same as level 3, plus personal reference or tradition is used to explain an instructional event; reference is made to the use of instructional rules and techniques but not to an explicitly stated cause; pedagogical principles are recognised, but cause - effect connections are stated vaguely | 'We always use reading groups'  |
|          | <b>PRINCIPLED PEDAGOGICAL THINKING BEGINS</b>   |   |
| Level 5a | Explanation with principles or theory given as the rationale.<br>Simple: -An instructional event is explained using one cause - effect pedagogical principle ('if . . then')  | 'Interdependence in group work helps build a desire to help others learn; this sink or swim feeling keeps students committed to their own learning and that of their peers'   |
| Level 5b | Complex: Same as Level 5, Simple, but with more than one cause of cause - effect pedagogical principles   |   |
|          | <b>CONDITIONAL PEDAGOGICAL THINKING BEGINS</b>  |   |
| Level 6a | Explanation with principles / theory and consideration of context factors.<br>Simple: One aspect of contextual data is used, along with cause - effect pedagogical principles to explain an instructional event ("if . . .then . . because . . .")  | 'In this class, students' social groups are generally formed along economic lines. Cooperative learning is especially useful in such situation because it provides repeated positive experiences with children from different backgrounds'                      |
| Level 6b | Complex: Same as Level 6, Simple but with more than one use of contextual data, along with cause - effect pedagogical principles  |   |
|          | <b>MORAL PEDAGOGICAL THINKING BEGINS</b>  |   |
| Level 7  | Explanation with consideration of ethical, moral, political issues<br>Same as Levels 5 & 6, plus reference to moral / ethical / political issues to explain an instructional event  | 'Cooperative learning is being used here because there is a split along economic lines in this community and we want students to accept and value each other in spite of these differences. Such values may contribute, in the long run, to saving this planet' |

Tomlinson (1999) suggests that practitioners' actions and verbalisation are not totally separate implying that the level of practitioner language may be representative of their level of reflective practice and thinking: a low level of pedagogical language indicates a similarly low level of reflection. Earlier studies also imply a direct link between reflective practice and pedagogical language (Ross, 1989; Zeichner and Liston, 1985). These all suggest that pedagogical language must be encouraged in order to promote reflective practice. Bruner (1990) also suggests that narratives, talking about practice, often reflects practitioner cognition, and offers a way of re-constructing reality. He also suggests that the engagement with researchers, may serve to focus on the conceptual in addition to the situational.

Use of pedagogical language within reflective practices, is a critical factor in promoting reconstruction. Developing pedagogical language and the concepts within the labels, requires substantial degree of time – this is discussed in the following section.

#### **Reconstruction: through time**

Engaging in reflective practice is inevitably time consuming and has significant implications for practitioners. Griffiths and Tann (1991) indicate different periods of time associated with the various levels of reflective practice and propose a five level model with references to the time required for specific levels of reflection. This ranges from:

- immediate, instinctive responses and reactions to situations;
- occasional pauses for thought during a day's routine resulting in changes at a procedural level;
- practitioners taking time out to assess past practice, within a period of hours or even days;
- research within practice which is systematic, focused, occurring over many weeks or months;
- reconstructing theories within practice, characterised by abstract, rigorous examinations may extend for many months or years (Hall and Hord, 1987).

### **Reconstruction through differentiated support**

Reflective practice involves change and confrontation even though the concept of confrontation can be harsh, suggesting altercation and treachery. It can be ominous but also implies revelation, unfolding, openness and explicit. Hord et al (1998) insist that addressing and facilitating change can be done in humane and understanding ways that confrontation can be supported and constructive. They claim one of the strengths of the Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) is that understanding the needs, attitudes and skills of the practitioners is a critical factor in promoting change. Consequently, support such as coaching, professional development, materials must be related to practitioners' own perceptions of their needs. CBAM documentation reflects its own philosophy. It provides students who are considering changing practices with clear underpinning principles. Detailed accounts of research and strategies to diagnose, support and interact with practitioners are also included in the CBAM documentation. Hord et al (ibid) also suggest examples of real practice, with illustrations of responses made by practitioners and change facilitators, is also included. The TBtP practitioners produced examples of their practice in the form of written cameos; these were used to promote discussion and support the early processes of change. Written journal entries are often used during studies of practitioners' thinking. Alternative methods, such as audio or video transcriptions are more time consuming to produce and analyse. These methods should all be used with caution as they are based on the belief that measuring language is a reliable indicator of practice. This method was used in the research with caution, being supplemented by additional forms of data collection as described in Chapter Five.

### **Reconstruction through creating new understanding**

In order to reconstruct values, beliefs and understandings, time, informed thinking, pedagogical knowledge and its related language is required. There are also many references within literature suggesting the construction of new understandings may result from collaborative relationships between researchers and practitioners (Ballantyne and Packer, 1995; Bain, Packer and Mills, 1999; Zeichner, 1992; Calderhead and Gates, 1993; LaBoskey, 1993). Developing new understandings may result from working through the tensions between high, academic theory, and the theory that

emerges from everyday practice (Bolin, 1988; Sparks-Langer et al, 1990; Hatton and Smith 1995). Studying literature or examining documentation produced for teaching as learning inform pedagogy although this process presupposes metacognition, also known as reflective intelligence, the ability to think about thinking (Abbott, 1998).

Reconstruction may also occur through the use of reflective journals, produced by practitioners. Holly (1989) reasoned that this can be a powerful way for practitioners to explore past and present practices through discovering new ways of theorising, reflecting, coming to know the multiple realities within one's practice and beginning to construct and reconstruct experiences. This is not without risks and discomforts especially as journal documents may reveal the many voices within practices. Courage and tenacity are needed to cut a 'pathway through the jungle of evidence' (Holly, 1989: 76). These reconstructions will be relevant to practitioner and researcher alike. However, Holly warns of the danger that researchers see practitioners through their own eyes, through the eyes of their own culture. Whilst researchers call attention to a lack in teachers' use of theory to ground their teaching, teachers voice regret at a lack of researchers' real world description and applications of their findings. It has been argued that teachers are not a-theoretical but that researchers are theory - bound, and do not permit the researcher to be open to the subtle and complex nuances that are indications of teachers' theories in use (Schön, 1983).

Reaching a shared definition of anything, especially play, is a highly complex process demanding a uniform language, similar levels of language, philosophical consistencies, in a way that all stakeholders are represented. Geddis et al (1998: 95) propose a 'scholarship of pedagogy' that draws on both the theoretical understanding of researchers and the experiences of practitioners through a process of surfacing and articulating the grounded theory within practitioners' settings and then encouraging them to interrogate formal theories. He argues that it is possible for practical theories, constructed from experiences with children, to be different from formal theories of research in a variety of ways. Two practitioners in his research were encouraged to articulate practice, 'building collaborative communities of inquiry' (ibid). They prepared presentations and discussions of aspects of their practice, and through a process

of construction and reconstruction endeavour to achieve a scholarship of pedagogy. This involved presenting an account of practice to surface their own pedagogical awareness: -

And what of my teaching? I am interested in each of the boys and the plans they are pursuing. I try to make sense, give reasons, and uncover their thinking – questioning their ideas, following their leads and providing sufficient wait time for them to reformulate their ideas. I approach each boy differently . . .

(Geddis et al, 1998: 102)

Using written reflections provided practitioners and researchers with a permanent transcript to re-visit captured practice following their own reflections in an attempt to create a scholarship of pedagogy – ‘a formidable undertaking’ (ibid: 106).

#### **Reconstruction through a culture of reflection**

Structural changes are required in order to cultivate educative communities, and make deep reflection a reality (Bullough and Gitlin, 1991). Day (1993) draws attention to the current context which encourages practitioners to construct meaning through short, medium, and long term planning and being engaged in the actions of teaching, although there are few procedural opportunities to observe and reflect, i.e. to deconstruct at deeper cognitive levels (Handal, 1990). Day (1993) argues that critical attributes of reflection are the engagement in processing problem solving and reconstructing meaning within a culture of inquiry.

Geddis et al (1998: 106) argue ways must be found to move collaborative enquiry out of the confines of academic domain to make it ‘part of the daily lives of school and university teachers’. Schön (1969) appealed for a culture of challenge and critical reflection. Van Manen (1999: 14) also argued the need for a pedagogical culture in which practitioners are encouraged to engage in professional enquiry to ‘problematise the conditions of appropriateness of educational practices’ in particular where the term pedagogy is avoided.

Galton (1999) suggests that practitioners have not had the opportunity to examine one demand before new requirements are introduced. Practitioners’ first response is more

likely to bolt on each development to familiar, safe, existing practice, especially if given new opportunities to reflect on new ideas before considering how to incorporate them into existing structures. Consequently, opportunities to reflect, to deconstruct and reconstruct values, beliefs and understandings are limited.

Sternberg and Martin (1988) concluded that theories alone do not inform practice. Many practitioners also need a framework to assist linking theories of teaching with learning for Blenkin and Kelly (1998: 29) argue that teaching, if not informed by theory is blind 'without a conceptually secure theory is dangerous'.

Practitioners require a structural, cultural framework to support the process of reflection. They are likely to benefit from a culture in which pedagogy is celebrated. Only then are they likely to promote the emergence of new understandings, the result of partnership between theory and practice.

### **Conclusion**

A supportive, collaborative framework can sustain engagement through the stages of deconstruction and reconstruction. This framework must include differentiated support, in which practitioner cognition is nourished within a culture which values and respects pedagogical enquiry.

Collaborative relationships between researcher and practitioners must be sustained in a context of care, respect and integrity (Hall and Hord, 1987). The potential is there to define a pedagogy that transcends both domains. It appears, from the literature, that a reflective approach, other than at a pragmatic level, is not a natural process within the busy lives of practitioners. The contexts in which they teach do not make provision for time to reflect in different ways, - they are encouraged to plan, to think forward, in pragmatic terms but are not encouraged to think conceptually, critically, reflectively about ethical, moral or political issues, as frequently espoused by academics (Day, 1999).

The literature has identified ways in which collaborative partnerships between researchers and practitioners might be mutually beneficial in creating micro cultures in

which the practitioner's voice is acknowledged. Without an ongoing reflective approach to practice, it is unlikely today's children will benefit from new pedagogical understandings.

Without these conditions, it becomes increasingly difficult to surface and develop pedagogical knowledge, begin to reflect in deeper, different ways and sustain such an approach in order to further practice. This is further exacerbated if the focus of enquiry is teaching and learning through play, for that is also uncertain. Specifically relevant to the context of this thesis, uncertainty is raised by Wood (1999) who states that a current weakness of play is that its relationship to pedagogy is not fully understood. It is within this uncertain context that a reflective approach to practice, in particular within the context of play, is pursued. This is a complex approach, an ongoing process which needs support, framework, time, skills, challenge, conceptualisation, confrontation, deconstruction, frame and reframe, pedagogical knowledge, application and reconstruction

Working together, to develop a reflective approach to practice, can create an environment in which practitioners are familiar with '*underlying knowledge*' that enables them to observe and interpret '*the advances that the children have made*'. The following chapter examines the contemporary playful context in which practitioners work.

### CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF LITERATURE: PLAYFUL PEDAGOGY

*I mean we're quite able to set up activities that the children will play happily. . . but I still sort of want, I want my objective in the back of my head, and I want to be able to find out if they've got there or not, which is the hardest bit.*

*What are they learning? What do they know? Where do they need to go next through the play activities? That's the hard bit, not just setting it up and having a good time.*

(Carole, Interview 1)

The original purpose of the research was to explore the practitioners' understanding of play, to discover their realities and their experiences of how children learn through play. The original intention to celebrate play was achieved, unexpectedly, through the interrogation of reflective practice and sustained through their enthusiasm and commitment to teaching and learning through play. Their concerns and enquires also directed the literature review, whilst responding to: *'What are they learning? . . . where do they need to go next? . . . I don't know how to do that'*. Their perspective of play was grounded in actions and narratives: determined through the content and way in which they talked with each other about play and through the documentation they produced for teaching.

Not only is play intrinsically complex, but also it is compounded by the complex and contradictory beliefs and personal, implicit values about play which are often held by practitioners (Berlak et al, 1975). Consequently, their understanding is not based on consistent, easily identifiable constructs. Many of their actions and decisions are informed by an invisible pedagogy (as discussed in the previous chapter). For these very reasons, their beliefs have a powerful impact on practice. Deconstructing practitioners' values, beliefs and understandings is likely also to be a complex process, given what the literature search has revealed. It involves surfacing the implicit theoretical systems that inform practice as well as examining relevant pedagogical theories (Spodek, 1988).

Three aspects of play are presented in this chapter:

- early theories;

- its elusive nature;
- evolving a framework.

The literature on play is vast, so extensive that it is not possible to do justice to its complexity and diversity in this thesis whose primary focus is reflective practice. This chapter begins by identifying some early, classic theories of play, which have informed current understandings. It then explores current views on why a definition of play remains so elusive.

After three years of extensive, intensive research, the TBtP project defined conditions under which play may occur. It stated the nature of children's entitlement to learn through play and asserted the practitioners' entitlement to teach through play. Through a process of reflective practice former understandings of play have been deconstructed. Through collaborative discussion, a revised set of values, beliefs and understandings have been reconstructed. A reference will also be made to the context in which practitioners work, its dilemmas and contradictions (Murphy, 1998).

The theories underpinning these new understandings, a playful pedagogy, are presented in the final section of this chapter.

## EARLY THEORIES OF PLAY

A brief summary of the key theories informing practitioners' invisible pedagogy (as indicated in the previous chapter) is introduced in this first section. Some early theories continue to inform pedagogical interrogations even though, as Wood and Attfield (1996) argue, inherited principles no longer provide an appropriate base for practice today. They suggest that practitioners place themselves in a vulnerable position if they continue to base practice on early theories without also considering contemporary evidence of how children learn.

One of the early principles defined by the group was: '*Play is practice for real life*'. Groos (1901) presented the view that play existed in order to allow the practice of

adult activities and suggested that play in childhood served to prepare for the activities of adulthood, that children's interest in the process of an activity provided opportunities to rehearse skills which would adopt greater significance of purpose in later life; it is unlikely that children have sufficient foresight for this to be intentional (Ellis, 1973).

The surplus energy theories (Spencer, 1873 cited in Rubin, Fein and Vandenberg, 1983; Schiller, 1954) have been inherited by practitioners and continue to be used during the day at playtimes, partly to promote the development of gross motor skills, although this need to dissipate excess energy has later been challenged by Beach (1945: 523 - 541). Although there is no empirical evidence to support this theory, practitioners continue to refer to the need for children to let off steam. Fein and Wiltz (1998) suggest this type of play complements and support the work ethic of the school. Play activities provide a relief from the drudgery and tedium of work, and after periods of relaxation and/or physical exercise, children are expected to return to work refreshed.

Herron and Sutton-Smith's (1971) studies aimed to reformulate the relationship between work and play. They identified the complexity and confusion that exists when for example boating is considered to be play while divergent thinking or creativity might be considered work. Stone (1971) argues that play was considered to be recreational and dramatic, contributing to children's physical development and preparing children for adulthood.

These dilemmas are often faced by practitioners who struggle with their own and children's construct of play and its role in learning: -

*There seem to be three things: children who think they're playing, children who think they working, children who think they're playing at working - and that seems to be the one in the middle. Anything with a pencil or pen is work, so far, almost except for art things, that seems play, but the children who are making something, really engrossed in it, often will say I'm working, or they'll say I'm playing at working. I think that's the very serious side of the play.*  
(Sarah, Interview 1)

Following the initial set of over one hundred principles for play, discussion and negotiations reduced these to seventeen. During the process of negotiating and refining these principles, the practitioners had many opportunities to articulate and surface their understandings of play. Many references were made by them to play being recreational, creative and pleasurable (Perry and Dockett, 1998). Three further principles from the original group of 104 stated that

- Play is pleasurable, spontaneous, uninterrupted, imaginative, creative and uninhibited.
- Play should be enjoyable.
- Play is instinctive and a vital way of learning.

Rubin et al (1983) considered the study of play to be enigmatic; Hutt (1971, 1981: 284) reasoned that play was too broad a term to represent play and promoted the notion of types of play in order to 'distinguish between two major subdivisions of all those intrinsically motivated, self-chosen activities we call play: epistemic behaviour and ludic behaviour, that is, behaviour which is concern with knowledge and information, and behaviour which is playful'.

Hutt (1971) acknowledged the physical and social aspects of play. Hutt (ibid) also explored curiosity or exploratory behaviour suggesting the cognitive aspects of play. She argued that exploration occurs when certain changes occur within the environment, typified by asking, 'What does this do?' and so promoting curiosity and investigation. Play, is more relaxed, occurs in familiar settings when a child may wonder 'what can I do with this object? Conclusive evidence at that time, that play and cognitive development are related, remained elusive and uncertain. In Sutton-Smith's (1971: 258) discussion on the role of play in cognitive development, he uses language such as 'it implies. . evidence to suggest. . does not appear to be . . it seems possible'. He concludes:

Given the meagerness of research in this area, however, it is necessary to stress that these are conclusions of a most tentative nature.

Piagetian perspectives have influenced practitioners' understanding of how children learn. It is acknowledged that children learn as a result of being actively engaged in the environment, with opportunities to manipulate resources, to make decisions based on their construct of their world (Malaguzzi, 1996). Later Vygotskian perspectives placed a greater emphasis on the adult role and the provision of an environment based on the children's developmental levels, within their 'zone of proximal development'. Bruner (1996) also acknowledged the significant responsibility held by the adult in making provision for children to learn through play.

If learning through play is to occur in an educational context then the adult role is critical. Anning and Edwards (1999) suggest that provision must be made for:

- effective interactions in play contexts;
- structuring the content and context which will 'scaffold children's developing competence in talking, listening, reading and writing';
- helping children develop as thinkers and problem solvers (p86).

It follows that provision for supporting learning through play must be informed by theories of how children learn and the application of that theory to practice. The process demands secure pedagogical knowledge.

## THE ELUSIVE NATURE OF PLAY

The concept of play remains ethereal, too dynamic to define (McLane and Spielberger, 1996). It has been established that exploring the nature of play is highly complex. This section of this chapter explores current thinking on some of the reasons why this remains problematic. For decades, a definition of play has defied both practitioners and academics alike. Berlyne (1969: 814) argued that

there is however obvious disagreement on what ought to be regarded as the salient defining characteristic of play.

Not only is play intrinsically complex but also it is compounded by the contradictory beliefs and personal, implicit values which are often held by practitioners (Berlak et al, 1975). Consequently, their understanding is not based on consistent, easily identifiable constructs. Many of their actions and decisions are informed by an invisible pedagogy (Bernstein, 1975, cited in Spodek, 1988) - often a result of the conflicting paradigms on which they base their work. Their perspective of play is grounded in their actions and narratives – the content and way in which they talk with each other about play - through the documentation they produce during the course of teaching. Exploring play inevitably involves exploring the grounded realities and experiences of how practitioners support children's learning through play.

Gitlin-Weiner (1998: 77) states

Although play is an essential activity that serves many unique purposes during the life span, the disparity of viewpoints about its meaning has impeded the development of a unanimously accepted definition. Many descriptions of play are too broad or too narrow to be functional or discriminative. Perhaps the concept of play is too complex, diffuse, expansive, and dynamic to call a singular explanation of its distinctive characteristics and components.

This uncertainty continues, even though play continues to be proclaimed the way through which children's learning and development may be promoted (Wood, 1998). Practitioners are aware of the difficulties in ensuring children learn through play, being clear of the learning intentions *'I want my objective in the back of my head, and I want to be able to find out if they've got there or not, which is the hardest bit'* so that children's entitlement to learn and practitioners' obligation to teach is fulfilled. It is easy for children to remain occupied, to have fun, *'to have a good time'*, during playful activities. The challenge for practitioners is to make provision for playful teaching and learning.

Ashton et al (1975) found that many practitioners consider theories belong to college seminars, which they attended during their initial training. Once practitioners are based in schools the demanding and absorbing preoccupations within the classroom are all-consuming, consequently critical thinking at a deeper level becomes an unrealistic expectation. The uncertainties surrounding a construct of play are further compounded by the contradictions within today's educational context. In addition to an uncertain and changing legislative context practitioners' own uncertainties continue to abound although these are not unique to today's context. Rubin, Fein and Vandenberg (1983) argued that whilst it is too easy to claim children learn through play the practitioner must determine what the children are to learn, and how children's development can be linked to learning. This is especially difficult in the context of a skills based curriculum (Groos, 1901; Vygotsky, 1978).

#### EVOLVING A FRAMEWORK FOR PLAY

Extensive recent literature about play has been published for both academics and practitioners working within an ever-increasing range of early years provision (Gura, 1992; Kotulak, 1996; Pellegrini, 1995; Sutton-Smith, 1997).

There appears no clear framework for learning through play relevant to the contemporary context in which practitioners work. Fein and Wiltz (1998) argue that play cannot be understood without regard for its ideological context which impacts upon the perceptions of provider and participant, teacher and learner, adult and child (Wood, 1999). This view is also supported by Carter (1995: 9) who argues that, for example, studying children's communication with their caregivers without attention to cultural variations in goals for child development, would be like attempting to learn a language without trying to understand the meaning it expresses. Similarly, studying practitioners' construct of play without regard for the context in which they work would limit the value of this research. Bronfenbrenner (1979) also argued that considerations of childhood need to acknowledge the societal, ideological and cultural context in which children live. Within the context of the TBtP group, knowledge of child devel-

opment or a conviction of appropriate play was localised in that it reflected the specific cultural contexts within each school setting.

New understandings of play are based on considerations of contemporary issues. These contribute to current contexts for play and to challenges of investigating practitioners' stated beliefs and understandings regarding children's learning through play. There are contradictions and inconsistent beliefs about the phenomenon of play, varying from the very formal construct of play presented through current legislative and curriculum frameworks to practitioners' beliefs that in play, children 'revel in being silly and gleeful and in just plain having fun' (Rubin et al, 1983: 694). Similarly playfulness is considered to be characterised by fun, enjoyment, accepting challenge, interest, excitement and ownership and does not necessarily contribute to learning (Day, 1981). Considerable tensions are created as a result of these polarised models of play (Wood and Bennett, 1999).

Practitioners may find themselves on the one hand planning for experiences which are fun and enjoyable whilst they struggle to ensure planned, predicted learning also occurs. Practitioners also have the responsibility of reconciling their understanding of children's responses in play, based on early models of play, with the direct instructional methodologies supported in the current climate (Cox, 1994). The challenge for practitioners, as students of play, is less the need to define precise formulation of play, but more to explore new methodologies and deepen conceptual understanding (Rubin, Fein and Vandenberg, 1983). Hurst (1994a) confirms that the adult role in supporting autonomous behaviour in play is a subtle and increasingly challenging one.

Fein and Wiltz (1998) argue that spontaneous, flowing play does not occur in schools. When children do play at school it is structured by times, areas, materials and controlled by practitioners. The type of play which might promote children's development might not be the type of play required by teachers who are expected to plan, record and predict learning outcomes.

Many concerns have been raised that the demands of the curriculum are incompatible with teaching and learning through play (Blenkin and Kelly, 1994; Hurst, 1994; Wood, 1999). These debates occur despite evidence that not all children have the opportunity to learn through play, and not all practitioners know how to teach through play (Wood and Attfield, 1996).

Gipps and MacGilchrist (1999:63) argue that in order to develop a primary pedagogy which encourages effective learning we need primary teachers who not only have good subject knowledge and classroom management skills but who also have a good understanding of how children learn and are able to use this understanding to inform the teaching strategies they employ. Bruner (1996) suggests that it is difficult for children to engage in metacognition if practitioners do not know or understand how to promote its development. Play does not automatically contribute to a child's learning and development nor it is not always appropriate for the teacher to organise the children's play (Boström, 1998). Play, if conceived as voluntary, spontaneous and independent, is unlikely to occur if practitioners try to force play or make inappropriate intervention. Earlier work by Hutt (1981) maintained that children's ludic play behaviours are relatively mood dependent. Children will play simply because they wish to do so and for the fun of it. Play is unlikely to occur if children are obligated or expected to do so (Hutt, 1981). During occasions when children may appear to be playing, for example:

- engaged in symbolic interaction, affectively and socially;
- in meaningful and relevant contexts;
- characterised by physical and cognitive activity;
- that is voluntary, pleasurable, dynamic experiences.

Even in episodes where it is relatively straightforward to identify playful aspects, it remains difficult to ascertain whether children are also learning (Perry and Dockett, 1998)

It appears that planning for appropriate adult intervention and interaction demands a clear, secure pedagogical framework. Boström (1998) suggests the development of new theories, representing a new level of play in which children and practitioners plan and play together, incorporating the child's contributions to creating a play environment. However, if practitioners have a weak pedagogical framework, it is unlikely that their responses in children's play will be well conceived.

The practitioners made frequent references to the scaffolding role in children's play. Wood and Wood (1996: 5) identify several functions within the adult role including attracting and sustaining children's interests, establishing and maintaining concentration on specific tasks and modelling ways in which goals might be achieved. Scaffolding aims to provide a degree of involvement and initiative, without too much complexity although Wood and Wood (ibid: 6) suggest that the nature or content of children's learning through play remains 'unclear and controversial'.

Wood and Attfield (1996) suggest that one reason for the discrepancy between theory and practice is practitioners' varied conceptualisations of play. These conceptualisations will inform, for example, classroom organisation and the adult interactions and interventions. However, if the theoretical and pedagogical base is insecure practitioners are unlikely to make effective, secure provision for play. They also report (ibid: 14) that some practitioners are beginning to consider developing practice through 'reflection and enquiry' and argue that for a playful pedagogy to be effective a more rigorous examination of the relationships between play, teaching, learning and the curriculum is imperative. Examining play, learning and the curriculum requires making the implicit explicit, the invisible visible, in order to clarify some misunderstandings.

In planning for a playful pedagogy, practitioners make many decisions which may be based on invisible, unfamiliar or distanced theories of teaching and learning. Whilst it may appear that practitioners share similar values and beliefs, Bennett et al (1997) argue that the ways in which practitioners conceptualise and implement these beliefs, are varied. For example, although two practitioners may express similar values on children's ownership of play, the way in which they implement this may differ. Fre-

quently child-initiated play may conflict with teacher-initiated activities or curriculum requirements. Practitioners respond in different ways to the issues of control and ownership depending on their own understanding of how children learn or the stated culture and expectations of individual early years provision. As well as practitioners' interpretations of even shared values there are other demands from the curriculum or specific early years provision on practitioners' time which influence the way in which their pedagogy is defined. Consequently, practitioners who claim to value play as the medium for learning may have difficulty in making provision for adults to support that learning. In addition, their familiarity with pedagogical theories will also influence the way in which they define teaching and learning. Practitioners who are unsure of the processes within children's play may have difficulty in determining what children are learning through play.

Many practitioners claim that children's learning must be developmentally appropriate (Bredekamp, 1996). This demands that knowledge of child development is sufficiently secure in order to appraise the sometimes contradictory values between children's developmental interests and the curriculum requirements. Consequently, the concept of adult intervention and the ways in which practitioners support children's learning remains problematic. Wood and Wood (1996: 6) suggest that whilst 'several attempts have been made to try to remedy these shortcomings, though the nature of what gets learned or internalised during the course of interactions still remains unclear and controversial'.

### **Play and reflective practice**

Athey (1990) argued that practitioners' knowledge and understanding is the key to theories of teaching and learning but is dependent on practitioners developing a critically reflective approach to practice, surfacing and examining their existing pedagogical knowledge and subjecting it to rigorous scrutiny, challenge and confrontation. Bennett et al (1997) advocate incorporating specialised training for practitioners offering opportunities for reflection. The training needs to accommodate different levels of expertise, ranging from novice to the more expert. Inevitably, these courses will have resource implications in order to address practitioners varying needs for time and dif-

ferentiated support. Offering short-term practical training sessions in which practical ideas might be offered or exchanged is unlikely to promote deeper cognitive and affective levels of reflection. Developing a new playful pedagogy through reflective practice demands knowledge skills and understanding of both concepts.

Dahlberg et al (1999: 12) believe that theory, far from being ‘meaningless or apparently irrelevant to practice’ can be of great help to practitioners. It can be used as a ‘tool to help construct their understandings and enhance their practice. In turn, practitioners can contribute to the ‘development of theory’. Recent research suggests that effective teaching within the early years must include an understanding of how children learn as well as an ability to apply that knowledge to practice (Bruner, 1996). Amongst current recent research on practice, Gipps and MacGilchrist, (1999) also identify a need for further research to generate a new pedagogy, explicitly linking effective teaching and learning with additional opportunities for practitioners to integrate new understandings, rather than merely bolting on or adding new techniques to existing practice (Askew et al 1997; Medwell et al 1998; Munn and Schaffer, 1999).

A significant aspect of this research has been the partnership established between practitioners and researchers. Through working together they attempted to create a playful pedagogy enriched by the understanding of both, a combination of theory and practice, both informing the other the outcome of which is a training pack (StEPs Moyles et al, 2001). Practitioners’ theories, their experiences and insights, were incorporated into the training pack, for Mitchell (1999: 63) argues that practitioners determine what happens in classrooms and that ‘literature should place a higher value on types of knowledge and forms of communication that meet teachers’ needs’. This new pedagogical framework is a result of practice and theories, which inform practice (Edwards et al 1998; Hurst and Joseph, 1998; Riley and Reedy, 2000; Siraj-Blatchford, 2000; Suschitzky and Chapman, 1998; Woods, 1999)

Understanding some of practitioners’ complex realities has revealed many of the tensions and contradictions they face in pursuit of applying their principles for play to

practice. These are intensified by not knowing how to make provision for learning through play prompting critical enquiries:

*What are they learning? What do they know? Where do they need to go next through the play activities? That's the hard bit, not just setting it up and having a good time.*

The research methods used to explore, develop and define a playful pedagogy are presented in the following two chapters. Chapter Four explores the impact of a grounded theory approach to research.

## CHAPTER FOUR: GROUNDED THEORY

*It would be nice to feel that we are coming to some conclusion - I know [researcher] said the other week that we were nearly there, but I wasn't entirely sure where! and [researcher] might think we're somewhere, but I don't know whether I know that I'm anywhere. But I realise that there aren't absolute ends to things.*  
(Pauline, Interview 2)

The previous two chapters refer to the complexities within the research. Whilst the original intention to celebrate play was achieved, the routes to that celebration were more traumatic, more cognitively and affectively demanding than envisaged. The methodology and the outcomes of the research were grounded in the responses of the practitioners and informed by the ethical framework which ensured practitioners' entitlement to respect and dignity were honoured (BERA, 1992). This chapter identifies the ways in which a grounded theory approach directed aspects of the research.

For the purpose of this research, grounded theory is defined as theory generated from multiple stages of data collection within conceptual categories, systematically built within the process of social research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Creswell, 1994). Strauss and Corbin (1994) also define grounded theory as a general methodology for developing theories during a continual process of coding, analysis, reflection and re-coding (Altrichter and Posch, 1989). These processes, sometimes referred to as the constant comparison method, generate thick, saturated descriptions, a state reached when further analysis will no longer contribute additional evidence (Glaser, 1978; Grove, 1988; Strauss and Corbin, 1994; King, 1994; Seale, 1999). The multiple stages of data collection formed a framework for the research methods. The continual process of coding and analysing the data has informed the emerging changes in research aims.

The dynamic nature of grounded theory created an unpredictable environment, sometimes charged by the practitioner-researchers' apparent resistance to change. A simple, tidy paradigm did not reflect or support the complex realities of the participants within the TBtP project. Consequently, many of the procedures were frequently modi-

fied and refined in order to support and sustain the unexpected and changing responses of the participants (Abbey et al 1997; Middlewood et al 1999). A degree of discomfort resulted from the ways in which events changed uncontrollably. Tom (1996) expresses concern that many published accounts of qualitative research do not record the ways in which methodologies change within a research project. A concern that the 'messiest' accounts are interpreted as failures inhibits an open reporting of grounded methodologies (ibid: 347). Yet, important lessons may be learned from the changing, grounded process and the impact this has on those involved.

The TBtP project provided the context for this research which has aimed to discover the reality behind practice during the research rather, than commencing with a hypothesis which required substantiation or fine-tuning. This has necessitated an open approach to emerging theories, with few predetermined hypotheses of practitioners' pedagogical constructs (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Many of the aspects of the research and its methods which were subjected to change. It is inevitable that a degree of overlap will occur between this and the following chapter on the research methodology. It is hoped, however, that in highlighting the flexible approach, methods and the ethical framework at this stage, it will be easier to understand the many references to the complexity of the research at later stages throughout the thesis.

This chapter highlights the impact of adopting a grounded theory approach to the research. It identifies the unexpected directions of the research and aspects which were particularly and intrinsically vulnerable (Robson, 2000), i.e.

- Research aims
- Research methods
- Ethical framework

Chapter Five deals more comprehensively with the research design, methods, data collection and analysis.

## RESEARCH AIMS

The practitioners involved with TBtP project had been recommended by their head teachers because of excellent classroom practice. As they were also experienced practitioners, it was anticipated they would be inclined to learn from being involved in the project. Statements written by the group during early meetings confirmed they were eager to continue the process of professional development and learning within the framework of the project

*Discussion, where we reflect on practice . . . finding out more of the theoretical background to what I am doing. . . I think it can be difficult at times, to justify play and I think any tool that aids you, the better. .*

(Interview 1)

Their sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Soodak and Podell, 1996), the expectation that they would be able to promote learning was high, further confirming the impression that this was a group of confident, reflective practitioners prepared to be challenged (Ross, 1994).

During discussions in the first two meetings, the practitioner-researchers generated 104 principles for learning through play. They talked openly about their expectations to be '*challenged*', to '*learn*', to '*receive training*' and to '*share ideas with colleagues*'. This confirmed an expectation that the theoretical framework for the research would be based on play.

At that time, the literature investigations for the research were focused on teaching and learning through play. Glaser and Strauss (1967: 37) suggest an effective strategy is to '*ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area of study, in order to ensure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas*'. However, studying early and more recent understandings of play provided an informed, theoretical sensitivity that may result from studying the literature which relates to the research area (Glaser, 1978). Altrichter and Posch (1989) believe that the theoretical background is not ignored but reflected so that data collection, for example, is appropriately informed. Previous knowledge, by both researcher and prac-

titioners, is not prejudicial, but relevant interest, motivation and knowledge which both bring to the field. Often the research is directed by the researcher's own 'implicit knowledge' (Altrichter and Posch, 1989: 29). The process of the research becomes a reflective conversation between theory and evidence, similar to reflection-in-action, as identified by Schön (1983, 1987).

Throughout the research it was vital that discussions were managed with great sensitivity in order to minimise the likelihood of practitioners responding to questions or requests in ways they thought would be expected, to be seen, heard or read (Bryman, 1988). The researcher's values and beliefs about play were known to the group (Creswell, 1994). However, Locke et al (1987) argue that the investigator's contribution to a research setting can be useful and positive rather than detrimental. Knowledge and understanding of play provided an enhanced awareness and sensitivity to the subtleties within the discussions and documentation. Whilst every effort was made to ensure objectivity, it was inevitable that some bias informed the way in which data was interpreted. It was difficult, for example during interviews, to remain unmoved by enthusiastic accounts of playful learning or unexpected responses from the practitioners, such as Pauline declaring '*I felt destroyed*'. (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

It was originally predicted that as the TBtP project developed, a training pack would be produced, containing materials on how children learn through play. Through working together on the training pack, it was expected that both researchers and practitioner-researchers would acquire new understandings of playful pedagogy. Whilst working together, theories were used to reconstruct and enhance practice; in addition, practice would then be used to inform theory and become an instrument for change (Dahlberg et al, 1999). Early impressions that the group was open to challenge and change were initially confirmed. This impression changed within a few months as raw findings from analysis of the interviews, documentation and observation during the frequent meetings identified the following issues:

- insecure pedagogical practice;
- no apparent planned provision for children to learn through play;

- an emphasis on resources and activities rather than teaching and learning;
- resistance to pedagogical language;
- practice rooted in affective domain;
- tensions and contradictions within early years practice.

The analysis of the data is presented in the following chapter, the findings are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

These unexpected findings prompted a gradual and inevitable change in the direction and purpose of the project. The original intention had been to celebrate and further practice and, with the participants, to cascade practice in the form of training within local schools to other practitioners.

The reality of the dilemmas during this period was challenging for practitioner-researchers. There were occasions when uncertainties were disturbing, when a sense of order and predictability was more attractive than capriciousness, a feeling typified by the Pauline's comment in the opening to this chapter . . . *'but I don't know whether I know that I'm anywhere'*.

King (1979) reported feeling similarly unable to communicate his objectives to participants in his study. Making sense of the chaos can also be challenging for researchers (Fine and Deegan, 1996). However, a sense of self-efficacy amongst the practitioners remained high: they were responding to uncertainties within the project with renewed vigour, and maintaining a high commitment to its success was a significant factor in the decision to persist with the project (Ross et al, 1996).

Although TBtP was planned to be an intervention study, the focus of intervention changed as the research developed. As it became evident that practitioner beliefs and values were fragile, support was provided to the group during the frequent meetings. The nature of support was individualised and differentiated; it included presentations, teaching, guiding, coaching, listening and later questioning, deliberating and challenging. In spite of the supportive framework within the project, the processes of reflec-

tive challenge appeared to spiral out of control as the practitioner-researchers pursued a process of deconstructing values and beliefs. The intention, as stated in the research proposal, for practitioners to deliver training within one year, was postponed and, at the time of writing, has not yet occurred.

However there was no sudden realization on the part of the researchers that the focus had changed from 'play' to 'play within reflective practice'.

As a result, there were occasions when methodologies were out of synchronisation with the demands of the project. Attentions remained focused on the participants, the future direction of the research grounded in their responses. Robson (2000) also experienced a similar dilemma and considered it more important to continue to answer the right questions rather than to answer the wrong question extremely well (King, 1995). It was considered more appropriate to modify the research aims in response to the emerging evidence of practitioners understanding, than to adhere relentlessly to earlier aims which emerged as inappropriate.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Data collection, during three meetings in the first term, consisted of observation of meetings and all documentation produced by the practitioner-researchers during each meeting. This included the outcomes of discussions, practitioners' responses to tasks, evaluation forms, journals, planning documentation and 'homework' undertaken by the group.

Data analysis began at the commencement of the project through constant comparison of coding through comparing incidents with documentation and with discourse with individual communication with group discussions and with emerging categories (Glaser, 1978; Creswell, 1994; King, 1994). The perpetual involvement of participants and researchers was a significant factor throughout data collection and interpretation. Repeated confirmation by the practitioner-researchers that they were seeking to further practice, together with initial rhetoric, contributions to discussions, personal

journal notes either posted or brought to meetings, all confirmed earlier statements by practitioners and their head teachers that they were open to challenge and change.

Gradually categories became saturated and evidence of practitioners' difficulties in making provision for play emerged. In spite of continued analysis of all the data, no additional findings were revealed. The key words within this process were 'gradually' and 'emerge' for there was no immediate discovery. By constantly re-interpreting, coding and re-coding documentation and notes from observations during the first few weeks, concepts emerged which were more related to affective responses, personal concerns, resource provision than to playful pedagogical issues (Halliday, 1998). It appeared that the primary source of difficulties in making provision for play was a lack of pedagogical knowledge and an apparent resistance to change practice. At that time, no provision had been made for in-depth interviews. However, in the light of emerging evidence, questions were designed and the first round of interviews took place early in the Spring term.

A more detailed presentation of data collection and analysis is reported in the following chapter on research methods.

