Repositioning the Leadership in Early Years Contexts: Motivating staff to lead practice developments through practice-based research within an early years setting

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by

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Abstract
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This thesis explores, documents and analyses the actions of a leader, sustained by the belief that developments in Early Years practice are more successfully embedded when practitioners are part of a learning community within which they are able to critically explore, test and apply theories, concepts and strategies. It is based upon the pedagogical observation that those involved in leading the learning need to be active participants in the process, surfacing and collaboratively exploring their tacit knowledge through practice-based research as part of everyday practice.

This qualitative, case-study research project examines a leadership approach within a multifunctional Children's Centre with a multi-professional team over six and a half years. Action-based research - defined by Reason & Bradbury (2001) as a process in which individuals work co-operatively in order to find solutions for issues pertinent to them - has been used to study the development of Systemic Leadership through engaging practitioners in practice-based research. 'Practice-based research' is used in this study to describe practitioners' engagement as action researchers, engaging with theory and becoming involved in developing theory through actively researching their practice. Leadership is viewed as a continuous process of learning from action-based research, and as such it:

- explores a commitment to developing and sustaining a learning organisation in which staff are supported to reflect individually and co-operatively about their work with children, families and the community in order to be aware of themselves and their learning capacity as individuals and as part of a team
- analyses and documents the experience and learning of a leader in a complex and value-driven organisation, seeking to develop a democratic, systemic leadership model of collaborative practice-based research
- explores the complexities of the organisation and the implications of maximising practitioners' capacities to be curious about their work and open to feedback, using practice-based research groups to explore their inner worlds and review their values and assumptions
- analyses individual and organisational shifts in values, self-awareness and self-knowledge, including practitioners' capacity to theorise and weave theory into practice
- assesses the impact of co-operative practice-based research on professional development.

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Glossary

Definitions refer to meanings of these terms as they are used in the context of this research.

Action research A type of research in which the researcher works in partnership with the research participants, engaging in cycles of planning, action, observation and analysis aimed at achieving positive changes in practice or relationships. The term has much in common with *co-operative inquiry,* including the central role of *moral purpose* (Fullan, 2001)

Agency Feeling that you are able to make a difference to your own life and the lives of other people.

Children's Centre Refers to an organisation that holds a national Sure Start designation with the purpose of improving outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged families.

Andragogy Refers to the art and science of helping adults learn through learner focused education.

Authoritative Leadership A style of leadership that encourages verbal reasoning and discussion of policy decisions, seeking the perspectives from those who are being led, exerting firm control without being overly restrictive.

Authoritarian Leadership A style of leadership that does not encourage verbal reasoning or discussion, valuing obedience and using forceful, punitive measures.

Authority Is the power to influence the conduct and actions of others and the confidence resulting from personal expertise. (New Oxford American Dictionary [Electronic Version] 2006).

Constructivism A theory or belief about knowledge, or epistemology, which holds that there is no absolute truth, and so called 'reality', is constructed by our social, historical and individual contexts.

Co-operative Inquiry Also known as *collaborative inquiry* was first proposed by John Heron in 1971 and later expanded with Peter Reason (1988). The idea of co-operative Inquiry is to research 'with' rather than 'on' people.

Democracy Refers to a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, as well as to the control of an organisation or group by the majority of its members and the practice or principles of social equality.

Democratic Leadership A style of leadership that encourages inclusion, participation, involvement, empowerment, openness, nurturing creativity.

Dialogic A sharing of experience and response to experience being shared with others

Emancipation Freedom from restraint.

Empirical Knowing only by experience.

Empowerment A sense of purpose in action.

Egalitarian Principles Principles that assert that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities.

Experiential Learning A process of becoming aware of the consequences of experience as one experiences it.

Experiential research Research that focuses on the direct experience of the researcher.

Individualism A sense of self-fulfilment, potential

Inductive Thematic Analysis An open approach to coding and identifying themes when analysing interview transcripts. Themes may bear little relation to the questions asked.

Isomorphism Corresponding or similar in form and relations, e.g. *pedagogical isomorphism* refers to changes in knowledge, understanding and behaviour that tacitly mirror the essential features of how one has been helped to learn.

Paradigm The overall conception or method of research shared by researchers in a particular discipline.

Pedagogy The art or science of teaching a subject or theoretical concept to, and facilitating the learning of, children**.**

Practice-based Research Practitioners become action researchers, engage with theory and become involved in developing theory through actively researching their practice.

Reflection Refers to the action of thinking and considering personal understanding of relevant structures of meaning derived from his or her own actions in the world.

Self-efficacy Solving one's own problems in order to achieve success in one's own pursuits.

Supervision An accountable process, which supports, assures and develops the knowledge, skills and values of an individual, group or team.

Systemic Democratic Leadership Leading through a continuous process of co-operative inquiry whilst encouraging inclusion, participation, involvement, empowerment, openness and nurturing creativity.

Systemic Leadership Leading through a continuous process of co-operative inquiry and learning, a growing and evolving model.

Systems Theory Information from the environment, which tells a system if it is effectively moving towards its goal.

Thematic Analysis Searching for themes or patterns within data in relation to gaining knowledge about why we are as we are.

Theoretical Thematic Analysis Searching for themes or patterns in data, influenced and driven by the researcher's preconceptions and interest.

Transformational Learning A process of engaging in self-reflection and increasing self-knowledge that results in a profound emotional change.

Triangulation A research process that seeks multiple perceptions in order to clarify meaning, verifying the authenticity of an observation.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The capacity to discover and participate in our unfolding future has more to do with our being – our total orientation of character and consciousness – than with what we do. Leadership is about creating, day by day, a domain in which we and those around us continually deepen our understanding of reality and are able to participate in shaping the future. This, then, is the deeper territory of leadership – collectively "listening" to what is wanting to emerge in the world, and then having the courage to do what is required (Jaworski, 1996, p182).

1.0 Overview

This thesis is a qualitative case study grounded in front-line practice research and will be of interest to other leaders who are committed to exploring '*Systemic Leadership'* (Marshall, 2000) – a discipline for inquiry and continual evolution within an organisation – and therein leadership as a continuous process of action research. It is of particular relevance to Children's Centre leaders, School leaders, Headteachers and those involved in andragogical professional development of non-graduate practitioners. This documented work may encourage other leaders to support the promotion of positive learning trajectories across their organisation and to live leadership as a process of inquiry.

This thesis documents and makes a retrospective analysis of the actions taken by a leader-researcher to motivate Early Years practitioners to engage with co-operative practice-based research. Leadership is conceptualised as a process of inquiry. The leader-researcher has a commitment to developing a sustainable learning organisation in which staff from different disciplines and with different levels of qualification are encouraged and supported to reflect individually and co-operatively

about their work with children and families. The social intent of this study was to develop motivated and curious practitioners who remain interested in improving their knowledge and understanding of the job they are doing in order to transform their practice.

The overarching intent of this study has been to develop processes that support '*Systemic Leadership*', in a learning organisation in which everyone can become a leader of practice. The interdependence and interrelatedness of a holistic organisation, rather than a leadership model that is deterministic or hierarchical, is recognised. It was therefore imperative when considering the research methodology to identify an approach that was sensitive to issues of designated hierarchical power within the organisational structure. Whilst the organisational structure was to a large extent dictated by local authority defined job roles and responsibilities, McNiff with Whitehead (2002, p243) perceived that organisations are formed from people, not structures. Individuals who make up the organisation are all connected. They are not all the same but all part of a community, and these communities are joined in the organisation. Referring to theories of Individual Psychology on what motivates people's different attitudes and behaviour, in order to develop a deeper awareness of the complexities of interconnectedness and interrelatedness within the organisation, was of particular relevance to this research.

1.1 Originality

This thesis makes an original contribution to the Early Years education and leadership field as it explores the complexities and challenges of working to develop an inquiry-based culture within an organisation where the majority of the workforce holds basic-level formal educational achievements. Gorard & Reese (2002) recognised that most research about adult learning trajectories is concerned with institutionalised, accredited and more formal learning, often undertaken for economic

gain. This documented account explores and analyses the process of developing a work-place learning culture in which informal learning, i.e. engaging with reflection on practice, theory and research, start to become the norm rather than the exception. It explores and analyses the development of a culture in which motivation to learn is intrinsic to work, rather than for external accreditation or material gain. Four democratic processes required for the development of Systemic Leadership are identified, providing a new leadership model.

Fieldwork was undertaken in a Nursery School based Children's Centre where the researcher, was the designated leader, the Headteacher, and the large majority of staff members were non-graduate childcare or social support workers, with only six percent being teachers. All staff were female, 6.8% were of Asian Pakistani heritage, 93% White British. Staff members included teaching assistants, outreach social family workers, a childminder coordinator, play-workers and administrators. Staff qualification levels at the time this study started are shown below in Table1.1.

Table 1.1 Qualifications of Centre Staff in 2008.

Job Titles	Qualification Level	Number of Staff
• *Headteacher*	7 (Masters or Post Graduate Degree)	1
• Deputy *Headteacher* • 2 x Teachers • Childminder Network Coordinator • Receptionist • Outreach worker	6 (Degree)	6
• Extended Services Co-ordinator	4 (Higher National certificate)	1
• Nursery Assistants • Outreach Family workers • Receptionist	3 (National Certificate Diploma)	30

• Site Supervisor	2 (National Vocational Qualification)	1
• Lunch Assistants	1 (National Vocational Qualification)	5
	Total:	**44**

In contrast, three-year action research projects undertaken in New Zealand's 'Centres of Innovation', where all staff were teachers funded by the Department of Education, were facilitated by a 'research associate', typically a member of the University (Urban, 2010).   Baldwin (2002), McArdle (2002), Mead (2002), Barret and Taylor (2002) studied the practicalities of how to instigate co-operative inquiry groups, acting as external facilitators to corporate organisations. The dilemmas they faced when inviting organisational members into groups did not include issues of designated leader power, faced in this study. As external facilitators, they did not have the opportunity to pay attention to the wider assumptions at work in daily incidents. Neither were they required to deal with the aftermath of the research in the longer term.

A unique feature of this study is that it looks at the process and implications of instigating and facilitating mostly non-graduate practitioner co-operative inquiry groups in an organisation to which the leader-researcher belongs. As leader-researcher there is a history and a future with the organisation. The researcher cannot walk away from the messiness of the action research process or shy away from the findings. However, on the positive side, the leader-researcher is in a position to promote the implementation of cultural change as a result of the action research findings. This requires a willingness to be open to and learn from both constructive and critical feedback.

1.2 Local Context in which the Fieldwork was Undertaken

The Children's Centre in which the fieldwork was conducted is situated in a heavily populated area of an east Lancashire town. The Centre was developed from a local authority maintained Nursery School established in 1952 and a financially self-sustaining Neighbourhood Nursery managed by a charity. I, the leader-researcher am Headteacher of the School and the Centre and a trustee of the charity, which serves a locality that falls within the top 5% of socio-economic deprivation as identified by the Multiple Deprivation Index. In 2006 when the Children's Centre developed, 7.5% of children attending the over-subscribed Nursery were from the top 5% most deprived areas. By 2013, through the successful outreach work undertaken to engage the most vulnerable families, 87% of children being allocated the Nursery places were those living in the top 5% areas of deprivation. Over the last twenty years, local authority data shows there have been a steadily increasing number of Asian-Pakistani heritage families living in the area. There are also fifteen traveller sites. Sixty-five per cent of children attending the Centre Nursery are of Asian-Pakistani heritage and have large extended families often living in the same house or adjoining houses. Twenty-seven per cent of children were White British. Languages spoken by the children included English, Punjabi, Urdu, Italian, Russian and Polish. Levels of spoken English varied from family to family.