The use of NUD\*IST software (QSR, 1997) provided a tangible means of restructuring concepts and investigations. The flexibility of data within NUD\*IST made it possible for emerging theories to be compared with existing theories. Transforming these related concepts to Inspiration Software (1997) provided graphic clarity especially beneficial during the messy stages of grounded theory. This can be particularly helpful for the qualitative researcher who may experience issues of confidence in raw findings partly due to the unpredictable nature of qualitative grounded theory (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

An additional feature of NUD\*IST is that coding categories can easily be changed. One dilemma within grounded theory approach is that continued coding uncovers emerging errors of judgment, for example, gradually realising the difference between what practitioners said and corresponding evidence found in documentation, claiming

to teach through play with no evidence of play provision within planning files (Swann and Pratt, 1999). NUD\*IST has a facility to recode data in order to accommodate new understandings without affecting the reliability of other related codes within the data.

It is possible that a study of reflective practice in the very early stages of the project would have better informed responses to practitioners in the research. However, it was also necessary to have in-depth knowledge of play in order to assess and support the development of the adult role in children's learning and serendipitously realise planned insights from unplanned events (Fine and Deegan, 1996). A study of play theories was required in order to recognise the underlying issues for expert practitioners although 'expert' appeared to apply to the pragmatic element of teaching rather than deeper conceptualisation. Steadman et al (1995: 49) argue that change in practice requires more than the immediate acquisition of skills or tips for teachers, but is dependent on challenging deeper values and beliefs leading to reconstructing approaches to teaching. The literature studies on reflective practice and play were indicating that this level of change, at deeper pedagogical levels would require time, sustained and informed support. Gradually the roles, needs and understandings of practitioners and researcher were changing.

On-going critical reflection by the practitioner-researchers became essential role determining the nature of intervention and support provided. Discovering unexpected aspects within the research field during the process of generating grounded theory was not unusual but demanded an unexpected robustness from the researcher! (Cooper, 1998). An ethical framework was essential to the overall integrity of the TBtP project and its research methodology.

## ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

Because of the uncertainties and unpredictability of grounded theory, the ethical framework played a key role in this research. Ongoing reflection, frequent negotiations of objectives, open discussion, regular feedback of raw findings to practitioner-researchers, anonymous and signed evaluations from researcher-participant ensured

the research was conducted with due care for the respect and integrity of all involved. In this section four aspects of the related ethical issues are considered:

- Respect for the individual;
- The right to be informed;
- The right to withdraw from the research;
- The right to remain anonymous.

The British Educational Research Association believes that all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for persons.  
(BERA 1992)

A culture of respect and integrity had been established at the outset of the research. The primary concern was respect for persons but respect for knowledge and the quality of educational research was equally crucial (BERA, 1992). A culture of honesty and openness between practitioners and researchers had also been established. These issues were frequently encountered particularly in the regular feedback of raw findings. On occasions the evidence gained from insider knowledge was unpalatable although the researcher's roles were not to protect practitioner-researchers from the reality of the evidence. However there was a personal, moral, professional and ethical obligation to extend personal and professional care and concern (Riddell, 1989) and provide a constructive framework for professional support and development. For example, some of the emerging issues were related to practitioners' lack of knowledge of child development, which as a result of identification, became an item on the agenda for future meetings and training.

Similar dilemmas were faced by Kelly (1989: 108) who considered it was much easier to explain to the teachers that they were researching children's attitude and behaviour rather than to stress their interest in teachers' own behaviour and attitudes. 'It is difficult to say to someone that you want to co-operate with them in reducing sex stereotyped option choices – but incidentally you think that they might be part of the problem!'

Participants in a research study have the right to be informed about the aims, purposes and likely publication of findings involved in the research and of potential consequences for participants, and to give their informed consent before participating in research.  
(BERA, 1992)

The TBtP project proposal was examined with the group before the research commenced and a formal contract provided to the practitioners who obtained signatures from their head teachers (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

An additional dilemma within grounded theory approach is the discovery of emerging errors of judgment although accompanied by opportunities to adjust understandings and learn from the process (Swann and Pratt, 1999). A heightened sense of responsibility towards practitioners sustained an ongoing regard for their welfare.

Participants have the right to withdraw from a study at any time  
(BERA, 1992)

Two members left the TBtP project within a few weeks of it starting. One was replaced and the group of nine practitioners continued for the duration of the research.

As the focus shifted from exploring play to developing a reflective approach to play practices, the processes of thinking also changed. Critical reflection demanded a preparedness to confront beliefs. At every stage, practitioners were given opportunities to halt the process but it frequently felt out of the researcher's control, as if the participants recognised that in order to reconstruct their beliefs the process of deconstruction would have to complete its own cycle.

Informants and participants have a right to remain anonymous. This right should be respected when no clear understanding to the contrary has been reached  
(BERA, 1992)

Maintaining anonymity can sometimes create dilemmas. In this case, the group was offered confidentiality but they also requested acknowledgement of their role in writ-

ing up the training pack (Burgess, 1989; Creswell, 1994). Towards the end of the TBtP project, they suggested the pack should be illustrated with their photographs. This was addressed by ensuring authorship of documentation and interview transcripts remains anonymous whilst acknowledging the significant contributions of the individual members of the group.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately the focus of this research became an examination of the de-construction and reconstruction processes of reflective practice within the content of learning and teaching through play. The research is the result of a partnership between practitioners and researchers, where both have developed a critically, thoughtful approach to enriching pedagogical knowledge. Researchers and practitioners were both afforded the privilege of having time to reflect together critically. Researchers and practitioners developed a theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978) to the emerging voices and deliberations within professional selves. A reflective conversation with the situation and with each other helped to surface and confront uncertainties – for what is ‘good for practice is good for research’ (Altrichter and Posch, 1989: 30).

It appeared that the commitment, enthusiasm and relevance of the research to practitioners’ sense of personal and professional efficacy overwhelmed many of the challenges and tensions experienced through the TBtP project (Ghaith and Yaghi, 1997). The commitment to exploring their grounded, playful pedagogy was sustained throughout the research. Tom (1996: 358) cautions that

If we do not make a conscious commitment to emergent and changing research design, we run the risk that collaborative-looking actions will be mistaken for genuine collaboration with the consequence that opportunities for collaboration will be missed.

More important is the risk that practitioners’ openness, enthusiasm and commitment to engaging in research, will be abused.

The research methods used to support this dynamic process are discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The implications of grounded theory, highlighted in the previous chapter, are a recurring theme in this thesis. The dynamic and vicarious nature of grounded theory demanded a robust methodology so that plans could be changed without impacting the reliability and validity of the research (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The research methods, the processes and the outcomes of the research were all grounded in the responses and contradictory voices and practices of the practitioners. The key concept explored throughout this study was reflective practice. This concept characterised the process through which practice was extended: developing reflective practice during its interrogation.

A single paradigm did not reflect the complex realities of the practitioners' values, beliefs and understandings. Various approaches were used:

- It is a phenomenological study, based on interpretivist paradigm presenting the interpretations of practitioners' work with young children (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). A post positivist approach accepts the complexity of the situation and is likely to be reflected in the research design.
- It is also a holistic study, which examines the varied affective and cognitive processes of reflective practice (Abbey et al, 1997).
- Unintentionally it adopts a feminist approach. Its purpose was not to pursue qualitative research 'by women on women with a desire to make sense of women's lives and experiences' (Kvale, 1996: 73). By default, that definition is a description of what occurred: following his promotion the one male member left the project after four sessions. The remaining nine practitioners, researchers, the project director, and research assistant worked together for over 32 months. References are made to the nine practitioners throughout the thesis.
- It is an intervention study aiming to change, enrich and enhance the effectiveness of a playful pedagogy (Fryer and Feather, 1994; Boulton, 1996). The nature of intervention was informed by a Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) introduced in Chapter Two. This is a diagnostic model used by change facilitators to

plan for appropriate intervention whilst supporting practitioners through the process of changing practice (Hall and Hord, 1987). The CBAM model was considered compatible with a grounded theory approach, because of its emphasis on understanding the differentiated, contextual needs and perceptions of people who are committed to professional and personal growth in schools. Its methodological consideration of personal needs and professional behaviours also incorporated procedures for ongoing evaluation.

- Finally, a longitudinal design has enabled frequent measures to be taken of practitioners' responses. Typically, change may occur over many months or years (Hord et al, (1998). The practitioners have provided a vast volume of documentation so that, for example, any changes to planning documentation, can be assessed. Apart from one male member leaving the group, within a few weeks of its commencement, as explained earlier, there were no difficulties caused by attrition – often a weakness in longitudinal studies (Oppenheim, 1992).

There are many occasions in this chapter of the thesis where it has been necessary to illustrate aspects of the research methods with evidence from the research. This has been in an attempt to communicate, logically and in sufficient detail, the research methods (Miles and Huberman 1994). This has inevitably resulted in some overlap of information – it is hoped Chapter Five did not pre-empt Chapter Six.

Studying practitioners' pedagogical understanding is best suited to a qualitative research approach (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). The focus of inquiry, exploring pedagogical values, suggested a small purposive sample be used (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Turner-Bissett (1999) provides evidence of the difficulties experienced by practitioners as they attempt to surface and articulate pedagogical values and beliefs. Jensen et al (1997) suggest that in order to support practitioners locate their voices, they need many opportunities to recount the stories of the daily activities in which they are engaged. It was expected that surfacing practitioners' values, beliefs and understanding would be a complex and demanding process although its intensity and extent was unexpected.

During the early planning days of the research, the precise nature and direction of the research and the support practitioners might require remained uncertain. With so many unknown aspects to the research process, it was considered that adopting a grounded theory approach would be most appropriate (Altrichter and Posch, 1989; Argyris et al, 1985). Research methods were selected on the basis of providing insightful understanding of the practitioners' needs with provision for sensitivity and flexibility should practitioners' needs change during the process.

There are three sections in this chapter:

- Section 1 defines the research aims and objectives, placed within the context of the Too Busy to Play project;
- Section 2 discusses the research design based on the development of a collaborative partnership between researcher and practitioners;
- Section 3 defines the research methods. This includes
  - data collection which was primarily through group and individual interviews, observations of practitioners during meetings and in schools, and documentation produced during the course of the TBtP Project;
  - data analysis.

The ethical implications, a significant, recurring theme in the research, are considered in the section on interviews and also conclude the chapter.

## RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Qualitative research is defined as an attempt to create meaning out of complex situations: it is also subject to certain methodological standards involving a rigorous process of enquiry (Hopkins, 1993). The complexity of the situation in this research has been characterised by

- differentiated experience and expertise of the nine practitioners;
- their requirement for differentiated, informed support;
- rhetoric-practice discrepancies accompanied by apparent resistance to change;
- the elusive nature of play, still apparently not understood;
- complexities within reflective practice, ranging from anecdotal to moral, ethical and political, and from the pragmatic to deeper conceptualisation of pedagogical issues.

Consequently, the research aims and objectives have been subjected to on-going revision in true grounded theory approach. The aim of this research began with enquiring 'What is the impact of adult intervention on children's learning through play?' and was modified to explore the de-constructive and re-constructive processes within reflective practice whilst endeavouring to explore the adult role in promoting children's learning through play. The objectives, closely linked with those of the TBtP project, were to

- identify strategies used by practitioners to promote and support reflective practice;
- identify support indicated by practitioners in questioning and evaluating their current practices;
- explore and define practitioners' knowledge and understanding of play, learning and child development.

It is well documented (as referred to in Chapter Two), that practitioners have difficulty articulating practice and that many of their values and beliefs are deeply embedded within their own personal constructs of being a teacher (Convery, 1998;

Herrington and Oliver, 1997; Jensen et al, 1997; Qualter and Dean, 1999; Simon, 1999). There appear to be few occasions on which practitioners are encouraged to engage in pedagogical discourse. As a result, being presented with opportunities to articulate aspects of teaching and learning through play was a highly complex process. At times, it was also a painful experience. Unexpectedly, the strategies used for data collection were also used by the group as tools for their own pedagogical de-constructions.

The conceptual framework was informed by the principles of developing a critically reflective approach to educational practice through collaborative partnerships established between practitioners and researchers. Early impressions suggested that practitioners were experienced, reflective practitioners, eager to further their own practice. More extensive and prolonged discussions revealed a resistance to change and insecure pedagogical knowledge (as presented in Chapter Six).

The emerging research design aimed to be sufficiently robust to support a vigorous inquiry, yet sufficiently flexible to support the practitioners' cognitive and affective responses to the process of change and confrontation. Through developing a reflective approach to practice, this led eventually to the re-construction of a set of values, beliefs and statements. It was the intention of the practitioners that these statements eventually would inform their adult role in supporting children's learning through play.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The overall structure and orientation of the investigation needed to be manageable and flexible, for often, with a grounded theory approach, initial objectives are modified in the light of the unfolding processes (Bryman, 1989; Clark and Causer, 1991).

This section will discuss the approaches which informed the broad design of the research:

- qualitative research;
- the development of a collaborative approach between researchers and practitioners;
- and the strategies developed for intervention.

### **Qualitative research**

Qualitative research is characterised by its substantive appreciation of the perspective, culture and subjective reality of the practitioners (Wilkins et al, 1997). It aims to examine the multiple perspectives and realities constructed by its practitioners (Brotherston, 1994). Their situated knowledge, their 'lived experiences', (Creswell, 1994: 12; Abbey et al, 1997: 102), grounded in the daily process of working with young children is explored by an ethnographic researcher, often over a prolonged period of time, in this case for over 32 months (Schulz et al, 1997). The practitioners' day-to-day experiences were accepted and respected for their own reality (Day, 1998). Their talk, humour, grief and anxieties, anecdotes, observations, documentation and their own institutionalised knowledge, discussions, deliberations, understandings and interpretation represent significant processes defining their professional lives (Allan and Skinner, 1991; Rhedding-Jones, 1996).

Some quantitative data is presented in tables in order to confirm and elaborate the analysis, and potentially to promote new insights and improve the quality of communication (Rossman and Wilson, 1991; Silverman, 1993). Seale (1999) argues that a combination of qualitative anecdotes and numerical tables (perhaps illustrating the

frequency of the phenomena) presents a more balanced picture than selected anecdotes alone. For clarity, both will be used in this thesis.

Qualitative research is a process of inquiry characterised by its messiness and unpredictability (Creswell, 1994). A frequent question of qualitative, interview studies is whether the results are generalisable. By its very nature the research process becomes difficult to replicate (Allan, 1991; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). No generalisability was intended in this longitudinal research. Its validity rests in the detailed accounts and analysis of practitioners' pedagogical understandings.

Findings from qualitative studies are potentially context rich, offer possibilities of 'fuzzy generalisations' (Bassey, 1999) with opportunities for further large scale, longitudinal studies (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Bassey argues that the term fuzziness is not intended to imply frailty: he acknowledges the likelihood of there being a degree of uncertainty in areas where the complexity of human behaviours is paramount. The term 'fuzziness' in this context acknowledges a degree of caution in generalising the outcomes, or relating its relevance to other practitioners, whilst retaining absolute 'intellectual honesty' within qualitative research (Bassey, 1999: 51-54). Kennedy (1979: 664) argues that the in-depth knowledge obtained from case studies may be used to inform the general case, which may confirm or disconfirm but never provide 'conclusive evidence'.

Seale (1999) argues that concepts of validity and reliability are no longer considered fashionable but, in this post-modern era, have been replaced by a new language such as interpretation and deconstruction, embracing a world of multiple perspectives, multiple voices and collaborative relationships between practitioners and researchers (Holly, 1989). Issues of validity and reliability still need to be addressed, possibly through providing a detailed account of the procedures and methods conducted through the study and also offering the reader an opportunity to remove any 'nagging doubts about the accuracy of their impressions of the data' (Silverman, 1993: 163). This is particularly so within this educational research as concern has been raised by OfSTED on the reliability of qualitative research within education (Tooley and Darby,

1998). Emerging themes and issues were constantly discussed with the practitioners especially as qualitative, interpretive research can be vulnerable to misinterpretations. Both practitioners and the researchers' responses were included in the data being analysed.

### **Collaborative research**

A characteristic of this project has been based on the collaborative relationships between researchers and practitioners. Developed throughout the project, these relationships have been characterised by open, challenging and reflective dialogue and became critical to the effectiveness of the project. It was essential that the research methods supported the development of such relationships in an attempt to bridge the gap that has existed between academics and researchers (Johnson et al, 1999). Bolster (1983) suggests that researchers and practitioners adopt different assumptions about the processes of teaching. Consequently, if research is to have meaning and relevance to practitioners and to impact practice, then academics must conduct research that enables practitioners to relate its results to their classroom practice. This has been a firm intention of the research.

Partnership, which develops through collaborative relationship, is similar to mutually beneficial aspects of friendship (Schulz et al, 1997). Abbey et al (1997) argued that the collaborative partnership developed through their study enabled the practitioners to achieve as a group more than they could have as individuals. This symbiotic quality was achieved through a joint recognition of concerns and purposes of the study together with reciprocal trust, respect and a desire to learn. There was a period when researchers became powerless to prevent further progress 'there was no way to stop it' (Abbey et al, 1997: 113). A similar feeling of powerfulness in this research was experienced as the process of deconstruction spiralled beyond the researchers' control. Once these characteristics were established within this research, the process of deconstruction and re-construction generated its own momentum.

The concept of partnership challenges the traditional role of researcher as expert especially if practitioners and researchers plan to work together, contributing to discus-

sions and challenging each other in pursuit of a new pedagogical understanding (Schulz et al, 1997). Johnson et al (1999: 123) report on the 'research circles' developed by researchers and practitioners in order to encourage 'reciprocal exchange of expertise and benefits to both groups of participants'. Although the two groups had attempted to provide adequate support during the early stages of the project, Johnson found that some tensions emerged as they worked together. Many of these tensions stemmed from affective, personal dimensions of collaborative research: issues relating to change: 'power, vulnerability. . . guilt . . . status, and fear of misunderstanding, and exploitation'. (ibid: 125). They argue that while the personal dimension of change is very important it is often 'denied, ignored or insufficiently considered' (Johnson, 1999: 125). Some of the tensions they experienced were due to practical issues such as finding sufficient time to travel to convenient locations and work together. These tensions were minimised during the TBtP period as funding made provision for supply cover, enabling practitioners to attend meetings during the day.

When the TBtP project began, each practitioner stated they were looking to the project director '*for a lead*'. In order to promote a culture of autonomy, exchanges between researcher and practitioners included posing questions rather than adopting a more didactic approach. Problematising issues within practice, identifying aspects of 'good' practice and supporting the development of quality products prompted responses both of discomfort and liberation. As with Johnson et al (1999), this research benefited from the planning, administrative and methodological structures that supported collaborative work between practitioners and researchers.

Producing an interim report for the conclusion of the project produced varying standards of writing with an accompanying challenge for the researchers to respond without 'jeopardising our working relationship with teachers, or our commitment to produce a consistent, high quality report' (Johnson, 1999: 132). Partnership between researchers and practitioners and the manner in which exchanges are conducted can influence the quality and result of project. Respect for the emerging truth and views of the people had to have priority (BERA, 1992). The obligation to value practitioners in this way may have delayed apparent progress of the training schedule and accompa-

nying materials and possibly contributed to the project extending beyond the period predicted (and funded) in the original proposal submitted to Esmée Fairbairn (Allan and Skinner, 1991).

The relationship between researchers and practitioners become complex with a 'need both for closeness and distance, for continuously working the tensions between high theory and everyday practice' (Lather, 1991; Dahlberg, 1999: 154). Mandzuk (1997) encountered this conflict and suggested that the culture of practice within schools, and that of theory and research within universities is mutually exclusive. A clear sense of purpose was demanded in order to reconcile these ambiguities as both parties 'juggled with two very different sets of values and expectations' (ibid: 440).

Schulz et al (1997) argue that ethical dilemmas cannot be resolved by invoking rules and protocols – particularly in collaborative research when small decisions made to enhance the research or the relationship lead to larger moral and ethical dilemmas. Each research setting gives rise to slightly different ethical issues. Ongoing, continual negotiation in conversation – characterised by honesty and candour and built on mutual trust and respect - is a more ethical guideline in qualitative research (Schulz et al, 1997). Following each meeting, new decisions were made, based on the evaluation of practitioners' responses. Practitioners' evaluations were also used to inform these decisions.

Developing a reflective approach to practice was encouraged through articulating the pedagogical beliefs. Early, raw findings were presented to the practitioners and opportunities offered to contribute to and to discuss the interpretations (Adalbjarnsdottir, 1997). This was done in small groups with later opportunities for feedback, to the larger group, in order to ensure many opportunities for all voices to be heard. This was especially required as there were some dominant members, both teachers and nursery nurses who were more confident and articulate than others were. Others claimed they preferred to listen. A summary of each meeting was sent to practitioners and included an invitation for them to respond by mail or telephone (Appendix 2). This was intended to offer those who wished to reflect on issues the chance to do so. Those who

chose not to contribute during the meetings were not disadvantaged as they were still provided with opportunities to express their views. The practitioners had opportunities to question, discuss 'confirm and disconfirm the portrayal of their constructs by the researcher' (Spodek, 1998: 16).

Apparently mundane issues such as the location for future meetings, in school or university, in lecture hall or more intimate seminar room had inevitable influences on the ethos and culture developed within the group. Also, the location provided 'authentic context' for discussion, promoting articulation to enable tacit knowledge to be made explicit (Herrington and Oliver, 1997: 125) and reveal the 'taken for granted, habitual ways we all have of responding to curriculum situation' (Qualter and Dean, 1999: 41).

Building rapport is important. This was achieved through practitioners feeling comfortable enough, being trusted, to speak and share openly their experiences. However, the extent of the confidence and trust can generate its own ethical dilemmas as researchers consider whether to scrutinise the sometimes unsolicited information (Johnson, 1999).

Schulz et al (1997) argues that talking enables practitioners to surface their grounded pedagogical knowledge, for meaning is often retrospectively constructed through reflection. In particular this process may be enhanced when practitioner and researcher work together, during moments of 'co-reflection' as both parties explore the complexities within their differentiated roles, and extrapolate pedagogical understanding (Jensen, 1997, Schulz et al, 1997: 482). Wagner (1997) suggests a model of co-learning agreement where practitioners and researchers work together in order to understand each other's roles and perceptions. The variety of strategies used to promote discussion became sources of data collection examined in Section Three.

In addition to planning for many opportunities within meetings to talk with each other, provision was made for establishing an explicit culture of trust, confidentiality and genuine respect for individuals engaged in the project (BERA, 1992). The frequent, regular meetings and nature of pedagogical discourse resulted in an openness 'I

*think now as well those of us who are within the group are comfortable with each other'* (June, Interview 1). This openness raised the possibility that with a familiar and supportive audience the practitioners would possibly later regret such exposure. For instance during one interview Pauline revealed the process of deconstruction left her *'feeling destroyed'*. She was asked if she wished her comments to remain in the transcripts. The group were informed of potential benefits of being involved in an intervention, research project. Discussed later in the chapter, these included opportunities to:

- study;
- explore;
- train;
- share;
- discuss;
- visit each other's settings to see other perspectives and gain understanding of diversity within early years.

Formal consent to participate in the project and the research had been obtained by participating schools and head teachers through the practitioners themselves. It was expected that practitioners would largely be contributing evidence of their own practice.

Schulz et al (1997: 477) state that, in the traditional sense, the concept of informed consent means that individuals involved in a study not only understand what is expected of them but also the possible consequences of having taken part in the study. It is not possible when working with emergent themes to try to satisfy the demands for the kind of clear-cut statements of intent and consequence that are traditionally associated with informed consent. Kvale (1996) suggests that informed consent may be obtained informally especially if it remains uncertain how the project may unfold. This was done repeatedly at each phase of the research - before interviews, visits to schools, videoing play activities. Draft copies were discussed with the group before forwarding reports to the funding body or presenting papers to colleagues and conferences (Moyles and Adams, 1999; Adams and Moyles, 1999; Adams and Moyles,

2000a; Adams and Moyles, 2000b) and for publication (Adams et al, 2000; Moyles and Adams, 2000).

Working with a small purposive sample, nested in their context has the advantage of facilitating effective relationships within the research group and, as implied in Chapter Two, provides opportunities to obtain rich, thick data, necessary for case study type research. (Geertz, 1973; Miles and Huberman, 1994). With quantitative data, the question of sample size requires critical consideration as it contributes to the overall robustness and generalisability of the research. However, with qualitative research greater attention is paid to achieving 'saturation point' from the data (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994: 63). Within collaborative, qualitative research, practical issues have to be taken into consideration as there is a finite limit to the amount of resources available to sustain the management of people and data within a research project.

Abbey et al (1997) questioned the appropriateness of having nine practitioners in her study on the grounds that it exceeded an appropriate workable size. However, the few members who later left her group had joined after the initial few meetings, after the agenda and goals had been negotiated. She (ibid: 106) explains: 'They missed this "initiation" phase, and consequently, their presence changed the dynamics for the entire group and feelings of awkwardness seemed to persist'. This was not the situation with the TBtP research because of their:

- existing links between practitioners in this study;
- knowledge of the educational and institutional cultures within their own LEA;
- familiarity with each other;
- previous experiences within the university;
- knowledge of the project director (Hord, 1987);
- shared and stated confidence in the purpose of the study.

Nine was considered a manageable size for the TBtP collaborative study: it was possible to maximise opportunities to work with and provide adequate support for the practitioners throughout the research.

The supportive relationships served firmly to establish commitment to the eventual outcome, even during the 'swampy lowlands' of reflective practice as referenced in Chapter Two (Schön, 1995: 28). Truly collaborative research between academic researchers and school practitioners requires extensive, open communication, based on mutual trust and respect (Johnson, 1999).

Opportunity for communication in between meetings was offered and taken up through use of mail and telephone calls in-between meetings. This would not have been possible with a larger group but would possibly have been more spontaneous and immediate if practitioners had access to electronic e-mail, which offers greater flexibility in time, and remote access (Harasim, 1996).

When the practitioners arrived at the university for meetings they were eager to talk about the events of the day. They had stated one of their prime reasons for joining the group was to have the opportunity to talk with colleagues about their practice.

*And what attracted me . . . was the thought of people involved in Early Years Education, getting together, talking about what we're doing, our practice and what we believe in, because I enjoy doing that at any time. That was why I really wanted to do it.*

(Pauline, Interview 1)

Provision for informal discussion was made, at the beginning of each meeting in recognition of the need continually to reinforce the group dynamics and the group's difficulties with articulation.

The agenda for meetings included adequate time to talk through the various levels of pedagogical language (Simmons et al, 1989). This ranged from anecdotes through to potentially deeper conceptualisation in order to promote practitioners moving beyond a shallow, pragmatic, technical response to deeper analytical reflective approach (Sparks-Langer et al, 1990). The frequency of meetings, in particular, was central to developing a collaborative relationship, essential before any meaningful intervention could take place (Laframboise, 1997). This is discussed in the following section.

### **Strategies for intervention**

The practitioners were informed that the project was to be an intervention study, intended to draw on and enhance 'good' practice. Practitioners and researchers would be working collaboratively to produce materials based on their joint expertise and understanding of how children learn through play. The training materials would be used in educational institutions, supporting practitioners in utilising play as a pedagogical tool.

Interpretative researchers, also known as phenomenological researchers (Coleman and Lumby, 1999: 10) recognise that observation alone may change the phenomena being examined. If people know they are participating in a project, that knowledge alone may prompt a heightened awareness of the subject being explored or change in behaviours (Oppenheim, 1992). Schulz et al (1997) argues that it is possible for both, researchers and practitioners to influence the direction of this change, particularly when they work together to reconstruct pedagogical understanding. Consequently, the researchers' role was complex. At times, the purpose was to question, challenge, inform, support, train, advise, and work together in producing the training materials. However, in the context of the research, the role was to observe, communicate findings, reflect, collect and analyse data and communicate the raw findings. It was important that the details and responsibilities of the two roles were clarified so that one did not compromise the other. For example, values and beliefs were openly shared and discussed between researcher and practitioners, possibly providing a heightened awareness of the subject being explored in this research. In an attempt to minimise researcher bias during this intervention study, ongoing reflection and open communication was encouraged in both practitioners and researchers. In addition, a second researcher coded sets of the data in order to check reliability and minimise researcher bias (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

There are limitations to the effectiveness of intervention studies, which need to be acknowledged. For example, the effectiveness of Boulton's intervention study with lunchtime supervisors (1996: 378) was limited because the impact of the intervention was assessed immediately after implementation without opportunities for reflection,

further implementation and later evaluation of any changes to their practice. Similarly, a limitation of this intervention study is that although practitioners' pedagogical understanding has been thoroughly examined, there has been limited examination of its impact on children's learning or the broader environment in which practitioners are based (Simco, 1995). A fuller examination of this, with clarification of further opportunities for research, is discussed in Chapter Seven.

Watkins and Mortimore (1999: 5-6) argue that although classrooms are very dynamic they can also be very resistant to change. Simple interventions, such as adding a specific teacher skill or changing the content of the curriculum, often show little lasting impact. Consequently, instruments of change had to be sufficiently sophisticated to identify the various pedagogical layers that might be susceptible to change. Watkins and Mortimore illustrate the complexities of teaching through explicitly identifying elements of teaching activities such as tasks, social structure, roles within the settings, time and pacing, resources and identification of teaching goals. They argue that each of these elements needs to be impacted if long-term change is to occur. Consequently, when working with the researcher-practitioners, pedagogical components, their relationship to learning and child development were identified. This process continued for over 32 months, beyond the conclusion of the funded project.

Intervention was by focused training and discussion following analysis of practitioners' needs through use of a Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM - Hall, 1979; Hall and Hord, 1987) as referenced in the introduction to this chapter. This approach, based on a belief that practitioners need individualised, differentiated support during the process of change, is used to determine appropriate intervention, in the form of staff development training, coaching and provision of materials related to practitioner's perceptions of their needs, rather than the requirements of a specific project.

Intervention occurred during meetings held throughout the 32-month period of the research. The dialogue, questioning, challenging, training and engagement through examining practitioners' documentation prompted the deconstruction of values and beliefs. During the third phase, the process of reconstruction began. The details of this

are illustrated in Figures 5,6,7 modified from Hall and Hord (1987: 149). The three research methods, indicated in these tables, are discussed in section 3 of this chapter.

The research has been characterised by three distinct phases:

- The first formative phase, consisted of six meetings. In total, this lasted a total of 24 hours. During this period, initial impressions were challenged and early findings used to inform the changing direction of the research.
- The second phase involved a period of confrontation and deconstruction. This represented a period of seven meetings, a total of 24 hours. During the following summer vacation, the practitioners held several informal meetings in each other's houses, continuing the development of a set of principles for play.
- During the third phase, the group met for approximately 30 hours of meetings although many additional informal meetings were held by small subgroups of practitioners. A third round of interviews was held: the research concluded with a group interview.

The following section examines all three phases through the research methods, data collection and analysis.

## RESEARCH METHODS

FIGURE 5: CRITICAL INCIDENT AND TIME LINE FOR PHASE ONE

| DATE and TIME       | OBSERVATION / Agenda of meetings  | DOCUMENTATION   |   | INTERVIEWS   | Researcher memos   |
|---------------------|---|---|---|--|--|
|                     |   | Meetings  | Homework  |  |  |
| 9/10/97<br>3 hrs    | Small group discussions to define principles for play   | 104 principles  | Response to reading: - Moyles, J. (1994) The Excellence of Play   |  | "I am delighted with this group and think they have a lot of potential, particularly when we start analysing their practice, by which time they will be extremely comfortable with each other and ready to challenge even if it's a wee bit uncomfortable" |
| 13/11/97<br>6 hours | Small group discussions: reduce principles  | Refine principles. Group Statement: - "We feel the principles of play are fun enjoyment ownership communication and decision making" 104 principles reduced to 27                       | Provide copes of your Planning Complete Journal / personal anecdotes & responses to play.   |  | " Every one had their own set of words, with very little repetition .. I've begun to chart this information and am surprised at the results, especially as their discussion initially appeared to display a shared philosophy"                             |
| 9/12/97<br>3 hrs    | Discuss planning documents in large groups<br>Broadening discussion<br>Visits to schools                                | Criteria for good practice<br>27 reduced to 17 principles   | Consider questions in Abbott (1994:87)  |  | "Group demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment to play yet, concerns re curriculum content, Where is the planning for play, learning, adult intervention, assessment?"   |
| 14/1/98<br>3 hrs    | Small groups. Feedback to group, early findings   | Relate principles to practice. Discuss in pairs, relate discussion to readings. Evaluation sheet distributed for completion. Identify "Straightforward" and "Dilemmas" To 17 principles | Complete principles sheets. Write What are the frustration as a practitioner in attempting to resolve the delivery of a prescribed curriculum with children's play and learning?" |  | Group have difficulty in completing implications of principles to practice and planning / policy. Their responses in all columns relate to resource provision.   |
| 27/1/98<br>3 hrs    | Small groups  | Discussion of work completed last week<br><br>Collated evaluation forms distributed   | Write short review of your practice "How do children learn?"  |  | "I wonder if we should do something on the 'reflective practitioner' especially as the intervention study aims to change practice. They may need to know that being challenged can be uncomfortable"   |
| 18/2/98<br>6hrs     | Difficulty in relating principles. Anxiety expresses re 'homework' Visits to schools, (refuse to challenge each other). | Principles sheets<br>5 Cameos given to group, evaluate practice in light of 17 principles   | Write 500 words 'What is play?'   | 9 individual, semi-structured in-depth interviews. Approx. 45 mins. each | Can't doubt the commitment energy and thoroughness of their work within the TBtP but there seems to be patchy evidence of real teaching. Group Development?  |

FIGURE 6: CRITICAL INCIDENT AND TIME LINE FOR PHASE TWO

| Date   | OBSERVATION / Agenda of mtgs.  | DOCUMENTATION   |   | INTERVIEW  | Researcher memos   |
|--|--|---|---|--|--|
|  |  | Meetings  | Homework  |  |  |
| 12/3/98<br>3 hrs<br><br>18/3/98<br>3 hrs<br><br>30/3/98<br>3 hrs | Visits to schools continued.<br>Begin to question How children learn?<br>Match teaching and learning intentions<br>Discuss visits to schools | Reflective practice<br>Hypothetical Framework   | Write about frustrations & dilemmas. Prepare 3 questions for discussion.<br>Bring in planning documentation<br>Write 500 words on "How children Learn"                      |  | Discussion re schools appears to relate to resources. Group defensive especially in Jungle discussion.   |
| 29/4/98<br>3 hrs   | Video of play activity taken in a local school. Input: -<br>How Children Learn<br>Child development  | Relate principles to practice. In what ways might your readings inform practice? Make theory / practice links in discussion?  | Adjust Principles<br>Bring in Planning.<br>Reading + focus + questions  |  | "I wondered if they quite enjoyed the session, because they didn't have to think too much? It always seems to me that is we give them open-ended tasks it offers a change to go off at tangent and avoid the more difficult issues " Can we thrash out the difference between play and active learning?" |
| 7/5/98<br>3 hrs  | Visit to School, practitioner determined focus: -<br>(Cultural context)  | Develop own plan for play and learning to include<br>What children will be doing<br>What they will be learning<br>What your role will be<br>Identify the principle which support things<br>If possible, show how your readings have had impact on the way in which you teach. | Identify adult role in learning through play.   |  | Planning sheets show no link between teaching and learning. Emphasis on resources and activities   |
| 19/5/98<br>3 hrs   | Discuss visit to Pat's nursery & link to principles. Observe video of play in order to develop observational skills                          | Principles<br>Study Hutt model of play – leading to play spiral and flump.<br>Model of types of play to include, Cognitive, Social and types (resources)<br>Hypothetical Framework developed and discussed.   | Plan for play activity<br>Play and active learning<br>Reading – adult role.<br>Responses to readings<br>Selected references for studying re adult role –prepare 6 questions |  | They express concern re play provision – feel guilty, uncomfortable about providing play. Planning relates to resources, not teaching and learning   |
| 30/6/98<br>3 hrs<br>3 hrs  | Develop draft materials for Training pack.<br>How to meet curriculum intentions.<br>Video taken of play activity in their classrooms.        | Types of play -<br>Written feedback given to group for discussion.<br><br>Principles reduced and refined to 6.  | Stimulated recall of video.<br>Write 250 words " Your response to being involved in the project.  | 9 individual, semi-structured in-depth interviews. Approx. 45 mins. each | Difficulties in concentrating on writing. Questions from readings are general and unfocussed, -<br>Adult roles unclear, Learning intentions not identified,  |

FIGURE 7: CRITICAL INCIDENT AND TIME LINE FOR PHASE THREE

| Date                                | OBSERVATION / Agenda   | DOCUMENTATION   |   | INTERVIEW  | Researcher memos  |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|--|---|
|                                     |  | Meetings  | Homework  |  |   |
| August 98                           | Group met with each other, in small groups throughout the summer vacation to continue writing about types of play for training pack. |   |   |  |   |
| 11/9/98<br>3 hrs                    | Feedback on stimulated recall of video.<br>Are we beginning to answer "What is the value of play based activity?"                    | Refinement of Statements of Children's Entitlement to Play Writing completed during the summer distributed to the group for discussion  | Concern expressed re writing "We would like to change some of the terms, e.g. pedagogy (or pedabogey.)<br>Readings Hurst & Joseph (1998)<br>Geddis et al (1998) |  | They are beginning to express a reluctance to learn, to change. They are requesting feedback – encourage individual communication to provide differentiated support.  |
| 7/10/98<br>3 hrs                    | Adult role<br>Critical examination of writing on Types of play<br>Statements of Children's Entitlement to Play                       | 6 Entitlements to include 5 columns<br>* What this provides for children<br>* Children's skills<br>* What underpins practitioners' work<br>* What practitioner should do<br>* Practitioners' skills / processes | Write 500 word in response to one of readings "Observing Play"<br>Review video and identify underpinning statements/principles.<br>Why is it Play?              |  | Ask are there any aspects of your practice you would like to change as a result of this reading or the work we have discussed through watching the two video's / stimulated recall?   |
| 29/10/98<br>3 hrs                   | Further refinement of statements. Examine content.   | Child Development inserted into Statements: - social, physical, intellectual, emotional, linguistic.<br>Stimulated recall – written response & individual communication   | Entitlements – continue to develop these  |  | Content of principles tables drawn from practice. No reference to readings.<br>Ask What knowledge informs teachers' work?<br>Emphasis on affective in planning, assessment.<br>No change in planning sheets   |
| 16/11/98<br>3 hrs<br>3 hrs<br>3 hrs | Further refinement through discussion.<br>Bring in one lesson plan.<br>Evaluation of our involvement with meetings.                  | Planning sheets<br>Written feedback   | Entitlements: continue to develop.<br>Written cameos to illustrate principles   |  | Written feedback given.<br>Entitlement charts show difficulty in accessing or presenting your own knowledge<br>Video show inconsistencies in linking play with learning<br>Planning inconsistent links between learning and activities<br>documentation doesn't; link to practice<br>Written reflections show no change in practice |
| 1/99<br>3 hrs                       | Make links across columns of StEPs.<br>Work in pairs to develop one statement each   | Challenge content of Steps, changes made.<br>Links made with Curriculum   | "The only way we can tackle this is by covering knowledge which is derived from own instinct and nature, experience, discussions with others"                   |  | Reluctance to reference StEPs<br>Further explicit evidence of practice informs practice   |
| 2/99<br>3 hrs<br>3 hrs<br>3 hrs     | Group take one entitlement each to develop   | Further development of StEPs  |   | 9 individual, semi-structured in-depth interviews. Approx. 45 mins. each |   |

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Data collection

The practitioners had been invited to bring to the first TBtP meeting, their principles for play. These principles formed the basis of discussions during which 104 principles for play were generated. Phases One and Two initially involved the development, examination and reduction of a set of these principles to 17. This was designed in an attempt to surface practitioners' tacit knowledge, i.e. that gained through experience and 'not usually articulated' (Pope, 1993). Day (1993: 221) argues that within schools, opportunities for practitioners to engage in reflective practice, to enquire 'why' as well as 'how' and 'what' are being displaced by technical exercises where enquiry is not encouraged. As a result of limited experiences to engage in RP, practitioners' articulation at deeper levels was insecure. It also follows that pedagogical thinking at deeper levels, also may be insecure (Zeichner and Liston, 1985). Consequently established methods used to promote and research reflective practice needed ongoing review and refinement in the light of responses presented by the practitioners

Provision was made for triangulation within data collection, not as an automatic mechanistic approach but one that enabled the same phenomenon to be investigated from different angles (Seidman, 1991; Cooper, 1998: 85). Triangulation does not necessarily accurately replicate findings, although the credibility of reporting may be enhanced by demonstrating alternative methods to support its key claims (Seale, 1999: 61). There were instances when triangulation between data collection revealed discrepancies, confirming rhetoric-practice dislocation. Essential to the validity of this research was the ongoing presentation and discussion of the outcomes of data analysis with the practitioners. Their interpretations and responses were incorporated into the data for further analysis, consonant with a grounded theory approach. A range of opportunities to challenge and discuss emerging findings was offered to the practitioners. These opportunities were designed to provide open and honest communication and occurred during individual and group meetings. It was suggested that written responses were either anonymous or identifiable. Anonymity was rarely preferred.

Throughout this process three main research methods were used providing a rich source of data:

- three rounds of individual, in-depth, semi structured interviews, were conducted and identified the three phases of the research. One final group interview was used to summarise the research process and to provide the group with a formal opportunity to make additional reflective comments;
- observations were made during meetings and from one visit by the researcher to each school, then during visits by the group to three of the schools. Video recordings of each practitioner working with children were made, followed by a group evaluation of the videos through stimulated recall (Day, 1998). Observations were also made, during meetings of the regular feedback of raw findings back to the practitioners;
- documentation, including the range of strategies used to promote discussion and articulation of values beliefs and understandings, were used as a source of data collection. These included:
  - individual, written evaluation of the videos, through stimulated recall (Day, 1998);
  - notes taken by the researcher during each meeting;
  - transcripts of group meetings;
  - personal journals and written reflections;
  - jottings, informal notes, ideas and comments either posted to or presented in person during meetings;
  - planning documentation, for children's learning and teachers' teaching provided at different stages within the research;
  - school brochures and policy documentation from practitioners' schools;
  - written tasks given to the group.

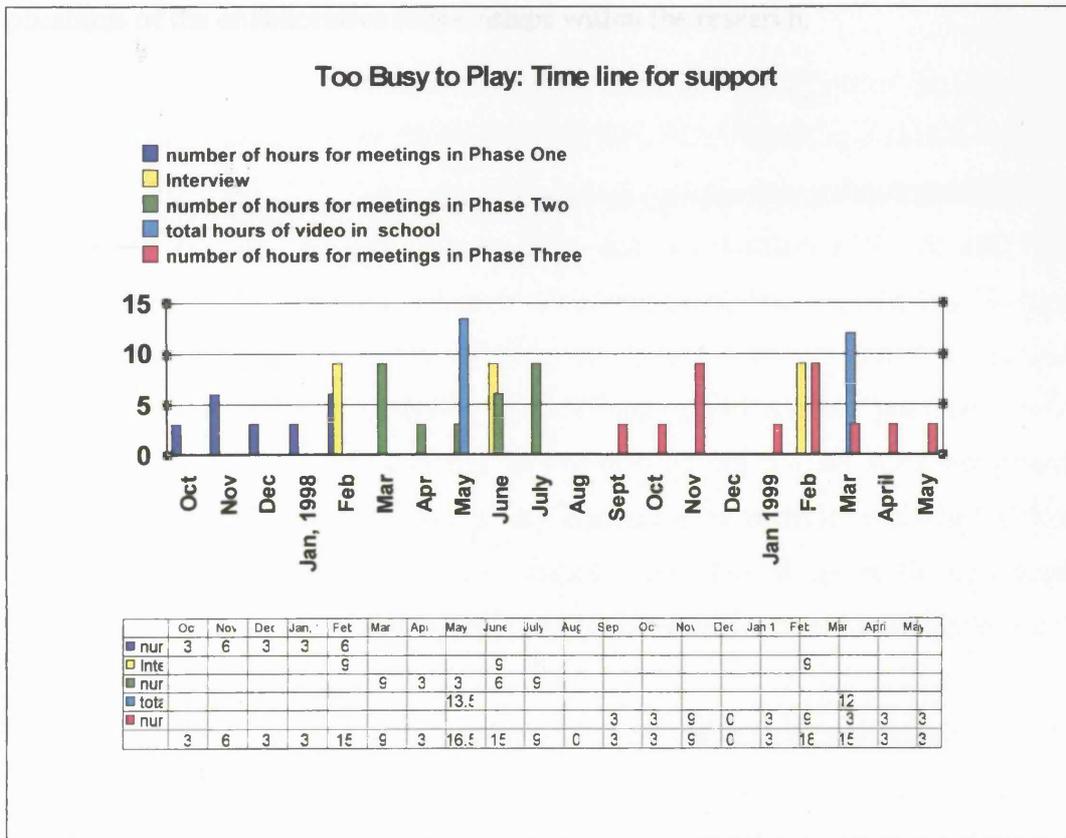
These three key research methods were used to promote discussion and as a source of data collection. They are discussed in the following section. The main source of evi-

dence for the research was taken from the three rounds of semi-structured interviews. Additional data from the meetings as listed above and practitioners' analysis provided during the course of the study, added richness and depth to the data (Middlewood et al, 1999).

The interview transcripts have been used to identify three key phases in the research (FIGURE 8).

- Phase One: October 1997 – February 1998
- Phase Two: March 1998 – July 1998
- Phase Three: August 1998 – July 1999

FIGURE 8: TIME LINE FOR SUPPORT



The first phase was a period of familiarisation where initial understandings were established and the group's needs identified.

The second phase, in which values and beliefs were deconstructed, continued from February until the end of the summer term.

The third phase, in which values were reconstructed, continued until July 1999. The process of reconstruction continued to be refined during this period, although meetings were less frequent and progress less dramatic. The project continued for a further year whilst training materials were revised and completed. In addition, practitioners met frequently during evenings, weekends and during vacation. These hours are not represented on the table.

The outcome of this was the production of a set of tables, Statements of Entitlement to Play (Moyle et al 2001). A final group interview, held during February 2000 offered the group an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and was used, in particular to evaluate the impact of being involved in the research and to consider the ethical implications of the collaborative relationships within the research.

## **Data collection**

### **Through interviewing**

Three rounds of individual interviews were conducted, totalling 28 interviews: one practitioner cancelled twice during the first round due to illness. It was considered inappropriate to press for a further meeting at that time. Each round identified a distinct phase in the research – an initial familiarisation and realisation of emerging issues, a period of deconstruction then the final phase in which beliefs and understandings were reconstructed as indicated in previous paragraph. This section on interviews presents:

- aims of interviews;
- nature of interviews (individual, semi structured);
- interview questions;
- group interview;
- ethical issues relating to interviewing.

### **Aims of interviews**

The interviews aimed to gather descriptions from the practitioners' perspective that could later be interpreted to provide insight into their values and beliefs and understandings. Individual interviews were conducted because they offered practitioners the opportunity to talk privately, face-to-face, and in confidence (Clark and Causer, 1991). This also offered them a degree of control within the research process through introducing their realities and controlling the direction of the interview (Scheurich, 1995: 247). Practitioners generally have difficulty in articulating practice. Their understandings are often held unconsciously or they do not possess sufficient pedagogical language to describe what they do nor communicate underlying principles (Kagan, 1990: 420). She advises accessing practitioners' beliefs indirectly 'for example through extended interviews, when a teacher can recount specific cases and events'.

Individual interviews provide opportunities for the researcher to be sensitive to the issues and concerns of each participant in order to evaluate their personal and professional needs within the course of the research - an important aspect of supporting practitioners through intervention (Hall and Hord, 1984). It had been anticipated that

changes to practice would be made during the course of the research. Change is a highly personal experience. Different school cultures, contexts, experiences, training and attitudes result in each individual reacting differently. Some practitioners respond more quickly and confidently than others. Change is most successful when practitioners are provided with differentiated, informed support. Individual interviews, rather than at this stage, group interviews, provided opportunities to obtain detailed information of practitioners' development - their concerns, and the ways in which they might be reflecting about change (Hord et al 1998). This information was used to plan for provision of differentiated support.

In order to remain sensitive to individual feelings thoughts and actions, Oppenheim (1992) suggests that semi-structured interviews are more appropriate than structured interviews. Open-ended questions can be posed during semi-structured interviews and are more likely to lead to rich and spontaneous information. Open questions also provide further opportunities to explore deeper into practitioners' beliefs. Semi structured interviews provided opportunities to expand and elaborate through exploring beyond the first responses to the interview questions. It is possible to encourage the development of a line of thought without engaging in conversation or leading the interviewee or other group members interrupting (Jones, 1991; Oppenheim, 1992). This was particularly useful with the many hesitant responses to Question 2. 'Please give a recent example of children learning through play, in your setting'?

Semi-structured interviews are similar to everyday conversations in style as both parties expect that information will be elicited during the interview. They are often used when detailed descriptions of the life work of the interviewees are required for they allow the interviewer to make allowances for spontaneous, unexpected evidence, an essential aspect of grounded theory (Oppenheim, 1992; Kvale, 1996). The structure of the interviews provides the framework for conversations, bounded by the theme and emerging theories within the project. Kvale (1996: 3) suggests that during interviews the researcher 'strips the surface of conscious experiences'. Conversational style is more appropriate than formal interviewing, especially in this research where some questions prompted practitioners to express concerns about aspects of practice or their

involvement in the TBtP project. A formal setting may have inhibited otherwise spontaneous, open responses.

The interviews informed early evidence of the unanticipated de-construction process initiated by practitioners. The transcripts became the main source of information for planning individualised assistance through the process of reflective practice. This was essential to the later pedagogical reconstruction and to changing practice.

All the interviews were conducted in practitioners' own time, out of the context of the TBtP project.

#### **Interview questions**

- What would you say attracted you to the research group in the beginning?
- Please give a recent example of children learning through play, in your setting?
- What aspect of play provision here, do you feel is a particular strength, weakness?
- One of the statements in the Too Busy to Play proposal states that "no practitioners seemed able to put teaching through play into practice" Why do you think it might be so difficult to put into practice?
- Has being part of the project affected your practice?
- What would you say was the impact of adult intervention on children's learning through play?
- What support do you think you need to develop your practice further?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

(Scheurich, 1995: 240) argued that a post-positivist approach results in language within interviews being 'slippery, unstable and ambiguous from person to person, from situation to situation, from time to time' rather than a collection of closed questions designed to reflect researcher values. Leading questions were avoided, although from a post-modern perspective, Kvale argues (1996) that in close interpersonal relationships between practitioners and researchers, the values and beliefs of the interviewees will be known. Consequently, shared understandings may effect the nature and direction of the interviews. The interviewer therefore must display impartiality in

order to minimise researcher bias (Brotherson, 1994; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). This decision to be impartial was clarified with the practitioners before the interview began. Occasionally issues arose and were discussed after the interview. For example in response to Question 3 Carole said she did not know how to make provision for role play '*I mean there may be very valuable learning things there, but I've not seen them I don't feel particularly confident about that*'. The classroom was visited after the interview, and the discussion continued. Carole's immediate concerns were addressed without compromising the integrity of the interview. Because the researcher's beliefs about play were known to the group it was particularly important to adopt a non-judgmental, receptive approach, in order to encourage open and honest responses and discourage any preconceptions or notions of 'correct answers'. (Oppenheim, 1992). The group appeared to value the opportunity to talk and to have someone to listen to them – '*a rare experience*'. There were occasions when silence was sufficient to encourage the practitioners to continue in their responses to the questions.

Questions were carefully worded in order to remove any degree of ambiguity, yet sufficiently open in order to permit a degree of interpretation and autonomy on the part of the interviewee. They were approached as a trigger to latent values and beliefs so that practitioners' responses remained a reflection of their own values and experiences. Hord et al (1998) caution that practitioners will only express concerns or ideas that are of greatest interest to them or that are easily accessible. They state (ibid: 34)

While the procedures are reliable enough for clinical work (in schools), they should not be considered infallible or used for research or evaluation. In addition, information obtained through routine interactions with teachers may be used to enrich these data.

A degree of formality and structure is also required in order to identify any changes during the research period; eight questions were repeated at each of the three different phases in the project. At different stages in the research, repeated measures were taken of the practitioners' responses (Oppenheim, 1992: 33). Any changes within the practitioners' pedagogical articulation and thinking could be identified and examined (Wilson, 1997).

Tomlinson (1989: 172) suggests keeping questions as open as possible yet aiming to adhere to researchers' purposes and also suggests strategies to elicit deeper responses from the interviews: the power of silence or where necessary, requests to seek elaboration, maybe through giving encouraging responses or offering opportunity to make further comments until 'spontaneous coverage seems to have been fully exhausted' and saturated. These approaches of encouragement were considered appropriate for the purpose of this research especially as the practitioners were very open and willing to respond to the many demands of the research (Seidman, 1991).

- The interview was developed through use of a hierarchical structure to the interview questions ranging from an initial contextually linked question as in the first question 'What would you say attracted you to the research group?' This question provided an opportunity to talk about recent experiences.
- The second question followed similarly, an open-ended question, relating to learning through play in their settings. This question was context specific requesting concrete examples of recent practice 'could you give one example of children learning through play?'
- The questions were designed to promote reflective responses – for example, Questions 3 provided opportunities to consider the strengths and weakness in their practice. It was important that questions remained open in order to accommodate differentiated and unexpected responses. The responses to the interview questions were used to monitor their concerns and the way in which practice was being impacted by their involvement in the project.
- Many references were made during the course of discussions about the tensions practitioners experienced when planning for playful learning. A further opportunity to articulate these concerns was provided in question 4. Following this, a hypothetical framework (Figure 26) was generated, graphically representing many of the concerns raised in response to this question. This is discussed in Chapter Six.
- The fifth question also prompted reflective thinking of the ways in which thinking and practice had been affected by being involved in the project
- The impression from the many group discussions was of a group of practitioners whose practice was predicated on a belief that children learn through play. This

question was conceptually focused: ‘Can you say what is the impact of adult intervention on children’s learning through play?’

- Question 7 invited them to comment on the support being received and responses used to evaluate the progress of the research. In response to questions about the validity of this, Hord et al (1998: 70) state:

Our experience has been that they are more than willing to talk with someone about their use of an innovation and what they are doing with it. However, they may not share with you the kind of information you seek unless you ask for it . . . . People do not intentionally withhold information as a rule, but they may not be thinking along the same lines as you are.

Finally, it is always advisable to ask, “Is there anything else you would like to add?” as a revealing comment or aside is often made at the end of the interview. Researchers need to be ready to listen for at times it was not clear if practitioners wished these additional comments to be included. Where final comments were made in confidence, that trust was respected and their comments not included in the transcripts apart from two occasions when later permission was invited. For example, Vera had difficulty in replying to question 6: What would you say was the impact of adult intervention on children’s learning through play? At the end of the interview she added:

*I ought to think about this adult role, because it’s something I take for granted and I’m a bit horrified and, I don’t mind you quoting me on this, I can’t answer it.*  
(Interview 1)

Individual interviews provided reliable measure of the same practitioners, responding to the same questions on three occasions during almost 18 months. At the outset, it was stated that the individual interviews would offer total confidentiality and privacy. They do lack the interactions obtained through group interviews – it was decided that the final interview would be used to elicit the group’s reflective responses to being involved in the research.

### **Group interview**

Wilson (1997: 211) established the following criteria for focus group interviews:

- a small group of between 4–12 people. The researcher- practitioners were, at this stage, very familiar with each other, although did not know each other at the beginning of the TBtP project;
- Meet with researcher or facilitator;
- Meet for 1–2 hours;
- Discuss selected topics;
- In non-threatening environment;
- To explore practitioners' perceptions, attitudes, feeling and ideas; and
- Encourage and utilise group interactions.

The TBtP group met these requirements. Wilson (ibid) argued that a group interview was the most appropriate method to discover practitioners' thoughts and feelings as well as enquiring why and how their thoughts had developed. Kitzinger adds (1994, 1999) that as interviewees tell their stories, each is enriched by the other, resulting in a dynamic process of interpretation.

An interview was conducted with the entire group in order to provide a social context in which the practitioners could comment, question and reflect on their involvement with the project and research. Qualitative research, an interpretive process, is often associated with focus group interviewing offering a potentially valuable method of eliciting multiple perspectives and realities from practitioners. It provides opportunities for group interaction that might not be obtainable in other contexts (Brotherson, 1994). If discussions are particularly lively it might prompt new insights although that then becomes more demanding for the interviewers who have to ensure all practitioners have an opportunity to contribute if they wish (Oppenheim, 1992).

This interview was unstructured, although the following aspects were pursued:

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in what ways has being part of the project influenced you and your practice?</li> <li>• how did it meet your expectations?</li> <li>• do you think the changes will last?</li> </ul> |
|---|

- how far the project has enabled you to be reflective practitioners?
- is there anything that you expected from doing it, that you haven't achieved from doing the project?
- what kind of support do you feel you received as part of the project?
- what do you think of the entitlements?
- do you have anything else to say ? . or questions to ask?

Each question was pursued until agreement or disagreement had been established through asking such questions as 'does anyone else agree, disagree, are there any other points'.

#### **Ethical guidelines in interviews**

Ethical guidelines underpin the entire research process, the basic governing principle being no-one should be harmed in any way (Oppenheim, 1992). All research processes were informed by ethical consideration including early conceptualisation, the research design, obtaining informed consent, securing and assuring confidentiality, respectful management of the interviews, loyal, accurate transcription, confidential and safe storage of data, reliable analysis and verification involving researcher and practitioners. Eisner (1991) states this can be particularly difficult when a change in direction or purpose in the research has occurred. This was an issue which caused deliberation and frequent referral to the underpinning guidelines especially during the period of deconstruction when practitioners talked of feeling '*destroyed*' by the process. This occurred at the end of the interview. Permission to retain this element of the interview was not sought, but given by the practitioner.

One of the dilemmas in interviewing is to permit the interviewees to respond to their own agenda but also for the interviewer to be true to the purpose of the study especially if in contentious areas, e.g. early years where legislative and curriculum discontinuities exist (Wood and Bennett, 1999). This is further compounded if the interviewees suspect they have a sympathetic audience for their concerns (Riddell, 1989). The researcher, adhering to ethical guidelines, needs to be conscious of the framework of their role and their loyalty to the purpose and integrity of the project (BERA,

1992). Kvale (1996) advises that researchers respect the integrity of the interviewees. For instance, if discrepancies are realised between what informants say and do, the researchers need to be very clear of the purpose of their role and the purpose of the interviews. This was a particular issue within the research and discussed in Chapter Eight. A pattern of regular, open feedback was established at the beginning of the research. At each phase practitioners' response to the feedback was incorporated into the data and new understanding negotiated.

The intimate atmosphere of individual interviews may entice practitioners to be more open than they had anticipated. This may be especially so in profession characterised by the 'closing down of spaces for debate' (Smyth and Hattam, 2000: 161) where it is unusual, '*a rare opportunity*', to have the opportunity to talk in a non-judgmental setting, to be listened to or afforded the opportunity for systematic reflection on the practices, beliefs, values and contexts (Day, 1998).

The search for practitioners' reality risks becoming too 'confessional' and needs to be managed with professional care (Smyth, 1999: 77). The researchers must not be too distant so that the interviewees lose interest, nor generate so much rapport and warmth that they are cast in the role of personal friends (Oppenheim, 1992: 90). Determining how best to situate the various dimensions of the researcher role was often considered during reflections of the research process.

Deep knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation was vital – to be well informed by the researcher's own interest and knowledge but also to be open-minded, reflective, sensitive to unexpected or new ideas (Moyles and Adams, 2000). Sikes (2000) cautionary account reminds researchers of the obligation to avoid placing practitioners in situations where they may feel compelled to invent the truth. Equally, the expectations or values of the researchers should not influence interpretations of the data. Inter-researcher reliability procedures were used to ensure valid interpretations and reduce the likelihood of obtaining distorted or imbalanced perspectives of the phenomenon. There is a danger that the researchers will only see interpretations that support their biased expectations so it is important to involve other colleagues and the

interviewees although this also assumes the validity of their statements (Sikes, 2000). There were occasions when the role of researcher, to be impartial and non-judgemental, was in conflict with the role of tutor, for example, offering advice and encouraging a confident, playful approach to practice. Many of these dilemmas were resolved by clarifying through discussion with the practitioners the different dimensions of the role – varying from tutor, advisor, change facilitator, yet also observer, analyst and researcher.

Practitioner values and beliefs are often deeply embedded so even carefully planned questions are unlikely to tap instantly into implicitly held beliefs. Wilkins (1999) reasons that practitioners' understandings may be subjective, impressionistic and unreliable (Allan 1991: 180). In contrast, the researchers need to be well informed and self aware in terms of their own related values, beliefs and expectations so they do not only hear their own 'preferred terms' especially, as already indicated, when the interviewees have difficulty articulating their own beliefs (Tomlinson, 1989: 158).

Kvale (1996) acknowledges the difficulties and dangers in transferring an oral language with its own set of rules to a written language with a different set of rules. Riley (1990: 22) states that the researcher needs to decide on the quality and detail of transcription, considering whether all repetitions be included, or whether all umms and ahhs, silences, pauses, giggles, interruptions, unexpected or missing categories are to be represented. This attention to detail revealed, for example, an avoidance strategy, to perceived challenges, through use of humour. Meetings were always characterised by humour and playfulness, often described as '*incorrigible*'. Once the moment of amusement had passed, a pattern emerged in which confrontation or sustained, focused discussion was avoided through witticism, and '*comfort breaks*'. These patterns were more discernable when analysed through recordings of the meetings. Hesitations, pauses were all taken into consideration during transcription of interviews and group meetings. For example, during group discussions the impression was given to the researcher that play was a medium by which children learned within the practitioners' settings. When invited to illustrate this point during individual interviews, all practitioners hesitated and had difficulty in recalling an episode. Seidman (1991: 77)

argues that laughter can often be used to represent many inner responses, and that silence needs to be tolerated for 'thoughtfulness takes time'. Laughter was used frequently as an avoidance strategy especially during discussions when challenge or deeper exploration of pedagogical issues was resisted.

Consideration must be given to the audience of the transcripts. If the transcripts are solely for researchers, then they must accurately represent all that was heard. If the transcripts are also for interviewees, they may wish to confirm that their speeches are accurately recorded and perhaps have opportunities to elaborate or change some comments. Verbatim transcripts were produced for analysis, for within the text maybe non-verbal meanings such as hesitation, mumbles, repetitions or interruptions (Scheurich, 1995). Often verbatim transcripts result in incoherent representations of speech and may offend so, for the purpose of this thesis and other publications, repetitions are omitted, unless hesitation or repetitions are the focus of discussion. However, in the interests of authenticity, they are always indicated:

*I think, I think there's got to be adult intervention, I think, I don't think it's got to be there all the time, but I think there has definitely got to be times when you, you know, just, you know, go and sit down and you know, just put, give one sentence, that one brick, that one bucket of sand just because, other wise, they would never move forward and not only would our job get boring but their lives would get boring. . . .and I think without that, um, you know you would all get very staid and life would be very boring, and you know . . .'*

might be represented as:

*I think there's got to be adult intervention, . . . don't think it's got to be there all the time, but I think there has definitely got to be times when you . . . . go and sit down and . . . give one sentence, that one brick, that one bucket of sand just because, other wise, they would never move forward and not only would our job get boring but their lives would get boring.*

The interviews provided a framework for the research process although additional evidence, as listed earlier, was required to supplement and triangulate the data obtained through the interviews. It would have been unrealistic to expect the interviews alone to have provided adequate opportunity for practitioners to talk about their be-

liefs. Practitioners are not always able to identify and articulate effective and successful aspects of their work (Turner-Bissett, 1999). The methods for collecting this additional data are discussed in the following two sections.

**Data collection: through observations**

Observations are used frequently, in qualitative research, in conjunction with in-depth interviews (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Using observation as a form of data collection entails systematically recording or taking note of events or behaviours in the research setting (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). This method can be highly structured or used as a more holistic description of responses (as was done in this research).

Observations were made during

- group meetings, small and large discussions;
- during visits to each of their schools;
- through use of video recordings of practitioners working with children.

It has been established that this research has been characterised by the ethical issues related to collaborative partnership between practitioners and researchers. An additional dimension relates to the use of video and, in particular to working with young children.

At each stage of the research permission was requested from practitioners, head teachers and the families of young children who were involved in play situations. Requesting permission does not absolve the researcher of ongoing responsibility to ensure adherence to ethical guidelines. It is essential that researchers and practitioners understand the more sensitive, complex situations of working with children. Boström, and Vilien (1998:31) identify the difference in understanding and status between researcher and child:

Here the big challenge is to remove a possible power differential between researcher and child in order to establish equal relations. For example, one researcher asked the children to choose the place where they would be interviewed. They did not choose the head's office but the top of a hill.

Within the context of the TBtP project it was important that children were invited, not instructed, to be videoed. The invitation needed to be presented in a way that was not

only sensitive to children's level of understanding but also offered respectful and genuine choice.

Using video recording and stimulated recall can be applied as an aid to reflection on practice (Day, 1998). Kagan (1990: 420) also suggests that stimulated recall be used to surface implicit knowledge: 'stimulated recall, when a teacher tries to remember interactive thoughts while viewing a videotape of his or her classroom performance . . . Researchers must then infer underlying beliefs from the data generated by these tasks'. Videotapes of children, producing episodes of learning through play, in the practitioners' settings provided a range of opportunities for the practitioners to talk about practice. These videos were also closely linked to documentation provided throughout the course of the research. Similarly, stimulated recall was used in a group situation, watching videotapes of play episodes. The video was used to stimulate reflective discussion. The group was also invited to write their responses to this, following a period of reflection, during the summer vacation. This is discussed in the following section.

**Data collection:****Through documentation**

There are established research methods used to inform understanding of practitioners' reflective practice including collection of all documentation, writing and 'notes in action' (Maas, 1991: 211). Educational documentation provides a rich source of insight into practitioners' lives as they represent evidence of the interactions and procedures within the schools (Forster, 1994).

Categories of documentation, used during this study, are listed here and followed by a brief description or examples of each:

- Personal, unfocused
  - Personal, focused
  - Written tasks
  - Professional documentation
  - Written and oral stimulated recall of video
  - Development of principles
  - Responses to Literature
- 
- Personal, unfocused written narratives, journal writing, spontaneous jottings, including diaries and logs were produced by the practitioners (Pope, 1993).
  - They were also asked to keep a journal and record personal reflections about aspects of play (Laframboise and Griffith, 1997). These reflections were frequently related to specific topics discussed during the project meetings. The journals and other notes were then used to promote discussion in future meetings and identify the group's training needs.
  - The group provided written autobiographies, personalised, focused, at the beginning of the TBtP project stating their expectations of being involved with the work. During the period they often wrote about their responses to being involved. For example, following a discussion on some of the dilemmas they frequently faced, they produced personal accounts entitled "What's hard about teaching". Two sets of

evaluation forms providing their own responses to and expectations of the project were also completed under the following headings:

- What has been most useful about the project so far?
- What has been least useful about the project so far?
- In what ways would YOU most like to contribute to future meetings?
- What aspects of play do you find particularly easy or difficult?
- What aspects of adult intervention do you find particularly easy or difficult?
- What would add to your 'enjoyment' of or satisfaction with the sessions?

The results of the completed evaluation forms were collated and returned to the group for discussion. Information from this discussion was used to plan future direction of the project.

The group were also given focused written tasks (see Appendix Four) in response to some of the issues raised during the meetings (Calderhead, 1993). During one meeting a lengthy discussion explored practitioner's understanding of how children learn. The homework for that week included studying related references (Abbott, 1994) accompanied by a request to write 500 words on 'How children Learn' (The results of this are presented in the Findings Chapter Six).

Adalbjarnsdottir (1997) states that practitioners may not always be aware of the pedagogical philosophy of teaching. This can be promoted through the use of cameos and stories (as discussed in Chapter Two) were obtained from familiar literature (Merry, 1998). These cameos were then used by the researchers to relate practitioners' thinking to the conceptual purposes of the project and to model the link between theory and practice. As practitioners arrived at the meetings, they often spontaneously shared significant episodes of the day's events. These were used as an effective tool to aid deeper reflective thinking (Bassegy, 1999). Bryman suggests that stories, cameos also referred to as anecdotes, vignettes, episodes and narratives can be designed to reflect the complexity of a situation in concrete terms – a strategy also used to promote

deeper levels of thinking and reflective practice (Bryman, 1989: 40; Hord et al, 1998; Van Manen, 1999).

Distanced from the immediacy of their practice might promote reflective thinking, using cameos was a less confrontational way of asking critical questions (Convery, 1998). For instance, during discussions on observation of children's play, a related cameo would be produced. Cameos were used frequently to illustrate discussions and model ways in which theory and practice might be related.

Further opportunities to establish links between theory and practice were made during visits to each other's schools. The hosting practitioner provided a focus for the visit, in order to initiate a spirit of enquiry as opposed to supporting a culture of obedience, dependency and rule-directed practitioners. The concept of 'disobedience' is discussed in Chapter Seven (Granström, 2000).

### **Professional documentation**

The group contributed a wide range of documentation from their schools, including:

- Long, medium and short term planning documents;
- parents' information booklets;
- play policies;
- curriculum documentation;
- photographs.

Planning documentation was included based on the evidence that decisions practitioners make in the course of their professional lives are informed by their perceptions and beliefs: because these are so implicit and deeply embedded, various strategies are employed to access an 'invisible pedagogy' (Spodek, 1988: 14).

### **Written stimulated recall of video**

The group were asked to reflect on the videotape of play activities following the group discussions they had soon after the event (Day, 1993). Written reflections were

process of being engaged in research in this way. At that time, it was not possible to substantiate this strategy. Chapter Three suggest that some methods were grounded in the practitioners' developing reflective approach. This particular strategy was informed by the professional judgment of the two researchers working with the project. Its effectiveness and the issues relating to grounded methods are explored in Chapter Eight (Discussion).

### **Research methods: analysing the data**

This section begins with an outline of the analytical approach used in the research for:

- interviews;
- observation;
- documentation;
- computer software for aiding analysis;

#### **Interviews**

The interviews were analysed in order to determine practitioners' changing values, beliefs, and understandings as they developed a reflective approach to practice.

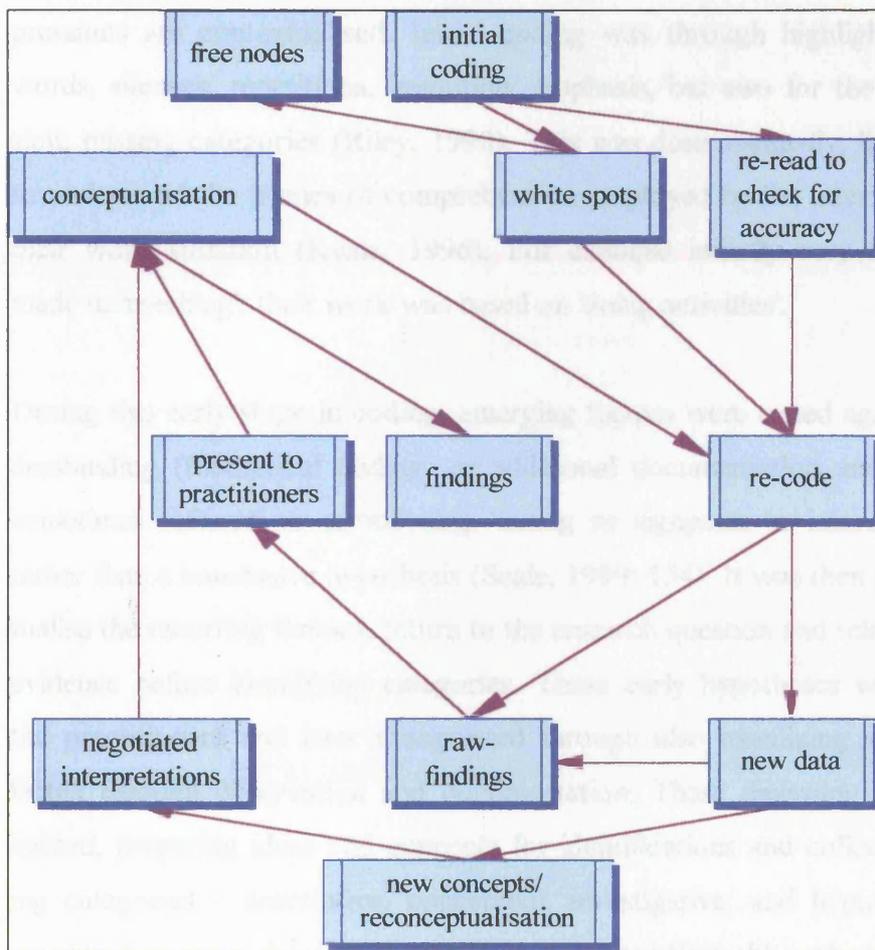
The product of in-depth interviewing is text, i.e. transcripts of interviews. Techniques of qualitative analysis recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), and Glaser and Strauss (1967) were used to analyse the transcripts of interviews, group meetings and other documentation. Initially this was pursued in order to understand practitioners' construct of teaching and learning through play. As the research progressed the analysis also interrogated the processes within reflective practice: deconstruction and reconstruction.

Kvale (1996) advocates a cyclical hermeneutical approach to interpreting the interview transcripts. This is supported by Glaser's approach (1978) to theoretical coding and characterised by the continual link between coding and conceptualisation. This involves data collection, data analysis, coding, emerging conceptualisation and recoding resulting in a cyclical, unpredictable rather than linear process. The hermeneutical process involves an initial reading of interview transcripts in order to get an overall feel of the messages within the texts. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest that initial categories are synthesised then studied for potential patterns and relationships within the evidence.

The following figure (Figure 9) illustrates the cyclical process of coding, recoding, coding against conceptualisations, presenting interpretations to the practitioners. Raw findings eventually matured into more secure interpretations. Through negotiating un-

understandings of raw findings, data and existing theories, secure reliable coding is established. This cycle was continued until no new patterns emerged.

FIGURE 9: CYCLICAL HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH.



Transcribing the recorded interviews, playing and replaying the tapes to listen to phrases to test for accuracy enhances familiarity and provides opportunity to focus on words, expressions (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Transcribed interviews are initially interpreted and interrogated by the interviewers in order to place some tentative structure within the analysis, although initial coding or categorisation has to be contextualised (Kvale, 1996). The transcript is read as a whole document, and then re-read to determine the first tentative coding units. For example, sometimes it is easier for interviewees to illustrate their responses with stories. These are analysed with denotational

and associated meanings within the text (Scholfield, 1995). Where stories were used, especially during discussions, they frequently did not relate to the current discussion – a pattern of an inability to conceptualise issues was emerging.

Analysts then returned to the larger phrases so that specific understandings and impressions are contextualised. Initial coding was through highlighting phrases, text, words, silences, repetitions, hesitation, emphasis, but also for the unexpected, omission, missing categories (Riley, 1990). This was done manually, line by line, in order to understand the frames of comprehension employed by the interviewees to describe their work situation (Kvale, 1996). For example initially very little reference was made to 'teaching': their work was based on 'doing activities'.

During this early stage in coding, emerging themes were tested against the global understanding (theoretical coding) or additional documentation and evidence. This is sometimes referred to as indexing 'acting as signposts to interesting bits of data' rather than a conclusive hypothesis (Seale, 1999: 154). It was then possible to conceptualise the recurring themes, return to the research question and relate this to emerging evidence before identifying categories. These early hypotheses were discussed with the practitioners and later triangulated through also examining additional data collected through observation and documentation. These emerging themes were highlighted, preparing ideas and concepts for identifications and collection in the following categories – descriptive, conceptual, investigative, and hypothetical. These are presented in more detail in the findings (Chapter Six) although one category, hypothetical, is illustrated in Figures 10 and 11. The data, coded through NUD\*IST has been transferred to Inspiration Software. The Two formats illustrate the versatility of software (discussed in the final section of this chapter). The first (Figure 10) presents a linear model of the hypothetical coding; the second, clusters the categories, illustrating their interconnectedness and complexity.

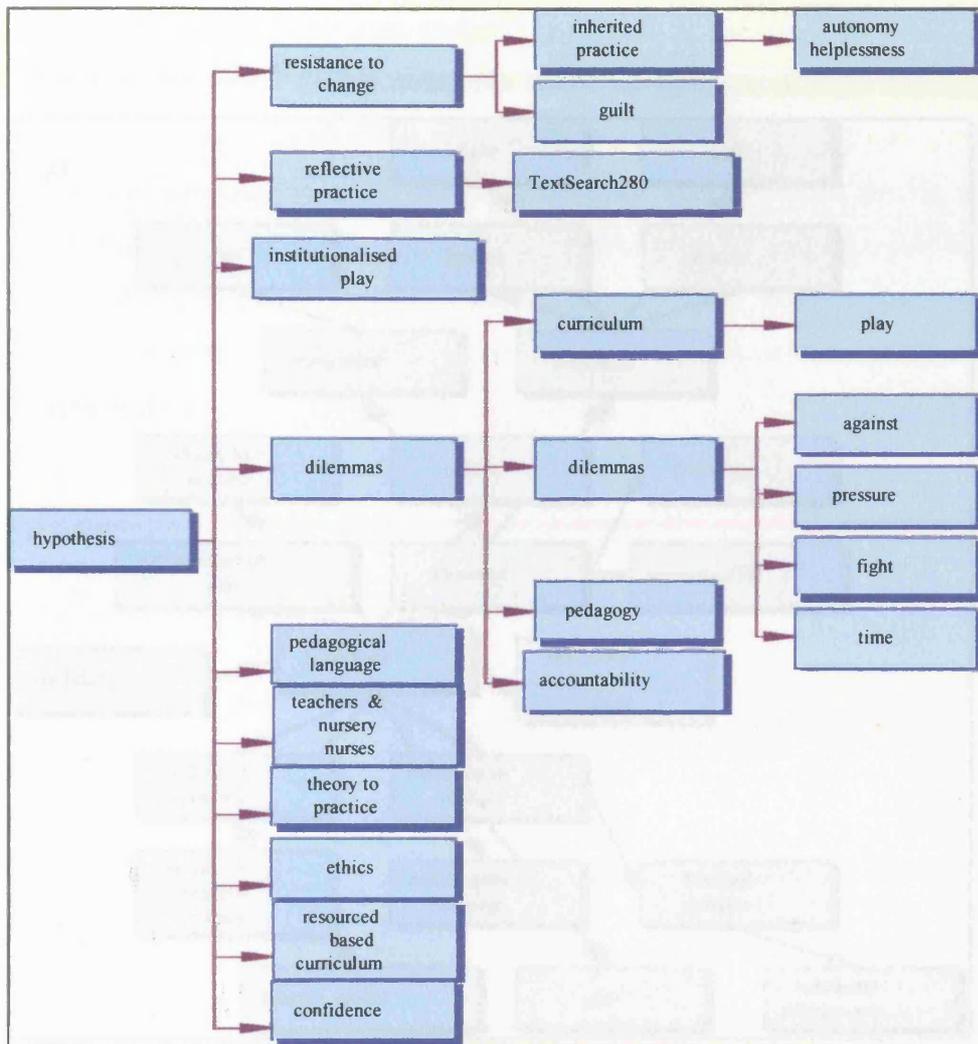


FIGURE 10: LINEAR CODING OF HYPOTHESES

from what we were interested in the coding, grounded theory through the 12 weeks, it was found that 'play' occurred in the context of dilemmas or at least partly in the context of quality and learning. Some 'situated' categories were created. They were created as free nodes, also known as 'white spots' were not pre-qualified aspects of the school reality (Kleinberg, 1993: 201). What was pre-qualified is Figure 9. During the early stages of the research, coding was not very systematic, e.g. the text code was found in three categories.