1.3 Defining a Children's Centre

Children's Centres were a vital part of the Labour Government's Ten-Year Childcare Strategy '*Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare*' (DfES, 2004) to enable all families with children to have access to an affordable, flexible, high-quality childcare place for their child. The Government's aim was that by 2010, every community should be served by a Children's Centre, offering permanent universal provision across the country, ensuring that every child got the best start in life. Children's Centre services could vary according to the

centre but were required to include: Integrated early education and childcare, support for parents, child and family health services and helping parents into work. Table 1.2 below lists the services offered and those who provided them from the study's Centre when the fieldwork was conducted.

Table 1.2: Nursery and Children's Centre Services in 2012

Service	Provider
160 Integrated early education and childcare places	School and Charity
Childminder Network (31 Childminders) – on behalf of four Centres – accreditation training.	Centre Network Co-ordinator and Deputy
Nurture Groups in Primary Schools	Centre
Baby Clinic	Health Visitors & Centre Outreach Workers
Ante-natal Clinic	Midwives supported by Centre Outreach Workers
4 x Parent and Toddler Groups	Charity and Centre
Baby Group	Centre Outreach Workers
Young Parents Group	NHS and Outreach
12 month home visiting programme for new parents and families experiencing difficulties on behalf of three centres	Centre Outreach Workers
Intense Family Support	Sure Start Local Programme Children's Centre – Sure Start
Baby Massage	Centre Outreach Workers
Practical Workshops (for parents with learning disabilities)	Centre Outreach Workers in liaison with Social Care Services
Contact Visits	Centre Outreach Workers in liaison with Social Care Services
Volunteer Programme (16 weeks, twice per year for 24 volunteers)	Charity, School, Centre and local College
Play Sessions – Traveller Site	Centre Outreach
Nurture Group for young children and parents	Sure Start
Student Placements	School and Charity in partnership with local colleges and Edge Hill University

1.4 Historical Development of the Fieldwork Study's Organisation

The Local Authority asked the school to accommodate a Neigbourhood Nursery in 2001 but was reluctant to support the development of day care through the school because it was perceived to be of high risk financially. Offering full time funded day care places in an area of high deprivation held long-term risks. Consequently, as Headteacher I worked with five governors, one of whom was the teacher governor, parent governors and the school secretary in order to establish a company limited by guarantee and registered charity to be a provider of day care. We opened a Neighbourhood Nursery for thirty children from birth to five years of age in February 2003. The pay and conditions for these staff were less favourable than for the school staff due to the requirement to be totally self-sustaining, while providing services for the most deprived families. Staff appointed all came from the private sector, and through staff appraisals it was identified that none of them had ever been given opportunities for further professional development. None of the staff moving from the private sector had ever had experience of an appraisal. The development of the day care provision moved the building use from term time only, thirty-eight weeks per year, to being open for a full year, i.e. fifty-one weeks. The length of the day was also considerably extended from five hours to ten hours. Diagram 1.1 below illustrates the staffing structure and hierarchy of designated responsibility of the Children's Centre in 2008.

Head of Centre

Deputy Head

Outreach and extended Services Manager

Childminding Network Co-ordinator

Business and Finance Officer

Nursery Manager

Adult Education and Employment officer

2 part time receptionist
1 part time nursery school administrator
1 day care administrators

11 level 3 nursery nurses
.5 teacher

2 teachers
3 level 3 nursery nures
.5 teacher

3 outeach workers
1 part time outreach worker
1 play worker

site manager
1 cleaner
2 part time chefs

Diagram 1.1 Staffing Structure 2008

The Nursery School was designated as a Children's Centre in December 2005. The Local Authority commissioned the governing body to deliver services to a designated reach area comprised of one thousand and fifty children under five years of age, and their families. As the school's Headteacher I agreed to become the designated Head of Centre. Further building work began the following year and the thirty childcare places were increased to sixty full time places, facilitated by the charity. This development entailed further strategic changes including: the development of the Governing Body, new staff appointments (including the appointment of a Deputy Head of Centre), recruitment and development of an outreach family worker team and a review of the

pedagogical approach, in order to accommodate flexibility in patterns of provision and the development of the *Early Years Foundation Stage Framework* (EYFS), which became statutory from September 2008 (DFES 2006).

The most significant period of change took place in 2006. The original Nursery School staff returned from their six week summer holiday to a changed building that structurally separated the Headteacher from the Nursery, several new members of staff, integrated nursery provision, a Deputy Head in post, and a drive to change the pedagogical focus. The impact of these changes, how they threatened established staff members' sense of efficacy and belonging, was pertinent to the challenges of developing an organisation's systemic learning culture.

1.5 Conceptualisation of the Hypothesis

Calder (2014) recognised that *"Choices about policy and practice are often made on grounds other than research evidence"* (p41). The inspiration for this thesis began following what proved to be a personal and professional transformational study visit to New Zealand in 2005, as a National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) pilot programme participant. As the study visit progressed I visited several kindergartens - kindergarten practice appeared extremely strong in placing the child at its centre. Talking to New Zealand teachers revealed strong, in-depth knowledge of theoretical concepts and how these related to their practice. I began to ask questions about the professional development opportunities for Early Years teachers.

In answer, teachers talked about New Zealand Ministry of Education's Educational Leadership Project. This was an independent Early Childhood Professional Development Project. The centres involved decided upon a project including a bicultural focus connected to the use of Carr's (2001) "Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars",

the purpose being to develop aspects of: assessment, pedagogy and planning processes. Centres were selected for three-year research projects and were then known as Centres of Innovation. The Ministry's belief was that research should sit alongside policy. I observed and recorded in a personal journal the impact of the involvement in research projects on kindergarten teachers described by one Papatoetoe kindergarten participant in the following way:

> "*It takes teachers out of their comfort zones and challenges thinking. Continually shows and offers new possibilities. It makes one think outside the square. Shifts thinking and practice*"
> (Personal Journal, March 2005).

This teacher's powerful insight brought recognition that engagement in practice-based research is a powerful professional development tool. Practitioners could become empowered to lead practice developments through creating their own theories. I realised that not all practitioners might readily embrace movement from their positions of equilibrium or comfort. Practitioners confirmed my realisation in comments made during the first Focus Group discussion about this study held on 21 July 2011:

> "*not everyone's academic*"

> "*as much as we see our learning and development as important, some staff are happy in their current role*".

I also recognised that the New Zealand Centres of Innovation staff were graduate teachers. To develop a culture of practice-based research in United Kingdom children's centres, where the majority of staff held basic level qualifications, and did not see themselves as academic learners, could be a challenge for designated leaders. Urban (2010) also recognised the challenge of developing an environment for constant inquiry at all levels of the early childhood education and care workforce.

> "*The fundamental dilemma of the early childhood profession, today, is that practitioners are left in an impossible situation: they*

are expected to act professionally – within a professional system that is largely unprofessional" (Urban, 2010, p15).

One New Zealand Centre of Innovation, Roskill South, was contracted to:
- develop and document innovative learning and teaching through using Te Whariki, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum
- share information about innovative learning and teaching practices, and
- work with researchers to find out what children and parents gain from research findings.

The centre used Learning Stories, an approach to assessment developed by Professor Margaret Carr (Carr, 2001) at Waikato University following Ministry for Education commissioned research.

Learning Stories are based on the belief that developing good learning habits or dispositions is most important in Kindergarten, and that planning for learning is about knowing children extremely well. Individual children's stories were being told in the form of digitally illustrated narratives that were shared with parents and children. Children were involved in the illustration and writing of their stories at all stages. Every child I came across in this centre was keen to share his or her precious portfolio, and each child's story was unique to the child. I found this practice to be effectively embedded in all the New Zealand Centres of Innovation. In visiting centres not involved in research projects, I noted that the use of Learning Stories, whilst implemented as good practice was not utilised as effectively. In fact the basic principles appeared to have been lost. Looking at many individual children's portfolios I found that the same Learning Stories appeared in every child's portfolio. As a direct consequence of the observations made on the New Zealand study trip I formed a hypothesis that practitioner engagement in researching their work could result in more sustainable and effective approaches to

working with children and families.   This thesis is based on the pedagogical propositions that:

- those involved in leading the learning should be active participants in the process of its development
- leaders of learning participants are required to help surface and cooperatively explore their tacit knowledge through action-based research as part of everyday practice
- to lead learning, practitioners need to become action researchers, engage with theory and become involved in developing theory through actively researching their practice. This may also be described as practice-based research.

In my role as Headteacher and local authority Adviser I often heard colleagues ask questions about staff attitudes or why things happened as they did. Sometimes I would hear throw-away questions in the room about aspects of work.   Mentoring other Headteachers I was often asked the question about staff, *"Why don't they get it?"* Whilst questions were raised, no plans were formulated to make inquiries and discover answers.

In summary, the research proposal proffered new theoretical and practical understandings about the complexities of encouraging mostly non-graduate Early Years practitioners to become systemic leaders of their own practice and develop their own sense of agency through engaging with co-operative practice-based research – and thereby improve services and outcomes for children and families.   The complexities of individual learners' identities, formed by a multitude of historical influences, and how these are expressed within organisational groups, were considered when analysing the evidence gathered.

1.6 Methodology

The design and methods used in this research fall under the broad heading of qualitative research more particularly, an evaluative case study, underpinned by action research principles and approaches. The subject of the research is the study of leadership processes and the complexities of working to bring about transformational change, how it is experienced and shared within a single Early Years setting over a six and a half-year period – from February 2008 to July 2014 – and ultimately, its relative effectiveness in meeting the needs of young children and their families. The participants were the twenty-nine members of staff who agreed to be part of the inquiry.

1.7 Underlying Research Questions were, how can a Designated Children's Centre Leader:

- motivate practitioners to become curious about their work and engage with practice-based research?
- help practitioners to become conscious of their inner worlds and develop as self-assured individuals within a co-operative team?
- support a multi-functional Children's Centre to discover and establish its identity, enabling it to learn from the continuous feedback its environment provides?
- support the emotional needs of individuals within the setting as they experience disequilibrium from their learning?
- ensure that practice developments are informed by the findings of co-operative practice-based research?

1.8 Developing Research Methods

Developing research methods was an iterative process, typical of a cyclical action research approach. Each piece of action research was reviewed and critically reflected upon. This resulted in three stages of research. Information gained from each stage was used to inform the methods and actions employed in the following stage.

At the outset, a purposeful sample 'Centre Inquiry Group' or 'Research Group' was established with the intention that this would work to uncover practitioners' tacit knowledge regarding their experiences as they engaged with practice-based research. Preliminary analysis of this work gave limited data and this is discussed further in Chapter Four. Briefly, the pre-conceived theories upon which the selected sample group and semi-structured interview questions were based limited the scope of data produced. More open and inclusive focus-group discussion with the staff teams, facilitated and reported by an External Facilitator, proved to be data rich when an inductive thematic analysis was undertaken. This led to a further more open-ended methodological approach of triangulation by inviting all staff to engage in practice-based research, share participant practitioner comments and ethnographical reflective accounts. Table 1.3 provides a summary of the timing, participants and methods used in the study.