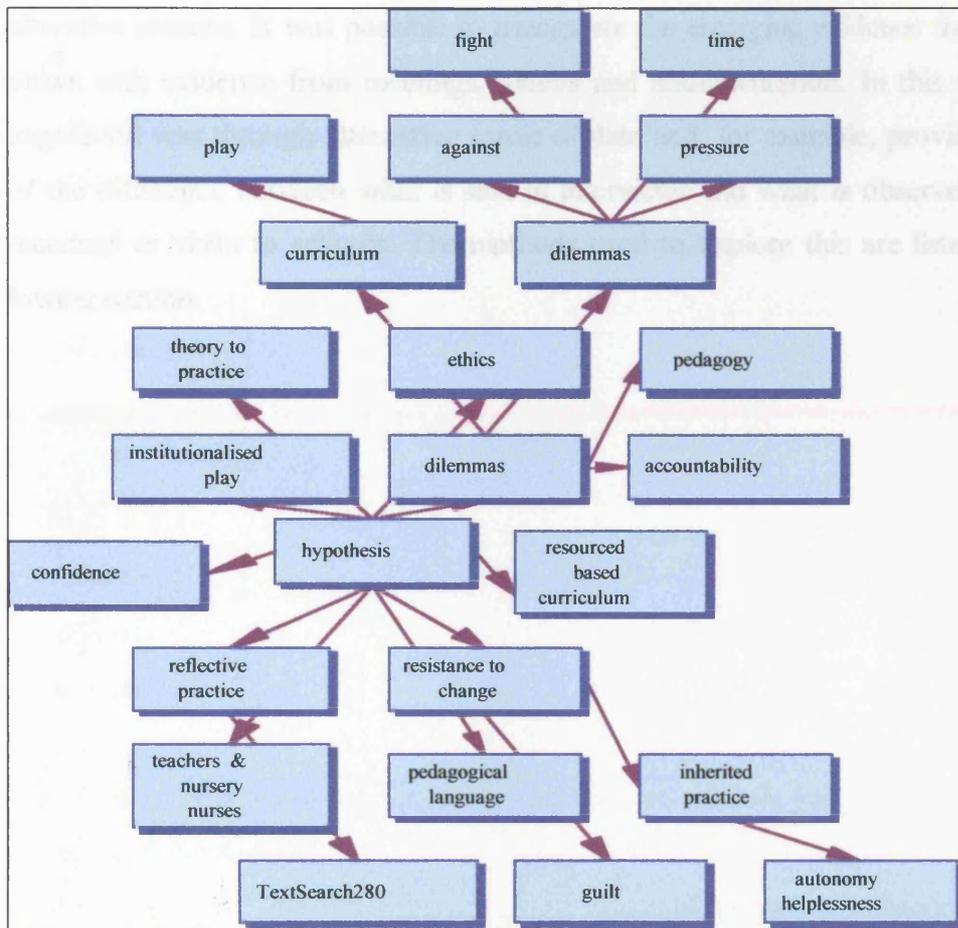


FIGURE 11: HYPOTHESES CLUSTER CODING

Text searches were incorporated into the coding system and interrogated. Through this, for example, it was found that 'play' occurred in the context of difficulties or dilemmas, rarely in the context of teaching and learning. Some anticipated categories were not found. They were created as free nodes, also known as 'white spots', representing unidentified aspects of the school reality (Kelchtermans, 1993: 203). White spots are represented in Figure 9. During the early stages of the research, teaching was represented as free nodes, i.e. no text units were found in those categories.

The interviews were the main sources of data. It is possible that contradictions may emerge in the data. Findings from one source of data may conflict with findings from alternative sources. It was possible to triangulate the emerging evidence from the interviews with evidence from meetings, videos and documentation. In this research, triangulation was through alternative forms of data and, for example, provided evidence of the difference between what is said in interviews and what is observed during the meetings or visits to schools. The methods used to explore this are listed in the following section.

### **Observation**

The responses of the group during the meetings were noted in the following categories (Burton, 1982):

- Attendance
- Attendance during meeting
- avoidance strategies during discussions, e.g.
- leave room
- laughter
- unrelated discussions
- request refreshments.
- disposition
- confident
- diffident
- articulate

The video of play episodes , taken in practitioners' schools was examined in relationship to the following criteria

- Principles established by the group; (exploratory and experiential)
- Principles to practice link; (encourage creative interpretations)
- Implications of child development; (conceptual and spatial awareness)
- Learning intentions; (appropriate mathematical language)
- Assessment of Early Learning Goals; (no evidence in plan)
- Types of play; (constructional play)
- Adult role; (support through discussion)
- Provision for learning through play; (confirm through viewing video).

For the purposes of this thesis, some of these criteria are represented in the following lesson plan, shown overleaf:

FIGURE 12: LESSON PLAN (PHASE THREE)

|   |   |  |  |   |   |
|---|---|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Activity Title:</b><br><b>Building Houses</b><br><b>Where:</b> in classroom, clear large space to enable children to work and discuss their projects.  |   | <b>Learning Goals:</b><br><b>Maths:</b> -size, spatial awareness<br><br><b>Assessment:</b> - |  |   |   |
| <b>Affective and Social</b><br><br><b>Meaningful and Relevant</b><br><br><b>Imagination and Creativity</b><br><br><b>Trial and Error</b><br><br><b>Exploratory and Experiential</b><br><br><b>Individual and Dynamic</b>  | <b>Activity (Please note differentiated activities / assessment opportunities / deployment of staff).</b><br><br>Following a walk to see some of our homes, discuss with whole group ways of representing houses with construction materials, encouraging broad and creative interpretations. Emphasis need to estimate size, model appropriate language for materials & likely mathematical language; refer to last week's lessons on size.<br><br>Ensure children have appropriate choice of resources, according to ability. Provide opportunity for them to explore materials and experiment with ideas.<br><br>Adult support, ensuring all children involved and have opportunities to discuss, listen and talk about their models. Take opportunity to model use of appropriate language, observe and assess children's developing spatial awareness and conceptual development | <b>Key Language</b><br><br><b>English:</b><br>Mathematical                                   | <b>Resources</b><br><b>Large</b><br>wooden bricks,<br>large plastic bricks,<br>small construction bricks<br>(Lego) | <b>Whole class</b><br><br><b>Group</b><br>12 children 3 – 4 1/2<br><br><b>Free Choice</b> | <b>Personal, Social and Emotional</b><br><br><b>Language and Literacy</b><br><br><b>Mathematics</b><br><br><b>Knowledge and Understanding</b><br><br><b>Physical</b><br><br><b>Creative</b> |
| <b>Evaluation:</b> I felt as I supported the children they were involved in the tasks, some engaged in discussion, others working independently. Some careful consideration of size of bricks, especially when making large table and completing enclosure around the house. Next session, provide greater range of sizes with small bricks to encourage further application of spatial concepts. |   |  |  |   |   |

### **Documentation**

There are established methods used to inform understanding of practitioners' reflective practice (Berlak et al, 1975; Holly, 1989; Pound, 1989; Qualter and Dean, 1999; Trevor and Bickmore-Brand, 1999). The key documents in this research were the 28 interview transcripts. In addition, the following were included for analysis:

- Practitioners' medium and short term planning documentation;
- written narratives by practitioners;
- focused writing about particular tasks or events;
- journal writing, notes-in-action;
- completed evaluation forms;
- development and refinement of the 6 StEPs and related documentation (Figure 12).
- autobiographies;
- transcripts and note taking from sessions. Not all meetings were recorded and transcribed as this would have generated too much data (Cassell and Symon, 1994).

Pedagogical categories were identified through an informed interest in reflective practice. This knowledge was also developed through reading and re-reading documentation produced during the meetings as referenced in Chapter Three Grounded Theory. The early findings were communicated to the group, through discussion and in written report. The group were offered opportunities to elaborate, clarify and challenge in small and large discussions, individually by telephone or post or through informal discussions. This process of open negotiation of findings became a key aspect of the analysis (Spodek, 1988).

As with the interviews, initial findings were developed through theoretical coding, an intensely complex process producing conceptually rich theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) also identify analytical tactics, ranging from the descriptive and concrete to the explanatory and conceptualisation which were used during initial coding. These four categories, descriptive, concrete, explanatory and conceptual also supported Simmons et al (1989) taxonomy of reflective thinking (as

described in Chapter Three). Van Manen (1999) suggests that students often view teaching in terms of personal qualities such as patience and kindness rather than in pedagogical concepts. Documentation was used to examine the ways in which practitioners viewed aspects of pedagogy. For instance, observation was referred to as 'eavesdropping'. This is explored in Chapter Six.

Planning documentation was analysed with similar categories and in conjunction with observation of the videotapes. Short term and medium term plans were requested on three occasions in order to measure change in practice although practitioners frequently brought in additional copies.

Written narratives about aspects of teaching and learning were requested (Figures 5, 6 and 7, Appendix 3 and 4) and examined in order to determine the development of conceptual, reflective thinking, the use of pedagogical language. These are explored in the Findings Chapter Six.

Journal writing is considered a powerful means of exploring practice (Holly, 1989). As practitioners write about children (as in the cameos) it is possible to 'learn about the lenses through which they are viewing children teaching' (ibid: 75). Holly suggests (ibid: 76) that 'Writing is both constructing experience and reconstructing it as facilitates an awareness, consciousness of consciousness', surfacing the implicit. As with planning documentation, the writing was analysed to identify emerging components of pedagogical thinking. Writing captured these stages. The maturing levels of reflective thinking are revealed in the following Chapter Seven.

The development of StEPs from the broad 104 principles to the refined 6 statements involved over 70 processes. All these were retained. Through conceptualising the changes, it has been possible to identify some developmental changes in their practice. Analysis involves attributing pedagogical concepts to the data based on the evidence that pedagogical language is indicative of reflective thinking (Ross, 1989; Krogh and Crewes, 1989; Zeichner and Liston, 1985; Simmons et al, 1989). Categories of reflection range from a statement containing 'no description of an instructional

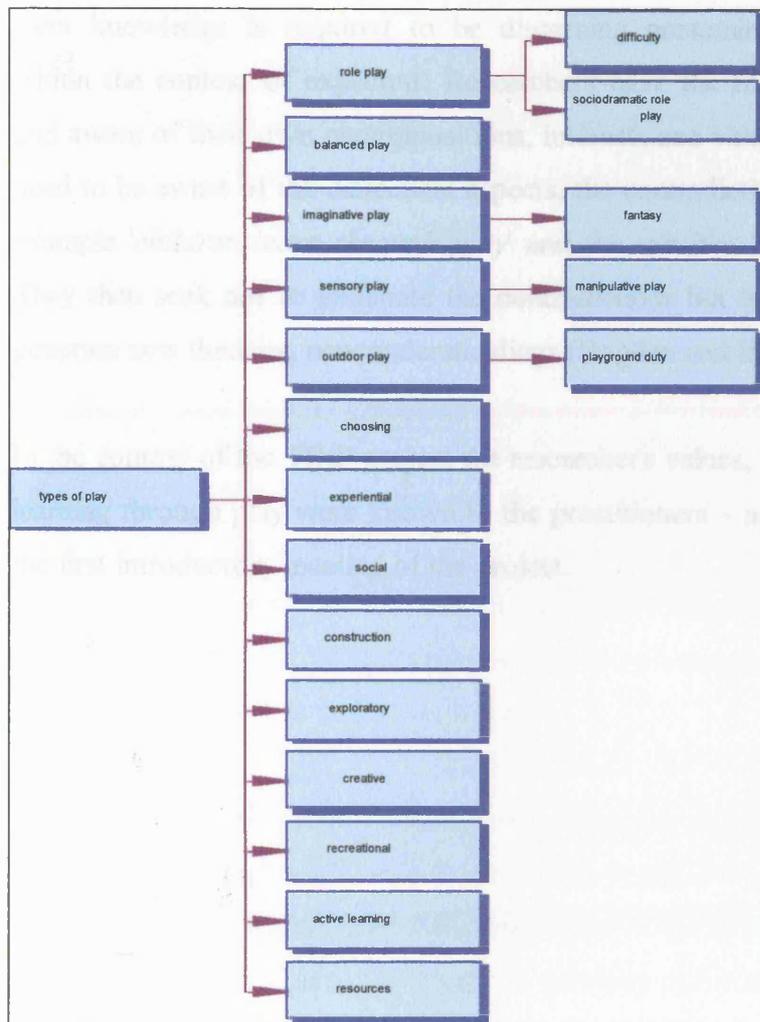
event to use of pedagogical principles to provide contextual data with, for example, an ability to critically analyse cameos. The list of principles were interrogated and challenged, through exploring their relevance to practice and surfacing the underlying concepts.

Some results of coding the interview were coded against other documentation. Questions emerged from the interview transcripts such as 'is there additional evidence of ways in which children's learning through play?' This claim that children do have playful learning experiences, was asserted during discussions in the meetings, but little supporting evidence found during the interviews. Planning documentation was then interrogated, with similar categories as indicated in the previous section of this chapter, in order to determine the nature of play provision.

On some occasions documentation confirmed evidence gleaned from the interviews and observations. On other occasions, there were discrepancies, confirming the rhetoric – practice gap.

It has been established in Chapter Three that the concept of play remains problematic (in theoretical and practical terms). Analysis of documentation also explored practitioners' perceptions and practice of play. The practitioners identified 14 categories of play during the interviews (Figure 13). There was no evidence of provision for play in the Phase 1 planning documents.

FIGURE 13: TYPES OF PLAY



With so many unexpected findings, it was imperative that researcher bias was reduced to a minimum in order to support its later reliability.

Altrichter and Posch (1989) argue that it is not possible for researchers to be totally value free and unprejudiced. Prejudices need not necessarily imply being blinkered but may contain much relevant knowledge, experience and understanding. These insights are required for responding sensitively to practitioners and later during engagement with the data in order to clarify and deepen understanding of the phenomenon.

Researcher knowledge of these emerging themes is a critical aspect of coding. Sufficient knowledge is required to be discerning presuming emerging themes remain within the context of expected! Researchers have the responsibility to be conscious and aware of their own presuppositions, interests and values (Kvale, 1996). They also need to be aware of the dialectical aspects, the contradictions between the general, for example '*children learn through play*' and the specific, '*tell them to make a house*'. They then seek not to eliminate the contradictions but to explore their contexts and generate new theories, new understandings (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

In the context of the TBtP project the researcher's values, beliefs and understanding of learning through play were known to the practitioners – all were made explicit during the first introductory meeting of the project.

## COMPUTER SOFTWARE

Theories can be formulated and tested more easily with computer software (Miles and Huberman 1994) such as NUD\*IST (Herrington and Oliver, 1997) which has the facility for browsing through text, coding and recording ideas and memos within the text. Use of computer software enables data to be easily studied, easy to add information, memos, references, summaries, potentially interesting sections of data can be highlighted, initial reactions can be retained for more considered reflection (Riley, 1990).

Repeated listening, identifying codes and concepts within the text until themes emerge was made easier through use of NUD\*IST which has facility for family nodes (groups of texts units within the same category, e.g. all practitioners talked of anticipating 'challenge') and free standing coding (individual text units, e.g. no mention was made of 'teaching' during the first round of interviews) in order to investigate anticipated themes as well as capturing surprises.

Rhedding-Jones (1996: 28) presents data collection as a form of ethnography and argues that consideration of early findings with practitioners might prompt a process of de-construction, especially if discourse is examined and then tentatively compared with initial emerging theories. As the researcher's understanding is developed and familiarity with practitioners' pedagogical theories flourishes, it becomes possible to question and challenge those theories. In this way, de-construction is diminished and a process of reconstruction is promoted; new meanings are revealed and further understandings created rather than former values destroyed (Dahlberg et al, 1999).

It is especially helpful in displaying the structure of coding schemes such as hierarchical models. This can also be represented through use of graphic software such as Inspiration (1998-9). Computer software supports ongoing data collection and coding through adding memos, annotations, dating all additions and alterations so that, if desired a history of all transactions and developing theories can be represented.

However, use of NUD\*IST reduces text to coded units which then risk becoming de-contextualised, separated from its original sources to be placed in various other contexts (Ayres and Poirier, 1996). Researchers must therefore remain faithful to the informants' stories and develop a trustworthy analysis accepting the limitations of coding and ensuring the text and its deeper meanings are recognised. Sandelowski (1993: 8) argues that an overzealous zeal to remove bias risks obscuring the realities embedded within the data and suggests that transcripts must be contextualised, so that analysis includes examining the text and beyond. She concludes

Research is both a creative and a destructive process: we make things up and out of our data, but we often inadvertently kill the thing we want to understand in the process. Similarly, we can preserve or kill the spirit of qualitative work; we can soften our notion of rigor to include the playfulness, soulfulness, imagination, and technique we associate with more artistic endeavours, or we can further harden it by the uncritical application of rules. The choice is ours: rigor or rigor mortis.

It is hoped that the frequency of meetings reduced the risk of killing the spirit of qualitative work. The research remained dynamic and passionate due to the sustained contact with the people involved. In addition, technology has advanced from the early chunking of text to a far more flexible system that displays a variety of relationships within coded units, yet also has the facility to 'spread' so that units may also be interrogated in their broader original contexts. Consequently, coding units were very small – often a few words - but, at the press of a key the units could be enlarged and contextualised.

While software can aid analysis, the responsibility for analytical rigour remains firmly with researchers (Richards and Richards, 1991). Coding in both ways, with single text codes and broader units, provided the researcher with in-depth familiarity with the data, and was an opportunity for reflection within the process. Often reflection is required in order to benefit from a balance of understanding from the data analysis (Day, 1998: 270). Taking time to deliberate, consider and reflect was particularly helpful where both context and content (reflective practice and play) are highly complex concepts. The quest for truth and understanding may involve many shades of

grey; presenting raw findings without the benefit of deliberation and reflection may render the truth as harsh and brutal. Nonetheless the researcher has a responsibility to the researched to 'tell their stories to give them a voice', to give clear indications of how the theories were discovered (Strauss and Corbin, 1994: 281). Ongoing raw findings were regularly presented to the group throughout the research. The purpose of the research, to interrogate reflective practice involved practitioners' reflective thinking, learning to know their professional selves (Holly, 1989). This would not have been possible without working together respectfully with the emerging evidence of their reflective thinking.

There is a fine line between analysing the data in order to understand practitioners' needs to inform planning for differentiated support, and analysing individuals. The intention was to work, with rather than on, the practitioners (Schulz et al, 1997: 474).

Early analysis of the interview transcripts produced evidence that the group were resistant to change. At this stage the methods of analysis were changed and intensified through use of CBAM, in order to understand, support and promote change. This analysis is discussed in the following section.

### **Changing practice**

Earlier studies of responses to change suggested that a degree of resistance to change is to be expected (Miles, 1964; Fuller, 1973). However, this can be minimised through making provision for team building within the context of the change process (Morrison, 1998). Facilitators need to provide opportunities for developing effective communication and opportunities for free talking. Shared ownership, through agreeing on the purpose and nature of the work, encourages commitment to the focus of change, especially if this is developed through a supportive climate. Griffiths (1964) also proposed that change will occur if an outsider, rather than internal chief administrators facilitate the change process. Day (1993) advocates the critical need for support by key colleagues to enable practitioners to maintain and enhance autonomy. Additionally Miles (1964) suggested that resistance to change might be due to lack of information or direct experience of the innovation.

Attempts were made to incorporate these conditions into the research methods in which practitioners' needs were identified and provision made for differentiated support, information and appropriate training.

In their longitudinal study, Pigge and Marso (1997) make provision for teacher concerns based on Fuller's evidence (1969) that practitioner concerns begin with an emphasis on self-concerns before later considering teaching and pupil concerns. Pigge and Marso found that practitioners' self concerns diminished as they experienced success in their teaching and suggested that teacher preparation and initial in-service training take consideration of the developmental and individualised concerns of practitioners. It was found that analysis with CBAM provided detailed individualised information of practitioners' levels of use and concerns about changing practice to incorporate aspects of teaching and learning through play. The Concerns Based Adoption Model is discussed in the following section.

#### **Analysis of data with CBAM**

CBAM was originally designed by Hall, Wallace and Dossett (1973). The design was motivated by a conviction that the most significant way to improve learning is through improving teaching although they recognised that teachers need assistance if they are to change and develop practice. CBAM is a concerns-based approach, which emphasises:

- the personal side of change;
- an understanding that change was a process, not an event;
- that individual concerns were important.

The personal and emotional aspects of change are acknowledged and supported by CBAM. These aspects may range from initial denial to later acceptance and internalisation of innovation, in this case, teaching through play. The effectiveness of the change programme can be supported by the dynamic nature of the collaborative relationships developed through the process. This cannot be planned in such intensity but

its spontaneity and fluency is likely to provide the ongoing lubricant to the organisation (Morrison, 1998: 196).

CBAM was originally developed to support practitioners and policy makers respond to new understandings of teaching and learning. It aims to inform and facilitate intervention through anticipating and planning for practitioner's behaviour and respecting their individual concerns. It provides the concepts, techniques and procedures relevant to each stage in the process and helps to facilitators understand the dynamics of change within schools.

For change to take place, facilitators must provide leadership to direct and manage the processes, working closely and assisting practitioners in order to understand their needs within the context of their school environment. Hall and Hord (1984) also suggest there is merit in considering a second facilitator, to complement the principle facilitator, so that between them they may search, adapt, intervene, monitor and listen, thinking systematically about how each aspect of change will affect other elements within the innovation. The two researchers involved in the research and TBtP project adopted different but complementary roles, both providing informed support to the practitioner.

Hord et al (1998: 75) suggest a checklist of six key actions to support the process of change within practitioners' work. These key areas discussed within the context of this research, so that 'use of innovation' is replaced by 'teaching through play'. The strategies of support include:

- supportive organisational arrangements;
- training;
- consultation and reinforcement;
- monitoring;
- communication;
- dissemination.

The ways in which these strategies were applied to this research were often the result of negotiation between researcher and practitioners. Some examples of these are discussed and illustrated in Chapter Six.

Some aspects of the change process can be anticipated and provision made to provide appropriate support although innovations can be dynamic and may need a flexible framework, sensitive to the needs of the individuals within the change process. Consequently, three diagnostic dimensions are used (Figure 14):

- stages of concern (SOC) in order to identify how practitioners feel about the change process
- levels of use (LOU), which address what they are, or are not doing, to implement the innovation.
- this also includes reference to types of use (TOU) within each level of use.

FIGURE 14: IDENTIFICATION OF SOC, LOU AND TOU

| DEFINITION OF CBAM  | REFERENCE FROM TRANSCRIPT  | RESPONSE BY RESEARCHER   |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Stage of Concern:</b><br>Informational level typified by saying 'I want to be able to find out about it'   | I want to be able to find out if they've got there or not . . . which is the hardest bit   | Discuss with Carole, through reference to her video, ways of planning and assessing children's learning. Provide concrete examples, Discuss during meeting – identify other practitioners at similar level |
| <b>Level of Use:</b><br>Orientation level typified by saying Level 1 - state in which the user is acquiring information about the innovation and/or is exploring its value orientation.<br><br>See also Taxonomy of Reflective Thinking | I want my objective in the back of my head<br><br>that's the hard bit not just setting it up and having a good time its sort of finding out what they've learned from them   | Include reference to linking learning intentions to activity   |
| <b>Type of Use:</b><br>Acquiring Information:<br>Seeks descriptive material about the innovation. Seeks opinions and knowledge of others through discussions, visits or workshops   | You know we often sort of read things and articles and things and get idea and that's one of the nice things. You know when we've been visiting other people's nurseries, to sort of see an idea . . . oh, I've not done that and think I'll have to do that one, I think that's nice, to try new things and I'm always very happy to try new things out | Ask Sarah, what ideas did she see, did she try it – why? What impact on teaching / learning / play? Relate to focus of visit   |

CBAM is also based on the belief that within the change process, the facilitators' role is critical (Hord, 1987). This is especially so when the facilitator has a management

role in school, has knowledge of the people within their professional context, is familiar with communication systems and has the authority to make a difference at policy level. Grimmett and Dockendorf (1999: 88) consider there is a notable absence of published studies on the facilitators and the importance of that role. Extensive research, associated with CBAM, provides highly detailed strategies for guiding interventions in response to practitioners' concerns, levels of use and types of use (Rutherford et al, 1984; Draughon and Hord, 1986; Blum and Butler, 1987).

Additional transcripts and notes taken during meetings with the TBtP project members were used to assess specific learning needs of the practitioners, the agenda of future meetings always grounded in the evidence of previous meetings so that we were able to make the course as relevant as possible to the practitioners' stages of concerns (Ford et al 1999).

This helped to identify the nature of personal concerns, confirmation that the group was intensely focused on information gathering. This enabled the provision of appropriate training and support.

The process of analysis is illustrated with a brief extract from one of the interviews:

*I still sort of want, I want my objective in the back of my head. . . I want to be able to find out if they've got there or not, which is the hardest bit, you know if you they are learning what they are learning what do they know, where do they need to go next, through the play activities that's the hard bit not just setting it up and having a good time its sort of finding out what they've learned.*

CBAM was not specifically designed as a research tool although developed from extensive research on the process of change within educational institutions. However, the basic assumptions were supported by the framework of the research and the recommended procedures of CBAM analysis were compatible with the research project. Hall and Hord (1987) suggest that the change facilitator shares early findings, possibly informally, with practitioners before formalized interpretations are made and that time is made for the facilitator to attend to the concerns of individual practitioners.

This was incorporated into on-going dialogue with the group. At termly intervals, the group was also provided with written feedback of on-going findings; these formed the basis for discussion as the group challenged and clarified the researcher's interpretations.

## ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

Bassey (1999: 74) suggests three ethical aspects should be considered when considering the nature of relationships within the research process:

- respect for democracy relating to the freedom to investigate, to question, to give and to receive information;
- respect for truth, to be truthful and trustworthy;
- respect for person, respect for dignity and for privacy.

Confidentiality and anonymity were offered and initially accepted by all practitioners (Allan, 1991). However, as materials have been prepared for publication, the group have increasingly requested acknowledgement of their contributions and expressed an eagerness to participate in the video. Towards the end of the project, they suggested photographs should be used to illustrate biographical details an option not pursued. In order to retain the personal dimension of this research names are used to reference quotations although, as discussed in Chapter One, names were changed in order to respect anonymity and confidentiality.

This policy was also adopted for report writing which aimed to be a valid account of the main findings whilst respecting the dignity of the researched (Smith, 1990). Writing during the second phase, when findings appeared to be so traumatic and negative was a challenging period of the research. The decision to share on-going findings with the group had been established at the beginning of the project. There was a similar obligation to present findings from the research, in a formal report, to a wider audience. That too was based on respect for the practitioners within the research. Similarly,

anonymous extracts of the interview transcripts were given to other researchers and for examination in order to minimise researcher bias during interpretation and analysis.

### **Conclusion**

The research process created a professional context for the two voices of academia and classroom practice leading to challenge, confrontation and new understandings of playful pedagogy. The context of a funded research project provided vital resources for time and support as critical reflective enquiry led to deconstruction and reconstruction of practitioners' values, beliefs and understanding. The interviews provided the framework for the methodology. The eight questions, repeated in each interview, provided evidence of progress and change in the practitioners' responses. The key concepts, emerged from analysis of the interviews and were confirmed or disconfirmed when coded and re-coded against data from observations and documentation. Initial analysis revealed a discrepancy between rhetoric and practice.

Through extensive individualised, differentiated support, time and a purposeful framework, there began to be developments in practitioners' level of thinking and use of pedagogical language. The process was prolonged and intensive, involving cognitive and affective engagement in the processes of reflective practice. The content of these on-going processes - deconstruction and reconstruction - are captured in their comments during the final group interview:

*I've changed practice in the nursery and I've got so much more confidence in my knowledge in what I do I think my knowledge has really grown I don't think I knew anything before. I've got more knowledge.*

*I've got more confidence to tackle the head, and I have to tackle the parents, more confidence in myself, self-belief and what I believe in.*

*I've got more confident intervening in children's play and doing it without feeling guilty about it. I used to think I was spoiling it by going in but now I don't, as long as I think about it first.*

It has been clear throughout this chapter describing the research methods, that methodology and findings are difficult to separate out in a study of this kind, because of the flexibility and dynamic nature of the overall grounded theory basis of the research. In adopting a grounded theory approach, the research design was closely correlated to

the, often unexpected, developing cognitive and affective responses of the practitioners.

The findings continue in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS

There have been many studies on the nature of teaching, based on the belief that the more we understand about how practitioners work, the better we will be able to influence the ways in which children learn (Ashton and Webb, 1986; Berliner, 1987). Teaching is a highly complex process partly based on the ways in which implicitly held theories are interpreted. Because practitioners infrequently engage in professional discourse, they do not readily have appropriate language to surface implicit pedagogical theories. The process of surfacing these theories begins with talking about what goes on in the classroom (Spodek, 1988).

The practitioners in this research had stated they were committed to deepening pedagogical knowledge and promoting change, suggesting a reflective approach as defined in Chapter Two. Talking about their actions and behaviours, identifying underlying theories, questioning, listening and confronting issues eventually led to an extended and sometimes traumatic period of challenge and deconstruction (Ross, 1989). Reconstructing that knowledge base and relating new understandings to practice demanded extensive, differentiated support. The perception that reflective practice was a '*nice thing to do*' was contested by the harsh reality of confrontation. Placing this research in the context of play added to its complexity so that despite their strong motivation and commitment to exploring play, progress was deliberate and protracted.

During the course of the research, the practitioners developed a pedagogical consciousness of play. All developed a greater sense of self-efficacy and firmer grasp of their values, beliefs and understandings. In the final round of interviews, their self-assurance was evident:

*I've got more confidence to tackle the head, and . . . the parents; more confidence in myself, self-belief and what I believe in.*

*I've got more confident intervening in children's play and doing it without feeling guilty about it. I used to think I was spoiling it by going in but now I don't, as long as I think about it first.*

*I've got more knowledge. I've changed practice in the nursery and I've got so much more confidence in my knowledge in what I do. I think my knowledge has really grown. I don't think I knew anything before.*

The three rounds of individual interviews differentiated the separate phases in the research process (see Figure 15).

FIGURE 15: TIME LINE OF RESEARCH PHASES

| Familiarisation           |                                  | Deconstruction                 |                | Reconstruction              |                |                | Reflection                      |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
| Phase 1<br>Autumn<br>1997 | Spring<br>1998                   | Phase 2<br>Summer<br>1998      | Autumn<br>1998 | Phase 3<br>Spring<br>1999   | Summer<br>1999 | Autumn<br>1999 | Spring<br>2000                  |
|                           | Feb<br>1998:<br>inter-<br>view 1 | July<br>1998: in-<br>terview 2 |                | Feb 1999:<br>interview<br>3 |                |                | Feb<br>2000:<br>Group interview |

They consist of:

**Phase 1: a period of familiarisation**

A formative phase, a period of familiarisation, in which early findings with its tales of the unexpected (Moyle and Adams, 2000), indicated a change in direction of the research focus. This suggested an exploration of reflective practice. The initial impressions were that practitioners were committed and enthusiastic about exploring how children learn through play. The emerging themes challenged that impression.

Three key themes began to emerge from the data, indicating practitioners:

- were committed and enthusiastic about exploring how children learn through play;
- displayed insecure pedagogical knowledge, practice rooted in affective domain;
- were resistant to change and to use of pedagogical language.

Further analysis supported the evidence that many of the difficulties being faced by practitioners in making provision for children's learning through play, were related to their difficulties in conceptualising pedagogical principles and developing a critically reflective approach to their practice.

### **Phase Two: a period of deconstruction**

Models for reflective practice were used to inform the process of interrogation. In addition, more recent studies including Dahlberg et al (1999) and Day (1999) have retrospectively been used to inform interpretation of the practitioners' developing approaches to reflective practice. Phase Two initially involved encouraging the practitioners to look back at earlier practice, recapturing events and drawing on their own experiences for consideration. This was done through talk, during meetings and interviews, through use of documentation, writing and stimulated recall and through viewing video recordings of play activities within the classroom. Practitioners questioned themselves and each other about teaching and their role in children's learning. They began to confront the realities and assumptions which informed their practice: in particular, this involved the realisation of insecure pedagogical knowledge, practice rooted in affective domain.

Confrontation led to a period of reconstruction and potentially to more abstract levels of critical reflection.

### **Phase Three: a period of reconstruction.**

The CBAM model is based on the belief that change is a process, requiring differentiated support. This model was used to determine the nature of support and pedagogical information required by the practitioners; it also suggested possible reasons for an apparent resistance to change and use of pedagogical language. Both practitioners and researchers developed a series of frameworks which illustrated the dynamic links between theories of pedagogy and practice. Through studying, training, and applying new understandings to practice, a period of reconstruction began. A year later, the group met to review their involvement in the research and TBtP project.

Maykut and Morehouse (1996) suggest that themes, patterns and outcomes are more appropriate headings for qualitative research than results and discussion usually associated with quantitative research. Whilst the overall heading of Findings has been retained, early analysis emerged as themes rather than secure findings; in time, these

became more established patterns. This language has been accepted and applied to the discussion in this thesis. During the 32 months of the research the initial emerging themes became more established as additional data was collected.

There are few statistical outcomes from this research, most of them being the results of analysis and reflection. This has involved interpretation, by the practitioner-researchers, of the data gathered from the three research methods. The researcher as person is an important aspect within qualitative research as Maykut and Morehouse argue (ibid: 27) ‘the human instrument is the only data collection instrument which is multifaceted enough and complex enough to capture the important elements of a human person or activity’.

This chapter contains three main sections, representing the three phases in the research. Each phase is approached through the three research methods. The interviews provided the key source of data and are triangulated with evidence from documentation and observation. It was found that triangulation confirmed, and on occasions refuted, the evidence from the interviews.

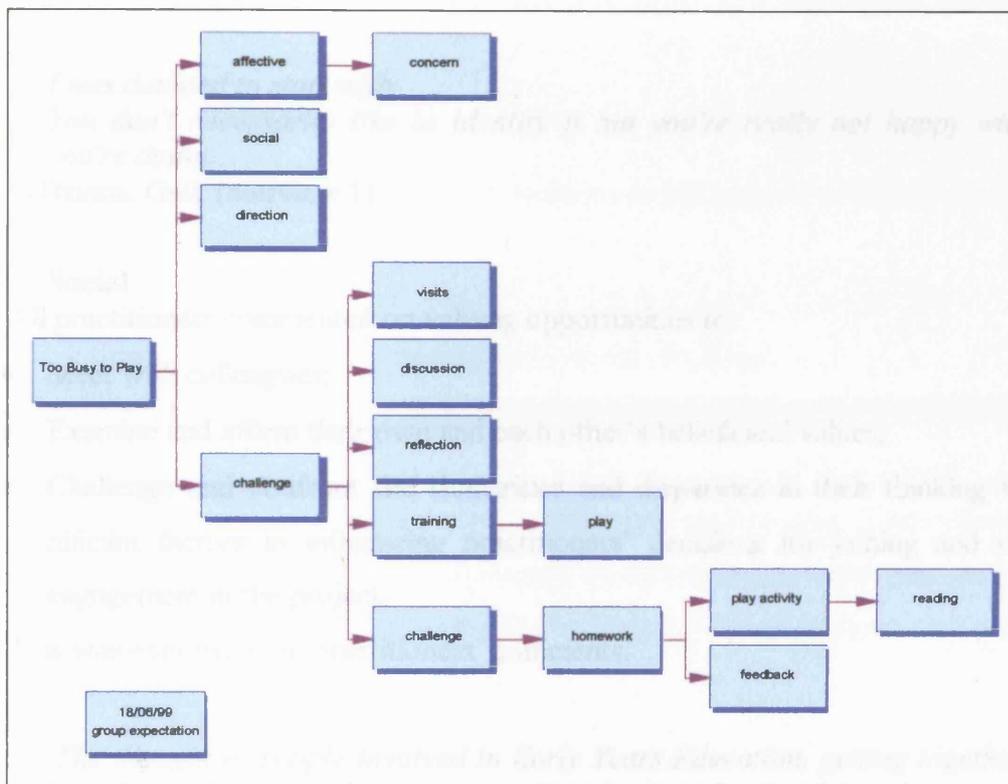
Concluding this chapter is a reference to the final group interview in which practitioners were given opportunities to reflect on their involvement in the research and the production of StEPs, its outcome (Moyles et al, 2001).

## PHASE ONE: A PERIOD OF FAMILIARISATION

The group joined the TBtP project in a state of buoyant confidence, stating they were eager to learn, to be challenged and to further practice. The impressions gained from their head teachers implied a group of reflective practitioners whose knowledge and expertise of how adults support children's learning through play would be a starting point for developing training materials. It was intended to use the training materials to support other practitioners, initially in the immediate locality and within each other's schools. It had been anticipated that the project would eventually become self-funding once the materials were published and training delivered by the practitioners in the TBtP project.

This first section presents the data from the first round of interviews which took place during February 1998, four months after the Too Busy to Play project began. The group's willingness to talk about aspects of their practice, matched with their enthusiasm, suggested informed and reflective practitioners, open to innovation. The first of the eight interview questions invited the practitioners to say what had attracted them to join the TBtP project. All suggested they were seeking additional information about play with the responses in four categories: - affective, social, directional and challenge confirming the initial rhetoric of the group. Inspiration Software (1998-99) provided a diagrammatic representation of analysed data as described in the previous chapter and illustrated in Figure 16:

FIGURE 16: 'WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO JOIN THE TOO BUSY TO PLAY PROJECT?'



### Affective

The research proposal stated that participants in the project would be engaged in developing their own practice and understanding of how children learn through play. This was reflected in their response to the first question, for the primary reason for joining appeared to be related to their own feelings about play.

*Play is very close to my heart. .*

*I feel very strongly about play as the medium to learn, for children*  
(Dianna, Linda. Interview 1)

Deep, personal commitment to play was expressed by all group members. Being recommended by their head teachers, 'such a morale booster' also affected their decision to join. They arrived enthusiastic about the opportunity 'talk about' play. Whilst eve-

ryone spoke positively about their involvement in the research, two practitioners also expressed concern about being with the group:

*I was daunted to start with.  
You don't necessarily like to identify it but you're really not happy with what  
you're doing*  
(Dianna, Gail, Interview 1)

### **Social**

All practitioners commented on valuing opportunities to:

- Meet with colleagues;
- Examine and affirm their own and each other's beliefs and values;
- Challenge and confront the similarities and disparities in their thinking were significant factors in influencing practitioners' decisions for joining and sustaining engagement in the project.