Table 1.3 Summary of Research Timing, Participants and Methods

Dates	Participants	Methods
February 2008 to September 2012	*Headteacher*/researcher	First Person Action Research – reflection on personal learning journal (field notes)
November 2009	*Headteacher*/researcher	Participation in semi-structured interview followed by thematic analysis
February 2008 to 2013	PhD Learning Community Group (5 students, 2 tutors)	Second Person Action Research – co-operative inquiry – discussion
November 2009 to September 2012	Inquiry Group (6 practitioners)	Purposeful Sample Group Co-operative Inquiry (used auto-ethnography as an inquiry method) – study of process/experiences
December 2010	Inquiry Group (6	Semi-structured interviews,

	practitioners)	use of personal journals
February 2011		Theoretical thematic analysis
July 2011	29 practitioners	Third Person Action Research
May 2012	27 practitioners	Discussion focus groups led by an External Facilitator Followed by inductive thematic analysis
November 2013 to July 2014	39 practitioners	All staff involved in experimental co-operative practice based research
July 2014	39 practitioners	All staff anonymously submitting reflective written statements on their experiences of engaging in practice-based research
January 2015	6 practitioners	Practitioner ethnographies, reflecting on their learning trajectories Inductive thematic analysis

1.9 Evidence

Findings on leadership processes of engaging staff in the process of practice-based research are formulated from the analysis of the following evidence, generated from the study's fieldwork:

1. The leader-researcher's personal learning journal
2. Practitioners' self-reflections on life histories in the form of first person action research
3. Feedback obtained from audio recorded semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample group comprised of practitioner participants (the 'Inquiry Group')
4. Written reports from two practitioner focus group discussion days conducted by an External Facilitator

5. Feedback from PhD study group colleagues

6. Practitioner participants' reflections on the impact of fieldwork undertaken

7. Practitioners' documented research work

8. Parent journals maintained on their child's induction into nursery

9. Observations of changes staff have made to their practice and the impact on children's outcomes.

1.10 Findings

Findings include as leader-researcher my experiential learning of how the initial fieldwork method - a purposeful sample inquiry group, which I selected with good intentions - was flawed. I learned that imposing an expectation of engagement in practice-based research upon practitioners in order to emancipate them from hierarchical practice directives was an attempt to impose a culture rather then co-operatively develop a culture. As a consequence, the vision of a workforce empowered by its engagement in practice-based research became problematic in its realisation. Selecting a sample group (the Centre Inquiry Group) served to undermine feelings of equality and reinforced negative learner identities for some. This is evidenced in the following exerpt from the External Facilitator's first report.

> "*Staff referred to focus [Inquiry] groups being set up within the centre and the frustrations associated with this process. Staff, who expressed a view, believe there is a lack of clarity and transparency and information generally about what these groups are meant to be doing, who is involved and the process involved in setting up the groups*" (External Facilitator's report, 21.7.11).

Practitioners' comments about the 'Inquiry Group' included:

> *"what's happened with the groups? – there's a feeling of exclusion"*
>
> *"why pick me?"*
>
> *"why not pick me?"*

"what are they talking about?"

"what will this mean for me and my job?" (External Facilitator's report, 21.7.11).

In cyclical action research, each planned method informed the next methodological development. Following an analysis of the evidence from the sample inquiry group, focus group discussions were facilitated to which all staff were invited.

At the start of the study only 13% of the Centre workforce where the research was undertaken were at graduate level and only 6% were Teacher Qualified, including me. Calder (2014) reports: "historically, English Early Years professionals (for birth to five-year-olds) tend to have diverse backgrounds, training and experiences" (p36). From an exploration of historical and recent texts, McGillivray (2010) concluded: "*uncertainty and ambiguity are inherent in the daily lives of Early Years practitioners, not least resulting from a rapid pace of government-imposed change" (p120)*. Mather & Smees (2014) undertook a study on quality in the Early Years. They found that out of the 1079 Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) settings sampled in their study, only 33% employed a Qualified Teacher or Early Years Professional.

The new knowledge gained from this study has been transformative, and four processes for Systemic Leadership are identified. They concern the transformation and change processes in a predominantly non-graduate workforce, namely, that these processes need to be democratic and systemic if they are to really work and be sustainable for the future. Knowledge gained is about isomorphic practice as a result of developing a research culture in an Early Years setting in order to emancipate practitioners and develop their sense of professional agency. It explores the processes of leadership required in supporting such development amongst an all female workforce, many with self-perceptions of being

non-academic, who have struggled to gain qualifications or to feel recognised within institutionalised formal education. The study analyses the iterated journey of developing co-operative practice-based research and identifies how this had an impact on working with children and families and subsequent outcomes for children. Knowledge identified through the research is the implication of maximising practitioners' capacities to be curious about their work and become open to feedback from others as they work co-operatively.   Awareness is gained about the impact on practice of predominantly non-graduate, low professional status practitioners engaging in experiential learning through co-operative practice-based research. McGillivray (2010) attributes low status partly to the fact that there is not even a professional job title that identifies Early Years practitioners.

At the start of the study in 2008, five practitioners in the Children's Centre (11%) were research active. Only 9% of practitioners were accessing the Centre's professional library. At the time of writing this thesis in 2014, 92.5% of Centre practitioners were participating in co-operative practice-based research and 81% were accessing the Centre's library.   At an evening held for practitioners to share their research with each other, written comments made were:

> *"I really enjoyed the experience of doing research. I was worried at the beginning about how it would go, but it went really well and I gained a lot from it."*
>
> *"It was very interesting to complete a piece of research. It made me think about my work"* (Practitioner Feedback, 14.7.14).

The term 'practice-based research' is used in this study to describe the engagement of Early Years practitioners in purposeful inquiry into an aspect of their work.

1.11 Summary

This Chapter has outlined the scope of the research fieldwork undertaken. Conceptualisation of the research inquiry, formed during a study visit to New Zealand where the political drive to develop an all-graduate workforce was observed, has been discussed. The social intent of this study – to reposition leadership so that non-graduate practitioners take responsibility for transformational practice – has been explained. Many have struggled with accredited, formal learning resulting in poor learner identities. This was particularly relevant to this study as it engaged in a process of action research to gain new knowledge and an understanding of developing conditions to promote a learning culture across the organisation, recording and analysing the processes involved. Socio-political contexts in New Zealand and England where the study took place are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

"The main mark of an effective principal is not just his or her impact on the bottom line of student achievement, but also on how many leaders he or she leaves behind who can get even further" (Fullan, 2005, p. 31).

2.0 Introduction

This chapter gives a retrospective, critical account of the literature review undertaken prior to, during and post fieldwork. The literature review looks beyond educational leadership because of this study's discovery that employing co-operative practice-based research, in order to effect cultural change (towards social equality) is extremely complex in reality. Unintentional, unexpected consequences resulted from the fieldwork, and as leader-researcher I held a responsibility to explore, understand and review my leadership approach as well as the study's methodology. Looking beyond educational literature to that of psychology and sociology helped to inform subsequent actions taken as part of the cyclical action research.

Briefly outlined are key documents defining socio-political differences between New Zealand and England. This includes relevant political shifts that have been instrumental in the development of the Early Years workforce working in the Children's Centre in which this study's fieldwork research has taken place. This is followed by a review of literature focussed on leading systemically – leading through a continuous process of co-operative inquiry whilst encouraging inclusion, participation, involvement, empowerment and openness, nurturing creativity. Then a related literature pertaining to andragogy – the art and science of helping adults learn through learner-focused education is discussed. Next, organisation and management literature addressing the challenge of changing organisational culture is highlighted. This literature deals with reawakening and developing a sense of agency amongst all those

involved in an enterprise – encouraging people to feel that each of us makes a difference – which for an Early Years workforce lacking a professional identity was paramount. Theories of Individual Psychology and Group Psychology are then explored because of the need to understand possible explanations for the initial degenerative behaviours of research participants. Lastly, I explore Social Philosophies relating to social democracy and equality, organisational values that I aimed to develop.

2.1 The Socio-political Context of this Study

Wylie and Thompson (2003) reported on New Zealand's political drive to ensure that from the late 1980s support was made available for staff in childcare to upgrade their qualifications. New Zealand aspired to develop a 100% teacher-led workforce in the Early Years sector, justified by research evidence that the presence of qualified teachers had long-term positive outcomes for children. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, a longitudinal research study *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project* conducted by Sylva *et al* (2003) also showed the positive outcomes for children when a qualified teacher was present. Mathers & Sylva (2007) linked the quality of provision, particularly children's access to a trained teacher, to children's improved behaviour and social skills. Crucially, Brind *et al* (2011) identified that very few members of the Early Years workforce held Qualified Teacher Status. However, unlike New Zealand's political drive, the English *Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework* (2006) only required that an Early Years setting be led by a practitioner qualified to a level three standard in childcare. Just half of the staff had to be qualified at a level two. The remaining staff could be unqualified. No stipulation for a fully qualified teacher was made.

Urban's (2010) conclusion that growth in the Early Years sector has been politically driven due to economic concerns appeared to be confirmed

by relevant socio-political literature. At the start of the New Labour government's Early Excellence Centre initiative in 1999, which combined education and care for children under five years of age, the Department for Education published *The National Childcare Strategy: meeting the Childcare Challenge* (1998). This stated a commitment to increase childcare places, improve the quality of childcare provision, to make childcare more affordable and provide free education for all four-year-olds. The focus of the Strategy was on childcare as opposed to education. Recruitment to the workforce consequently became a recruitment of childcare workers rather than teachers. This resulted in what Dahlberg & Moss (2005) referred to as a '*quasi market',* a wide range of settings being sanctioned to deliver free education to three and four year olds whilst having to operate as businesses in a real market place. Such factors resulted in low wages and low levels of training in the Early Years sector.

Sylva & Pugh (2005) identified issues regarding the number of under-qualified childcare workers due to the expansion of nursery provision being politically motivated by socio-economic factors. They questioned how much consideration had been given to the needs of children. The New Labour government's drive to provide full time childcare was a big shift away from recommendations to expand part time nursery education made thirty years earlier in the Plowden Report (Plowden, 1967). Plowden was anxious that young children should not be separated from their mothers for lengthy periods. Post 1999, the rapidly expanding childcare sector developed a workforce with no or low level qualifications to meet the needs of young children experiencing the emotional trauma of being separated from their families for up to ten hours per day. Practitioners expected to work long hours each day on poor pay was hardly conducive to promoting a positive learning trajectory.

Waller & Clark (2007) identified the assortment of people, with differing levels of relevant professional training, working with young children in Early Years. By 2005, approximately a third of full day-care places in England were provided by private or voluntary settings (Ofsted, 2006). The Department for Education found there to be a tradition that people who worked in the Early Years sector were predominantly women, and that the pay and status were low (DfES, 2002). Similarly, Bertram & Pascal (2001) recognised the low self-esteem of childcare workers.

Childcare workers in England earned £6 per hour on average in 2003 (DfES, 2005). Brind *et al* (2011) undertook a survey commissioned by the DFE and reported that on average in 2011, staff in part time nursery provision earned £7.90 per hour and full day care staff earned £7.80. At this time the national average wage was £14.76 per hour. Nationally, only 4% of practitioners were qualified to a level six (graduate) standard in 2007, but this rose to 11% in 2011 (Brind *et al* 2011).

Prior to the New Labour government's appointment, the Conservative Government (1979-1997) had begun to take control over what was being taught in schools. The first national guidelines for nursery education curriculum came in 1996 with the introduction of a Nursery Voucher scheme that enabled parents to purchase nursery places in maintained, private or voluntary settings. There was a requirement that settings receiving vouchers worked to help children reach Desirable Outcomes (SCAA, 1996) by the time they entered compulsory education at the age of five years. In 2000, the first curriculum guidance was introduced for children aged three to five years; *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000). The Foundation Stage Profile (QCA, 2003), an assessment of attainment at the end of the Reception class year, closely followed. The EYFS became statutory in September 2008. It replaced *The Foundation Stage Curriculum* (QCA, 2003). This was the first time that Early Years provision

had a statutory educational framework. This framework was reviewed and the revised *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage: Setting the standards for learning and development and care for children from birth to five* became mandatory in September 2012.