This was epitomized in practitioners' comments:

*The thought of people involved in Early Years Education, getting together, talking about what we're doing, our practice, because I enjoy doing that at any time. That was why I really wanted to do it. I was pleased to join . . .*  
(Pauline, Interview 1)

*To be able to work with people who think in the same terms as I do.*  
(Linda, Interview 1)

*We don't get a chance to sit down and say this is what we mean by play.  
I think we can probably identify with each other.*  
(Pauline, Gail, Interview 1)

### **Directional**

The collaborative leadership style, balanced with high expectations, and a belief that the group's needs and pace in the process of change should direct the project were all significant, as was the shared commitment to its purpose. The project director was known to the group for her expertise and knowledge about play. Each member referred to their enthusiasm for working with her, characterized by such comments as:

*Initially looked for a lead*

*Whereas a group with the backing of the university, with names that are well known, makes all the difference.*

*I sort of knew of [project director] and so it can't be half bad if she's put her name*

*to it you know.*

(Gail, Linda, June, Interview 1)

Their need for assistance through this more profound process of change was later recognised and articulated:

*We need to be supported, individually, in the challenge.*

(Pauline, Interview 2)

### **Challenge**

Challenge emerged as a key focus of practitioners' participation. They valued the opportunity for training and being challenged in their thinking about play, as evidenced in their comments about involvement in the project. One practitioner wrote that being in the project:

*[Made] my brain work.*

(June, Interview 1)

The main reason for joining the group was the expectation to be challenged:

*Certainly been challenging in terms of thinking, I mean you come out and your head is buzzing and you feel as if you had ten times the size, it's certainly not. . a cop out. In fact you feel more tired than after a session (with the TBtP group) than at school to be quite honest.*

(Linda, Interview 1)

References were made to visiting each other's schools:

*It will be interesting when the group visits.*

*Going round to visit each other's settings. I think that's very valuable.*

(Linda, Gail, Interview 1)

Some commented that they were interested in developing their own understanding of play:

*Interested for my own interest anyway, I think it can be difficult at times, to justify play and I think any tool that aids you, the better.*  
(Sarah, Interview 1)

Another felt the purpose was to:

*Clarify my thoughts [on play and early years practices]*  
(Vera, Interview 1)

And to reflect on practice, both during the sessions and in between meetings:

*I'm not suggesting that I reflect on my practice more than I did, but I reflect in a different way, I think I'm being more professional in my examination of things*  
(Gail, Interview 1)

Although they were conscious of the commitment they were making in attending the frequent meetings, they also realised this was necessary if any development in practice was to be achieved.

*I think without doing anything like this, you carry on blindly don't you?*  
(June, Interview 1)

Using CBAM to inform analysis suggested that the group were interested and enthusiastic about the opportunities to work with colleagues in order to explore ways in which they could support children's learning through play. The results of the analysis showed all practitioners were in a state in which the user has acquired or is acquiring information about the innovation (in this instance, learning through play) and/or has explored (or is exploring) its value orientation, typified by comments such as:

*Until you're with other people and talk about it in any depth you just carry on doing your day to day and doing your own thing, and filling in your tick lists, and all the rest of it. If you know what I mean, the learning bits.*  
(Carole Interview 1)

*I think the whole process of having to . . . explain what we understand by play, and to describe what play is . . . don't think we've reached an understanding yet, but part of the excitement . . . is . . . we have to define it. That's been hard because (originally) I felt quite secure in what I felt play was.*

(Linda, Interview 1)

Initial analysis of the interviews implied that they were committed and enthusiastic about learning about play. This was also confirmed by their autobiographies (*'I'm ready for some new ideas . . . am always open to new ideas'*).

The transcripts from the first round of interviews were further interrogated, re-confirming the view that the practitioners were committed and enthusiastic about exploring how children learn through play. The focus of their enthusiasm and commitment emerged, as shown on Figure 17:

FIGURE 17. PHASE 1: PRACTITIONERS' STAGES OF CONCERN AT EACH LEVEL OF USE

|  | Stages of Concern | Awareness | Informational | Personal | Management | Consequence | Collaboration |
|--|-------------------|-----------|---------------|----------|------------|-------------|---------------|
| <b>Level of Use</b>  |                   |           |               |          |            |             |               |
| <b>Non-use</b>   |                   | 0         | 3 (2)         | 0        | 0          | 0           | 0             |
| <b>Orientation</b>   |                   | 1 (1)     | 22 (5)        | 19 (5)   | 1 (1)      | 1 (1)       | 6 (2)         |
| <b>Preparation</b>   |                   | 0         | 0             | 1 (1)    | 0          | 0           | 0             |
| <b>Mechanical</b>  |                   | 0         | 0             | 0        | 0          | 0           | 0             |
| <b>Routine &amp; Refine</b>  |                   | 0         | 0             | 0        | 0          | 0           | 0             |
| <b>Integration</b>   |                   | 0         | 0             | 0        | 0          | 0           | 0             |
| <b>Renewal</b>   |                   | 0         | 0             | 0        | 0          | 0           | 0             |
| Numbers refer to the number of documents, i.e. interview transcripts coded.<br>Number in parentheses indicates number of practitioners |                   |           |               |          |            |             |               |

A matrix union search was undertaken, combining CBAM's definition of Levels of Use, and Stages of Concern. This search confirmed all practitioners were at an orientation level, i.e. 'a state in which the user has acquired or is acquiring information about the innovation and/or has explored or is exploring its value orientation' (Hord et al, 1998: 55). Within the domain of orientation (Figure 17. in red) the data also showed that practitioners were at various stages of concern.

One practitioner was at an awareness stage (see Figure 17, above), aware of an interest in play, but not totally concerned with the immediate issues. She was more concerned with 'catching up'. Pauline, the practitioner who joined the group at the fifth meeting stated she 'found it quite hard to understand what other people meant by what they [were saying during the meetings]. I think that's the problem of not being there from the start'.

Twenty-two text units were coded, in union, with an orientation level of use and informational stage of concern. These confirmed that the practitioners were acquiring information about play, based on a personal concern characterised by ‘I would like to know more about it’ (Hord et al 1998: 31). Five practitioners were coded at the orientation/ informational level. They made frequent references to this state during the one interview, i.e. 22 references by 5 practitioners, all repeatedly affirming their interest in learning more about play.

Figure 17 also shows 19 documents were coded, again at the orientation level, but also at a personal stage of concern. These confirmed that the practitioners were acquiring information about play, but also at a personal level, asking ‘How will it affect me?’ confirming Hord et al (1998: 31) finding that ‘personal concerns are likely to be intense at this stage’. June’s transcript, for example was coded at several stages – she made five references during the course of one interview to personal concerns within the context of talking about acquiring information about play:

*I think you get mechanical in what you do.*

*You get comfortable in what you do, you get comfortable in what you do and so you never change.*

*[Being in the project} - it’s made me step back and think (about play).*

*I think it’s made me evaluate how I look at play.*

*It’s made me [think] and probably I wouldn’t have thought of it before and although we were laughing on Wednesday about the principles, I think the principles are humming around in my head all the time.*

In addition, there were three occasions when two practitioners stated they had no knowledge of learning through play. Both were nursery nurses. The implications of this are discussed in Chapter Seven.

This analysis confirmed that the practitioners were interested in acquiring more information. One practitioner made a reference to considering preparing to incorporate aspects of play ‘*just in the planning*’ but there was no evidence that any were considering any further level of use. This analysis with CBAM confirmed the disposition of the group was at a level of acquiring information.

Five additional levels are defined under a comprehensive heading of 'mechanical', indicating the users' attempts to master the tasks required to use the innovation (Hord et al, 1998). Often these result in disjointed and superficial use, practitioners will master specific tasks although at a superficial level. In this context it would imply that the practitioners might incorporate aspects of a playful pedagogy possibly offering occasional opportunities for children to play, but not necessarily linked to learning. One practitioner later stated '*I think it's very easy to provide play activities, but whether the children are learning anything from what they're doing is a completely different matter*'.

It is relevant to note the additional levels of use indicated in Figure 17. At this stage, in Phase One, there was no evidence of any practitioner functioning at these levels:

The term 'routine' implies that one aspect of the innovation (e.g. playful teaching) is fully incorporated into the routine. However, little preparation or thought is given to improving innovation use or its consequences. There was no evidence from the interviews, documentation or observations that being involved in the project had changed aspects of practice at this level or at this time.

A routine level of use might be followed by a level of 'refinement' in which the user varies the use of the innovation, in order to increase the impact on children's learning. Variations in the way in which the innovation is used are based on knowledge of both short-term and long-term consequences for children.

A level of 'integration' implies practitioners are incorporating their own ideas into use of the innovation.

Finally a 'renewal' state in which the user re-evaluates the quality of use of the innovation and plans alternative methods to the benefit of children's learning.

One practitioner was at a level of preparation, preparing to use the innovation. Linda had identified that it was difficult to observe and assess children's play was difficult especially with a large class. She contemplated using a video camera in order to

provide her with opportunities to view, at a later time, the ways in which children behave in their play:

*I think one of the hardest things is, I don't find it intervening with it {children's play] a problem but to actually to assess what's going on, especially when your adult to children ratio is not very good, it's very difficult. But the only way that I'm going to prove that the learning's happening is by assessing what's going on and observing what's going on, and that's why I was talking to you earlier on to you about a video camera because I can prove what I'm saying but I can also see things that I wouldn't see otherwise.*

During Phase One, all practitioners were at an informational level – enthusiastic and committed to learning more about how to teach and learn through play.

The interviews confirmed the early impressions of the group's enthusiasm which was also explored through examining documentation. This is explained in the following section.

**Documentation: committed and enthusiastic about exploring how children play**

The evidence interrogated during the first phase in the research consisted of:

- brief autobiographical notes;
- the group's principles for play.

**Biographical notes**

The first meeting made provision for informal chat, welcome and introductions. During this session, each practitioner-researcher wrote a brief biographical note illustrated with Polaroid photographs taken during the meeting. The biographies presented a group of people who were

- Enthusiastic:

*Concentrate on serious playing. .looking forward to this project. . I believe vehemently in providing opportunities for children . . .to play, enjoy and do. . I am looking forward to the opportunity.*

- Open to challenge and discussion, professionally. .

*I'm ready for some new ideas. .am always open to new ideas and to ways of playing to learning and learning to play. . Help me understand that common comment 'well they are not learning, because they are only playing. . I cannot see how we can teach without play and would like to see that recognised by other people in Education. . [Looking forward] to research this.*

- and also open and willing to share personal details.

*I have three children. .my three nephews. . I'm single but live with my partner and son . . at home with 1 daughter, 3 dogs, 2 cats and any number of visitors . . I also go to aerobics.*

(Autobiographies: all practitioners).

The practitioners' willingness to be open became a significant aspect of the research. This candour was later extended to their professional lives, characterised by a direct and relentless contribution of professional documentation including planning, policies, school brochures, journal entries including anecdotes, accounts of incidents observed and experienced, many written tasks and responses to being involved in the project as well as eventually, forthright deliberations during meetings. The generosity

and willingness to communicate so abundantly and honestly provided a wealth of rich data. For example, the video of play activities and its related planning documentation activities were accompanied by:

- practitioners' immediate response;
- stimulated recall in group discussion;
- stimulated recall - written account after individual viewing;
- later written account of the same cameo following a period of six weeks for reflection;
- group's feedback and comments on three of the videos; the remaining videos were viewed independently, partly due the time required to do justice to each viewing and partly prompted by the group's increasing discomfort on viewing the films:

*I found the video horrifying, but it was probably useful at the same time. I think people ought to be videoed . . . everybody balks at the idea of being assessed or having some one watch and appraise them and yet the video where you do the appraising yourself, is very valid as an alarming way of perhaps you seeing what you don't want to see or do want to see.*

Gaining multi-perspectives was made possible through the practitioners' sustained willingness to communicate and provide a plethora of information.

Each member of the group was given a copy of the (auto)biographies in order to support familiarisation and forging of relationships and to confirm their shared commitment to the project aims (Burton, 1982). This commitment to developing supportive relationships and to the development of training materials was sustained throughout the project with increasing intensity. The group continued to meet with the researchers and with each other for approximately a period of nine months beyond the end of the funded period of the project, until the materials were nearing completion.

The invitation to capture thoughts in between the meetings confirmed their continued enthusiasm and revealed that challenges were being considered by the group beyond the context of the meetings: -

*I am still finding working with/exploring these principles still a little vague / overlapping.*

*I have been trying to formulate / identify my principles behind the play opportunities we offer.*

*When I look at the principles, some of them seemed to be saying the same thing twice, so I crossed some out. I felt the important ones were 'Play is a life long necessity. It is instinctive, inevitable and therefore a vital way of learning. Play is about embracing opportunities and being spontaneous'.*

(Carole)

### **Principles for play**

In response to a request to prepare a statement of their principles for play, the first meetings began with a discussion on beliefs and understandings of teaching and learning in early years. It was hoped to generate a set of principles by and through which they provided for play. These principles were intended to be a set of statements against which practice could be discussed and evaluated which could then be used to form the basis of materials for training. The group were aware of this and were apparently committed to its cause - they stated that although they did not all know each other they all spoke the same language of play. Based on their written statements and enthusiastic rhetoric 104 play principles were generated during the first meetings. Each practitioner had their own set of words apart from a few repeated phrases including: -'*Play is owned by the child*' and two references to each of the following, that play is enjoyable, provides emotional security, and is '*a child's need*'.

The group was insistent that all principles were important - '*principles to die for*' - although they later found it difficult to relate these directly to their practice. In part, this appeared to be due to the sheer overwhelming number but the weakness was also within the implicit semantics (Darling, 1994). For example, '*Play is practice for real life*' was considered to reflect a particular established feature of play (encompassed, for example, in the very early work on play by Groos (1901), and discussed in Chapter Three). Yet, in terms of providing a basis for teaching and learning, this statement was determined ultimately to be meaningless by the practitioners. This is typical of many of the play principles identified at that time. The underlying concepts continue to be valued and sustained within the practitioners' rhetoric: the refinement of such high ideals has been one significant development in the practitioners' progress towards greater understanding of play and pedagogical processes.

During the first three meetings, the principles were reduced from 104 to 27 then to 17, through lengthy deliberations, challenges and intra-group negotiations. Some principles were combined with others of similar conceptual value. For example, it was considered that the following six principles could be more succinctly represented by a seventh:

1. Play has rules that are flexible, owned and specific;
2. Play has meaning and structure which may alter before, during and after it has occurred;
3. Play is creative;
4. Play is expressing feelings, not set rules or no set times;
5. Play has no limits;
6. Play is pleasurable, spontaneous, uninterrupted, imaginative, creative uninhibited.

Play is subject to continual development: lets instincts and exploration take over for a while.

Where repetition or overlap occurred, statements were removed.

Reducing the principles was an intense process, involving questioning and challenging firmly held convictions. Throughout, practitioners remained committed to learning about play. This was also confirmed through observations, discussed in the following section.

The enthusiasm and commitment displayed during the early stage continued throughout the duration of the funded TBtP project and was sustained for a further year, meetings being held during weekends, evenings and holidays.

However, after four meetings the emerging evidence began to contradict the early impressions that the group were also expert, critically reflective practitioners. There was evidence of a discrepancy between the rhetoric and the practice confirming one practitioner's concern that

*It's hard to match what you're talking about with what you practice.*  
(Pauline, Interview 1)

Whilst much of what was said seemed to imply secure, knowledgeable practitioners, the evidence was beginning to display insecure pedagogical knowledge with practice apparently rooted in affective domain.

Evidence of insecure knowledge is examined, through all three research methods in the following section. This deals primarily with the evidence drawn from Phase Two. It also includes data collected at the end of Phase 1 just as the initial themes were beginning to emerge. At that time, these early themes were somewhat tentative, but are presented here in order to demonstrate the early stages of deconstruction.

## PHASE TWO: A PERIOD OF DECONSTRUCTION

There are many studies, as indicated in the literature review (Chapter Two), that suggest engaging in reflective practice requires support, challenge, and confrontation (Goodfellow, 2000). Being involved in the project provided a supportive framework. The meetings were held regularly and frequently leading to familiarity and warm, open relationships. Common goals and an apparently shared vision of the TBtP project focused attention during conversations on exploring ways in which children might learn through play.

Frequent comments by the practitioner-researchers confirming that they reflect on practice helped to promote a culture in which talking about practice was encouraged and valued. The meetings during Phases One and Two provided many opportunities for talking, at length, about practice. Initially the exchanges remained at an anecdotal level before later moving to deeper analytical reflective language (Sparks-Langer et al, 1990). Questioning during the discussions gradually became more incisive, reflective enquiry more critical. The narrative approach to the research continued beyond the meetings into the interviews. Interviewing provided singular opportunities for the practitioners to talk about their practice, for moments of self-realisation and for their voices to be heard.

No one was prepared for the strength and rawness of the emerging themes. It was not expected that challenging valued beliefs and understandings would lead to confrontation and deconstruction. It was not until these themes were more sharply brought into focus and, more importantly, the group's agreement secured, that further data collection and deeper analysis could be implemented.

It can be seen from the Phase One, critical incident chart (Chapter Five, Figure 5) the researcher notes a slight concern regarding the emerging evidence. Although discussions during meetings were enthusiastic and generated much rhetoric, pedagogical knowledge did not appear to be reflected, in particular, in the documentation. A degree of uncertainty also emerged during the interviews as practitioners talked very

hesitatingly about their role in children's role. Notes from the researcher's journal during this phase make the following observations:

*Initially really pleased with the enthusiasm and apparent commitment to play . . . Continued commitment, even during the hectic festive season and end of term pressures . . .*

*Very open and willing to share ideas, experiences and documentation.*

However, there were concerns due to:

- *Curriculum content, largely based on activities and distribution of resources e.g. 'Art: - Make faces, collage, pasta faces on plates (use paper plates).'*
- *Limited evidence of preparedness to discuss at length or to accept challenge, often using humour or unrelated anecdotes to distract from focus of discussion*
- *Limited evidence of planning for learning through play*
- *Limited evidence of planning for adult intervention other than allocation to areas of room and tasks related to classroom organisation.*

During this phase, the extent of the apparent gap between rhetoric and practice was unclear. Further analysis was undertaken in order to understand the apparent emerging difficulties between an obvious commitment and enthusiasm for play and limited evidence of its presence in practice. The following section now presents the evidence of practitioners' emerging insecure pedagogical knowledge, practice rooted in affective domains.

### **Interviews: evidence of insecure pedagogical knowledge**

As the project moved into the second phase, an apparent discrepancy emerged between evidence obtained through the interviews which was then triangulated with data from documentation and observation. Findings from the first phase confirmed that practitioners were committed and enthusiastic about exploring how to support children's learning through play, however there were few overt signs of this commitment being applied to practice. Findings to substantiate these claims are presented here.

The first interview question was related to the group's expectation on joining the TBtP project and its underlying links with this research. Subsequent questions were designed to elicit practitioners' values, beliefs and understandings through providing them with a context in which they could talk about their practice – concrete, familiar examples of current activities in which they were engaged. Discussions about teaching and learning through play during the meetings had been fluent so it was anticipated that the second question 'Please give a recent example of children learning through play' might provide a similar opportunity for some of the group to respond with confidence and ease. The impression gained during the meetings was that learning through play was the basis of their pedagogy. However, on each occasion, before continuing with this question in the interview, the practitioners hesitated and were uncertain. Seven practitioners each recalled one incident which had been discussed during a recent meeting. The one practitioner who referred to current practice commented:

*I saw one this morning, this morning, following on the theme of the boats, because we've made a lot of boats. I decided to make a boat, they could make a boat they could steer.*

(Gail, Interview 1)

All presented examples of children learning through play although their accounts revealed a discomfort or insecurity with the adult role in children's play as indicated in the way in which their role in supporting play was referred to, in terms of personal concerns and tentative pedagogical understanding:

- *If you're performing down on the carpet;*
- *I tend to dive in;*
- *I'm sort of observing play situations and waiting for the evidence to come out;*
- *none of us really like being in there but, I don't know, perhaps none of us are major performers, but we can perform in story times, we can perform other things, but we're not sort of major performers. I don't think any of us can go in the home corner and really lose ourselves in there and that's really hard, I think we'll find that difficult;*
- *I tried to go in, in to role play, that was incredibly difficult because the children almost don't accept you;*
- *I don't often stay there, . . . but as long as I keep going back or show an interest in it and maybe take part in it they just used me as a bouncing board for the ideas, because if they became a cropper, with an idea;*
- *some children seem to think that intervention is taking away their ownership of their play, once the adult was involved it was no longer play, it was work;*
- *but when they're on their own they can have a little dabble and, you know, they can come back to it and I don't think they feel they've this sort of freedom with the adult.*

(All practitioners, Interview 1)

In response to Question 5 'What would you say was the impact of adult intervention on children's learning through play?' a similar uncertainty emerged. Eight stated that adult intervention was necessary although all had difficulty in articulating the role.

*Well . . . . introduction of new vocabulary, modelling sometimes, - - you've put me on the spot here, I take it for granted, don't I?*  
(Vera, Interview 1)

*Um, I think, I think there's got to be adult intervention, I think, I don't think, it's got to be there all the time, but I think there has definitely got to be times when you, you know, just, you know, go and sit down and you know, just put, give one sentence, that one brick, that one bucket of sand, jus, because otherwise they would never move forward. You know you would all get very staid and life would be very boring.*  
(June, Interview 1)

As the initial impression was of practitioners who were confident about teaching and learning through play they were asked to suggest aspects of play provision, in their setting, which they felt was a particular strength. In Phase One, the responses were closely related to provision of resources. It can be seen from Figure 18 that changes occurred during the three Phases:

FIGURE 18: QUESTION 3

**What aspect of Play provision in your setting do you feel is a particular strength?**

| Name     | Interview 1   | Interview 2                              | Interview 3  |
|----------|---|--|--|
| Dianna.  | Freedom to play in the nursery                                  | Happy children                           | Imaginative play                                     |
| June.    | Parent and Toddler groups                                       | Construction Toys                        | Construction Play                                    |
| Carole.  | Toys  | Outdoor Equipment                        | None   |
| Gail.    | Free Play   | Free Play                                | Imaginative use of Resources                         |
| Hannah.  |   | Resources                                | Interpretation of Play                               |
| Linda    | Imaginative Play, e.g. jungle                                   | Imaginative Play                         | Imaginative Play                                     |
| Pauline. | Imaginative Play e.g. provide extra things like pasta and jelly | Socio-dramatic and Imaginative Provision | None 'I don't think I've got any strengths any more' |
| Sarah.   | Situations for Play, e.g. MacDonald's                           | Creative e.g. making flowers             | Imaginative Play                                     |
| Vera.    | Role Play. e.g. puppets   | Role Play, e.g. puppets                  | Problem Solving                                      |

Analysis of the interview transcripts, working through phrase-by-phrase and highlighting references to aspects of teaching and learning revealed a lack of pedagogical confidence. For example when referring to observations of children at play, some commented on the inherent difficulties within that role:

*So observation skills. . making time, finding a way of taking time to observe, and then making sure that your observations are worth doing, so you're not just sitting there writing woolly things like 'so and so picked up a hat' - which you tend to do when you first start doing observations and you end up with sheets and sheets of rubbish.*

(Carole, Interview 1)

*I think it peaks and troughs and this year we haven't done a lot of observation as a unit. I hope in the next 12 months we do. Previous to that we did as part of the EEL project . . . and actually all of us were involved in observing and because suddenly we are not part of the observation part of the project it's one thing that's fallen by the wayside,*

*It's nice to be able to stand back and reflect and see the advances that the children have made, but I would like a target of what to observe now, I feel I need that.*

(Gail, Interview 1)

Evidence from the interviews implied that insecurities in practice were related to:

- aspects of teaching including observation, intervention, assessment and planning;
- theorising and practising the role of play in both teaching and learning.

Based on individual responses, the findings at this stage were not sufficiently reliable on their own to imply an insecure pedagogical knowledge. The hesitant responses, for example, might have been a reflection of their discomfort with the interview. Pedagogical knowledge will be explored through analysis of documentation after the following section which presents evidence, from the interviews, that practice appeared to be rooted in an affective domain.

A further examination of the interview transcripts revealed frequent use of affective language relating to:

- being in the TBtP project

*I mean it's a luxury isn't it? I view it as a luxury . . . you might know a slight amount more . . . or you might know it better, but in practice you never actually get there, or even half way. I mean I shouldn't view it as a luxury but I do, at the moment. I don't want to stop being part of the group even if I had to do it on Saturday mornings, or evenings, cos. I would feel like I'd lost something;*

*visiting each other in placements has been lovely;*

*I think it's nice that on days that we meet together, it's such a lovely atmosphere, there is a lovely atmosphere, and it doesn't seem to even matter if someone shouts somebody down about a point;*

(Carole, June, Dianna,)

- role in children's play

*I found that in the course, that when I tried to go in, in to role-play, that was incredibly difficult because the children almost don't accept you. . . (I intervene in children's play) other wise they would never move forward and not only would our job get boring but their lives would get boring.*

(June)

- evaluation of practice

*I think adult intervention is crucial really, otherwise it's just a sort of playgroup session getting all your resources out, they're having a nice time and then go home again.  
the nursery is also very play based so that's lovely.  
I think that we do some very nice sensory work  
(Carole, Dianna)*

While talking about their role in the group, all practitioners made reference to affective responses. The following is typical in its references to feelings of pleasure, and later, of feeling 'destroyed'.

*I was really glad. What attracted me to it was the thought of people involved in Early Years, talking about what we're doing, our practice and what we believe in, because I enjoy doing that. I thought it was a really nice experience*

*I've really enjoyed the discussions and I was pleased to join in. I feel a lot more happy about play and active learning.*

*I think, there's just a feeling there and it's really hard to explain, I was wanting to be challenged but wanting to be supported in the challenge and I felt very destroyed, I would use that word, I felt very strongly afterwards, whereas I would have said I was fairly secure and confident you know, and I don't feel that way now.*

*I am fairly dreading doing this video, in case I end up being in the same way.  
(Pauline, Interview 1)*

The evidence, from the interviews implied that practice was informed by affective responses – concerns about feelings and emotions.

Frequent references were also made to children's affective responses in lesson evaluations. This is discussed in the following section which examines documentation, looking first at practitioners' insecure pedagogical knowledge.

### **Documentation: further evidence of weak pedagogical knowledge**

In the literature review (Chapter Two) it was suggested that writing is a powerful means of promoting reflection, as it brings into focus the taken-for-granted knowledge practice (Holly 1989).

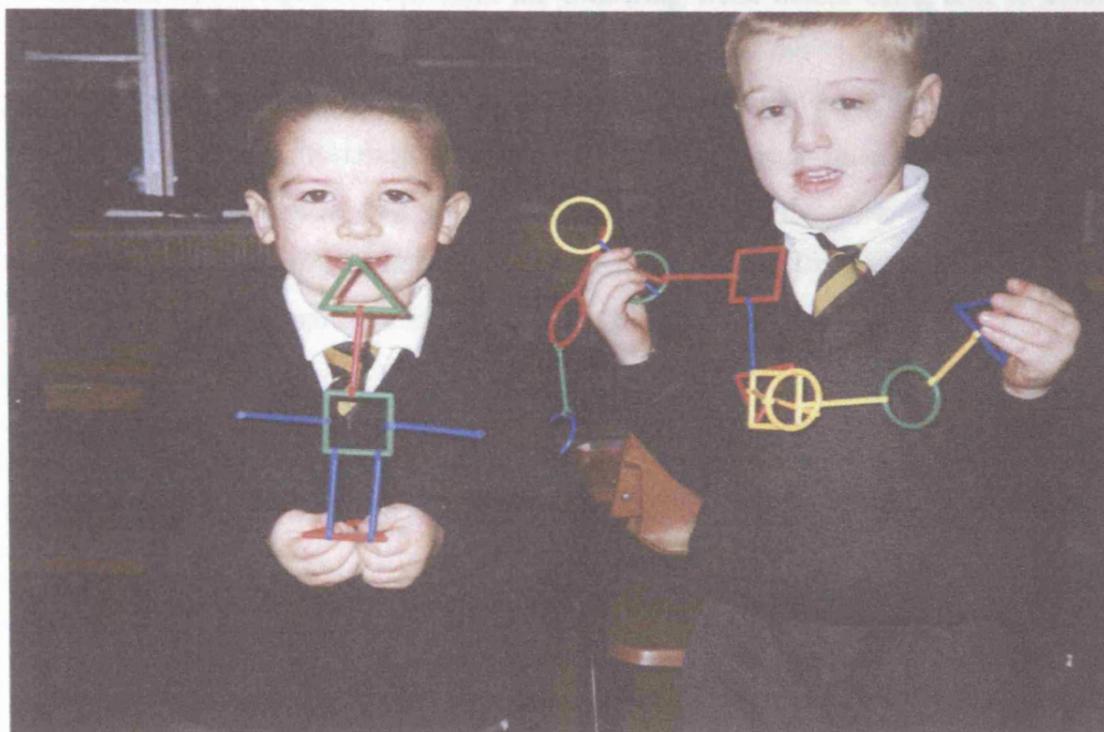
The group was given tasks, referred to by the group as 'their homework'. They were asked to consider:

- **Planning:** Provide copies of their lesson planning in which provision was made for children to learn through play
- **Principles:** Complete a set of sheets illustrating ways in which the 17 principles (defined by the group) might inform practice.
- **Homework,** relating to emerging issues from the group's discussions. - including, Write 500 words on What is play?

### **Planning documentation**

An initial preference for talking about practical activities was reflected in practitioners' documentation. Practitioners were also asked to bring in photographs of children at play in order to illustrate children learning through play. The photographs were of resources and children posing with completed work rather than illustrations designed to capture the processes of play (Figure 19).

FIGURE 19: LOOK WHAT I'VE MADE



Practitioner confidence appeared to be based mainly in resource provision and management. Visits to each other's settings prompted much interest in resource provision practitioners exchanging ideas on the value of specific resources and possibly purchasing or exchanging similar items.

Planning documents showed an emphasis on resources so that activities were linked to '*doing Lego. . building bricks . . making flowers for the display*' rather than deeper conceptualisation of learning intentions. Figure 20 illustrates the way in which one practitioner planned careful allocation of resources for each day of the week. There was no apparent attention made to children's conceptual development, or provision for continuity and progression within learning.

Consider the opportunities for learning and development that are represented in this planning sheet (Figure 20): A child may have developed an interest in the boats and ducks floating in the water tray, on Monday, yet the following day, on Tuesday, the water tray will be filled with bottles and lids. There appears to be no recognition of

children's continuing interests, conceptual development or curriculum progression. The child would have to wait until the following week before being able to continue the investigations stimulated by playing with boats and ducks. Bottles and lids, available the following day, are more likely to structure the investigation of capacity than floating or sinking. Similarly, a child who has attempted to complete a jigsaw on Wednesday has to wait two weeks before returning to the same puzzle, in order to comply with the resource driven arrangements for play. The two pages in Figure 20 are taken from a brochure entitled Planning for Play.

FIGURE 20: PLANNING FOR PLAY / RESOURCES

| <u>MONDAY - Blue Resources (Weekly)</u> |   | <u>TUESDAY - Red Resources (Weekly)</u> |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| WATER PLAY                              | Boats, ducks and assorted floating/sinking resources                              | WATER PLAY                              | Bottles with lids (assorted sizes, shapes)  |
| SAND PLAY                               | Dry sand, sieves, wheels  | SAND PLAY                               | Seaside items : shells, pebbles etc.  |
| JIG-SAWS                                | Alternate weeks:<br>small puzzles<br>large and floor puzzles<br>*see jig-saw list | JIG-SAWS                                | Alternate weeks:<br>small puzzles<br>large and floor puzzles<br>*see jig-saw list |
| LARGE CONSTRUCTION                      | Duplo farm  | LARGE CONSTRUCTION                      | Large road carpet<br>Garage<br>Assorted vehicles                                  |
| HOME CORNER FOOD                        | Fruit   | HOME CORNER FOOD                        | Assorted tins of food   |
| BOOK CORNER                             | *see book corner list   | BOOK CORNER                             | *see book corner list   |

Further examination of practitioners' documentation, planning and records sheets provided additional evidence of little adult role supporting children's learning through play. No provision was made for an adult to observe or support children in their play although during meetings practitioners stated this was an important aspect of teaching. Where observations of children were made they related to 'baseline assessment' observations which were made at the beginning of the term or, on one occasion from the practitioner being involved in another research project. Once the particular project was completed, no further provision was made, in that setting, for practitioners to continue making observations of children during their play, although its pedagogical value continued to be proclaimed. The implications of this are discussed in the following Chapter Seven.

There were occasions when the clarity of instructions and requests made by the research, was questioned. In the example reported below, did the practitioners understand what was expected of them? Was it possible that the discrepancy between request and actual contributions related to conceptual issues? Following these early concerns, a summary of each meeting with decisions made, confirmation of requests and detailed clarification of tasks was sent to each member.

Two typical planning documents are reproduced here and illustrate:

- the emphasis on resources and display;
- few linkages between learning intention and assessment and activity;
- no apparent provision for play;
- no provision planned for adult to support children's learning.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>PLAN 1:</b>                                    |   |
| <b>Nursery Lesson Plan Details: Date: 23 3 98</b> |   |
| <b>Areas of Learning and Experience:</b>          | K. & U. Personal and Social   |
| <b>Objectives:</b>                                | To watch our farm video – remember and discuss  |
| <b>Organisation:</b>                              | Whole class   |
| <b>Assessment:</b>                                | Pupil's evaluation / observation of farm visit<br>Whole class discussion, asking children to describe things they saw / liked |
| <b>It was preceded by:</b>                        | VISIT WORK ON PICTURES / DISPLAY  |
| <b>It will lead on to:</b>                        | Completion of display   |
| <b>Member of Nursery Team:</b>                    | Nursery Nurse – do the video<br>Teacher: do the display   |

The second (an activity plan for creative development) showed little provision for children's creativity. The children were expected to work independently without the support of an adult, the emphasis being the outcome of the activity.

## PLAN 2: Creative play, in the nursery.

### Creative Development

**Learning Intentions:** - *To use a variety of materials to draw the picture – remember to put tops back on felt pens. To draw zoo animals carefully and with accuracy.*

**Grouping:** - *children can come and go as they please*

**Role of the Teacher:** -This activity will be introduced to the children during registration. It is then hoped they will work independently with it as the teacher will be leading other activities. The children can come and go as they please. Any pictures will be saved for our display.

**Conclusion:** -Praising the children for their work. Asking them to clear the area away.

**Differentiated Activities:** This will be by outcome – the accuracy of the pictures for some, are they recognisable, for others the correct colour.

**Assessment :** - The finished pictures

Relating the construct of play represented by the planning documents to the group's set of principles was problematic and raised several questions. For example:

Why was there a discrepancy between rhetoric and practice? This was evidenced in comments during the interview about the absolute importance of adult intervention in children's play. Yet planning documentation stated 'Children can come and go as they please, - - as the teacher will be leading other activities'.

Why was the practitioners' enthusiasm for learning through play not reflected in their planning?

How is it possible to reconcile one practitioner's statement that children '*must have ownership of their play*' with '*I saw one [episode of children learning through play] this morning, following on the theme of the boats, because we've made a lot of boats. I decided to make a boat, they could make a boat they could steer*'?

Why, in response to a request for planning documentation to illustrate ways in which adults support children's learning through play does one practitioner present a lesson plan in which the children are watching a video with a nursery nurse while the teacher puts up a display? What opportunities are made for children's creative development within an art lessons that dictate:

- *draw zoo animals accurately;*
- *remember to put the [pen]tops on;*

- *are the picture accurate representations?*
- *are they the right colour / recognisable.*

At the end of the first phase, there was insufficient data to confirm or thoroughly investigate these issues. The documentation was retained for later examination with the group in order to continue the shared pursuit of their values on play, teaching and learning. During discussions, the documents were also used to examine ways in which the set of agreed principles might be used to inform planning. Following these discussions, during the second phase, further training for planning and assessment were requested by the group.

There was considerable evidence in the planning documentation of an emphasis on children's affective responses. Evaluation of lessons made references such as 'Children enjoyed the activity' or 'Were enthusiastic' but not also references to learning. In response to the question 'Why do you have jigsaws or a home corner in your classroom?' the most repeated response was '*Because children enjoy them*'. There was an emphasis on providing a secure happy environment but not also one in which children might be challenged or one which would promote deeper learning and development.

#### **A return to the principles**

Partly in response to the emerging questions and uncertainties, it was agreed with the practitioners to return to the set of 17 principles. Following discussions in the second phase, each practitioner selected one principle and considered its implications for practice. In particular, key issues which had emerged during group discussions were identified and represented in table format. Figure 21 illustrates one example with the 4<sup>th</sup> principle at that time, stating that play enables an individual to explore and extend or mirror life.

Various strategies were discussed with the group which might help deconstruct some of the issues and concerns they appeared to be facing. The format and terminology was agreed amongst the group and provided a framework to help articulate and sur-

face underlying issues which might inhibit or support their provision of teaching and learning through play.

Column 2: Under the heading 'Straightforward' practitioners, described, within the context of the stated principles, those aspects of practice which they find straightforward or unproblematic to hurdle.

Column 3: Practitioners were invited them to state what might be the associated 'dilemmas'. In this instance, the practitioners considered implications for play that enables children to explore and extend or mirror life. It appears that the main dilemma is related to the provision for play. The practitioner asks 'How much should I provide?' in order to ensure the resources reflect children's experiences.

Column 4: The implications of the principle are explored here, possibly suggesting ways in which the dilemma might be resolved. The response, in the example illustrated in Figure 21, is for the adult to provide a variety of role models and to ensure adequate resources are available for the children's play. Chapter Two suggested that problematisation, surfacing issues, is a highly complex process within reflection. Seeing potential dilemmas within pedagogical concepts potentially leads to deconstruction of practitioners' values, beliefs and understanding which may in turn result in their eventual pedagogical reconstruction (Dahlberg et al, 1999). Surfacing 'dilemmas' in this way was an important aspect of exploring and developing a reflective approach.

The fifth column invited comments about school, curriculum or legislative implications that should be considered.

The final column was left free for additional comments or questions.

FIGURE 21: DECONSTRUCTING A PRINCIPLE

| Principles   | Straightforward                                  | Dilemmas  | Implications  | Planning / Policies  | Notes   |
|--|--|---|---|--|---|
| 4. Play enables an individual to explore and extend or mirror life | A planned curriculum that enables that to happen | How much to provide? Maybe limit resources to enable the child to really take it on board | Provide a variety of role models making sure that as much resources is available, so re-evaluate your equipment | Carefully look at how we plan the resources we provide so it is not tokenism | How do we expect them to be able to do this if we dictate the structure of play? Allow the children to witness you doing things that aren't just 'teaching' jobs, i.e. mending something in safety. |

The group found this task difficult to complete, confirmed by one practitioner who stated:

*I felt, um, the last session was quite hard, um, when we had the principles and we'd got to put them in the boxes and I thought that was quite challenging – to [make you] really think.*

(Sarah, Interview 1)

Although originally suggested as 'homework' this plan was revised and the form used as the basis of group discussion during the following meeting during which practitioners were encouraged to consider the agreed set of principles and their relevance to practice. It was found that without a specific focused framework to support the meeting, deeper discussion was difficult to initiate, develop and sustain.

The group often stated they had difficulty in completing tasks independently. The implications of this are discussed in the following chapter. Consequently, further tasks, involving sustained deliberations, were completed during the sessions or practitioners worked in pairs, often meeting in each other's homes in between meetings. Sarah later commented on the benefit to her of working in smaller groups before continuing deeper discussions with the whole group:

*I've been working quite a lot with Carole and you can really thrash some things out and it's quite nice to know when you agree with each other, and you think well yes maybe we're right. It gives you that confidence, when sometimes you may be happy with what you're doing, if so it adds to if some one else feels that's right*

*too . . . particularly if you're from a different type of school, you get into a bit of a closed shop very often.*

### **Homework: How do children learn through play?**

A series of writing tasks helped practitioners surface implicit pedagogical knowledge. Included in the tasks set at this time was the request to write approximately 500 words on How children learn through play.