The introduction of statutory Early Years frameworks and curriculum guidance required practitioners to review and in many cases amend or adapt their practice DfES (2004). Aspects of practice such as all children having a named key worker were often implemented, without the understanding explained by the underpinning theory. Gorard and Rees (2002) pointed out that situational factors, such as finance and lack of time, often prevented practitioners' access to learning opportunities. Urban (2010, p9) recognised the problematic top down approach:

> "*Consultations, held at national level by government departments who are introducing new policies, hardly ever reach the individual practitioner who is supposed to be working towards realising the policies.*"

2.2 Leading Systemically – Systemic Leadership

> "*Questioning what we mean by leadership seems fundamentally necessary if we are to discuss learning, organisational purposes, and multiple ways of knowing*" (Marshall, 2000, p5).

An important distinction must be made between '*Systems Leadership*' and '*Systemic Leadership*'. The latter is *used by* Marshall (2000) to describe a growing and evolving leadership model, one that is constantly opening its boundaries to new possibilities and learning from its inner self as it interacts with exogenous sources. The National College of School Leadership (2012) used '*Systems Leadership*' to define leaders working across several centres or schools to secure improvements across the Early Years sector.

This study aimed to be developmental for all those involved, thereby creating a sustainable culture of '*Systemic Leadership'*. The intent was to strengthen a workforce of predominantly non-graduate Early Years practitioners' self-belief, self-efficacy and self-motivation through engaging them in a process of learning by undertaking practice-based research. I sought to encourage and support participants to identify questions related to practice that were of interest to them and identify or create ways of exploring those questions. My proposition was that, through this process practitioners would employ their learning to inform practice development, leading from the bottom of the organisation's designated hierarchy.

Informed by learning from the social sciences, McGregor (1960) offered a leadership approach that challenged traditional hierarchical models. He suggested that those in authority should show trust and respect for their employees, influencing their motivation to work. In a brilliantly perceptive paper, Whitaker (2009, p26) discussed, McGregor's two perspectives of leadership. The first perspective is that: "*People dislike work ---- they have to be bribed, coerced and controlled and even threatened with punishment to perform adequately*". This is defined as a 'determinist' model. The second perspective suggests: "*That people like to do work and do not have to be forced or threatened. If allowed to pursue objectives to which they are committed most people will work hard and not only accept responsibility, but consciously seek it*" (*ibid*). It is McGregor's more inspirational second perspective favoured by Whitaker, although seen by him as naïve, that this study sought to achieve. Later exploration of theories on social equality by Adler (1927), Dreikurs (1971), Giddens (1988), Taysum & Gunter (2008) and Taysum (2010) also led to questions about the reality of following McGregor's more inspirational leadership model. "*Equality and individual liberty can come into conflict*" (Giddens, 1988, p100). Individualism, defined by

Giddens as the concern for self-fulfilment can come into conflict with the goals of the organisation. Some form of monitoring in order to look after the interests of the whole organisation is therefore required of a designated leader, but feelings of trust may then be undermined.

Underlying the study's proposition was a belief that a designated leader could achieve '*Systemic Leadership*' by:

- working to promote practitioners' interest in, and commitment to learning
- developing a shared vision of the organisation as a learning community
- promoting practitioners' ability to see things through different lenses and discuss their thoughts with each other.

As leader-researcher, I focussed on **how** through action research, what I later identified from the literature review as Senge's (1990) '*Systems Theory*', could be implemented in practice. Whitaker (2009, p5) described a '*systems framework*' as being more a "*discipline of enquiry, than a plan for action*". He defined '*Systems Theory*' as being the systems in an organisation that are open to their environment, interact with that environment and, as a consequence, continue to evolve and develop. In this context, '*Systems Theory*' relates to the culture of an organisation, rather than a tangible plan of work. This suggested that a designated leader intent on developing '*Systemic Leadership*' should pay attention to learning from the organisation whilst actively working to promote a learning culture. Fullan (2005) noted that there had been a lack of progression in implementing Senge's philosophy into leadership practice, and asked a question synonymous with this study's inquiry. "**How** *do you develop and sustain a greater number of "system thinkers" in action?*" (Fullan, 2005, x). As an Early Years leader-researcher I constantly struggled with **how** morally inspirational theories of leadership could be implemented. The challenges arose from individuals' often

unexpected behaviour, which led to consideration of theories of Individual Psychology and Group Psychology.

Ironically, Senge (1990) introduced the idea of a learning organisation being that which stops trying to take itself apart in order to understand itself, and becomes an organisation that sees itself as a whole, recognising the interdependence and interrelatedness of all its members. He termed the need to consider the whole; because of the influence each part has on the other, '*Systems Thinking*', the fifth discipline. The other four disciplines, believed by Senge (1990) to be necessary in order to achieve '*Systems Thinking*' are:

- Personal Mastery (a commitment to personal learning), a sense of the mission
- Building Shared Vision – a shared picture of the future that we seek to create, a genuine vision compared to a vision statement
- Mental Models (an ability to look at internalised images and review them from others' perspectives)
- Team Learning (the ability for all members to learn collaboratively).

To further explain '*Systems Thinking*', Senge (1990) made the analogy of a car production factory where three teams were all working to design a bolt for the same car, but for different parts of the car. All three teams saw themselves as successful, as each team's bolts worked effectively. However, the production of the car subsequently became more complicated, requiring three different bolts to be manufactured, matched to the different parts, and fitted. In '*Systems Thinking*', the feedback perspective suggests that everyone shares responsibility for the problems generated by the system. Boundaries and group interrelationships therefore need to be permeable, open to the feedback available like the process of osmosis.

Whilst I agree with Senge's (1990) belief that an organisation must be seen as a whole, I would argue that the individual parts do need to be

understood.   McNiff (2000) reminded us that people are the organisation.   Dreikurs (1971) identified human propensity to fight for significance and supremacy, particularly when a person lacks a sense of belonging, feels less able or overlooked by others. As one person appears to succeed in this battle, others must feel thwarted.   One person's actions affect the synergy of the whole. I consequently offer a differing position to Senge's '*Systems Theory*' in relation to developing '*Systemic Leadership*'. The whole must always be held in sight and considered as such, but the individual parts must be understood, which requires 'dismantling' and 'scrutinising' each of the parts in order to keep them together.

I propose that Fullan's (2005) question on how to develop '*system thinkers*' becomes particularly challenging in an Early Years setting. Senge (1990) stated that in order to be a '*systems thinker*' a sense of '*Personal Mastery*' is required. Urban (2010) highlighted that Early Years practitioners are expected to act professionally whilst national political and economic drivers have led to a workforce that is constantly deemed to be unprofessional. The state of play resulting from discussions about professionalising the Early Years workforce has, as Urban (2010) concluded, left many practitioners with a fear of failure. As a result, Urban identified that practitioners often feel challenged and experience a need to feel they know the answers when approached by others. This can lead to impermeable boundaries, working against the development of Senge's (1990) '*Team `Learning*' and '*Mental Models*'.

Marshall's (2000, p6) expectations of leaders who wish to promote learning organisations, are that they would be '*engaging in inner work*' and in '*systemic reasoning and action*'. To engage in such inquiry work, a designated leader intent on developing, as a '*Systemic Leader*' must therefore become an inquirer, seeking feedback from the organisation. This advice supported the leader-researcher role adopted in this study.

Future actions of such leaders are consciously adapted, informed by the continuing learning process.

Schön (1983, p83) distinguished the idea of reflecting retrospectively from reflecting '*in action*'. He referred to reflection-in-action as a way of opening up a professional's claims of knowledge to the "*arduous task of opening it up to inquiry*". Johns (1999) expounded Schön's theory when he explored the idea of dialoguing with yourself and being aware of the way you are thinking during action as a way of being "mindful". Johns described those who were able to make a commitment to reflection, as "*Being open...not defensive, but curious and ready to consider new possibilities*" (*ibid,* p6). This described the ideal state for practice-based research participants, in which I included myself as leader-researcher. Purposeful reflection as a learning tool requires the organisation to work as a co-operative action research community, constructing meaning and knowledge collaboratively. Marshall, (2004, p17) talked about the continuing challenge of first-person action research (a critical self-reflective process) being about how to obtain feedback. It was recognised through this study that gaining honest feedback from work place colleagues, aware of a researcher's designated leader role was an exemplification of such a challenge.

Seeing things from different angles or perspectives in order to gain new, creative ideas is crucial to the process of action research. Torbert (1972) described '*Systems Theory*' as a process of seeking feedback and information from the environment in which we work in order to assess whether we are successfully moving towards our goal. All too often, people behave paradoxically, defending themselves against the feedback, if they don't like it, rather than giving it proper consideration as being another person's perspective. Unless feedback can be considered and used as part of an experiential learning process, it will be at odds with a systemic leadership approach. Torbert (1972), Schön

(1983) and Marshall (2001) also suggested the importance of being conscious in the midst of action as an important inquiry process.

Schön (1983, p79) regarded "reflection in action" as vital to creativity, discussing the work of a designer. He viewed doing and thinking as complementary, rather than interfering with each other, offering a way of researching the self and engaging in "*a continuing process of self-education*". Through this process of 'reflection in action', Schön asserted that a person could articulate and make tangible their tacit, intuitive understanding. This reflection-in-action stance was particularly relevant to this study's methodology. Schön (1983, p299) contended, "*When a practitioner becomes a researcher into his own practice, he engages in a continuing process of self-education*". An essential requirement of this research was promoting self-awareness and self-knowledge of all those involved and recognition of the setting as a learning community.

Sergiovanni (2001) reinforced Schön's (1983) philosophy of a practitioner researcher being self-educating by pointing out that professional knowledge is different from scientific knowledge. "*Professional knowledge is created in use as professionals who face ill-defined, unique, and changing problems decide on courses of action*" (Sergiovanni, 2001, p44). Urban (2010, p13) recognised the need for '*professional epistemology*' –'*knowing how we know what we know*' because of the complexity of Early Years daily practice. He pointed out that practitioners often found themselves in uncertain situations where the problem was not clear, yet a solution was needed. Such complexities arise out of the multiple interactions taking place between children, families, individuals, groups, lay-persons and other professionals who all have different interests as a focus.

Theorising from the discipline of Individual Psychology (Adler, 1927, Dreikurs, 1971) as opposed to Schön's (1983) philosophical approach,

Csikszentmihalyi (1992) determined that individuals have a need to engage in 'autotelic' experiences or 'flow'. This matches McGregor's (1960) inspirational leadership perspective, that people can enjoy work and be intrinsically motivated. 'Flow' refers to the experience of an individual being able to seek a goal, and gain a sense of self satisfaction on achieving that goal. When the person reflects on themselves, after such an experience, they are changed because they have gained new skills through meeting the challenge. The feedback they pick up in relation to the achievement of the goal enables them to *"create order in consciousness, and strengthens the structure of the self"* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, p57). In Csikszentmihalyi's framework, the periods of struggling to overcome a challenge are often what people find are the most enjoyable times of their life. The actual act of doing something, meeting the challenge is the reward itself. External rewards are not needed. For this reason, Csikszentmihalyi claimed that people feel happier, more satisfied, more skilled and more challenged at work. His observations accord with the observations of Individual Psychology (Adler, 1927, Dreikurs, 1971) and with programmatic research findings of developmental psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (Deci, 1971; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 1987; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000) on intrinsic motivation and self-determination.