Two examples illustrate the range of knowledge and experiences: -

*Play is many different things to many different people, and children! My six year old daughter says play is "having fun with your friends", my husband says play is "what children do", (you should have seen him exploring or investigating my son's remote control car on Christmas morning!). My belief is that the majority, if not all, children enjoy playing, it is instinctive from birth.*

(Dianna)

*PLAY, some thoughts. I see play as the child's 'modus operandi'; it is the child's vital way of sorting, classifying and making sense of their world. It is their operating system which gives them all the information they need to interpret the world. I can recall the moment when I know I could no longer play as a child. As an only child my childhood was filled with wonderful imaginative play, a part of which were my dolls. .*

(Pauline).

Increasingly it became evident that practitioners were drawing on personal knowledge and experiences of children to inform practice without also drawing theoretical understandings of teaching and learning (Wood, 1998).

Discussions and evaluations of lessons made frequent references to their concern for children's affective responses (*'being happy, comfortable, having nice experiences, they were enjoying it'*). All 9 practitioners made references to children's affective responses but without a similar emphasis on teaching and learning. It appeared that making for provision for teaching and learning, whilst also in a context of care, comfort and playfulness was problematic.

### **Observations: practitioners displayed insecure pedagogical knowledge**

#### **Observations: through visits**

Three visits were made to practitioners' schools in an attempt to further support articulation of pedagogical practice. One visit in particular was a key factor in developing a critically reflective approach to practice. It was hoped that in a familiar context, visiting each other's schools, practitioners would be able to talk about some of the issues and practices in which they were engaged. It was also hoped that talking about practice would lead to discussion about specific issues rather than broad based discussions in which sustained concentration was problematic. Each hosting practitioner was asked to raise one issue for consideration although this did not occur for it appeared that once in each others' schools they were distracted from more cognitive considerations or conceptualisation of pedagogical issues, by an overriding interest in classroom organisation and its provision.

Visits were made to three of the practitioners' classrooms. These took place during the school day.

One visit in particular was significant in which a group of children were observed playing in an area used to promote creative and imaginative play. Several large, green flowing drapes were used to create the effect of a jungle. Additional tissue paper, drapes, flowers, cardboard trees and tubular branches hung from the fabric, creating a shaded area for the children's play. In the same room were the art area and water and sand trays. Some children were playing with ducks and crocodiles in the water tray; others were playing with toy rabbits in their 'hutches' crafted out of cardboard boxes.

The group was invited to ask questions about the visit and all made very positive, complimentary comments. One researcher asked what had prompted the jungle theme. Initially the question was avoided, then challenge resisted. The jungle theme was then defended by all group members because:

- its inherent imaginative and creative qualities;

- it was an expression of the teacher's creative abilities, which in turn might have promoted creative responses in children;
- children need to broaden their horizons and learn about other climates and environments.

One question explored the implications on children's conceptual development in linking jungles with rabbits, ducks and crocodiles. This was justified on the grounds of promoting children's creative thinking. Suggestions that other experiences, such as a forest or wooded garden, might also benefit from the practitioner's creativity were rejected.

Further discussion was deflected by use of humour, although the group insisted they were eager to continue the process of challenging and exploring pedagogical issues (Adams and Moyles, 2000). This deliberation was continued through relating the jungle episode to three of the principles for play which were currently being examined and later through asking in what ways:

- was the jungle meaningful?
- do jungles build on children's prior learning?
- might children's conceptual and cognitive development be promoted through the resources within the jungle play area?
- could play contexts be based within the children's immediate environment / personal experiences?

The jungle debate did not reach a conclusion, but was a recurring theme during later meetings prompting further exploration of the principles and the ways in which they might be used to inform practice. The episode further confirmed practitioners' insecure pedagogical knowledge in being unable to articulate aspects of practice. Whilst this episode alone does not necessarily imply weak pedagogy, when considered along with other similar discussions and evidence from documentation, it began to be apparent that there might be a discrepancy between the confident, assured rhetoric and practice.

### **Observations: through video**

The group had suggested that video recordings were taken, in their classrooms of children playing. The intention was to illustrate the ways in which children learn through play for potential use with the training pack. In this section, findings are based on the video footage. The later stimulated recall (as discussed in Chapter Five) is presented in the third section in this chapter, which examines practitioners' resistance to change.

The video was significant in supporting their confrontation of practice. The purpose was to make a short film of children learning through play in each setting. Provision was made during several sessions to plan for the video to ensure all practitioners were prepared and clear of what they and the children might be doing. The researcher accompanied a technician who undertook the filming. The first video session progressed smoothly.

The first play activity in the video was a construction activity in which the practitioner presented a range of construction materials to the children and informed them '*We're going to make houses*'. This video was shown to the group who all considered it represented aspects of learning through play. The practitioner gave clear instructions to the children during the introduction, linking the task to an earlier mathematics lesson and children's developing spatial awareness. The children played at various developmental levels. Finally, one child placed a brick on top of her house – a chimney for Father Christmas. The video had captured the adult observing and playing with the children, whilst modelling language and encouraging problem solving. Most children completed their tasks and the exchange of ownership of the play from the teacher's instructions to make a house to the concluding act when the child, established ownership of Father Christmas' chimney. The play activity was discussed in the light of the existing play principles and it was agreed by the group that this episode represented an example of children learning through play.

However, the remaining videos provided further evidence of practitioner's insecure pedagogical knowledge. In some cameos it was apparent that children had either been

instructed how to respond or were being expected to behave in different routines or told to play for the camera. No documentation was provided for any of the cameos. There was no evidence of planning, teaching or learning and no evidence of play nor contextualisation of the tasks presented to the children. Relating the episodes of videotaped play to the group's existing principles for play would not have been possible.

This was an unexpected outcome. The video recording had been planned and approached with enthusiasm by the practitioners, yet provided clear evidence of weak pedagogical knowledge, confirming suggestions from other data that the original impression of expert practitioners was being challenged, as new evidence came to light.

After further deliberation, it was decided to discuss these findings from the interviews, documentation and observations with the group. It was hoped that through discussion, detailed training requirements would be identified and appropriate plans negotiated for future meetings.

#### **Observations: during meetings**

On arrival at the meetings, practitioners frequently engaged in sharing anecdotes, sometimes leading to anecdotes informing practice in which ideas they shared during the meeting were promptly adopted in each other's settings. Immediate current issues and companionship overwhelmed additional deeper discussion (Adalbjarnsdottir and Selman, 1997: 414).

When challenged about the appropriateness of particular activities, the practitioners recalled past experiences of working with young children, their own children or other children (nephews and nieces) they knew.

During discussions and studies of literature, while developing and refining the set of principles, the practitioners confirmed the importance of child development in children's learning (Bredekamp and Copple, 1996). The group had received training in child development during their initial training although there was no evidence within

documentation that this knowledge was used to inform either their practice or their understanding of young children. Evidence that the group seemed unable to apply child development theories to practice was presented to the group. They confirmed they did not bring knowledge of child development to their teaching although claimed that this was an important aspect of working with young children. During the interview, Carole stated that one of the benefits of working on the project was:

*finding out more of the theoretical background to what I'm doing or things you'd forgotten from a long time ago. I don't know that it was new (information), or whether it was just sort of cropping up again.*

The group subsequently requested that child development and ways in which it might inform practice should be included in the agenda for future meetings. For some this was a refreshment of knowledge they had forgotten. For others this and its application to practice appeared to be new. This was confirmed by Pauline who declared:

*I still think I don't know enough about children's development and research that people have done.*

A deeper understanding of how children learn would require a deeper level of knowledge of learning theories and retraining in other pedagogical aspects. Through discussion during the meetings, it became apparent that providing information alone would not be sufficient to support the practitioners developing a reflective approach to practice.

Analysis through CBAM provided evidence of the practitioners remaining at a level of acquiring information, yet little evidence of its application (See Appendix 5 for example from interview transcript/data analysis).

Hord et al (1998:75) suggest that six key actions to support change (including training) should be provided. This might include reviewing currently held information, holding workshops, providing feedback on implementation of learning through play. Hord et al (ibid) also suggest a period of consultation and reinforcement, encouraging, coaching, facilitating, celebrating successes as well as providing feedback and inform-

ing others. This was achieved through individual conversations during meetings, telephone calls, written messages. It was found that practitioners responded positively to personalised comments and opportunities for day-to day intervention. Suggestions at small, practical levels contributed to the support offered during early attempts at innovation. The detailed level of support was referred to during the final group interview:

Researcher: *You said you got support from each other, and that's obviously been very significant, but have you had support in other ways? What kind of support do you feel you received as part of the project?*

Carole *I think we've needed people to keep us on tack in various ways. Well, we have, haven't we? Gone off at tangents.*

June *And, all those letters, those letters are a godsend aren't they? You're coming here ...*

Carole *And don't forget you're coming and don't forget we said we would ...*

Dianna *And the letters that you always get . . .to remind us in between meetings . . . or ring me at home, don't forget you can ring me if you need to and this is I mean, I think I have ever only rang her once but that is such a ... just to know that you can do.*

Pauline *Very supportive.*

A period of challenge and confrontation with differentiated support was continued throughout this Phase Two.

Early themes confirming insecure pedagogical knowledge emerged primarily from interview transcripts. This evidence was confirmed through examining documentation and notes taken during group meetings. However ongoing provision was made to ensure the group remained willing to pursue this level of challenge and that they continued to receive appropriate levels of support, at both cognitive and affective levels.

Evaluation forms were presented to the group and further confirmed their total commitment to the project, their feeling of being trusted:

*'I think we've made very good relationships and we trust one another'*

(Gail)

as well as a cautious acknowledgement that further discussion would be potentially challenging

*I am happy this far, listening and learning from the other members of the group and making my own small contributions!*

(Dianna)

*At the moment I am being given plenty of food for thought, and find myself challenging everyday actions and assumptions.*

(Sarah)

As a culture of openness had been established at the beginning of the project. Raw findings were presented to the group for discussion at each stage. In the light of the emerging findings, it may have been difficult for this unexpected evidence of weak pedagogical knowledge to be presented at this phase without such precedence. Once the routine of open discussion had been established it was expected to continue, raw findings were presented without judgement, more in care and concern.

Clearer patterns began to emerge. The evidence confirmed that the practitioners continued at a stage of acquiring information whilst there was little evidence of its application to practice. Strategies were developed by the group in an attempt to promote a deeper level of reflective practice. These included several models to illustrate pedagogical principles and their application to practice. These are discussed in the following section.

Chapters Four and Five discussed the implications of the idiosyncratic nature of grounded theory, its implications and emergent methodologies. The emergent themes of affective responses driving an insecure pedagogy were unexpected. In an attempt to ensure reliability of interpretations, these themes were discussed with the practitioners and in turn their comments incorporated into the data. The evidence from the three research methods was used with the practitioners, to challenge and confront their pedagogical insecurities. Exploring this evidence occurred within a supportive, collabora-

tive relationship leading to more critical levels of reflection, and the beginning of Phase Three, in which values, beliefs and understandings were reconstructed.

### PHASE THREE: A PERIOD OF RECONSTRUCTION

A collaborative relationship with practitioners provides researchers with privileged access to opportunities for reflective conversations and deepening levels of reflective thinking (Schön, 1983, 1987). From this stems the potential opportunity to promote deeper understandings of how children learn, to lead to construction of new understandings, an empowered pedagogy, restructuring values, beliefs and understanding: - developing a critically reflective approach to practice (Kagan, 1990; Lather, 1991; Schulman, 1999). Reconstruction was promoted through working together, continued questioning and supported reflection in which specific aspects of pedagogical weaknesses were identified. These weaknesses were then addressed through training, support with articulation and developing a series of models which illustrated the ways in which practitioners might apply new understandings to practice.

The process of change was complex, progress was unpredictable and messy. During Phase 2, a period of deconstruction, there began to be evidence of the group questioning practice, beginning to reflect critically. From feelings of ghastly self-illuminations - the 'swampy lowlands' of reflective practice emerged new understandings and increased self-confidence.

Frequent measures were taken to ensure the practitioners were content to pursue the process of enquiry and that no implicit pressures served to coerce or make it difficult for any of them to withdraw. For example, evaluation forms included open questions and opportunities for further comments. The forms were designed to retain anonymity although all chose to include their signature or to indicate identity (see Figure 22 for responses to two questions).

FIGURE 22: EVALUATION FORM

**What has been most useful about the project so far? (1998)**

- The meetings have challenged my own thoughts and made me realise I have gaps in my knowledge and/ or don't think deeply enough "why?"
- Sharing ideas / developing a pedagogy confidence in own ability belief in self
- Thought provoking, supportive
- Challenging - my lack of pedagogic knowledge! informative - I've learned a lot, but I still feel there are huge gaps
- Refining my awareness / knowledge of (hopefully) reasons why I am providing what I am
- Good to exchange ideas - common 'blips' / concerns having to step back and evaluate my ideas / practice
- As the meetings have progressed - less challenging in terms of what I'm actually doing and why day to day, but more challenging in the way I express this - particularly on paper. Informative - snippets of theory dropped into the vacuum of my brain!

**What would add to your 'enjoyment' of / satisfaction with the sessions? (1998)**

- continuing to meet up + work in pairs or small groups between meetings
- more funding to last longer
- (Being allowed to eat). Continue constructive feedback it helps
- to continue after the funding runs out!
- I am going to eat now
- continued chocolate supply!
- Looking forward to developing materials and trialing these in summer term ..linking theory to practise ..children's learning and exploring facets of play
- I prefer the whole day sessions to half-day sessions, I find the group ,very enjoyable and supportive generally :-)

During Phases 1 and 2, the practitioners had attended over 50 hours of training, accompanied by their own studies and reflection. Yet there was no evidence in any of the data collection methods used in this research of ways in which this newly acquired pedagogical knowledge was being applied to practice. There was also little evidence of any change in use of pedagogical language. As was seen in Chapter Two, the review of literature use of pedagogical language might be an indicator of reflective thinking (Kagan, 1990). This suggested that although practitioners were acquiring knowledge, as it was not being applied to language. During discussions, it was also not yet being applied to their thinking and practice.

Analysis from Phase Two revealed the group continued to function at a level of information acquisition, so consideration was now given to providing clear, accurate and practical information about teaching and learning through play (Hall and Hord, 1998). A variety of strategies were used, ranging from:

- visits from other practitioners who work in a playful way, whose enthusiasm might offer support;
- video recordings of playful practices in which key concepts were identified;
- discussions in small and large groups;
- related references being given to the group to study and develop in subsequent meetings.

These promoted a supportive environment in which practitioners could confront the practices, in a non-judgemental way, conscious of the supportive framework within the project: -

*I think it's nice that on days that we meet together, it's such a lovely atmosphere, there is a lovely atmosphere, and it doesn't seem to even matter if someone shouts somebody down about a point, nobody takes offence, you know I would say as a group we're gelled very well together.*

(June, Interview 3)

It was suggested in Chapter Two that reflective practice involves a process of problematisation – which involves seeing potential dilemmas within pedagogical concepts. Coming to terms with their own not-knowing had promoted the deconstruction of values, beliefs and understanding. Questioning through collaborative support continued in an attempt to secure eventual pedagogical reconstruction (Dahlberg et al, 1999).

As in the discussions of Phases One and Two in this chapter, Phase Three now plots the progress of reflective practice in each of the three areas of data collection: interviews, then documentation and observation.

**Interviews: resistant to change and to use of pedagogical language**

The second round of interviews occurred at the end of the second phase – late in the summer term and provided information to plan for Phase Three.

FIGURE 23. PHASE TWO: - LEVELS OF USE AND STAGES OF CONCERN

| Stages of Concern                                | Awareness | Informational | Personal | Management | Consequence | Collaboration |
|--|-----------|---------------|----------|------------|-------------|---------------|
| <b>Level of Use</b>                              |           |               |          |            |             |               |
| <b>Non-use</b>                                   | 0         | 0             | 0        | 0          | 0           | 0             |
| Orientation                                      | 1         | 0             | 3        | 0          | 0           | 0             |
| Preparation                                      | 0         | 1             | 1        | 4          | 0           | 0             |
| <b>Mechanical</b>                                | 0         | 0             | 0        | 0          | 0           | 1             |
| <b>Routine &amp; Refine</b>                      | 0         | 0             | 0        | 0          | 0           | 0             |
| Integration                                      | 0         | 0             | 0        | 0          | 0           | 0             |
| <b>Renewal</b>                                   | 0         | 0             | 0        | 0          | 0           | 0             |
| <b>Numbers indicate numbers of practitioners</b> |           |               |          |            |             |               |

Levels of use, a behavioural approach to change indicates the way in which practitioners are using the innovation. Figure 23 shows the results of analysis during Phase Two with four practitioners at a level of orientation six at a level of preparation and one at a mechanical level. Typically, a level of orientation might involve practitioners attending a workshop or seeking out additional information about the innovation. Pauline stated that she was preparing to make changes in her class, following the summer vacation, and also shared some concerns she had about its implementation:

*Hopefully next term when my team are pulled together, we'll be able to carry that forward, (playful teaching) because what I want to do with that is to make a play policy because we don't have a specific play policy we have a curriculum.*

*I still don't know how I'm going to organise knowing all that, with 65 children every day, that's where I stumble a little.*

Levels of use, a behavioural approach to change, indicate the way in which practitioners are using the innovation. Application of information had not occurred so presenting an apparent resistance to change. However there was evidence that practitioners were at a preparation level of use, they were considering its implementation: *'I would like to do more observations'* [of children]. In addition, one practitioner, at a level of collaboration, stated she intended providing *'a bit of feedback to be given to the head, so that he understand the importance of what we are doing, and [he doesn't] I'm afraid, between these four walls'*.

Analysis through CBAM showed that within the orientation level of use (shown in red), the practitioners were displaying various stages of concern. This indicated that 4 practitioners were at an orientation level, with 3 at a personal stage of concern. One practitioner was at an awareness stage, in particular acknowledging a previous lack of awareness

*I've really enjoyed the discussions so and having you know when [we were asked] 'what is learning?' - -gosh we're teachers here, we should know what it is, and then you do know, you don't just verbalise it at all, do you, so there you go.*

Six were preparing for supporting play (shown in blue), through gathering information, considering personal concerns asking 'how will this effect me?' Gail commented

*You don't necessarily like to identify it but you're really not happy with what you're doing, and once we've all got passed the fact that there are elements that we are all not happy with what we're doing, that it gives us a feeling of there's an empathy between us, everyone is not happy with their practice however other people see that practice to be so we're all searching for something.*

Four practitioners were at a management level typified by comments such as *'I seem to be spending all my time getting resources together'* continuing their emphasis on provision of resources.

There remained open resistance to use of pedagogical language during the meetings. There was also some evidence during the third interview that practitioners were beginning to incorporate some pedagogical language. A taxonomy for measuring the pedagogical thinking and language was discussed in Chapters Two and Five. The findings from examining the levels of language are presented here in Figure 24.

FIGURE 24: REFLECTIVE PEDAGOGICAL THINKING TAXONOMY

| LEVEL    | DEFINITION  | Interview 1  | Interview 3   |
|----------|---|--|---|
| Level 1  | No descriptive language. No description of an instructional event   | No statement: -  |   |
| Level 2  | Simple, layperson description. Description of an instructional event without any use of pedagogical language as concept labels for what occurred  | I want my objective in the back of my head, and I want to be able to find out if they've got there or not, which is the hardest bit, you know if you they are learning what they are learning what do they know, where do they need to go next. (Carole, Question 5 Interview 1) | I don't know that it has being honest with you, I think my view of it has done, but I don't think that the actual practice, it's whether you feel comfortable, feel comfortable playing on the carpet when Y6 are going by and I do now. (Carole, Question 5 Interview 3)   |
|          | <b>PEDAGOGICAL LANGUAGE (CONCEPT) LABELING BEGINS</b>   |  |   |
| Level 3a | Events labels with appropriate terms. Simple: - description of an instructional event with one use of pedagogical language as a concept label for what occurred   |  | It's fairly easy to provide (play) opportunities, but it's not so easy to ensure that learning is going on. I mean you can provide resources so easily, you can provide adult intervention, fairly easily, it's just the quality of the intervention and whether you can ensure that learning is going on -that they're your learning aims coming out at the other end. (Carole, Interview 3) |
| Level 3b | Complex: Same as Level 3, Simple, but with more than one use of pedagogical language as a concept label   |  |   |
| Level 4  | Explanation with tradition or personal preference given as the rationale. Same as level 3, plus personal reference or tradition is used to explain an instruction event; reference is made to the use of instructional rules and techniques but not to an explicitly stated cause; pedagogical principles are recognised, but cause - effect connections are stated vaguely |  |   |
|          | <b>PRINCIPLED PEDAGOGICAL THINKING BEGINS</b>   |  |   |

There was no evidence of principles of pedagogical thinking, within the context of the research, in the three interviews.

Further analysis of practitioners' language was explored in the specific pedagogical areas which had been studied and discussed by the group during the interviews and on some of the meetings. For example, Figure 25 lists language relating to adult intervention. One of the tasks suggested to the group was to read Kitson's chapter 'Please Miss Alexander: will you be the robber?' (Kitson, 1994) on adult intervention. The group had expressed an interest in pursuing this subject. Subsequent discussions and references to adult intervention were analysed. Language, taken from Kitson's chapter, which was read and discussed by the group, is placed in two categories:

Column 1 'professional language' – language that directly relates to the professional role of an adult when working with young children;

Column 2 includes examples of lay language, used in Kitson's chapter, possibly language practitioners might use with parents when talking about their teaching role;

the third column is the language used by the group, when also talking about the same topic: their role in play.

Their reluctance to use professional language results in a colloquial style, difficult to categorise and limited to brief phrases. Their language also reveals a discomfort and insecurity in supporting children's play. The following quotation is brief, but aims to capture the hesitant approach often associated with discussions on play.

*We might take some of the resources away . . . I'll think about . . . It's not been really thought about, probably too many things in there . . . none of really like being in there.*

FIGURE 25: LANGUAGE USED TO DESCRIBE ADULT INTERVENTION

| COLUMN 1   | COLUMN 2  | COLUMN 3  |
|--|---|---|
| <p><b>Professional Language</b><br/>(Kitson, 1994)<br/>Channel this learning</p> <p>Help children to construct new dilemmas and challenges<br/>To open up personal learning strategies to children</p> <p>Many practitioners view children's play as being for children only. . educators are able to create a situation and generate motivation which will encourage the children to behave and function at a cognitive level beyond their norm</p> | <p><b>'Lay' Language</b><br/>(Kitson, 1994)</p> <p>Joins in<br/>Move learning on helping supporting</p> <p>set problems<br/>guide<br/>To set up problems to be solved</p> <p>Adults can encourage the children to work at a deeper level than they would if left to their own devices</p> | <p><b>Group's Language</b></p> <p>So I sat for a while waiting for my compare bears to sort of be interesting and they weren't and then one of the children can over from the play dough table and ---took the bears.</p> <p>We might take some of the resources away. .<br/>Probably too many things in there<br/>There may be valuable learning things in there but I've not seen any<br/>I don't feel particularly confident about that</p> <p>Role- play – it's their sort of little hidey hole<br/>Yes. I would like to think that the children felt that I could be included in what ever they were playing at the time.<br/>none of us really like being in there (Home Corner) but, I don't know, perhaps none of us are major performers, but we can perform in story times, we can perform other things, but we're not sort of major, I don't think any of us can go in the home corner and really lose ourselves in there and that's really hard.</p> <p>I think we still have a long way to go in terms of encouraging the rest of the team with adult intervention. I don't want them to take over which I think in the past it's something we have.</p> |

The significance of their resistance to use pedagogical language was not fully established. It appeared difficult to talk about pedagogical issues without use of pedagogical language. For example, when making references to observing children the following phrase was used:

*and we eavesdropped on them.*  
(Sarah, Interview 2)

Eavesdrop implies snooping, prying, spying, uninvited listening. Further examination of the denotational meaning as well as the associated meanings revealed a consistency of connotations to this pedagogical aspect (Scholfield, 1995). The home corner was described as the children's 'sort of hidey-hole' which implied that adult involvement was not welcome. June confirmed this by maintaining that all the practitioners in her nursery class were not comfortable about supporting children's play:

*I don't know, perhaps none of us are major performers, but we can perform in story times, we can perform other things, but we're not sort of major, I don't think any of us can go in the home corner and really lose ourselves in there and that's really hard. I think we'll find that difficult.*

The language used to define the practitioner role did not include observation or intervention.

Closer examination of discourse revealed a preference for lay language during their discussions, chatting amongst each other and in their writing. 'Professional language' was only used in the context of defining principles. The practitioners expressed discomfort with such language and certainly would not consider using any in the staff room for fear of censor by their colleagues. It appeared they believed that pedagogical language was only relevant in university contexts. In one report Gail wrote that the group preferred more '*audience friendly language*' with long words being more appropriate for the '*pedabogey-man of academia*'.

Tensions were created by their resistance to use of pedagogical language. A series of meetings were used to support articulation of some of the issues emerging through the discourse. Coming to terms with their own tensions, confronting some of the invisible issues, became a key factor in the process of reconstruction. The ways in which this development was promoted is presented in the following section.

#### **Documentation: resistance to change and to use of pedagogical language**

Analysing the documentation was originally planned to provide insights into practitioners' understanding. It was also used by the practitioners as they engaged in critical enquiry. Examining their own and each other's planning files and writing provided them with opportunities which led to confrontation of their own pedagogical weakness. It also provided the means by which reconstruction would occur. The role of the practitioners' voice – their thoughts, knowledge and experiences - was critical to the development of reflective practice. The strategies developed by the practitioners are examined here and include:

- a Hypothetical Framework;

- stimulated recall;
- models for play;
- implications of principles to practice;
- child development – linked to practice;
- statements of children's entitlement to learn through play.

Within all the dialogues during meetings throughout the period of the research, there were tentative references to the tensions and contradictions within the domain of early years. These were never specifically articulated although frequently implied. often in terms of practitioners' feelings of guilt and discomfort:

*I think sometimes you do feel guilty, well I do, sometimes . . . If I'm sort of on the floor with a train set, and you can see the other classes going by, and they're sort of looking at you and they're thinking What on earth is she doing?*

*You're not playing . . . they (the children) are not getting enough play, and they're not getting enough free choice. You know they're not deciding everything all the time, which made me feel guilty.*

References to tensions and contradictions within practice continued into Phase Two and Three with increasing frequency. It was decided to provide a more structured opportunity for the group to articulate the many emerging concerns and maybe examine the source of their guilt and conflict. The group were asked to write 500 words on What are the frustrations as a practitioner?

Many issues were identified by the group which they considered contributed to their difficulty in making provision for children to learn through play. Following their writings, a Hypothetical Framework was developed capturing the feelings, thoughts, concerns and issues which had hitherto not been 'formally' acknowledged. It also served to promote conceptualisation of some of the issues which contributed to the dilemmas they frequently faced.

The words and voices of practitioners have been accurately represented in this list.

### OfSTED Inspections

*Concerned about the demands for concrete evidence . . . Accountability of the system.*

*How do we overcome the pressures of written plans or can we simplify them so they have real meaning?*

### Government / economy

*'added value/target setting' is a mechanistic view of learning.*

### QCA NC / DCL's

*National Curriculum appeared to ignore the developmental needs of children*

*Trialing of the Literacy Hour was a cause of concern.*

*Prescribed Curriculum has been unwieldy and unmanageable and ever-changing*

*Very much delivery led – the child seen as passive recipient*

*I have never felt so accountable since the introduction of the National Curriculum and now the Desirable Outcomes.*

*Curriculum also implies that learning is a linear process.*

*I love playing and joining in, but find qualifying this theoretically or even planning for this effectively in terms of the Desirable Outcomes incredibly hard.*

### Teachers as arbiters

*How can we carry on with what is so centrally important to us when we are pressured into making sure the children attain certain levels?*

*Some of the Desirable Outcomes are as woolly as our learning objectives on our sheets.*

*How can I record what the children are learning in a way that is valuable, useful and manageable?*

*I think sometimes you do feel guilty, well I do, sometimes, sometimes if I'm sort of on the floor with a train set, and you can see the other classes going by, and they've sort of looking at you and they're thinking what on earth is she doing? I mean that's just having the courage to stand up for what you are doing.*

### Parents' expectations

*and I think there can be too much pressure at times for sort of written evidence from parents and I think you know if you've got to stand up to that*

### Developing Child

*When do the children 'just play?'*

*Curriculum assumes all children learning in the same way*

*Curriculum ignores how children develop concepts and understanding*

*the way that education has taken itself anyway, that there are a lot more constraints, may be, put upon the nurseries to some degree. There's pressure from above coming to below now, some of us do plan to conform*

*um, I think in some settings there's a lot of pressure from like the Infants department, the older children and the way that the National Curriculum has come in, and said you must do this, you must do that, and now the Literacy hour is coming in and the Numeracy hour. the pressure might be that, oh, you ought to do this at the end of the year to see what value added there is before you pass them up to Y1.*

#### Community (Socio-economic, socio cultural)

*League tables implying that the more forward (or not) is entirely due to what the school / educational setting has 'put in' rather than 3-way process - child / school / home*

#### Community (Educational)

*School system doesn't treat children as individuals*

#### Child as Learner

*How can we foster a love of learning?*

*How can we motivate children to become lifelong learners'?*

*Where is the child in relation to the prescribed curriculum?*

#### Principles

*What is quality / effective teaching?*

*What is quality / effective learning?*

*Our principles don't sit easily alongside a prescribed curriculum and the prevailing culture of testing, value added, accountability, providing concrete evidence, ticking boxes, league tables etc.*

*I feel I should be doing it but it's difficult to put it into practice.*

#### Philosophy

*Own theories overwhelmed by demands of curriculum – 'before National Curriculum my theories were behind planning and our own objectives to what I felt extended the children's play'*

*How do we carry on with what is so centrally important to us when we are pressured into making sure the children attain certain learning levels?*

*If the purpose of play is central to our theories - - but how can we give a learning objective to something that hasn't happened?*

*Do you consider it important that working together we evolve, share and 'vocalise a pedagogy that represents how we seek to challenge young learners (at an appropriate level and pace?)*

#### A final crie de couer: -

*Nothing has ever settled down long enough for us to have the luxury of looking at our practice and putting the children first. To me this is the most frustrating thing of all.*

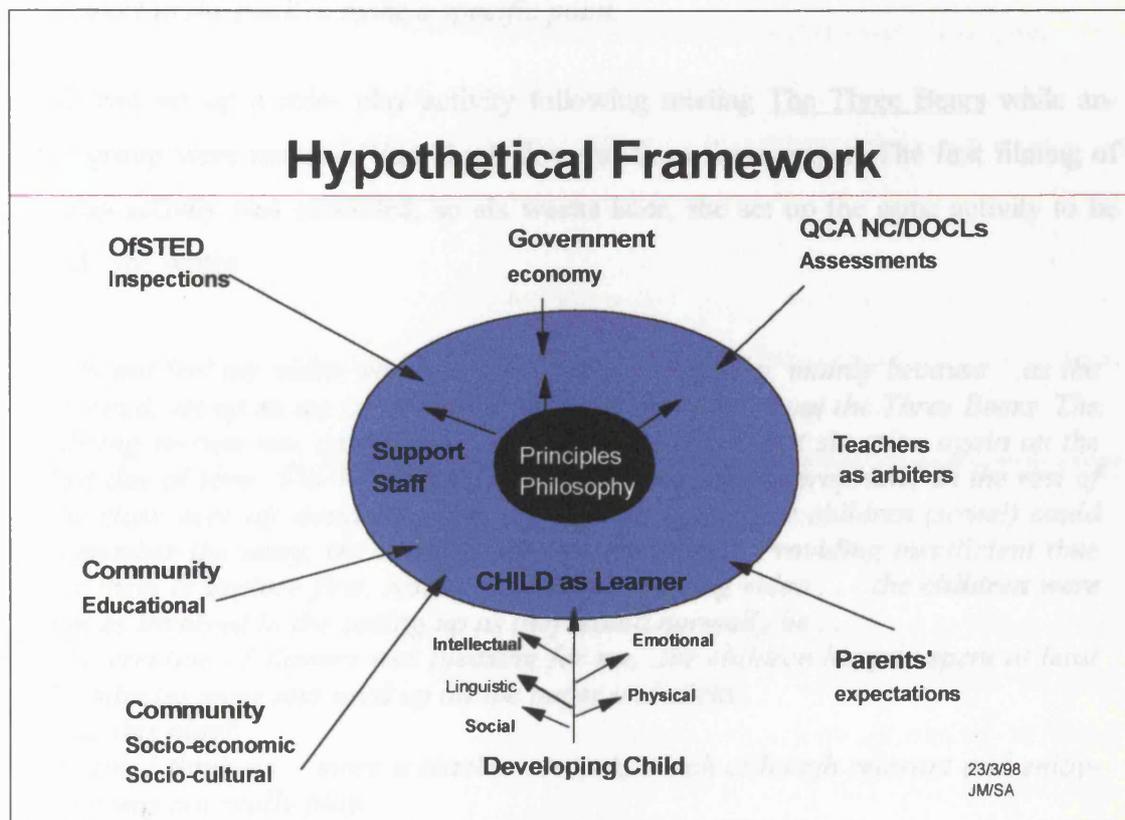
#### Black Hole: (Principles / Philosophy

*Knowing how and what to observe and support play*

*I'm trying to observe and sort of going to be a bit closer, as a participant then that hasn't worked, at all.*

*It's not something I get involved with terribly much, which I probably should.*

FIGURE 26: HYPOTHETICAL FRAMEWORK



Surfacing and acknowledging many of the tensions represented a significant period in the research. Representing their concerns provided a framework for understanding the context in which they worked. (The implications of these concerns are discussed in Chapter Seven).

**Stimulated recall**

Each member of the group was provided with a copy of their video to view independently, and, through stimulated recall invited to reflect critically and to write their responses. This has been discussed earlier in this chapter and now relates to their later written responses. This was partly a suggestion from Gail who wrote:

*However generally we felt that we could:  
review all videos together to criticise (if we can't cope with each other's criticism,  
we will not cope with adverse audiences), to decide what can be used to support*

*our pack / presentations. Then, to video again, to cover examples which need support in the pack to make a specific point.*

Sarah had set up a role- play activity following reading The Three Bears while another group were making ‘Van Gogh flowers’ from tissue paper. The first filming of her play activity was cancelled, so six weeks later, she set up the same activity to be filmed. She writes

*I do not feel my video was a ‘typical’ example of play, mainly because . . . as the original, set up **as an extension of work** we had done about the Three Bears. The filming session was cancelled . . . we simply ‘set up’ that situation again on the last day of term. For the children the situation was inappropriate, as the rest of the class were off doing something else . . . although the children (some!) could remember the story, the **activity was not relevant** . . . Providing insufficient time for them to explore first, resulted in a disappointing video . . . the **children were not as involved** in the setting up as they would normally be . . .*

*The creation of flowers was pleasing for me, .the children happily spent at least 20 minutes more and used up all the paper and sticks . . .*

*Was this play?*

*Again, I think no – more a teacher set task, which although relevant and enjoyable was not really play.*

Individual support was given to the practitioners, providing feedback in the form of informal comments and questions in order to promote further deliberations at differentiated levels. Key aspects from the written work were highlighted and introduced into the discussions during subsequent meetings such as:

How might play be used as an extension to learning?  
How important are relevant contexts to children’s play?  
What are the implications to children and practitioners’ of the ownership of play?  
(Researcher’s notes on Sarah’s homework ‘Revisiting My Video’.

Others commented:

- *It was set up, it was very much set up and it wasn’t natural at all and when I watched it, it just made me cringe and I just think if I could do it, if I did it again there’s a lot I’d do differently because it was set up*

- *But I told mine to come and play .. Yes, the photographer's coming. Right, you four children come here. Play. (Laughter). So, yes, in that respect it was engineered. And knowing that we were going to video it for the purpose of, of pulling it apart in a sense, there was a purpose to it but the purpose was just crap basically. (Laughter).*

However, the entire group had similar difficulties with the videoing of play activities although the subsequent documentation provided opportunities to address some of the issues. It was difficult to understand why the reality of their practice appeared to be so removed from the rhetoric. Many questions were raised about the apparent difficulties practitioners had in relating theory during the discussions and developing a set of principles to teaching.

The evidence from the video indicated no change had occurred and that although some issues were beginning to be confronted, practice remained unchanged. Working together to completing the pedagogical tables for the training materials provided evidence of the collaborative work involved in developing the StEPs.

Again, it appeared the practitioners did not know *how* to change. Alternative strategies were developed with the group to illustrate the link between theories and practice and promote a deeper level of thinking.

FIGURE 27: MODEL FOR PLAY, WITH INTERRELATED COMPONENTS

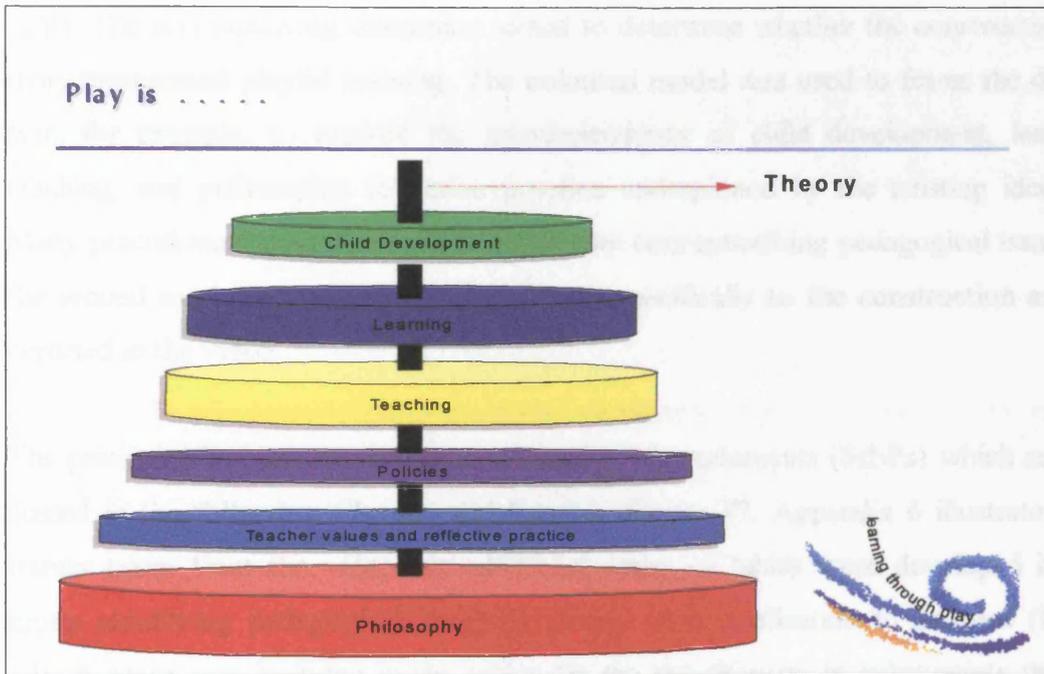
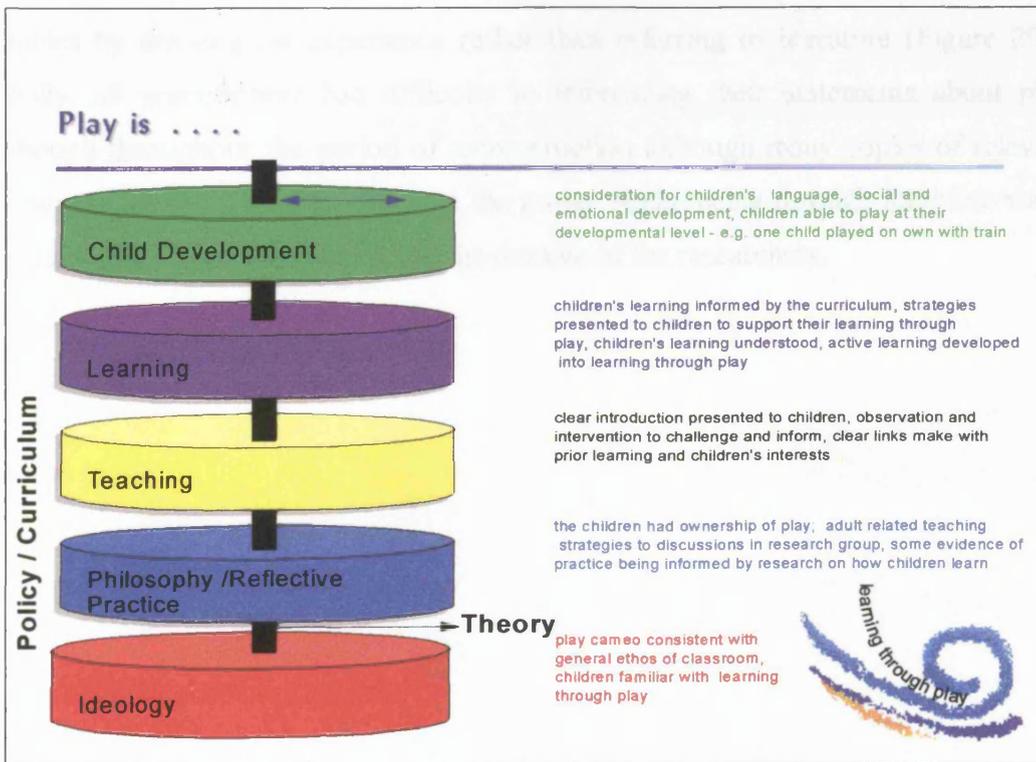


FIGURE 28: MODEL FOR PLAY, RELATED TO CAMEOS



The first two models (FIGURES 27 and 28) were related to the video of children playing in the construction area and were used to illustrate the pedagogical components. The accompanying discussion aimed to determine whether the construction activity represented playful learning. The coloured model was used to frame the discussion, for example, to explore the interdependency of child development, learning, teaching, and philosophy, reflective practice underpinned by the existing ideology. Many practitioners continued to have difficulty conceptualising pedagogical issues, so the second model was developed, relating it specifically to the construction activity depicted in the video.

The principles had been refined and reduced to six statements (StEPs) which are discussed in the following Chapter and listed in Figure 37. Appendix 6 illustrate three frames taken from the video. An additional series of tables were developed by the group identifying pedagogical components and their application to practice (Figure 30). A space was included in the tables for the practitioners to substantiate the evidence although response from June indicated that it was easier to draw on experience than referring to literature. In her note, June re-stated her preference to complete the tables by drawing on experience rather than referring to literature (Figure 29). Initially, all practitioners had difficulty in referencing their statements about play although throughout the period of reconstruction although many copies of relevant literature had been made available to the group. Referencing through literature was considered, by the practitioners to be the domain of the researchers.

FIGURE 29: PRACTICE INFORMS PRACTICE

After a long discussion Dianna & I decided that the only way we could tackle this is by covering knowledge which is derived from

- one's own instincts & alwz
- experience
- discussions with other practitioners
- role-modelling good practice.

Although academic knowledge was involved at several stages :-

- initial training
- in-sit training
- reading

due to limitations of time mostly referencing is not at our finger tip, so we felt unable to use it. If we did not base our findings on our daily experience, we would have been unable to fulfil this task.

Each comment if required can be supported by a cameo in situ.

(Practitioner's name has been changed to Dianna)

FIGURE 30: IMPLICATIONS OF PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE

| Children's entitlement                                     | What this provides for children - e.g.   | Children's skills / processes - e.g.   | What underpins practitioners' work   | What practitioners should know | Practitioners' skills / processes   |
|--|--|--|--|--------------------------------|---|
| Opportunities to use imagination and creativity / presence | ability to safely sample new situations<br>challenge stereotypes through role taking<br>escapism<br>sustained choice time and space<br>a window on the world<br>linguistic extensions<br>Opportunities to work through emotional responses<br>explore differences between real / not real<br>take the known into the unknown<br>work in groups and individually<br>develop self esteem<br>realise the implications or consequences of actions<br>use other language<br>communicate through different media | test out roles<br>expression - right or wrong<br>negotiation<br>problem solving<br>co-operative play<br>mastery of tools<br>make links and connections<br>non verbal and verbal communication<br>collaboration<br>adaptation<br>thinking processes<br>interpretation | knowledge of child development<br>knowledge of creative development - representation<br>symbolism<br><br>knowledge of what children do<br>professional relationship<br>liking children |                                | apply knowledge of child development to planning<br>provide appropriate resources<br>value child's background |
| References:-   |  |  | References:-   |                                |   |

Once the group's pedagogical insecurities had been identified, the following months became a period of intense training, studying and placing new and re-discovered knowledge in the tables referred to by one practitioner *'but to begin I thought I did know. I think I thought I knew a lot about practice, but I didn't really have the underlying knowledge or I had forgotten a lot of it'*.

The principles were further refined to accommodate child development, encouraging greater clarity of thinking (Figure 31). Together, through the development of collabo-

rative partnership and confrontation, practitioners began to identify and meet their own learning needs.

FIGURE 31: CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND ITS LINK TO PRACTICE

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>SOCIAL</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S:- Experience a variety of social / cultural situations</li> <li>S:- Develop confidence, security, acceptance ( self &amp; others)</li> <li>S:- Learn in a positive learning environment</li> <li>S:- Make choices</li> <li>S:- Work as part of a group / individually</li> </ul> |
| <b>PHYSICAL</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>P:- Learn in a safe environment</li> <li>P:- Develop an awareness of space and others</li> <li>P:- Become aware of own personal needs and limitations</li> </ul>   |
| <b>INTELLECTUAL</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I:- Develop secure sound basis for learning, including trial &amp; error learning</li> <li>I:- Initiate ideas</li> </ul>   |
| <b>EMOTIONAL</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E:- Be supported</li> <li>E:- Develop a sense of belonging</li> <li>E:- Develop positive relationships with peers and adults</li> </ul>  |
| <b>LINGUISTIC</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>L:- Control outcomes and other people</li> <li>L:- Express knowledge and opinions</li> <li>L:- Develop listening skills</li> <li>L:- Develop questioning skills</li> </ul>   |
| <b>References:</b>  |   |

Just as the frameworks (e.g. Figures 24, 25 and 26) supported the group's critical enquiry, it was found that a framework was also necessary to support reconstruction with pedagogical components presented in an easily identifiable format (Figure 32). In addition, professional language such as 'learning objectives' was elaborated to include colloquial phrases 'What do you want the children to learn?' The phrases were presented as questions, to encourage engagement with the issues, for the solutions were grounded in joint expertise and experience. This could be conveniently referred to as practitioners considered children's responses, planned for future learning with colleagues and identified their own and others' training needs:

*I think, the whole process, although quite gruelling, it has really helped. And now I know what they are and what their purpose is, what we mean by them, what their purpose is, to start with it was more difficult, it has been tremendous, it has helped.*

The phrases were presented as questions, to encourage engagement with the issues, for the solutions were grounded in joint expertise and experience.

FIGURE 32: YOUNG CHILDREN ARE ENTITLED TO PLAY EXPERIENCES WHICH ENGAGE THEM AFFECTIVELY AND SOCIALLY IN THEIR OWN AND OTHERS' LEARNING

| From their development and prior learning children are likely to know about: -  |              | Children need to learn: -   |
|---|--------------|---|
| <p>various social / cultural situations</p> <p>their own gender</p> <p>working as part of a group / individually</p> <p>confidence, security, acceptance (self &amp; others)</p>          | social       | <p>about different cultural / ethnic backgrounds[1]<br/>how to apply appropriate social conventions</p> <p>positive sense of own gender<br/>about gender through interaction<br/>to operate within a group<br/>to be sensitive to the needs and feelings of others<br/>to develop mature friendships<br/>to share<br/>a sense of fair play<br/>to develop sophisticated social skills in a variety of contexts<br/>to build on trust and security in relationships<br/>self-respect</p> |
| <p>their own personal needs and an awareness of limitations of self and others</p> <p>taking risks and personal safety</p> <p>awareness of space and surroundings</p>                     | physical     | <p>about own personal needs<br/>limitations of self and others</p> <p>appropriate physical action and contact<br/>independence and self help skills<br/>to extend physical capabilities with due regard to themselves and others</p> <p>about space and surroundings<br/>new and secure contexts</p>  |
| <p>empowerment[1]<br/>respect<br/>value systems<br/>acceptable/unacceptable behaviours</p> <p>decision making<br/>initiation of ideas<br/>setting parameters</p> <p>listening</p>         | intellectual | <p>to understand different perspectives and points of view<br/>difference between right and wrong<br/>to adhere to acceptable types of behaviour, understanding consequences of actions</p> <p>to choose<br/>to be confident in worth of own ideas<br/>how to select and use resources independently<br/>the consequence of actions<br/>persistence<br/>listening skills in different social contexts</p>   |
| <p>positive relationship with peers and adults<br/>having a sense of belonging<br/>a supportive environment<br/>prior emotional experiences</p> <p>equilibrium<br/>their own feelings</p> | emotional    | <p>about enjoying and needing companionship</p> <p>to be enthusiastic about learning<br/>to contribute to discussions<br/>to ask questions</p> <p>to make independent decisions about what is right or wrong<br/>to explore feelings<br/>to be responsive to their own feelings and those of others including guilt and shame<br/>to exercise self control<br/>to show a sense of humour</p>  |
| <p>verbalising feelings and opinions</p> <p>expressing thoughts and ideas<br/>assertiveness</p>   | linguistic   | <p>listening skills<br/>questioning skills<br/>to talk about experiences<br/>to develop non-verbal communication skills and articulation<br/>to engage in discussion</p> <p>to use appropriate language for different audiences<br/>appropriate expression of views and appreciation of others</p>  |

One of the practitioners commented that

*the structure of writing you've given was useful - pick an entitlement, pick a type of play, find a cameo, then write down what the children were learning, what was the adult role . . . . I found that useful.*

It appears that practitioners' apparent resistance to change was not a conscious, deliberate refusal to change. It appears more that they did not change practice because they did not have the knowledge to initiate change. An inability to conceptualise issues meant thinking remained at a pragmatic level, resulting in anecdotal discourse – talk was about immediate events often unrelated to current discussions.

However, there was significant change in their disposition and self-efficacy. All made similar comments typified by Dianna commenting:

*I think, just, most useful, I think it's made me more confident about what I believe in, being able to listen to what other people say. I've just learned such a lot.*

In response to the question, What support do you think you need to develop your practice further?:

*I don't think I need any support now I think that's something I need to work out now.*

Although their confidence appeared to have changed, in pragmatic terms there continued to be an apparent resistance to change. For example after 30 months of training and working on the project a request for planning documentation, several months after the project ended, resulted in the following message:

*Siân, hope this helps – believe it or not I have never written out a formal lesson plan! So I'm sorry if this is not what you would expect! Please let me know if you need me to do anything else . . .*

This was in spite of the pedagogical deconstruction.

*I still think that I feel that the group has already helped me a lot, to reflect in it because I think we all probably started thinking we were practicing well in play, but we've had to question ourselves and how we approach it and what we assume, what we don't assume, and I think I have to keep on that reflecting, and to keep this communication, this bouncing of ideas and I think now I feel prepared to be torn apart, and I think I would find it positive and probably at the beginning of the year I might have found it that a bit difficult.*

*I felt before when you all came I felt fairly confident but obviously you know, I stepped back and I thought you know I know there's a lot that I would like to change or to alter or to improve.*

*Focusing directly on Play, I think it's been so good for me to really think about what Play is, what Play isn't and to try to get to grips with the fact of learning as well, and it has made me think a lot more about what I'm actually doing with the children.*

*It's made me in a way question a lot of things I'm doing and how to change them and that's positive, but also I feel I've gone through a real taking apart and I've not really to put things back together again yet, so at the moment I feel pretty much in a state of limbo about where the direction of our nursery is actually going. But I think that having started on this process of actually looking at what we're doing and how it relates to the children's learning and their needs has been really useful.*

The frameworks appear to have supported a reflective approach leading practitioners to consider the pragmatic and deeper conceptualisation within pedagogy.

### **Observation: resistance to change and to use of pedagogical language**

Hall and Hord (1987) state that evidence of change is most reliably interpreted through observation rather than questionnaire.

Observation of the group revealed similar evidence of their resistance to change. This final section records the group's response during one meeting planned in order to present the findings for discussion with the group:

*Project director: [we] have been trying to work on some of the analysis, . . . things like the language that you've used . We've looked at your written reflections on your progress on the things so far. You aren't going to like this much folks but the picture's not a wonderful one at the moment and what we really want to try and do today, is to try and find out why and try and see how we can move forward. . (pedagogical knowledge) is somewhere deep inside you because you do it all the time. I think this is a classic thing with, with all the research which includes prac-*

*titioners, there's knowledge in there and somewhere we've got to find a way of getting it out.*

(Transcript of group meeting)

The group offered two possible reasons why they were experiencing difficulties in talking about their practice. First, their own difficulty in writing about practice, and, secondly the difficulty in surfacing their own implicit knowledge which in turn inhibited their ability to reflect on practice:

*Maybe we get out of the habit of thinking in that way, When you're at college and you're being a student, you're sort of in the habit aren't you, doing this sort of writing, these sort of things*

Planning documentation had been analysed and the following comments were made to the group:

*Planning documents show activity first, rather than thinking about children's learning first, with a very broad basis of trying to match the objectives for the activity with the evaluation of the outcomes. They almost never match.*

Interrogating all the documentation in this way provided opportunities to discuss the emerging issues with the grouping in a constructive and non-judgmental way.

*What you say you want children to learn and to do, is then not followed through in your evaluation.*

*So, you're not actually looking for the learning, you start off with 'children will do this' but then they have a nice time doing it, then you focus on that, (having a nice time) not upon what you set out for the children to learn.*

(Transcript of group meeting)

The day –long meeting concluded with the group suggesting and requesting further:

- training opportunities in order to ensure planning for learning provided opportunities for children to play
- training on linking planning, learning intentions, assessment and evaluation
- a second opportunity to plan for videoing play
- opportunities to discuss the use of pedagogical language.

The responses were recorded, analysed and used as a basis for future study by the practitioners.

### **Working with the entitlements**

All three methods of data collection were used by the group to support their own deconstruction and reconstruction. Working on the development of StEPs became the most significant support for developing a reflective approach to their practice. Deconstructing pedagogical components provided a framework, supporting practitioners in their pursuit of teaching and learning through play. It provided a framework and a focus for reconstructing their thinking. Commitment and enthusiasm sustained them through the discomfort of challenge and confrontation. The outcome, the preparation of training materials, provided the discipline to remain focused. The project provided support for each individual practitioner: individualised differentiated support with supply cover for the first two years.

Later analysis (Figure 33) showed that during Phase three, following production of a draft copy of StEPs practitioners had returned to an emphasis on personal concerns, presenting an apparent resistance to change. Most practitioners were at a stage of orientation, yet also at a personal stage of concern, i.e. they were acquiring information about the innovation and were exploring its value, and its implications for them, wondering 'How will using this have an effect on me?'

*(Being in the project) It's almost made me think I need to change my job, I know that sounds really drastic I feel I have my hands behind my back I can't do what I want to do and I'm really missing out.*

(Dianna, Interview 3)

As practitioners began to consider ways in which they might apply their recently acquired pedagogical knowledge, their concerns returned to personal domains (in red).

FIGURE 33: PHASE THREE, LEVELS OF USE AND STAGES OF CONCERN

|                             | Stages of Concern | Awareness | Informational | Personal | Management | Collaboration | Consequence |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|----------|------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>Level of Use</b>         |                   |           |               |          |            |               |             |
| <b>Non-use</b>              |                   | 0         | 0             | 0        | 0          | 0             | 0           |
| <b>Orientation</b>          |                   | 0         | 1             | 14       | 0          | 0             | 0           |
| <b>Preparation</b>          |                   | 0         | 0             | 10       | 1          | 0             | 0           |
| <b>Mechanical</b>           |                   | 0         | 0             | 6        | 0          | 0             | 0           |
| <b>Routine &amp; Refine</b> |                   | 0         | 0             | 0        | 0          | 0             | 0           |
| <b>Integration</b>          |                   | 0         | 0             | 0        | 0          | 0             | 0           |
| <b>Renewal</b>              |                   | 0         | 0             | 0        | 0          | 0             | 0           |

This also confirmed that six practitioners were at a mechanical level, considering ways in which the practitioner concentrate most effort on the short-term, day-to-day use of the innovation with little time for reflection.

Being involved in a project provided a clearly defined focus for the practitioners' reflective approach to their practice. StEPs provided a framework to promote a deeper level of thinking – from the practical technical aspects of their work to the underpinning theories. The collaborative relationship provided support and encouragement to sustain their engagement in the process of reflection, and a developing willingness to question their own beliefs and practices. The frequent meetings in which feedback was provided, helped to acknowledge both the importance of their affective responses, and the need to engage in cognitive aspects of reflection.

The engagement in reflective practice resulted in the group stating that they had gained '*Pedagogic knowledge - knowledge of children, what they do, how they play, how you can intervene. Everything really*'. This represented a significant change from the early stages in the research when they considered that:

*Basically, we had no knowledge, just intuition at the beginning. Because we did it then, it was because that's what we did; but whereas now it's the case of there's a sound reason behind it. So we've all grown in confidence because we are professionals.*

A supportive, collaborative framework sustained engagement through the stages of deconstruction and reconstruction.

The most significant change within the group of practitioners was in their renewed sense of self-efficacy their belief that they could make a difference to children's learning. In response to the question 'Has being part of the project affected your practice?' during the third round of interviews all practitioners referred to their increased confidence:

Carole stated that whilst there was no change to her practice she did feel she was able to stand up to being challenged about children learning through play experiences in her classroom.

Dianna also stated that she is now able to defend her commitment to providing play experiences for children with the result that the children '*always, they always really like coming to me and I know that that sounds a really conceited thing and big headed*'.

Gail stated that she now ensures she plays with the children rather than providing independent play experiences.

Hannah felt she was in a stronger position to support other colleagues as a result of her increased understanding of how children learn.

June compared the impact of being supported throughout the project with a day's inset:

*[Being part of the project is] completely different from just going on a day's inset where, you know, you say 'I don't know why I've bothered because they've not shown me anything, they not done anything for me'. [The project's] different in that because it's made you use your own brain, it's made you think about it. It's made you look at what you do everyday, and think 'how can I do it better? how can I make it better?' But without making it drastic changes, you know. And it's given me, me, specifically the professional push that I needed after 15 years, in the job that I knew like the back of my hand.*

Linda used the knowledge of child development to inform the way in which she supports children's learning through play '*I think I have improved in the way I intervene*'.

Pauline, who at one time had stated she felt destroyed by the process, commented she felt '*very confident, I mean, I didn't at one stage, but I do now*'.

Sarah said that being on the project had helped her to think more about her practice and, finally, Vera commented that she was ‘more certain ‘ about what she was doing.

Some illustrations, taken from the video, depicting children learning through play, are included in the Appendix 6.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the research process the group remained committed and enthusiastic about exploring how children learn through play. As pedagogical knowledge became more secure, practitioners spoke with greater confidence and fluency. They continued to be driven by affective concerns for children's welfare, and their own; there was also a greater emphasis on teaching and learning.

Planning and deeper conceptualisation continued to be problematic. Progressing from micro to macro concerns was difficult. The minutiae of daily practice and practitioners' obvious delight with the intimacy of working with young children appeared to prevent them from considering broader issues. Applying new pedagogical knowledge to practice was problematic.

For change to occur through reflective practice it needs to have multi level frameworks – from the political and ethical through to the pragmatic. Practitioners need time to consider, reflect, question, challenge, confront, and reconstruct new pedagogical understandings, in a context of differentiated support and within a culture that promotes professional dialogue and pedagogical exchanges.

In the context of a collaborative partnership, the processes within reflective practice informed new pedagogical understandings. The dynamic nature of working within grounded theory, and its related ethical issues, have resulted in a rich experience. Many questions have been answered and even more have been raised. Some issues emerged, within this research, which warrant further examination:

- Conditions under which reflective practice might occur;
- Ethical issues of researching with practitioners in short term funded projects;
- Tensions and contradictions within early years.

The implications of these are discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

*I mean, at the beginning of the project I thought I'm far too structured. I interfere far too much in what the children are doing. But I didn't know if that was the best way to get the learning to move forward. But I think the group have come up with the importance of adult intervention, and so I really do think that I'm here to teach, now. I'm not here to set things up and hope that the learning happens, which you can sometimes do with the early years. But it is actually down to you [me] to make it happen. I don't just assume it will.*

(Carole. Interview 3)

The introduction to this thesis stated that one element of the research was its intended relevance to practitioners. The principles of reflective pedagogical practice, presented in Chapter Two, provided the basis for the research. It was hoped that investigating the processes within RP would deepen understandings and, where appropriate, promote change.

Whilst the TBtP group upheld the principles of reflection, there was no evidence, at the beginning of the research, of their engaging in any form of critical enquiry. This was consistent with the rhetoric/practice divergence in the context of playful pedagogy, established during the research. Yet, Carole's statement above does reveal evidence of systematic appraisal and a significant change in attitude. There was no initial intention on her part to change practice. On arrival at the TBtP project she insisted '*I'll give you my knowledge*' but later testifies she is:

*waiting for this book list, I'm craving this book list cos.... I want to get myself key texts.*

It appeared there was a change from an initial attitude of cognitive self-reliance to acquiring a thirst for knowledge.

The opening quotation to this chapter confirmed many of the later findings presented in Chapter Six:

- Critical consideration of the adult role in children's learning: *far too structured;*
- Acknowledgement of weak pedagogical knowledge: *But I didn't know;*

- Value of social domain within reflective practice: *the group have;*
- Affirmation of teaching role: *I'm here to teach;*
- Consequence of provision on teaching and learning: *set things up and hope;*
- Empowered practitioner: *down to you to make it happen.*

Studying reflective, playful practices has resulted in changes in practitioners' values, beliefs and understandings, as can be seen in Carole's statements. A significant aspect of this research has been the extent of deconstruction and reconstruction, specifically in the context of developing a reflective approach to playful pedagogy. The insights gained from this investigation claims to be an original contribution to existing understanding. The principal issues raised during the enquiries and are discussed in this chapter as follows:

- 1) reflective practice;
- 2) ethical issues;
- 3) pedagogy in early years;
- 4) the implications of these three items have contributed to the limitations within the investigations and are identified in this final section.

## DEVELOPING A REFLECTIVE APPROACH TO PRACTICE

In Chapter Six, the findings confirmed the following conditions were required in order to support practitioners in developing an initial level of reflection in their work with young children:

- time to reflect;
- a culture of reflective pedagogy;
- collaborative, differentiated, informed support;
- focused framework accompanied by a:
  - willingness to engage in the process of questioning and confrontation;

- ability to conceptualise and reconstruct values, beliefs and understandings.

Whilst the practitioners were familiar with the concept of reflective practice, they lacked the skills and attitudes to apply its approach to their work. They declared it was '*nice to do*', yet there was no evidence of any depth in their understanding of reflection. The practitioners were not conversant with its inherent processes and did not have the skills to apply its principles to teaching strategies. The group's own theories of teaching and learning were largely intuitive, their actions driven by

- a) resource provision;
- b) the outcomes of current curriculum guidelines;
- c) a commitment to children's personal and emotional welfare.

But these actions did not appear *also* to be accompanied by a secure construct of teaching and learning.

**Reflective practice: promotes and requires informed practitioners**

Insecure pedagogical knowledge - teaching and learning - was displaced by the security of familiar personal constructs and 'safe' prescribed curriculum methodologies. This may go some way into explaining why many practitioners plead for a 'tips for teachers' approach to training. They lack the knowledge and skills to apply theoretical comprehension to their work. For example, whilst many practitioners stated they 'felt uncomfortable' with the National Literacy and National Numeracy Strategies, they were unable to articulate these concerns at deeper levels.

Practitioners are unlikely to realise their ambitions to challenge curriculum reform based solely on their feelings. During Phase One practitioners lacked sufficient knowledge to articulate why they were 'uncomfortable' with a formal curriculum. Frustrated attempts to express these concerns to, for example, senior management in their schools, may have been heightened by an inability to present a rationale for a more appropriate pedagogical approach to play. One of the results of developing the Hypothetical Framework was its promoting clear, concise, informed articulation of

the early years issues under dispute and scrutiny. It was only after practitioners had confronted and acknowledged these issues that they began to be motivated to learn more about pedagogical principles and the broader political context in which they work. Through informed reflection, practitioners were able to meet curriculum requirements, whilst also honouring children's entitlement to learn through play. Their enhanced practice is illustrated in the video accompanying StEPs (Moyle et al, 2001).

Researchers, whose academic appreciation might be more secure than their technical expertise, adopt different approaches to critical enquiry. These two perspectives - researcher and practitioner, theoretical and pragmatic - invited opportunities to maximise the co-production of pedagogical wisdom. Co-reflection, developed between the PRs contributed to the deepening understanding of early years practices.

#### **Reflective practice: requires effective communication**

The studies in Chapter Two suggest that levels of reflective pedagogical thinking relate closely to levels of language. The practitioners' anecdotal levels of language were accompanied by a pragmatic level of reflection. The emphasis on practical aspects of their work appeared to indicate that deeper levels of thinking did not occur. Their pre-occupations were related to resources, actions, '*doing*'; their levels of thinking and actions were informed at a 'hands-on' level, as suggested by one practitioner:

*Because in your every day work you just don't think these things, you don't think. Really. You just **do**. All the time.*

There is a wealth of publications on the subject of practitioner [teacher] reflection (Cole, 1997). When the research began (October, 1997) there was little literature suggesting practical ways – i.e. again, tips for teachers - in which reflective practice might be developed, particularly in the early years. During this research, it appeared that the wealth of rigorous, informed literature about play and reflective practice is not necessarily disseminated effectively to practitioners. Further research into why practitioners are unable to relate theory to practice might elucidate this. When writing at theoretical/ethical/political levels, consideration must be given to the ways in which

practitioners receive, interpret and apply the information. Many of the practitioners were familiar with studying, literature and research (see autobiographies in Appendix 1) yet appeared not to relate their understanding of how children learn, to practice.

In Chapter Two, it was noted that Convery (1998) suggests that although various categories of reflective practice are attractive, they do not necessarily support the practitioner in its practical application. This research has attempted to identify the strategies required to reflect on practice, i.e. deconstructing reflective practice, whilst also deconstructing theories of playful learning and later reconstructing values, beliefs and understanding. The researcher and practitioners' commitment to ensuring the relevance of this research to school settings dictated that its content should be playful teaching and learning. Itself a complex focus, learning through play is meaningful and relevant to the practitioners engaged in the TBtP investigations. Figure 2 in Chapter Two illustrates examples of the various levels of reflection ranging from practical, routine considerations to deeper deliberations of theoretical or ethical issues. (One row of Figure 2 is reproduced in this chapter: Figure 34).

FIGURE 34: LEVELS OF PRACTICE

|                                 |  |                        |  |
|---------------------------------|--|------------------------|--|
| Goodman (1991)                  | With experience, encouragement and collaborative relationship. | A dynamic way of being | <b>Focus:</b><br>Practical<br>Theoretical<br>Ethical<br><b>Process</b><br>Routine<br>Rational<br>Intuitive<br><b>Attitude</b><br>Open-mindedness<br>Responsibility<br>Enthusiasm |
| See also Chapter Two, Figure: 2 |  |                        |  |

**Reflective practice: builds on existing strengths**

Practitioners' reflections on, for example, role-play, were more focused on resources rather than articulating a rationale for its provision, as explained in the previous Chapter Six. Progressing from practical to theoretical levels involves subjecting existing theoretical comprehension to scrutiny. It is possible that one of the reasons for practitioners' resistance to engagement in reflective enquiry was that their theoretical under-

standing of RP and play were insecure. They did not possess the skills of reflection, or the knowledge content on which to reflect. They were entrenched in their own personal beliefs, without the tools to progress to a theoretical level. Their open-mindedness applied to the provision of resources so that, for example, considerations of children's role-play was focussed on resources for the home corner. The following extract from the final group interview demonstrates the development of reflection: critical consideration of the impact of resources on teaching and learning.

*Basically, we had no knowledge [before the TBtP project], just intuition at the beginning. Because we did it then [teaching and learning through play] because that's what we did, but whereas now it's the case of there's a sound reason behind it. So we've all grown in confidence because we are professionals.*

June

*I think also that goes with the equipment you put out as well. You've got more insight into the reason why you put that equipment out and what you're getting out of it, or never use it again because you can see the value of it.*

Dianna

*And you question it.*

Carole

*And [ask] what else you can do with it.*

June

*Yeah and some of it perhaps you put to the back of the shelves and never use it again, because you can't see the value of it and, mmm, I think it's given us that knowledge.*

FIGURE 35: REFLECTIVE THINKING

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Reflection-on-practice:                | <i>Basically, we had no knowledge.</i>  |
| Deeply embedded pedagogical knowledge: | <i>Just intuition at the beginning.</i>   |
| Reflection: rationale level:           | <i>Whereas now it's the case of there's a sound reason. You've got more insight</i> |
| Critical enquiry:                      | <i>You question it. And [ask] what else you can do with it.</i>                     |
| Confident, empowered:                  | <i>So we've all grown in confidence because we are professionals.</i>               |

During the early stages of the research the discussions were often focussed on practical aspects of teaching. Sharing ideas about resources perpetuated a 'practice informs practice' approach to reflection. Resource provision was a starting point for pedagogical reconstruction and was incorporated into the development of StEPs.

Through developing StEPs the practitioners

- learned about children's development and existing knowledge;
- studied the curriculum guidelines in order to determine how best to build on children's prior knowledge and relate that to learning;
- determined their own levels of comprehension and identified future learning requirements;
- evaluated existing provision and the ways in which it might contribute to children's learning and development (as in the Jungle Scenario described in Chapter Six);
- began to plan for teaching, meeting their perceived entitlement to teach through play.

Through restructuring the statements, the practitioners identified critical components of development, teaching and learning. This provided them with almost tangible aspects of pedagogy in which the link, from understanding and knowledge, to practice became attainable. In spite of all their enthusiastic commitment to play, reflection was too broad a concept to promote its application to playful pedagogy.

The content of reflective practice needed to be accessible but that alone was not sufficient to promote critical enquiry. In order to simplify the complex, the different languages of play must accommodate practitioners' levels of thinking. As stated in Chapter Three, investigating the complexity of reflective practice within the elusiveness of play demanded a substantial research design.

### **Reflective practice: in the context of research projects**

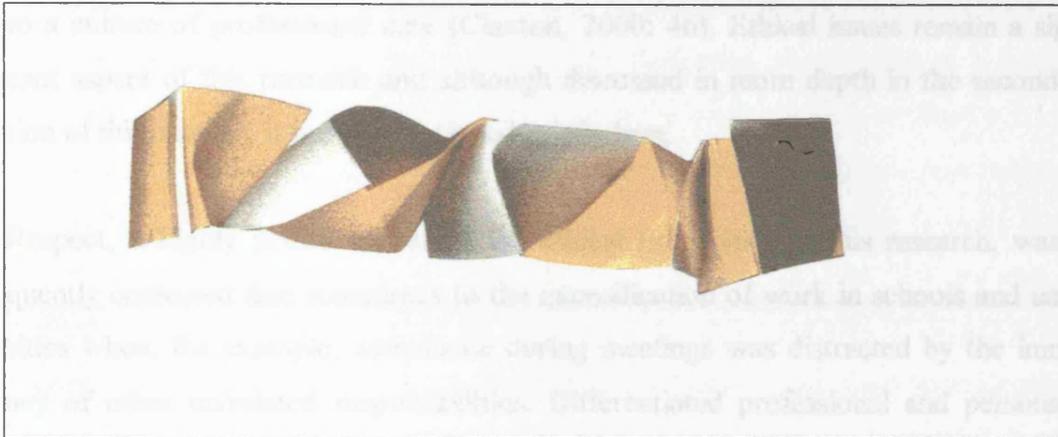
Qualitative research design is expected to be cognitively rigorous and exacting, especially as it is sometimes considered to be a 'less rigorous and less valued way of doing inquiry' than applying quantitative methods (Maykut and Morehouse: 1994: 7). In the

interests of rigour, there is a danger that inadequate provision is made for the dynamic, responsive, social dimensions of research. Investigating reflective practice in this research evolved through collaborative partnership. Yet effective relationships between researchers and practitioners require time and support developed through the context of an ethical framework. Involvement with the TBtP project provided the framework of aims and objectives, and clearly defined outcomes – the production of StEPs. Three conditions required to promote reflective practice were explored in the previous Chapter Six and are associated with certain methodological implications and are discussed here:

### **Researching reflective practice requires time**

Practitioners required time to develop open and trusting discussion in which they explored personalised, embedded values and beliefs. Reflective/supportive time must be incorporated into research planning and funding provision. Both practitioners and researchers require time to 'linger-longer' during those moments where critical evidence is shared, confidences may need to be restored, flagging spirits encouraged, sometimes through simply being playful. During Phase Two, the period of deconstruction, it was apparent that articulating an understanding of play involved convoluted, time-consuming deliberations. The concept of being playful can be illustrated by a response made by Gail during one lengthy meeting in which practitioners were attempting to define their construct of play. Gail suggested play was very similar to a Flump (an entwined toffee/chocolate bar). Her definition substantiated a growing evidence that confectionary was frequently used to obviate challenge. During the following meeting, Gail reinforced her theory by producing a model of Flump which she had constructed out of card (Figure 36). Other practitioners contributed an array of twirling chocolate cookies for weeks to follow. Flump was to herald change!

FIGURE 36: FLUMP



Following the Flump discussions the practitioners began to realise their construct of play was insecure. Differentiating between play and active learning brought attention to the fact that training would be required in order to inform their thinking and understanding.

Before considering changes to their teaching, practitioners will perceive an inadequacy in existing routines, often based on personal beliefs, before exploring ways in which modifications or enhancements might be introduced (Day, 1998). Such personal, affective processes must be treated with respectful consideration. In Chapter Six, it was stated that humour often characterised the exchanges between researcher and practitioners. Humour was used by practitioners to resist and possibly to protect the self and others from challenge. Humour and playfulness were valuable tools in forging effective, productive relationships, but they eroded carefully provisioned time during the meetings, as in the development of the Flump models and its subsidiary cookies.

Evening discussion groups found practitioners weary after a day in the classroom, risking them revealing vulnerabilities or personal and professional concerns. Recogn-

nising potentially vulnerable situations prompted concerns for maintaining respect and integrity within the exchanges between practitioners and between practitioners and researchers. Paying attention to the sometimes subtle changes within the group, capturing and responding to the 'faint and slippery ideas' reinforced the commitment to a culture of professional care (Claxton, 2000: 46). Ethical issues remain a significant aspect of this research and although discussed in more depth in the second section of this chapter, it is also mentioned briefly here.

Respect, a highly prized aspect of the ethical framework in this research, was frequently contested due sometimes to the intensification of work in schools and universities when, for example, attendance during meetings was distracted by the immediacy of other un/related responsibilities. Differentiated professional and personal responsibilities resulted in different priorities that also demanded respect. Whilst it was acknowledged that reflective practice can be protracted, time was not always available during group meetings. There were occasions when everyone was preoccupied. Appropriate provision has to be made for time to reflect; it cannot be hastened! The literature indicates various developmental levels of reflective thinking. Time required to mature through these levels is essential.

Developing reflective practice was challenging for with such 'fragile spirits of pedagogy', surfacing values, beliefs and understandings required differentiated support (Van Manen, 1999: 13). A framework for supporting the development of reflective practice was grounded in the group's responses, designed to meet their needs and to provide them with ownership of the process. It was important that they too would be involved in rebuilding self-images, self-esteem and overcome feelings of instability (Dadds, 1993). The meetings themselves appeared to generate their own supportive culture in an otherwise stressful process. The requirement for such intense levels of informed encouragement had not been completely anticipated nor provision made for creating such an all-embracing, supportive framework.

### **Researching reflective practice: requires support**

Whilst it appeared initially that reflexive practice was secure and confident, it was found that extensive support was required in order to promote deeper levels of reflection, linking practice with thinking and principles. Lifting the level of pedagogical knowledge from what they 'feelingly know' to more substantial cognitive assurances was also demanding (Van Manen, 1995: 33). Reflecting on practice, at a pragmatic and anecdotal level, does not necessarily promote confrontation or deeper levels of thinking. It appeared professional learning and reflective intelligence was contextualised and inhibited by a culture of non-pedagogy. Reflective practice is more likely to be effective if it becomes an integral part of a coherent ideology. For instance, it is difficult for practitioners to learn the art of talking about practice if pedagogical discussion is condemned or ridiculed. Cole (1997) observed that many practitioners engage in reflective practice secretly, as it is neither encouraged nor condoned in professional contexts within schools. This was also evident during the meetings, when practitioners displayed discomfort even with '3 syllable words' such as 'cognition' or 'competence'. Vera recounted one instance when she *'used the word 'eclectic' in the staff room and has not been allowed to forget it'*. This comment indicated her own familiarity with '3 syllabled words' yet this was an articulation inhibited by a context which shunned deeper levels of academic/language/thinking as noted in Chapter Six when *'pedabogey-men's'* language was similarly shunned.

It appeared that practitioners did not have a distinct professional language. There was an immediate affinity with each other and within the group as they shared experiences, recalled events, compared children's responses. These exchanges were at an anecdotal level, in which conceptualisation appeared elusive and use of professional language was resisted and derided.

This research has raised significant issues about reflective practice. If it is to contribute to professional development then structures need to be in place within the educational system, making provision for time and sustained support. It is suggested that reflective practice exists at many levels. Similarly, changes need to be made at micro and macro levels, within discussions between practitioners in schools, and at policy

level. This may promote a culture in which professionalism is valued and reflective practice promoted and encouraged. Policies contribute to the patterns of practitioners' behaviours and determine the structures and values of professional life. In this research, where political orientation is at odds with practitioners' ideologies, it became difficult to promote reflective practice. It was found, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, that the practitioners are driven by curriculum prescription, for example the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, Baseline Assessment and OfSTED Inspections. Critical, professional discourse amongst colleagues was treated with disdain. When initiatives are introduced, they must be accompanied with appropriate levels of training which inform practitioners at practical and theoretical levels. Training must include a combination of the technical – again, tips for teachers – and a deeper theoretical level so that practitioners understand how and why initiatives are being promoted. If effective, meaningful practice is to be developed, practitioners must also have time to:

- accommodate change;
- take account of the way in which initiative impact existing provision;
- make opportunities for open, challenging, professional discourse.

Ongoing support and encouragement, consultation and reinforcement, are required until the novice, in many domains (teacher, playful pedagogue, reflective practitioners and so on) becomes expert (Hord et al, 1998). Pedagogical principles, advocated for children's learning must also applied to adult learners.

Investigating reflective practice demanded a reflective approach to the methodology, representing a willingness to question and deconstruct emerging concepts. This necessarily responsive approach heightened the ethical considerations of the research design.