The concept of doing and thinking at the same time, *"reflection-in-action as an epistemology of practice"* (Schön, 1983, p133) appeared to be at odds with Csikszentmihalyi's (1992) view that

> *"...in flow there is no room for self-scrutiny, because enjoyable activities have clear goals, stable rules, and challenges well matched to skills, there is little opportunity for the self to be threatened"* (p63).

Csikszentmihalyi continued to describe how an individual, who is engrossed and immersed in meeting a challenge, loses the sense of self but finds it more strongly when the challenge has been met. Whilst

Schön and he are theorising from different discipline perspectives, their paradoxical frameworks are both relevant to this study and are worthy of further consideration.

Schön (1983) recognised that teachers are often too inhibited, through feelings of shame, vulnerability of fear of failure, to research their own practice. Worrying about the level or competency in performance would clearly interrupt the process of flow as described by Csikszentmihalyi, and has been confirmed through decades of research on self theories, motivation and mindset undertaken by developmental and social psychologist Carol Dweck and her colleagues (Dweck, 1975, 1991, 1999, 2012, Dweck & Leggett, 1998, Elliot & Dweck, 2005). This became particularly relevant when considering the research evidence gathered, which led me to consider Urban's (2010) conclusion that the national attempts to professionalise the Early Years workforce left many practitioners with a fear of failure. Schön recognised teachers' pervasive fear of failure, even though they had achieved graduate academic status. As discussed previously, the majority of Early Years practitioners have not achieved formal academic accreditation, and fear of failure and feelings of vulnerability are likely to increase when they are asked to research their own practice.

It seemed that the best way to align the two different perspectives of Schön and Csikszentmihalyi was to distinguish between being conscious and attentive to one's own actions or behaviour related to the challenge when engaged in flow, from being self conscious about how others are perceiving their actions. This is illustrated in Table 2.1 below concerning conscious and unconscious incompetence and competence.

Table 2.1: Conscious & Unconscious Incompetence & Competence

	Conscious	Unconscious
Incompetence	Acknowledging the fear of opening the self up to scrutiny and possible criticism from others	Refusing to do something as an automatic response
Competence	Articulating and giving form to the behaviour and actions adopted by the self in order to meet the challenge	Values and beliefs motivating practitioners to meet a challenge

They both appeared to see the self as the site of change and self-education, with Schön recognising the value of reflection in action whilst striving to meet the challenge, and with Csikszentmihalyi recognising the value of reflection after the action when the challenge has been met.

In 2010, speaking at the European Conference for Early Education Research Associates, Marshall expressed her view that leadership for future sustainability is about voice and power. Voice and power should not be the prerogatives of those given a portion of responsibilities in a distributed leadership model; instead they should be available to all. This sat comfortably with the intent of this study and with Lambert's (1998) view of leadership as a democratic process in which individuals endeavour to work together for a shared purpose. Writing from an American perspective, Lambert recognised that 'leadership' was generally thought of as synonymous with a person in a position of authority, yet every individual had the right and potential to work as a leader. She drew attention to the pattern of looking to those with formal authority to lead the way, instead of recognising the leadership potential within the organisation.

The key notion in Lambert's exploration of leadership is that leadership is about '*learning together*'. Lambert (1998, p8) regarded 'leadership' as "*the capacity to learn ourselves towards purposeful action*". Learning together to empower staff through practice based, co-operative action research was the social intent of this action research. However, I found that implementing the notion of flattening hierarchical leadership models through developing an active learning community culture held many emotive connotations for members of the organisation. Polanyi's (1966) theory that human knowledge involves us knowing more than we can tell became meaningful. Indeed, McGregor (1960) urged those in authority to seek out their implicit and explicit assumptions in order to manage people effectively. "*Action research is explicitly value-orientated*" (Marshall, 2007, p371). A designated leader intent on flattening hierarchical models by recognising leadership potential within the organisation is implementing their formal authority, demanding participation from others to become a community of learners. The leader-researcher holds explicit values and must be prepared to question these values if engaging others in '*Systemic Leadership*'.

Anticipating Lambert by more than 20 years, Banet & Hayden (1977, p163) claimed "*Responsibility within a system is everywhere, if it is anywhere, but the implications of that truth are often below the level of awareness*". The realisation of this theory, the messiness and complexity of putting theories into practice became apparent through my analysis of the Focus Group discussions, discussed in Chapter Four. I discovered that whilst leadership responsibility should be everywhere, not all members of an organisation are necessarily ready or able to take such responsibility, especially when they have lower levels of qualification and no defined professional identification.

Analysing evidence gathered by this study (Stage Two - Focus Group Discussion Reports) and reflecting upon the methodology used when

establishing a purposeful sample Centre Inquiry Group (Stage One), led to a review of literature on individual and group psychology, and social democracy. The extended review of the literature helped to better understand the challenge of developing *'systems thinkers'* and realising *'Systemic Leadership'*. Fullan's (2005) question about the lack of progression in implementing Senge's (1990) philosophy into leadership practice was explored through this study, and the challenge and depth of understanding required for implementing *'Systemic Leadership'* theory in practice was illustrated. As a consequence an understanding was gained of Reason's (2002) remark that he had been intrigued by how much people wanted to hear human stories of how co-operative action research worked in practice.

Drawing on the works of McGregor (1960), Torbert (1972), Banet & Hayden (1977), Schön (1983), Senge (1990), Lambert (1998), Marshall (2000), Sergiovanni (2001), Fullan (2005) and Whittaker (2009), a conclusion was reached that elements essential to an organisation's *'Systemic Leadership'* are:

- designated leaders who are ready and able to recognise all individuals as potential leaders
- individuals who are ready and willing to accept responsibility.
- individuals who are ready to engage with inner work or self-exploration
- individuals, who see themselves as learners, are open to learning and constructing new knowledge
- individuals who collectively hold a shared purpose trusted relationships.
- effective communication (articulating and hearing).

The study of leadership theories led to a hypothesis that leading through a continuous process of co-operative inquiry, whilst encouraging inclusion, participation, involvement, empowerment and openness, would serve to develop *'Systemic Leadership'*.

2.3 Action Research

Considering the theories of Heron (1971), Reason (1998), Stringer (1999), Reason & Bradbury (2001), I concluded that co-operative action research required the identification and development of the methodology to be decided collaboratively with the participants. Action research raises subjective experience to a level of consciousness through a process of articulating and sharing inner thoughts, taking account of and honouring the individuals' perspectives formed through their self-determination.

Reason & Bradbury (2001) described action research as a process in which individuals work co-operatively in order to find solutions for issues pertinent to them. The process entails uniting action, reflection, theory and practice. Individuals' history, culture, interactional practices and emotional lives are considered in community-based action research. Stringer (1999, p8) described it as a process that is: "*democratic, enabling everyone to participate*". Heron (1971) recognised a flaw in research methods that treated people as subjects of research rather than as participants, contending that people are the cultural experts on their settings. Co-operative inquiry was described by Reason (1998) and Heron (1971) as a creative process to which all those involved contribute.

Urban (2010, p10) discussed the layers of '*epistemological hierarchy*' in Early Years practice '*…where the professional body of knowledge is produced…*' by academic research. He argued that whilst there is awareness in some cases of theory, it is not common to find it related or tested out in the experience of the practitioner within their work place. A perceptive research participant commented during a Focus Group discussion (21.7.11) that it was **"***all very well [to] have academic ideas informing practice but practice needs to inform ideas as well***"**. I concur

with the research participant and Gould *et al* (2004, p20) that "*Academic or book learning on its own cannot be a substitute for learning from experience*". I would also agree with Marshall & Reason (2007, p370) that "*In action research, it is taken as axiomatic that the inquirer is connected to, embedded in, the issues and field they are studying.*" Urban (2010) pointed out that Early Years practitioners constantly find themselves at the bottom of a hierarchical knowledge stream, but as practice-based researchers they have the potential to generate new professional knowledge. The challenge lay in realising this potential, motivating a work force, whose level of professionalism is constantly questioned, to become inquirers, co-constructors of new professional knowledge.

"*Experiential knowing is knowledge by encounter*" (Marshall & Reason, 1998, p5) substantiated the study's underlying proposition. Suggestions to change because of what the theory says result in people doing something because of external, removed instruction rather than because they have experienced and internalised a belief. This was referred to by Urban (2010) as effectiveness being defined externally. Theoretical principles and values of co-operative inquiry, involving members of the organisation as research participants, inquiring into the effectiveness of their daily working practices appeared to sit comfortably with the notion of repositioning leadership. Co-operative inquiry explicitly endeavours to educate and promote personal development of contributors whilst promoting social action.

The notion of research as social action, an agent of change, appeared to be supported by the works of Schön (1983), Reason (1988) and Marshall (2007, 2001). Such theories focused on developing research methods that served to develop practice simultaneously. Schön (1983, p. ix) clarifiied that "*Research functions not as a distraction from practice but as a development of it.*" Reason (1988) was more explicit

than Schön (1983) in conveying that practice also informs the research methods. Marshall (2007, p371) aligned with Reason, describing "*Researching [as] an emergent process*".

Considering Marshall's (2007) recognition that action research is value orientated, a literature review was undertaken to explore how underlying beliefs might be brought to the surface. Dewey (1910) noted how beliefs come from our thoughts, and reflective thoughts involve making reflexive, conscious inquiries into the nature of those beliefs. Encouragement of practitioners to maintain personal journals for the purposes of critical reflection as a method within the action research was based on theories of Constructivism as described by Dewey (1910). Knowledge or the acceptance of knowledge is a unique and individual perception because of each individual's previous interpersonal and social experiences. So practitioners involved in this study had developed their unique constructs of knowledge through their experiences. As Dewey observed:

> "*Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought*" (Dewey, 1910, p6).

Kierkegaard (1957), as cited in Muncey (2005), suggested that life must be lived forward but can only be understood backward. Failure to explore reflective thoughts would have been a failure to acknowledge the subjectivity of the knowledge gained through this study. It would have also ignored Schön's (1983) construct of reflection as an epistemology of practice, the concept of doing and thinking at the same time.

Identification of inquiry into personal reflection as part of the methodology led to a consideration of literature about the use of ethnography as a research tool. Haug *et al* (1986) argued that, rather

than judging personal accounts of experience as being too subjective to be a source of knowledge because individuals could not give an objective account of themselves, researchers should be concerned with the how and why individuals constructed their identity and how this affected their relationships with the objects of everyday life. Twemlow, Fonagy and Saccom (2005) described sharing internal experiences with others as a process of '*mentalisation*'. They referred to this as something that an organisational system could develop. They also claimed that for an organisation to be creative and avoid coerciveness, '*mentalisation*' must be strong. This enables us to make sense of our own actions and the actions of others. This was pertinent to the analysis of evidence gathered from Focus Group discussions. Evidence was contextual to the individuals within the organisation. Feelings expressed were subjective, based on previous experiences within and outside the organisation. The research aimed to understand the how and why people felt as they did. It was initially intended that through this process, knowledge would be gained on how a designated leader could support individuals to become co-operative practice-based researchers of their practice. As the study progressed, it was realised that the real question was 'how a designated leader could '*create the conditions within which others will motivate themselves*' Deci (1995, p10).

As leader-researcher, I aimed to undertake a critical reflection of my behaviour and actions by considering how these had affected members of the organisation. Mayo (1999, p73) described how Freire termed the process of people detaching themselves from their actions in order to see things in a more critical light and reflect upon them as "praxis". Similarly, Marshall (1999) had been intent on recognising and heightening her self-awareness within her work, articulating it to herself and opening it up to others for comment in order to heighten her learning. Seeing things from different angles or perspectives in order to gain new, creative ideas appeared to be crucial to the process of

action research. Unless feedback could be considered and used as part of an experiential learning process, it could not be isomorphic. The new knowledge or understanding gained must result in change, mirroring how it was learned. Recognising the isomorphic intent of the action-research led to consideration of theories on adult education and 'andragogy'.

2.4 Andragogy

'*Andragogy*' refers to the art and science of helping adults learn through learner-focused education. The National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) pedagogical approach to Andragogy was based

> "...*on the belief that theory is best created by considering first our own personal experiences and then applying ideas and concepts from the literature to gain new insights and understandings*" (Whalley *et al*, 2004, p17).

Dewey (1963) argued that education should focus on how people learn, not just what they learn, claiming that learning and experience are profoundly inter-connected. Crucial to learner-focused education is the requirement to help the learner recognise how their knowledge and understanding has been constructed, identifying future learning readiness and needs. Participants must therefore see themselves as learners, recognising their own responsibility in engaging with the andragogical process. This is a very different approach to seeing themselves as recipients of taught learning modules. The teacher-learner model of adult education promotes a sense of dependence by the learner. It carries with it "*potential problems because it implies a sense in which the learner is the junior party who requires development and is needy of the help of others*" (Gould, Stapley & Stein, 2004, p25).

Anning & Edwards (2003, p145) made the direct link between children's learning and adult's learning:

"Children learn to love learning through being with adults who also love to learn, and are themselves in context that encourage their learning. …….The early childhood setting, when seen as a community of learners, is built on a shared understanding of practice, developed through reflection and enquiry".

Consequently, it appeared important that in encouraging Early Years practitioners to become learner-researchers, care was taken to promote a co-operative, non-dependent learning culture.

Drawing upon Dewey's (1910) theories of Constructivism, Chapman (2002, p22) recognised how *"Systems thinking predicts that individuals will not change their mode of thinking or operating within the world until their existing modes are proved beyond doubt, through direct experience, to be failing"*. Torbert (2004) referred to such a profound change as '*transformational learning'*. In this study, the understanding of '*transformational learning*' has been derived from a synthesis of the work of Torbert (2004) and Mezirow (2000).

Torbert (2004) discussed the power that action inquiry holds in enabling anyone within an organisation to experience transformational learning, but stressed that first the person needs to be open to learning from the feedback received from others. He described this as making yourself vulnerable. Mezirow (2000, p19) described transformational learning as something that happens through the passage of time and through giving consideration to and *"reconstructing the dominant narratives"*. Crucial to Mezirow's definition is the person's imagination. The method involves trying on another person's point of view in order to examine and interpret or transform how we perceive our own experience. Seeing things from different angles or perspectives in order to gain new, creative ideas is crucial to the process of action research. Torbert (2004), Mezirow (2000) and Schön (1983) referred to the concept of 'framing' as part of a transformational learning process. The decision was made to

use Torbert's (2004) definition of 'framing' as being the process for explicitly stating a purpose or dilemma and sharing assumptions with others as part of the self-inquiry.

Andragogy, a learner-focused approach to adult education must take account of emotional states. The importance of emotional intelligence came to the fore in this study through the analysis of Focus Group discussions. Emotional constructs are also based on past experiences that are often deeply embedded in the sub-consciousness of the individual, resulting in tacit behaviour. Bion (1970) used the term 'intuit', to capture feelings such as anxiety, which he says couldn't be explored through the five senses. Feelings often arise from the tacit knowledge that is nestling in our sub-conscious. Whilst emotions can be hard to understand, and Bion (1970, p1) argued that they employ reason as their slave, Goleman (1998, p106) claimed, "*Emotions are literally, what move us to pursue our goals*".

Drawing on the works of Bion (1970) and Goleman (1998), which accords with Individual Psychology, founded by Alfred Adler (1927) and extended by Rudolf Dreikurs (1971), it was concluded that critical subjectivity should be recognised and raised to a level of consciousness, contemplating and forming the knowledge that has become tacit within the organisation. Through this process it may be possible to promote systems thinking and democratise the practice. *"When a practitioner becomes a researcher into his own practice, he engages in a continuing process of self-education"* (Schön, 1983, p299). When a practitioner has an opportunity and is able to articulate inner thoughts to trusted colleagues, processes of co-operative inquiry commence in the form of second person action research. McNiff (2002, p254) advised that one must plan how to gain the maximum participation from individuals undertaking research co-operatively. It would therefore appear that a process of self-inquiry, aided by '*emotional intelligence*' (Goleman,

1998*),* or a propensity to understand one's own and others' feeling, motivations and needs, is essential to gaining maximum participation in co-operative action research.

2.5 The Challenge of Changing Organisational Culture

"The first thing we can discover about ourselves is that we are striving towards a goal. We cannot, therefore, imagine the human spirit as a single, static entity. We can best imagine it as a collection of moving parts, developed from a common origin, which strive to achieve a single goal. This teleology, this striving for a goal, is basic to the concept of adaptation, and the life of the psyche is inconceivable without a goal towards which all our efforts are directed" (Adler, 1927, p28).

Rogers' (1980, p57) humanistic approach to understanding motivation, is based on the premise that individuals have an innate sense of wanting to achieve: *"It means an approach to social change based on the human desire and potentiality for change, not on conditioning. It leads to deeply democratic political philosophy rather than management by the elite".* Agreeing with Rogers (1980), Sergiovanni (1992) believed that it is the emotions, values, beliefs and social bonds that drive people. A person perceives work as worthwhile and important when it is linked to his or her own system of values.

Cognitive disequilibrium, caused by knowledge gained from practice-based research, also requires leadership skills from those involved if they are to change the practice of work colleagues, to enable assimilation. If a change in belief occurs, and the challenge of assimilation is too great, it is likely that a high level of anxiety will occur. *"A defining condition of being a human is our urgent need to understand and order the meaning of our experience, to integrate it with what we know to avoid the threat of chaos"* Mezirow (2000, p3). Gould (2004, p113) in discussing

experiential learning, referred to the state of mind influencing the way in which we act: "*If the state of mind is one of hostility, then our actions towards even the* work place can often arise out of a person's defensiveness, which in turn arises out of the need to save face. Action-based inquiry into practice is designed to question current values and beliefs. Individuals within the organisation will begin to change their beliefs at different times, and become driven by a desire to change the practice to fit with those beliefs. Those involved need to have strategies that enable them to cope with their findings, without feeling threatened. The individuals' capacity for change and freedom of movement were recognised by Adler (1927) and Deci (1995) as essential requirements for them to be able to construct an achievement goal.

Dewey (1910) also identified Individual capacity for reflective thinking as an approach to learning that was innate. He recognised that reflection involved a consequence and could be troublesome because it prevented the acceptance of suggestions at face value. Beliefs come from our thoughts, and reflective thoughts involve making reflexive, conscious inquiries into the nature of those beliefs. He identified that reflection necessitated the individual overcoming the calm inertia that allows her or him to simply accept suggestions. Reflecting on the theories of Adler (1927), Dewey (1910) and Goleman (1998) as the methodological process of the study's fieldwork were evaluated, it became clear that practice-based research, a process likely to upset an individual's equilibrium, necessitated considering how the resultant period of turmoil could be supported. This was required so that the organisation could hold together as it changed shape.

Goleman (1998, p136) argued that by becoming emotionally intelligent we can "...*nurture the capacity for pleasure, even joy in our work*". Like Adler and others, Goleman (1998) recognised emotions as being the motivators behind people's pursuit of their goals. To ignore the

emotional intelligence or needs of the individuals within the organisation could result in the prevention of interest and enthusiastic participation in the action-based inquiry process, and this proved prescient in this study.

2.6 Individual and Group Psychology

> *"During most of his life the adult acts not purely as an individual but as a member of a social group. We belong to many groups all at the same time and their importance changes"* (Lewin, 1948, p108).

Those who have studied Individual Psychology and individuals' behaviour within social groups would agree that people have an innate need to belong and to feel able to make a contribution to their community. *"For groups to perform effectively, individual members' fundamental psychological needs must be met"* (John, 2000, p422). Considering theories on Group Psychology was necessitated because of the initial planned research method, which was to set up a purposefully selected sample group as a 'Centre Inquiry Group'. This soon resulted in some people feeling like they belonged and others feeling that they were not valued. The complexities of organisational groups and their influence on co-operative research processes proved to be particularly important to this study.

The nature of group membership, in view of the theories of Bion (1961), John (2000), Lewin (1948), Banet & Hayden (1977) and Whitaker (2009) required consideration. A group is made up of individuals who each have their own attitudes, values, needs and emotions constructed from their life experiences. In a group, individuals come together for a purpose, which might be for pleasurable relaxation or for a work-orientated task. When individuals come together they relate to each other, reacting to one another consciously and unconsciously. Their learning from past experiences plays a large part in influencing the

interactions. Bion (1961) recognised that every group functions on two levels, one being the *task*, which can be made clear, and the other *process* function being something unspecified and less clear. Bion referred to this *process* function as *'basic assumptions'*, meaning the undercurrents that flow through the interrelations, also known as group dynamics.

Through the work of this study, groups made up of members from different teams came together in the name of 'Inquiry Groups'. The relationships and dynamics of those groups, and in teams, played a large part in the individuals' readiness or openness to further learning opportunities. Liberation of the individual from pressures towards conformity cannot ignore group dynamics and the "*sometimes sinister irrational processes that affect individuals in group life*" (Banet & Hayden, 1977, p155).

'Systems Theory' requires group boundaries to be permeable and open to external feedback. Banet & Hayden (1977, p163), through their work with the Tavistock method to explore group relations observed that: "*Boundaries must be strong enough to maintain the integrity of what is contained inside, but also permeable enough to allow transactions between the inside and the outside environments to occur*". Team and group boundaries must therefore be porous and malleable, woven to a pattern that can be changed. Lewin (1948) discussed the uncertainties and anxiety that occurs when an individual joins a new group, or crosses the margins from one group to another. Their uncertainty of the new ground results in the person feeling uncomfortable and self-conscious.

John (2000) discussed how a group could become an entity in its own right, taking on a group identity. The way the group behaves and the beliefs it actively supports may not always reflect the individual's beliefs or behaviour. However, the individual may choose to support the group

behaviour because of his or her need to feel a sense of belonging to this group. As a result, individuals within a group may feel an internal conflict or sense of tension. Taken to another level, when a person's needs to belong and gain a sense of self-esteem are not met, alienation can occur and disruptive behaviour may be displayed. This phenomenon is illustrated through the analysis of the Focus Group discussions in Chapter Four.

Recognising that most work organisations are hierarchical, John (2000) points to how this results in work groupings emulating those of a family. The organisationally sanctioned leaders of the group would be seen as the parent authority figure, and as a result, an assumption is made that promotes dependency and competitive functioning. Promoting emancipation from dependency on sanctioned leadership was the study's intent. Through the literary review of Deci (1995) and John (2000) a recognition was reached that the initial research question of 'how I could support others' was promoting dependency and competitive functioning.

Discussing Bion's (1961) propositions that at a moment in time for any group there will be simultaneous levels of behaviour in operation, John (2000) drew attention to the fact that the emotional needs of the group looking for safety, a protector or container, see their task as being to identify a leader. They will seek protection from the person they see as the most powerful individual, and "*great significance is attached to a job in modern society*" (John, 2000, p430). Her rebuke of authoritarian structures, in favour of authoritative leaders who promote others to become leaders in a democratic organisation, sat comfortably with the intention of this study. John recognised the tensions between the desire to promote a democratic organisation in a time of needing "more for less", where pressures of expectations, push leaders into an authoritarian mode of behaviour.