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE REQUIRES AN ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

As indicated in Chapter Five, all research processes were informed by ethical considerations. Attention was paid to early conceptualisation of the research and its design, the researchers obtaining informed consent, securing and assuring confidentiality, respectfully managing the interviews, accurate transcription, confidential and safe storage of data, reliable analysis and verification involving researcher and practitioners. Eisner (1991) suggests that sustaining ethical considerations can be particularly difficult when a change in direction or purpose has occurred in the research. It is inevitable that delving into the understandings of individuals raises many ethical issues regarding the 'appropriateness of the research methods, the interpretation of data and the confidentiality of findings' (Calderhead and Shorrock, 1997: 34). In this instance, the extent of the traumatic period of deconstruction, described by one practitioner as being '*destroyed*', was unexpected and prompted considerable examination of the research process. The ethical framework underpinning the research remained an unequivocal factor in an attempt to ensure that the investigation of reflective practice sustained the integrity of the practitioners. Issues frequently emerged requiring on-the-spot decisions to be made, without opportunities for deliberation and negotiation. Surmounting these hurdles required clarity of purpose within the research and clearly defined ethical values and a willingness to question existing methodologies. For instance, would it have been irresponsible to have alerted the practitioners to the 'black hole' in which they were placed, if the resources were not available to ensure some means of escape? A central feature of this research has been the way in which the practitioners constructed their own route out of their hypothetical black hole. Their reconstruction was partly dependent on appropriate levels of differentiated support and challenge, the 'comfortable challenge' referred to by Pauline and captured in her comment '*I was wanting to be challenged but wanting to be supported in the challenge*' (Merry, 1998).

Considerable cognitive and affective energies are required to engage in critical enquiry although the rewards were found to offer an escape route, the 'enabling power of knowledge' removing feelings of helplessness (Adams et al, 2000: 163). However, the concept of reflection has obtained little support from policy makers. Autonomous, re-

flective practitioners appear to be incompatible with increased focus, for example, on a curriculum driven by outcomes and increased pace. It is doubtful whether practitioners be encouraged down a route that ultimately leads to critical enquiry at moral, ethical and political levels of thinking.

Although not fully explored there appeared to be evidence of a culture of dependency within the group, beginning in Phase One, with them 'looking for a lead' from the researchers.

Further research might explore this. Embedded in the process of reflective practice are the tensions of empowering practitioners, promoting professional language, which results in them challenging the system in which they teach. Granström (2000: 2) suggests that:

The loyal teacher is tied to the authority's apron strings, teaching the prescribed subject matter, using the methods and measures ascribed and makes no or very few own decisions . . . . On the other side, the disobedient teacher can be considered as more professional as he or she refuses to be governed by administrator or bureaucrats.

Maintaining the balance between encouragement and challenge, providing training without reducing autonomy, professional as opposed to 'obedient or disobedient' was often confounded by considerations of the inherent ethical issues.

#### CONSIDERATION OF ETHICAL ISSUES

At the conclusion of the research, all practitioners stated they had achieved personal and professional goals. En route, they had experienced conflict and resolution, deconstruction and reconstruction. All maintained that they felt supported in the on-going challenges. It was fortunate that the project was able to sustain relatively high levels of support. Yet, fortune seems a highly fragile justification for the traumas experienced during confrontation, in spite of benefits accrued through reconstruction. Various factors are woven in to the considerations of the ways in which the research was conducted. They include:

- respecting practitioners' commitment;
- avoiding their exploitation;
- ensuring equity in interviewing.

### **Practitioners' commitment**

Throughout, the practitioners insisted that the research should continue. This was affirmed by one practitioner, whose responses were polarised between feelings of total destruction, and later feelings of self-belief, reaching for things previously considered as being '*beyond her grasp*'.

The extent of their commitment demanded reciprocal support. Hall and Hord (1987: 72) suggest that when personal concerns are at their most intense, practitioners require 'one to one assistance and encouragement'. In the context of the TBtP project, it was possible to offer individualised, differentiated support. This support aimed to legitimise practitioners' affective responses and to inform and challenge cognitive development, within the processes of reflective practice. Hord et al (1998) asserts that ethically it is inappropriate to encourage change without making provision for addressing the affective responses of practitioners. When practitioners are engaged at such intense affective levels it is essential that relationships be marked by:

- respect,
- interest and attention to rebuilding their sense of self-efficacy, critical to their future personal and professional lives.

Wood (2000) raised similar ethical issues when her research was concluded. She recalls one practitioner stating '*But you are leaving me hanging on to a precipice*'. Yet funding was withdrawn at that point and further application for funding was unsuccessful. The underlying principle of exploitation is discussed in the following section.

### **Is exploitation inevitable?**

The TBtP group was enthusiastic in their involvement with the research (as revealed in Chapter Six). They willingly gave their time, energies and relentless quantities of documentation to the investigations. Nevertheless, this raises concern that their com-

mitment should not be exploited, that their generosity did not also contribute to their own vulnerability and abuse. The extent of determination, confidence and trust can generate its own ethical dilemmas as researchers consider whether to scrutinise the sometimes unsolicited information potentially revealing yet more challenges to be faced by practitioners (Johnson, 1999).

In order to attain and sustain a level of trust and respect, both researchers and practitioners committed considerable additional time and energy to the work within the TBtP project. It would have been easy, driven by enthusiasm, to overlook the underlying ethical issues. During the early phases of the research it became evident that procedures would be required to ensure thorough consideration of ethical implications, particularly in the light of

- events spiralling out of control as practitioners enthusiastically engaged in critical enquiry
- the researchers' unwillingness to compromise ethical or moral values (Schulz et al, 1997).

Within collaborative research there are inevitable tensions as both researchers and practitioners maintain different expectations from the process and possess different expertise. Frequent discussions included enquiries into practitioners' willingness to sustain this commitment to their involvement in the TBtP project. The researchers worked hard to ensure that mutual enthusiasm did not cloud judgment and exploit the spontaneous generosity of spirit which characterised the project. Provision was made to evaluate practitioners' possible concerns at regular intervals, requesting verbal and written, formal and informal evaluations and suggestions for specific items to be included in future meetings. Similar concerns, for example, were related to the interviewing process.

#### **Ensuring equity in interviewing?**

All practitioners were offered opportunities to listen/read the interview tapes and transcripts, although, to date, no-one has taken up the invitation. It appeared that once the

interviews were completed they became 'history' for the practitioners. One practitioner requested copies of her interview, but when handed to her, changed her mind and declined. It is not known whether the transcripts were a painful reminder of confrontation or if it was considered no longer relevant to new and current thinking.

Because the nature of the findings from this research was so unexpected the purpose of the interviewing and its later analysis being changed. The original aim was to explore ways in which practitioners support learning through play. Discovering weak pedagogical language, for example, was not anticipated. However this does beg the question, would the practitioners have agreed to being interviewed if it had been known the purpose would involve exploring the levels of pedagogical language? There was no intention at the start of the research to make value judgments. Yet, there were occasions when adhering to such principles was at risk.

An emerging dilemma in interviewing was to permit the interviewees to respond to their own agenda but also for the interviewer to be true to the purpose of the study. This is especially so in contentious areas, e.g. early years where legislative and curriculum discontinuities exist (Wood and Bennett, 1999) and is further compounded if the interviewees suspect they have a sympathetic audience for their concerns (Riddell, 1989). The researcher, adhering to ethical guidelines, needed to be conscious of the framework of the role and loyal to the purpose and integrity of the project (BERA, 1992). A pattern of regular, open feedback was established at the beginning of the research providing an open forum for emerging issues – including emerging concerns and emphasis of positive aspects of their work. At each phase practitioners' response to the feedback was incorporated into the data and new understanding negotiated. Developing the Hypothetical Framework, discussed earlier in this and the previous chapter, illustrates one occasion when issues raised during interviews were transferred to more open exploration.

The intimate atmosphere of individual interviews may entice practitioners to be more open than they had anticipated. This may be especially so in a profession characterised by the 'closing down of spaces for debate' (Smyth and Hattam, 2000: 161) where

it is unusual, '*a rare opportunity*', to have the opportunity to talk in a non-judgmental setting, to be listened to or afforded the opportunity for systematic reflection on the practices, beliefs, values and contexts (Day, 1998). The search for practitioners' reality risks becoming too 'confessional' and needs to be managed with professional care (Smyth, 1999: 77). There were occasions when practitioners revealed more than they had intended/expected. These were usually specific references, for example, to the difficulties all practitioners experienced in achieving collegiate support for playful teaching. In each instance, the practitioners gave permission for the entire transcripts to be retained.

### **Unexpected ethical dilemmas**

During Phase 1 was a concern that the intimate setting of the interview might encourage a divisive context, in which practitioners were critical of colleagues in schools who were not always supportive of practitioners' provision for play. As the project developed, and raw findings of weak pedagogical knowledge, for instance, were confirmed, their colleagues' judgments of early years practice were reconsidered. On reflection it was evident that practitioners were revealing more than they had intended, for the research evidence affirmed some of the criticisms being raised by the group's colleagues on the effectiveness of playful provision for learning.

The policy of openness inevitably affects the quality of data collected. For instance, all practitioners knew they were being recorded during interviews. Permission was requested and although attempts were made to reduce the intrusiveness of a tape recorder, it was visible at all times. No attempt was made to conceal it. The alternative, as discussed but not necessarily recommended by Scholfield (1995) would have been to record the interviews, then ask for permission to keep the tape. That was considered unacceptable and exploitive. It was found that in order to sustain an unyielding ethical framework, all other aspects of the research design were required to be adaptable. For example, determining how best to situate the various dimensions of the researcher role was often considered during reflection on the research process as the role of impartial interviewer was substituted by informed tutor (discussed in Moyles and Adams, 2000).

Hord et al (1998) state that one of the most frequent misjudgements made by change facilitators is to expect that an innovation will be implemented as soon as initial training in that innovation has been completed. Hord's studies showed that after training some practitioners make no change to their practice, remain at novice level, even months after their initial introduction. Others implement aspects of the new model while some continue attempting implementation for extended periods. A prime responsibility of the change facilitator is to support practitioners through to the point of successful and sustained implementation. It is also essential that no judgments are made (by change facilitators/trainers/researchers/funding bodies) if no visible changes are made by practitioners engaging in changing practice or if one person progresses beyond another.

In summing up, whilst the days in which practitioners' perspectives are ignored is long past, there are ethical dilemmas, as have been shown. Further research is needed to examine ways in which that exposure to practitioners, engaged in collaborative research, might be minimised (Reimer and Bruce, 1994: 214). There exists:

- a moral and ethical responsibility to provide appropriate support to practitioners engaging in the affective and cognitive responses within reflective practice;
- an obligation on education reformers to hear, acknowledge and value the multi-voices of early years practitioners: the commitment and enthusiasm that sustains, as well as the personal, affective responses that contributes to passionate practice, the cognitive processes involved in multi-level pedagogical decision making. Provision for change must include time to develop informed differentiated support so that practitioners can confront existing practice before accommodating new approaches to teaching and learning.
- ethical issues to be considered when engagement in reflective enquiry is likely to promote deep levels of deconstruction but where appropriate levels of differentiated support might not be available to practitioners. The ethical implications also bring into question the wisdom and desirability of continuing with a process that instigated a change in disposition from one of buoyant confidence '*a morale booster*' to one of deconstruction before later '*reaching beyond my grasp*'.

Do the ends justify the means? The practitioners insist 'Yes' although there remains a residual discomfort that it was so easy to slip into an ethical quagmire.

This dilemma was raised with one practitioner who responded:

The irony is that in aiming to foster a love of learning in the children in my setting I had forgotten to tend to my needs as a learner. I am responsible for my own lifelong learning. Taking part in this research project was a timely intervention, through which I feel and know I have become a more effective practitioner.

Not only have I survived, I feel as if I have achieved more and am reaching for things I did not know were within my grasp.

(Adams, Medland and Moyles, 2000: 163)

Maximising serendipitous opportunities without compromising values has resulted in a dynamic process. On-going deliberations aimed to ensure that professional integrity was not compromised in pursuit of playful research. Future intervention studies will be approached with an increased awareness of the challenges and risks of pursuing complex issues with practitioners who are so eager and committed to embarking on unfamiliar explorations. Through adhering to an ethical framework, provision was made to ensure the people have been protected from dishonourable practice. This did not protect them from the harsh realities of confrontation, but nor did it deny them the exhilaration of reconstruction. The intention was neither to cocoon nor to provide a sanitised route to deepening understandings. Through promoting a reflective approach to practice, it was anticipated change would occur, a result of deepening understandings of how children learn, though play and the role of adults in the playful learning process.

It was inevitable that investigating a complex

- concept (reflective practice) within a
- content (play) through the
- task of surfacing implicit values beliefs and understandings

would be multi-faceted and fraught with unexpected issues.

Yet hacking through the unfamiliar jungle (Adams and Moyles, 2000a) has been challenging for all concerned. Practitioners' personal narratives continue to illustrate how the collaborative process affected and changes their confidence-in-practice:

*If you say to someone [e.g. colleague] 'Look, children learn like this, and this is the way they need to learn'. Then they've got less chance of coming back at you and saying 'No I want you to do worksheets'.*

*Because you can say 'No . . . Because I know how children learn and that's the best way to teach'.*

*I don't think I would have had this new job if I hadn't been able to go to that interview and you know just articulate all the things that I know and believe in.*  
(Group Interview)

## PEDAGOGY IN THE EARLY YEARS

The Hypothetical Framework (Figure 26 in Chapter Six) represented many of the concerns and tensions faced by early years practitioners (Wood and Bennett, 1999). The TBtP group had 'felt' concerns about the impact of the National Curriculum on early years provision (David, 1990) yet had not articulated nor fully comprehended its implications. Partly as a result of this, the practitioners assumed a sense of personal responsibility for inadequate playful provision, resulting in their feelings of guilt '*[I'm] not playing, the children are not getting enough play, and they're not getting enough free choice, you know they're not deciding everything, all the time, which made me feel guilty*'.

Concerns about the inappropriateness of early years provision have been well documented (Hurst, 1994b; Blenkin and Kelly, 1994; Nutbrown, 1994; Anning, 1997; Wood, 1999). The sample of nine practitioners was small enough to conduct in-depth data collection and analysis and reveal considerable dislocation between the group's shared values of a playful pedagogy and their practice. The evidence from this research also suggests that inappropriate early years provision is a reflection of weak pedagogical knowledge. Whilst this continues to be the case, then existing early years provision cannot be an effective advocate of playful, early years pedagogy.

Through reflective enquiry in this research project, the practitioners developed from being 'powerless recipients of curriculum change' to informed autonomous practitioners with a sense of responsibility towards their own pedagogy and professional development (Wood, 1999: 22). The evidence from this research implies that in order to sustain their professional dignity and respect they have a responsibility to strive for excellence and realise their own claims that children should learn through play. There was an emphasis through the Findings Chapter Six that the collaborative partnership was a key factor in sustaining their developing a reflective approach to practice. Yet, it would be naïve to expect this level of support to be sustained. Early years practitioners have a responsibility to pursue a reflective approach to practice, to be informed and assert their entitlement to time for reflection, professional development and respect. Only through asserting their entitlement to teach through play will they be able to honour children's entitlement to learn through play.

#### THE POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Working with a small purposive sample provided the opportunity for gaining deep understanding of reflective practices, amongst nine early years practitioners. The size of the sample was partly bound by the funding of the research. It would not have been possible to have conducted the research with the same level of care and consideration if a larger group of practitioners had been involved. Reaching saturation point within the data analysis might not have been possible or making provision for differentiated needs during the process of deconstruction and reconstruction would have been questionable.

However, the converse suggests that bound by their shared ideologies, the group is not representative of a wider group of early years practitioners. There were significant similarities and differences due to the nature and quality of their experiences, training and qualifications. There were personal and cultural differences represented in their schools. The expectations and professional communities in which they were based were reflected in the culture within each school. For example, planning documentation all revealed diverse approaches to their work: various levels of detail were produced, different routines existed. Their critical awareness of personal values and in-

terests also contributed to differences of pedagogy. The purposive sample, with its differences and similarities, was representative of the idiosyncratic nature of early years.

The entire group, researchers and practitioners, were bound by shared values and ideologies. Both were in pursuit of developing playful pedagogical understanding. The content of reflective enquiry was informed by experts in practical and theoretical perspectives and enriched pedagogical understandings. Concerns about the external validity of this research are addressed by its theoretical framework – the methods, the data collection and analysis with its involvement of practitioners and other researchers. The processes of coding and recoding, perpetually renegotiating understandings with each other also ensured the emerging themes and outcomes were reliable representations of the multiple perceptions of the TBtP group.

The methods were developed in close synchronisation with the responses of the group. Changes were made to accommodate the dynamics of the group, including the personalities, humours, attitudes, willingness to confront, struggles and sharing attitudes throughout the process. All these determined the nature of the research, as understandings were drawn out of diverse practices. The on-going examination of research methods, the multiple waves of coding, analysis and interpretation has contributed to the authenticity of practitioners' voices in the research. One reality is presented and invites additional research to broaden and deepen understanding of play.

The practitioners' confidence had been based on personal constructs, built on previous teaching experiences and typified by such statements as '*practice informs practice*' so it was inevitable that their confidence, their own construct of self as teacher, was threatened during the process of confronting pedagogical beliefs and understanding. That challenges to practice occurred was no surprise, for this was, by intention, an intervention study. Motivated by an interest in understanding practitioners pedagogical construct, the intention was to change, to deepen understanding (as discussed in Chapter One).

### **Researching with practitioners**

Finally, it was not the intention of this research to investigate the different roles and status of nursery nurses and teachers. References have been made to 'practitioners' unless otherwise stated.

The purpose was to explore practitioners' understanding of teaching and learning through play. However some differences did emerge which must be acknowledged. For instance:

- in the early stages of analysis the two references to learning through play were made by the 2 nursery nurses;
- the first references made to children were also made by nursery nurses;
- during the first round of interviews, the 2 nursery nurses commented that they had very little understanding of how to promote learning through play.

All data in this research has been collected and categorised, principally through the use of NUD\*IST software. Data has been managed to provide further opportunities for examination. Relevant data about the different practitioner roles might provide the basis for future research.

There were no apparent differences between teachers and nursery nurses in their development of a reflective approach to practice.

### **Future research opportunities**

Three areas of research appear to be possible in order to address some of the issues raised in this discussion:

1. Early years: greater clarity of thinking is required on ways in which teaching and learning through play might co-exist within current curriculum requirements. This research has identified changes in practitioners' sense of self-efficacy. Further research is now required in order to explore the ways in which reflective practice has impacted children's opportunities for playful learning.

2. Reflective practice: Longitudinal study of the development of reflective practice, with particular attention to the components of pedagogy, and the ways in which they are informed by and inform everyday practice. Playful teaching and learning has been represented as a pedagogical model (Moyles et al, 2001). The practitioners proclaim its virtue, its effectiveness in promoting playful teaching. Opportunities arise from this development to continue with the research, exploring the effectiveness of StEPs and the ways in which critical enquiry has informed practice (Figure 37). It has been interesting to note that one result of empowerment has resulted in eight (of nine) of the practitioners achieving or seeking professional development through continuing education or promotion. It appears that highly motivated, informed practitioners are encouraged to pursue professional development outside the domain of classroom practice.
3. Collaborative, narrative investigations are increasingly recognised as powerful ways of understanding practitioners' lives. Further studies might contribute additional insight into the approaches used for research (Schulz et al 1997). It has been difficult to sustain singular ethical rules for such a dynamic process.

FIGURE 37: STATEMENTS OF ENTITLEMENT TO PLAY

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>Young children are entitled to play experiences which engage them affectively and socially in their own and other's learning;</b></p> <p><b>Young children are entitled to play experiences which are set in meaningful and relevant activities and contexts for learning;</b></p> <p><b>Young children are entitled to play experiences which promote curiosity, the use of imagination and creativity in learning;</b></p> <p><b>Young children are entitled to engage in play experiences which are open ended and offer trial and error learning without fear of failure;</b></p> <p><b>Young children are entitled to playful, exploratory and experiential activities with a variety of materials and resources and within a variety of contexts;</b></p> <p><b>Young children are entitled to engage in individual and dynamic play and learning experiences, relevant to their age and development.</b></p> |
|---|

Practitioners and researchers have refined and deepened understanding of their own and each other's perspective of teaching. A clear vision of its purpose and how to

achieve them has contributed to the development of autonomous practitioners. The strength of the partnership has been in acknowledging each other's voices, in which power relationships were never hidden but confronted. This shifted from practitioners' initial awe of academic knowledge to one in which they took ownership of the project. Once they had all found a role within the project, its writing and materials preparations and presentation, equilibrium was reached. The experiences have exposed issues relating many of the taken-for-granted assumptions about the ways in which collaborative research might develop.

Whilst reflection continues to be misunderstood or more importantly, not fully understood, it is considered a desirable attitude with its promise of thoughtful, more passionate practitioners. It appears many uphold its concepts yet its application to practice remained elusive.

Surfacing issues was exacting due to difficulties in conceptualising and problematising issues. Whilst they perceived their role to be based in actions, this perception of change appeared to be linked to change, modify, renewal, exchange, and replacement of resources. They were willing and able to talk about practice, even in its mundane and unglamorous aspects. Deeper pedagogical issues remained out of their grasp. It is difficult to understand how reflective practice can be promoted without a culture that values and celebrates pedagogical language and thinking. This study confirms that by Abbey et al (1997: 111) who found that that collaborative discussion 'scaffolds, supports' .[and provides] . . 'access to the tensions and contradictions that underlie' practitioners' work and also prompts 'intellectual stimulation and social interactions to create and analyse our own knowledge'.

Through reflection, practitioner-researchers have gained understandings of their own work and constructed meanings from the research and the ways in which it has informed understanding of the ethical, political and methodological processes involved in collaborative research.

The current pressures, tensions and contradictions in early years militate against a reflective profession. Practitioner-researchers engaged in collaborative partnership have a responsibility to identify the underlying issues. The evidence from this research suggests that practitioners' weak pedagogical knowledge is partly a result of the political, cultural framework in which practitioners work. They were discouraged from engaging in reflective discourse and considered they had limited opportunities to pursue professional development. Researchers are in the privileged position of being distanced from the 'busyness' of classroom life. One responsibility within collaborative research is to support practitioners in the discovery of their multiple voices: pedagogical and political.

Without a supportive culture of enquiry the evidence suggests that practitioners were *too busy to reflect*.

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## THE SUMMARY

This research has investigated the ways in which supported, reflective enquiry might deepen understanding and promote change. Researching values, beliefs and understanding of teaching and learning through play was sustained through the enthusiastic commitment of the early years practitioners who were engaged in the 'Too Busy to Play?' project.

Three main areas are highlighted in this concluding chapter.

- First, a summary of the findings is briefly outlined. This will acknowledge aspects of the findings which confirm existing research;
- Secondly, it has been claimed that unique to this research are the ways in which understanding of reflective practice has been deepened. These enhanced understandings were discussed in Chapter Six and are summarised in this section;
- Finally, areas for future research are suggested.

### **Confirmation of existing findings**

The research confirms existing knowledge that reflective practice is a highly complex process of engagement requiring a culture of support, time and a clearly defined focus. It is an approach to practice rather than an activity which occurs from time to time. Engaging in reflective enquiry is a cognitive and affective process. Critical reflection involves being able to recall practice, identifying conceptual issues and problematisation. RP, a multi-dimensional process maybe applied to pragmatic levels in consideration of practical issues, such as the appropriate provision and management of resources. It also involves critical enquiry of related moral, ethical and political issues, relevant, accessible pedagogical knowledge and a willingness to make judgements about practice. Use of pedagogical language is also related to reflective thinking, the one informing the other. These attitudes and willing engagement in the process of critical enquiry led to deepening understandings of play.

### **Existing knowledge deepened**

The first chapter introduced the group of practitioners as being expert, open to challenge, confrontation and change. The original intention of the research changed from

one of exploring teaching and learning through play. The investigations into reflective practice resulted in a process of deconstruction, and later reconstruction, of practitioners' values, beliefs and understandings. Analysis found that the practitioners

- were committed and enthusiastic about exploring how children learn through play;
- displayed insecure pedagogical knowledge, practice rooted in affective domain;
- were resistant to change and to use of pedagogical language.

Whilst engaging in ideological deconstruction practitioners' perception of reflective practice has changed from being a 'nice thing to do' to a 'nice thing to be'. The most significant change has been in an increased sense of self efficacy resulting in them proudly proclaiming:

*I think, just, most useful. Oh, I think it's made me more confident about what I believe in . . . I've just learned such a lot. Well, I just feel that I've learnt such a lot, gained such a lot from it.*

It is to the credit of the nine practitioners that the commitment and enthusiasm displayed at the beginning of the research has remained unmoved in spite of the extensive, traumatic periods of challenge and confrontation which occurred.

The development of reflective enquiry was inhibited by an inability to conceptualise issues. It was found that practitioners needed considerable individualised, differentiated support as they interrogated and re-defined the principles underpinning their practice.

Through use of CBAM it was possible to identify three domains of change:

- practitioners' stages of concern;
- their levels of use of innovative aspects of teaching;
- types or categories of use.

Interview transcripts were analysed in order to determine the concerns and developmental needs of the practitioners. This analysis confirmed that for lengthy pe-

riods the practitioners remained at a period of acquiring information. At first the evidence suggested that practitioners were actively resisting change. Although they had engaged in many hours of studying, researching and discussing ways in which they might change their practice in order to support children's learning through play, it appeared that they did not know how to change. Pedagogical knowledge was weak and insecure. Even weaker was the understanding of how to relate newly acquired knowledge to practice. Personal concerns were heightened during the process of change and at times inhibited further development.

### **Future research**

A secure ethical framework is required, able to withstand the robustness of changes which may occur if adopting a grounded theory approach to research. Changes did occur, impacting the direction of the investigations and challenging the values underpinning the research. Further research would benefit from more open discussion of the impact of grounded theory on longitudinal partnership between practitioners and researchers.

There is a need for additional research to explore the nature of play which currently exists in schools. Where effective pedagogy exists the pedagogical processes need to be defined and communicated in ways that inform the understanding of practitioner-researchers. As a result of this research, articulate, empowered early years practitioners continue to explore appropriate ways of enriching children's learning through play. If effective play pedagogy is established, children may be the best advocates of playful learning.

The evidence shows that engaging in reflective enquiry has deepened understanding and promoted professional development. The practitioners engaged in exploring, challenging, confronting, deconstructing and reconstructing their perception of early years pedagogy. Attitudes changed from believing reflective enquiry was an activity which occurred from time to time, to one in which it became an ongoing, rigorous process, an attitude or an approach to practice. Through a process of co-reflection the perceived discrepancies between practice and theory, between languages of practice and academia have been reduced.

The PRs chose to confront the emerging dilemmas as they defined and redefined their values, beliefs and understandings of play and reflective practice. Whilst these proc-

esses have involved much informed, soul searching the practitioners have rekindled pedagogical thinking. Their passion, energies and commitment to playful practices have inspired their own further studies of pedagogy and professional development. Further research is required to determine whether their optimism and gradual change in practice is sustained.

The collaborative partnerships between researchers and practitioners created a supportive culture in which pedagogical deliberations were encouraged. The final words rest with one practitioner whose comments are representative of the group. The co-construction of new understandings of play and reflective practice and resulted in the proclamation:

*It's our project [TBtP] and we're very much involved with it, but personally, we all probably wanted a greater understanding and awareness surrounding the issues of learning through play. I think we've all met that and more in terms of confidence in ourselves to deliver that and to see its purpose and identify the possibilities that are now ahead of us. We're now desperately keen and excited in what we're doing. The challenge is there and it's always there but it's exciting.*  
(Gail, final group interview)

## **APPENDIX**

## APPENDIX ONE

### Autobiographies of Practitioners in Too Busy to Play? Project

I am currently employed as an early years nursery nurse at a Primary School. My job is part-time 16 1/4 hours per week (officially!).

I have three children, aged 10, 8 & 6 who attend the school I work in, which has its advantages and disadvantages!

I am looking forward to this 'project' and hopefully being able to share knowledge and information with my colleagues.

Dianna

June. I am single but live with a partner and my son a seven year old boy. So, home is a hive of activity. Work is equally as busy as a Primary School where I have been a Nursery Nurse for 13 years. Although I feel the job has changed a lot the abilities of the children have not and the initial start for them is no different. The people I work with have the same feelings and concerns as me and although we all have our strengths, we work well to send the children on a happy start. Why I wanted to undertake apart in this project is to help me understand that common comment: 'Well they are not learning because they are only playing.'

I am Carole. I am Early Years co-coordinator at a Primary School and I've been there since 1989. I had several years in the Reception class and this school year I've been persuaded to take over and expand the nursery. After getting over my fear of children who have just had their third birthday, I've really enjoyed being with the nursery children and having other adults to laugh with! At the moment all I do is work and write policies and re-do timetables, and get ready for OfSTED – but I've nearly finished all these things and I'm ready to concentrate on some serious playing – my favourite things to play with are play dough, teddy bears and games on the carpet but I'm ready for some new ideas and I might even want to write another policy . . .

Gail, currently Nursery-Teacher in the Early Years department of a Community Primary School, working part-time combining school and parenthood. I have 3 children the youngest child has cerebral palsy which has fundamentally changed my perspective of life. I believe vehemently in providing opportunities for children of any age to play, enjoy and do. I work with a great committed team who will support me enthusiastically.

Hi!. I'm Hannah. I am Early Years Co-ordinator at a Primary School, where I enjoy teaching and playing with my year two class. I believe learning can be fun and am always open to new ideas as to ways of playing to learn and learning to play. My three nephews are an on-going part of this process and their ideas are always interesting.

Hi! I am Linda; I teach and play at a Primary School as a Reception teacher. I also co-ordinate Early Years and Art. I love this age group, something always happens, just like at home with 1 daughter, 3 dogs, 2 cats and any number of visitors. I am here because I cannot see how we can teach without play and would like to see that recognised by other people in Education and eventually the world out there. I am going to keep it at this otherwise I'll ramble on.

I am currently Head of Nursery at a Primary School. This is a thirty place nursery and I have worked there for eight years – prior to that I worked in KS1. Earlier this year I completed my training as a Registered Nursery Inspector.

I am the art co-ordinator for the whole school and spend one evening each week trying very hard to paint in watercolour at a local school. I also go to an aerobics class, unless I can think up a good excuse – I often can!

I very much enjoy playing with both the children at school and my niece and nephew, who I have to say whenever possible. I am very much looking forward to the opportunity to research this and meet up with like minded folk!

Sarah.

Vera.

I am 4+ curriculum co-ordinator at a Primary school. Having completed my M.A. in 1995, I am currently completing my Ed.D. at University (part-time).

I am interested in exploring and describing how the play of 4 –5 year olds can differ from that of the younger child, so that we can maximise the opportunities and resources we offer in the school setting.

## APPENDIX TWO

### Summary of meeting

Too Busy to Play

21 8 99

Dear Colleagues,

Brief note to you all to say

☛ we are looking forward to meeting with you on Wednesday 25th, 9:30 am

✓ we shall be in the Library Hall - upstairs, above the Library

✓ Please bring with you

1. Entitlement Tables \*\*

☛ complete with your constructive comments and, please,

☛ please, fully referenced

■ planning documentation and completed evaluation sheets

☛ Janet and I will bring in our laptops so we can type and print out your work by the end of the second day

☛ Please also bring in some food for our lunch

☛ Janet and I will provide the drinks

☛ do, please feel free to phone if you are unclear about any of this

- -0121 705 1233

Sian

enclosed - copies of planning & evaluation sheets

\*\* - many thanks to those who have posted these.

## APPENDIX THREE

### Writing , in response to literature

Hurst, V. and Joseph, J. (1998) Observing play in Early Childhood. Buckingham: Open University Press.

I picked this book up three times and began reading this chapter!

Finally managed and felt quite motivated by it. Yes, I do agree that observation is important, is a useful tool for teaching / planning if it is assessed and used properly, i.e. structured method of observing techniques and strategies, recorded and assessed, discussed with colleagues in the setting.

I have recently been co-opted by a colleagues involved in the EEL project to observe in our nursery – targeting specific areas:

Child Tracking Observations

Child Involvement

Adult Engagement

From the early analysis of the information gathered, it has shown areas of individual child / adult interaction lower than we had realised. So, we are now able to evaluate and look at ways to improve or change our practice.

Observing children gives us insight into the effect that our provision has on the quality of the child's learning and as a result insight to our own strengths and weaknesses.

After reading the imaginative play section of the chapter, I feel evidence gained through observation in 'free play' situations enables us to understand a particular child's thinking, feelings, its level of development and how it affects that child's learning.

I could see aspects of 'Earl's' behaviour in one of our children, who is also quite creative and confident when he can organise his own play, but quite uncooperative and sometimes difficult when in a different situation. It may prove beneficial to this child and to our knowledge and understanding of him to observe him using a more structured approach.

In my particular setting (the nursery) as a staff, have a good working relationship, common aims and work in a caring and mutually supportive environment. My main concern about observations and its analysis is that it may be subjective, as the judgements will be based on an individual's opinion.

(this isn't written well, I know what I mean!).

## APPENDIX FOUR

### Focussed, written tasks

Session 1: Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> October 1997

1:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Aim: initial discussion and opportunity for participants to articulate their principles for play and respond to 'What is Play?'

#### GENERAL INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME

Participants will have received letter inviting them to prepare a statement of their

Principles for Play.

Opening activity: work with stranger, discuss principles and modify  
in light of other person's comments;

Pairs join to create 3 groups of 4;

Reform 2 groups of 6;

Report back to whole group and begin to define what play is, in context of  
Early childhood education.

Are we beginning to answer 'what is the value of play based activity?'

Time to be allocated for participants to commence journal

JM to distribute Excellence of Play

Moyles, J. (ed)(1994 )Excellence of Play. Buckingham: Open University Press

Task and Reading:

Heaslip, P. Making Play Work in the Classroom (pp. 99-109)

Pascal, C. and Bertram, T. Evaluating and Improving the Quality of Play (pp. 161-172)

## APPENDIX FIVE

### Sample extracts of interview analysis

#### 1. INTERVIEW TRANSCRIBED AND CHECKED FOR ACCURACY

*Try to think of ways in which to develop my practice. Um and I want to review the curriculum and I want to review our record-keeping and I want to review . . . there's just so much and I want to clear my cupboards, and you know, file all our papers away, you know, there's just not enough time in anything. I'm hoping that this project is actually going to give me a lot of um-tangible ideas to make me think about what I am doing, and thinking of how we could develop practice. A chance ago to go to other places a chance to go and see places that have got good practice . . . like . . . somewhere in Birmingham where they've got this huge room that is their home-corner, and to go and visit places like that would be so stimulating, to see what other people are doing and their ideas, that would be good as well.*

#### 2. LINE LENGTH REDUCED TO SUPPORT LINE-BY-LINE CODING:

- Highlight significant words/phrases;
- Attribute categories, attach memos to codes (Glaser, 1987)
- Recode, link codes to codes e.g.
- Review: curriculum
- Review: Record keeping
- Search other transcripts for evidence of Review.

*Try to **think** of ways in which  
to **develop my practice**.  
Um and I want to **review**  
**the curriculum** and  
I want to **review our record-keeping**  
and I want to review . . .  
**there's just so much** and  
I want to **clear my cupboards**, . . .  
**just not enough time in anything**.  
I'm hoping that this project  
is actually going to give me  
a lot of **um tangible ideas**  
to make me think  
about what I am doing,  
and thinking of how*

*we could develop practice.*

### 3. INITIAL CODING, PHRASES COLOUR-CODED

*I'm hoping that this project is actually going to give me a lot of um-tangible ideas to make me think about what I am doing, and thinking of how we could develop practice.*

*Open to new ideas*

**Emphasis on practical**

Reflective attitude and willingness to engage in reflective enquiry

CBAM: Level 1 - state in which the user has acquired or is acquiring information about the innovation and/or has explored or is exploring its value orientation

### 4. NEGOTIATE INTERPRETATIONS WITH PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHERS

Enquire:

What information is required? Define and identify training needs.

Challenge – 'project going to give me' or 'co-production of understandings'?

Tangible ideas: in what context? To what purpose?

### 5. PLAN FOR TRAINING NEEDS

- Plan and deliver training as requested by practitioners. Evaluate effectiveness, with practitioners.
- Examine documentation, observation for on-going evidence of levels of use/types of use
- Transfer coding to NUD\*IST and repeat process

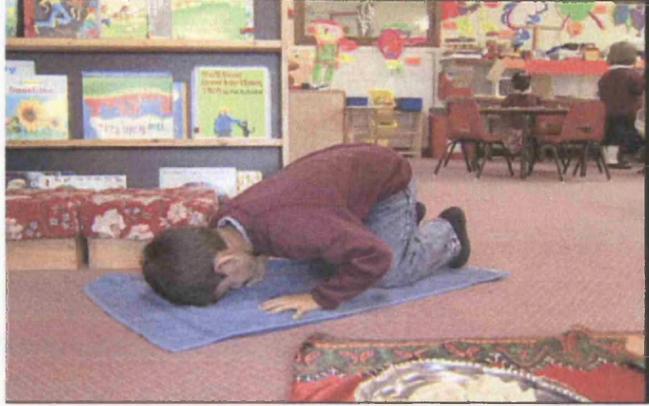
**Analysis through CBAM provided evidence of the practitioners remaining at a level of acquiring information, yet little evidence of its application**

**Decision Point A :- Takes action to learn more detailed information about the innovation**

| <p><b>Level 1</b></p> <p><b>Orientation:</b> State in which the use has acquired or is acquiring information about the innovation and / or has explored or is exploring its value orientation and its demands upon user and user system.</p>           | <p><b>Knowledge</b></p> <p>Knows general information about the innovation such as origin, characteristics and implementation requirements</p> | <p><b>Acquiring information</b></p> <p>Seeks descriptive material about the innovation. Seeks opinions and knowledge of others through discussions, visits or workshops .</p> | <p><b>Sharing</b></p> <p>Discusses the innovation in general terms and a / or exchanges descriptive information, materials or ideas about the innovation and possible implications of its use</p> | <p><b>Assessing</b></p> <p>.Analyses and compares materials, content, requirements for use, evaluation reports, potential outcomes, strengths and weaknesses for purpose of making a decision about use of the innovation.</p> | <p><b>Planning</b></p> <p>Plans to gather necessary information and resources as needed to make a decision for or against use of the innovation</p> | <p><b>Status reporting</b></p> <p>Reports presently orienting self to what the innovation is and is not</p>  | <p><b>Performing</b></p> <p>Explores the innovation and requirements for its use by talking to others about it, reviewing descriptive information and sample materials, attending orientation sessions and observing others using it</p> |
|--|---|---|---|--|---|--|--|
| <p><b>Carole:</b> 'saying what they've experienced rather than what they've learned, so it's getting that out of it that I would like to find out, you know as the research project goes on' 'also finding out more of the theoretical background'</p> | <p>I mean the observations we're not doing</p>  | <p>Until you're with other people and talk about it in any depth you just carry on doing your day to day and doing your own thing</p>   |   | <p>I would say, you know there wasn't as much thought given to what they're doing as there should have been, it was just a matter of if making sure the resources were there and supervising, rather than teaching</p>         | <p>But I would still like to do something major, like moving it or changing (the role play area)</p>  | <p>You feel that if you're performing down on the carpet with a train set, then you know it's not the right thing to be doing . . I mean that's just having the courage to stand up for what you are doing</p> |  |

## APPENDIX SIX

### CHILDREN, LEARNING THROUGH PLAY.

|   |   |
|---|---|
|    | <p><b>Young children are entitled to play experiences which are set in meaningful and relevant activities and contexts for learning</b></p>             |
|   | <p><b>Young children are entitled to engage in play experiences which are open-ended and offer trial and error learning without fear of failure</b></p> |
|  | <p><b>Young children are entitled to engage in individual and dynamic play and learning experiences relevant to their age and development</b></p>       |

Each activity was planned to focus on one specific entitlement.  
Illustrations taken from video accompanying StEPs (Moyles et al, 2001).  
Ethical issues related to working with children – see page 128

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