Whitaker (2009) similarly observed that the most common organisational structures were hierarchical, and that in schools there is usually a senior leadership team. He highlighted the fact that this results in senior staff having more opportunities to develop collaborative practice than those who do not have leadership responsibilities. Lewin (1948) also warned of the coercive dangers involved when an individual always acts as a member of the same group. Organisational structures that always remain the same may therefore increase the danger of coercive behaviour. Whitaker (2009) proposed a more organic network of groups drawing inspiration from 'Systems Theory'. Lewin's theories on group membership describing the psychology behind majority groups keeping minority groups or individuals in an under-privileged status became important to understanding the analysis of evidence gathered through this study.

Reviewing the literature of Individual Psychology (Adler, 1927) helped with understanding complex individual traits that affected the connections and relations within the developing organisation. Bringing individuals together in a co-operative action-based inquiry needed to take account of individual stories and capacity for change. Attention needed to be paid to how the tensions and conflicts that arose from individuals' changing perspectives could be managed and explored. This requirement was identified by the cyclical action–research process involving an analysis of method actions and amending subsequent actions.

Adlerian psychologists Boldt & Mosak's (1998) view that each memory acquired by a person is stored as a story that shapes the person's life fit well with theories of experiential learning and constructivism discussed earlier. As Lewin (1948, p107) stated: "*Every action one performs has some specific 'background', and is determined by that background*".

People's stories shape the way they receive and view new information and experiences. (Marshall, 1999, p2) explained this as a process of: *"seeking to pay attention to the 'stories' [she] tell[s] about [her]self and the world and recognising that these are all constructions, influenced by [her] purposes and perspectives and by the social discourses which shape meanings and values."*

Based on Adlerian theory (Adler, 1927) and Deci & Ryan's (1985) research findings, Lew & Bettner (1996) explained types of children's behaviour as a result of the need to feel 'connected' (a sense of belonging), 'capable' (able to meet performance expectations), prove that they 'count' (their unique voices and need to be seen as self-determining are heard) and that they have 'courage' (able to express their needs and handle challenges). Being able to connect, being capable, knowing you count and have courage is referred to by Lew & Bettner (1996) as the 'four Crucial Cs'. Reflecting upon my own behaviour in different social groupings accompanied by observations of friends and colleagues led me to believe that the Crucial Cs are equally important for adults. Bringing organisational members together to undertake co-operative practice-based action research work required attention to be paid to the Crucial Cs.

An intention of this study was for participant practitioners to have their own transformational learning opportunities as individuals and within staff groups. The danger of the individual's need to connect is that this can easily lead to a coercion (John, 2000). The development of a safe, non-coercive culture can enable people to face challenges and in turn gain satisfaction and happiness. A culture in which individuals feel unable to express different opinions or challenges in order to belong to a group or team is coercive and does not support progression of practice through action research. Individual rights and responsibilities within the recognition of interconnectedness and interdependency must therefore

be safeguarded. In agreement with McNiff's (2002) arguments for planning how to gain the maximum participation from individuals undertaking research collaboratively, Buckingham (2004, p3) suggested: *"The great organisation must not only accommodate the fact that each employee is different, it must capitalise on these differences."*

Dweck (1999) and her colleagues' programmatic work on self theories and their role in motivation provided empirical evidence for the earlier theories and observations of Alfred Adler (1927), about how improving awareness of oneself and one's potential, can lead to life changing behaviours. She and her colleagues found that the way we perceive ourselves affects the way in which we behave. She identified two types of behaviour that can be observed in most social organisations. There are people who feel very threatened by the idea of new ideas or suggestions of change. They feel flawless and strive to maintain this feeling of being smart by avoiding change or the trial of anything new. Dweck described this type of behaviour as having a fixed mindset. *"Nothing ventured, nothing lost".* The other type of behaviour was seen in those who show a willingness to try out new ideas, people who feel smart when they are learning something rather than repeating things they know they can already succeed in. Dweck described this type of behaviour as having a growth mindset, *"Nothing ventured, nothing gained".*

There is a crucial distinction to be made when considering Dweck's self-theories. They describe types of behaviour rather than people. When people display one type of behaviour more predominantly, we might describe them as having a particular type of mindset, however, in a different situation or social setting, that same person might display the alternative mindset. Most people will be able to think of social situations where they feel a need to appear smart and flawless, and alternative situations where they are happy to admit they need to know more

about something. Dweck recognised that for those who have a predominantly 'fixed mindset' there is a potential for them to develop over time. This description of a person with a fixed mindset at one point in time suggests an underlying fragile mental state at that time. Such a person will only do something if they know they will succeed, as they need constant reassurance of competence. Dweck's self-theories of mind set are pertinent to the Early Years workforce whose level of professionalism is constantly questioned, as discussed by Dahlberg & Moss (2005) and Urban (2010).

2.7 Social Philosophies Relating to Social Democracy and Equality, Organisational Values

"We are not familiar with what even the existing degree of democracy requires from each of us individually and from all of us collectively in order that we may profit from a democratic society" (Dreikurs, 1971, p.xiii).

Educational leadership researcher, Taysum (2010, p43) drew attention to the fact that "*school leaders have the power to recognise or misrecognise their own contribution to an educational community and that of others in the community*". Lambert (1998) urged those who hold authority to release their power and enable individuals to participate in decision-making. However, in a community of people whose '*human nature is to strive for significance, which too often becomes a fight for supremacy*' (Dreikurs, 1971, xiii-xiv), there lies a suggestion that to release such power without paying attention to individualism would not lead to a democratic decision-making structure.

Reading Adler (1927), Dreikurs (1971), Giddens (1988) and Layard (2005) whilst analysing evidence gathered through this study, it was realised that in order to be a democratic leader, supporting '*Systemic Leadership*', there must be equal concern for both the individual and

the community. Adler regarded '*social interest'* as a sense that an individual is connected to others and an antidote to a constant striving for significance or supremacy. He identified that all of us can become self-preoccupied when we feel insecure, and that when people are threatened, they become self-preoccupied and thus have a lack of social interest, which impacts negatively on both the individual and the group.

Individualism is defined by Giddens (1988) as, the concern for self-fulfilment or fulfilment of potential. As a consequence, "*equality and individual liberty can come into conflict*" (Giddens, 1988, p100). Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) identified the human characteristic of experiencing a sense of identity and interdependence with those who share resources resulting in an 'us' culture. Sergiovanni (2001, p105) regarded cultural leadership as an intention to "*transform the school from an organisation inhabited by a collection of 'I's to a moral community."* Theories on cultural leadership towards a moral community *appeared* to take into account of Gidden's (1998, p42) claim that *'inequalities can threaten social cohesion'*. Tensions appeared to exist between the ideological value-led approach to leadership of promoting individuals' participation in decision-making and ensuring decisions are in the interest of the organisation as a whole. Such tensions connect to the irony of Senge's (1990) recommendation for an organisation to see itself as a whole rather than constantly trying to take itself apart.

Dreikurs (1971) identified the requirement for individuals to be capable of taking on higher levels of responsibility for their own work if they were to behave as free agents. He recognised that not all individuals were able to act as free agents, holding what he termed a 'slave mentality' (Dreikurs, 1971, p37). Building on the work of Dreikurs, Taysum (2008) claimed that for an individual to have a real opportunity, they must be able to recognise it for what it is. "Only a society of equals can build

democracy" (Dreikurs, 1971, preface), and yet traditional hierarchical organisational structures and levels of professional qualifications in Early Years settings do little to promote a sense of equality.

Giddens (1988, p40) discussed "*equality as a relative concept*". He referred to different degrees of hunger within individuals. The notion of equality in terms of an individual's freedom to express him or herself is in itself extremely complex. Each person's past experiences, as previously discussed, and resultant levels of self-efficacy will impact on their feelings of capability, courage and confidence to express their opinions. Dreikurs (1971, p9) stated, "*It is the feeling of adequacy, rather than inadequacy, that leads to successful endeavour*". How individuals perceive professional development is crucial. Schön (1991), in agreement with Lambert (1998), concluded that it is professionals' capacity to reflect and learn about their experiences over time that unites them.

Lewin's (1948) discussion of his theories on group pressures having the potential to lead to coercive behaviour, and so undermining democracy, suggested that such pressures needed to be surfaced, articulated, understood and worked through in order to bring about common, shared values. Such work would however, appear to necessitate a hierarchical organisational structure that brings different views together, adjudicating in the resolution of conflicts in order to reach agreements. Equal rights in making choices for an organisation does not mean that everyone gets what they want. When discussing leadership being developed at all levels of an organisation, Huffington, James and Armstrong (2004) proposed that the devolution of authority was likely to require an increased need for accountability, as it necessitated a greater responsibility on organisational members to be open to monitoring and receive feedback. Lambert (1998) noted that a lack of agreement by all staff results in the leader, or person in authority, being regarded as the '*implementer*', forcing change. Whilst Dreikurs

(1971, p. 215) described the group as a *'value-forming agent'* in which opposing interests and points of view can be reconciled, Layard (2005, p105) claimed, "*some people say that we can only collaborate in order to fight some other group*".

Dreikur's (1971) theories on democratic evolution that man can only participate and contribute if he feels that he belongs sits comfortably with the psychological theories of Adler (1927), Lewin (1948), Deci & Ryan (1985), Lew & Bettner (1996) and John (2000). Polanyi (1966) discussed the conscious and unconscious images held by people in relation to others with whom they have a level of connectedness. This suggested that members of an organisation might often be unaware of their reasons for wanting to belong to some groups rather than others. Dreikurs (1971) described our knowledge of ourselves as a continuum from the known to the unknown. Sometimes we will be aware of the reasons behind our behaviour, at other times such reasons will lie below our level of consciousness. Such 'unknowns' might be regarded as a challenge to Dreikur's (1971) theory on the need to see and understand emotions as the most important assets of humans, regarding emotions as our driving force. '*Emotional understanding is an expression of our real beliefs, our real convictions*' (Dreikurs, 1971, p54), but many influential factors on those beliefs will remain unknown. The danger is as Taysum (2008, p184) proposed, that to be ignorant in the understanding of others' experiences leads to dominant discourses. I propose that a realistic position for a leader-researcher might be to endeavour to uncover and understand previous influential factors on individuals but to accept that there will always remain some unknowns. Such a stance was recognised by Lichtenstein, Orton & Schreiber (2006, p6) in their statement that "*real world complex adaptive systems do not lend themselves to controlled experimentation*". They go on to explain, "*In reality there are many influential factors, some known, some unknown*".

Cummins *et al* (2007) referred to relational developments within a place as '*constellations of connections*' that result in constantly evolving characteristics. Each individual is influenced by conditions in the multiple places they access. The complexity of individuals' emotional, social and cognitive development becomes clearly apparent when bringing multiple theories together. The idea of democratic organisations requiring a society of equals emerges as a challenging concept. In practice, the human qualities of individuals, who are the organisation, have the capacity to work towards a common goal, however, their motivation or commitment to do so is what is likely to stop ideologies being realised. This was recognised by Taysum (2010, p16) when she proposed that written theory was different to theory being realised. Self-theories described by Dweck (1999), although preceded by Alfred Adler in 1913 (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956/1964) were recognised by Dreikurs (1971) as a phenomenon working against social democracy. "*Our concern with success impedes our performance because it threatens us with failure*" (*ibid*, 1971, p11).

2.8 Summary

This literature review has identified how socio-political shifts were economically rather than educationally driven, resulting in an Early Years workforce with a professional identity crisis. Lack of '*personal mastery*' within a low paid workforce, alongside hierarchically determined outcome measures resulted in practitioners experiencing a fear of failure. Exploring the socio-political context of Early Years helped to highlight the challenges and complexity faced in working to develop Early Years practitioners' self-efficacy as opposed to that of teachers' self-efficacy.

A distinction between '*Systemic Leadership*' as opposed to '*Systems Leadership*' has been made. '*Systemic Leadership*' relates to developing the culture of an organisation enabling it to interact and learn from feedback it actively seeks about itself. Whilst the whole must always be in

sight, the holistic organisation must also pay attention to individualism, interdependence and interrelatedness. The need to understand individualism, defined by Giddens (1998) and see different perspectives identified by Torbert (1972) brought into focus some of the tensions in Senge's (1990) 'Systems Theory'. Consequently, it was imperative that works on adult learning; individual psychology, motivation, group psychology, equality and social democracy were explored. Key references that helped to formulate the social intent and principles underpinning the research methodology and choices of methods have also been identified.

The literature review highlighted the importance of knowing how we know what we know, recognising that we know more than we can tell, that we hold memories as stories and that experiences shape our lives– and that all are crucial to understanding participants' behaviours within co-operative action research contexts. The relevance of interconnectedness and interrelatedness within an organisation, through considering the individual psychology, motivation, mindsets and group psychology has been discussed. Exploring psychology regarding the uniqueness of individuals and their need to belong to a group also served to acknowledge the subjective nature of co-operative action research. Some knowledge can be surfaced, some knowledge will remain tacit and this cannot be controlled through research methodology.

Reviewing human response to change promoted an understanding of the complexity faced by a leader-researcher striving to promote a democratic organisation through engaging practitioners in practice-based research. Retrospectively discussing the importance of emotional states and how they affect engagement with new challenges helped me to understand some of the unintended consequences that the study's fieldwork brought. It illustrated Marshall and Reason's, (1998, p5)

theory that "*Experiential knowing is knowledge by encounter*".   This review began to explain Fullan's (2005) observation that there has been a lack of progression in implementing Senge's philosophy into leadership practice.

Table 2.2 below summarises the key theories and references reviewed in this Chapter.

Table 2.2 Key Research Theory and key References

Key Research Theory	Key References
Social Intent of action-research. Inclusive research – all concerned are participants rather than research subjects	Heron (1971) Reason (1998) Stringer (1999) McNiff & Whitehead (2000) Reason & Bradbury (2001)
Systemic Leadership	McGregor (1960) Torbert (1972) Senge (1990) Lambert (1998) Marshall (2000) Fullan (2005) Whitaker (2009)
Systems Theory	Senge (1990) Fullan (2005) Whitaker (2009)
Human motivation	Rogers (1980) Sergiovanni (1992) Csikszentmihalyi (1972)
Emotional intelligence	Sergiovanni (1992) (2001) Goleman (1998) (2004)
Tacit knowledge	Bion (1977) Polanyi (1966)
Individual Psychology – self-theories	Adler (1927) Deci & Ryan (1985) Dweck (1999)
Group Psychology	Lewin (1948) Bion (1961)

	Banet & Hayden (1977)
	Lew & Bettner (1996)
	John (2000)
	Whitaker (2009)
Maximising individual participation	McNiff (2002)
	Buckingham (2004)
Adult Learning	Dewey (1910) (1963)
Constructivism	Boldt & Mosak (1998)
Andragogy	Mezirow (2000)
Transformational Learning	Anning & Edwards (2003)
	Gould et al (2004)
	Whalley (2004)
	Torbert (2004)
Reflection as a learning tool	Torbert (1972)
	Schön (1983)
	Haug (1986)
	Johns (1999)
	Marshall (2004)
Social equality and democracy	Adler (1938)
	Drekurs (1971)
	Giddens (1988)
	Taysum & Gunter (2008)
	Taysum (2010)

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This Chapter provides a retrospective overview and account of the study's action research methodology. It clarifies the purpose and social intent of the research and how these shifted as a result of my learning through this study. The rationale for selection of the research paradigm, the conceptual frameworks and methods used are identified. The iterative development of methodological approaches at each stage of the study are recounted, explained and summarised in a research schedule. Participants in each stage of the fieldwork are identified. Included in this account are the measures taken to ensure the ethical conduct of the study – the gathering, recording, extraction and analyses of data at each stage in order to ensure that the accumulating evidence was substantive and useful in practice.

3.1 An Overview

The subject of the research is leadership, how it has been experienced and shared within a single Early Years setting over a six-year period – from February 2008 to July 2014 – and ultimately, its relative effectiveness in supporting practitioners' professional development in order to meet the needs of young children and their families. This has involved an inquiry into the process of leadership, studying the behaviours and actions of staff as they were encouraged to engage with self-evaluative practice-based research and developments and outcomes of services for children and families.

3.2 The Research Paradigm

This study sits firmly within the paradigm of qualitative research described by Heron (1971) as a method of inquiry, which seeks to take account of human behaviour and understand the reasons behind that behaviour.

Tracy (2012) further expanded the role of qualitative research as an inquiry into human behaviour, describing it as an inquiry into assumed, implicit knowledge. Kuper, Reeves & Levinson (2008) outlined the aim of qualitative research as being to generate in-depth accounts from individuals and groups, taking into consideration the different contexts in which they are based. This study explored the leadership of change within a unique single setting and therefore could not produce scientific findings. Exploratory research questions were required to provide in depth insights into the experiences of participants. A quantitative approach would have been at odds with research into the more tacit aspects of human nature.

The qualitative research approach taken falls under the umbrella term of "*co-operative inquiry*" described first by Reason (1988, p3), which was further discussed by Heron (1996). Co-operative research methodology emphasises participation (Reason, 1988). Reason (1988) stipulated that demonstrating thoroughness of how authentic collaboration was gained provides validity for the research. A decade later, Heron (1999) wrote about adopting the role of facilitator as a researcher. He defined co-operative research as a process of facilitating group work collaboratively in order to transform participants' knowledge. Marshall (1999) discussed the power of co-operative research as a tool for learning about wider issues than those pertaining to an individual. Coghlan and Brannick (2000) defined cooperative inquiry as an action research process that involves a group-participatory approach where members are both the co-researchers and co-subjects, sharing common interests. More recently, Torbert (2004, p129) also discussed co-operative inquiry as a shared transformational learning process.

This study explicitly endeavoured to educate and promote the personal development of contributors. Co-operative Inquiry methodology (Coghlan & Brannick, 2000, Heron, 1999, Marshall, 1999, Reason, 1988,

Torbert, 2004) was in accord with the study's purpose. For example, Reason focussed on developing research methods that serve to develop practice at the same time. As a result of subscribing to these understandings of co-operative inquiry, the methodology informing this study was constantly revisited and explored, rather than determined at the outset. Marshall (2007, p371) also described '*Researching [as] an emergent process'*. Co-operative inquiry raises subjective experience to a level of consciousness through a process of articulating and sharing inner thoughts and takes account of the individuals' perspectives formed through their self-determination.   It honours the individual experiences of those involved (Reason, 1988).

3.3 The Proposition - Social Intent

> *Research is also 'political process' in many ways. Who researches and how; whose experience is researched and how that is named or categorised; what discourses gain currency and hold power, what forms of inquiry and writing are favoured by 'mainstream' power-holders; and much more are political issues. 'Creating knowledge' is political business. Living practice is thus politicised* (Marshall, 1999, p2).

To restate, the proposition underlying this research was that encouraging mostly non-graduate Early Years practitioners to become systemic leaders of their own practice and develop their own sense of agency through engaging with co-operative practice-based research would lead to improvements in services and outcomes for children and families.

The social activist intention of this study then was to bring the opportunity of academic study to the Children's Centre, as an agent of change, in order to reposition leadership. The vision was to emancipate practitioners from slavishly following hierarchical directives whilst continuing to improve practice. Schön (1983), Reason (1988) and Marshall (2001, 2007)

identified the notion of action research as an agent of change. Lingard, Albert, Levinson & Eaton (2008) defined action research processes as being an egalitarian approach to issues of power and education. Therefore, action research methods also sat comfortably with the study's purpose. McNiff (2002) debated two views of action research: 1) the study of people's behaviour through observation and 2) the process of inquiring about more tacit aspects such as values and how these are experienced in practice. Coghlan & Brannick (2000) defined action research as an approach that integrated theory and took action in order to address organisational issues in co-operation with those affected. Written as I neared the end of this study, Tracy (2013, p56) described 'participatory action research' as a co-operative or collaborative approach to understanding and improving conditions that affect practice.

Engaging practitioners in a process of co-operative practice-based research was designed to result in experiential learning. Through such an approach they would become empowered leaders of practice committed to the changes they initiated, repositioning leadership within the Early Years setting. Practitioners would create their own theory based on experiences, trying out ideas from relevant research literature, sharing reflections with colleagues in order to gain understanding based on constructed knowledge. Consequently, practitioners would feel ownership of policies created, gaining a sense of autonomy. Such an approach appeared to be supported by Schön's (1983) theory of research as a process of self-education, Whalley *et al*'s (2004) articulation of the theory of andragogy, Dewey's (1910) theory of constructivism and Deci's (1995) theory of self-motivation.

Allocations of precious time and resources to practice-based research had to support the Children's Centre's core purpose of making a positive difference to the community it served. It had to promote the

organisation as a generative and pedagogically isomorphic learning community. The use of publicly funded resources meant that this study's research could not sit as a purely academic study. Co-operative action research was therefore selected as the most appropriate research paradigm.

3.4 Initial Research Question

The initial research question was: How can I motivate and support staff to lead practice developments through practice-based research within the Early Years setting?

3.5 The Research Question Informed by Learning from this Study

As a result of the initial findings and learning from this study, the research question became: How can I create an organisational culture and conditions within which others are self-motivated to lead practice developments through practice-based research within the Early Years setting?

3.6 The Aims of the Study were to:

- explore my leadership approach in developing a co-operative practice-based research culture within a Children's Centre in order to emancipate practitioners from a hierarchical leadership structure and energise practice

- study the continual process of my leadership as action-based research

    understand the complexities of systemic frameworks within the organisation in order to help other designated leaders become more reflective in their approach to leadership

- provide opportunities for emergent leaders to explore, test and apply theoretical concepts relevant to their roles.

3.7 Underlying Questions were, how can a designated Children's Centre Leader:

- help practitioners to become conscious of their inner worlds and develop as self-assured individuals within a co-operative team?
- help a multi-functional Children's Centre to discover and establish its identity, enabling it to learn from the continuous feedback its environment provides?
- support the emotional needs of individuals within the setting as they experience disequilibrium from their learning?
- ensure that practice developments are informed by the findings of co-operative practice-based research?

3.8 Methods Used Throughout the Study

3.8.1 First Person Action Research – Self-inquiry – Maintaining a Learning Journal

The medium of a reflective personal learning journal was selected as a method for engaging in '*first person action inquiry*' (Torbert, 2004). The learning journals formed part of the field notes, '*capturing reflections in the field*' (Tracy, 2013, p121). The journal, was used to document critical incidents, described by Harding (1993) as socially situated knowledge, and then permitted me periodically to revisit these entries in order to reflect and question assumptions, feelings and to explore the part I played in the incident. Torbert (2004) described the attentiveness to one's own thoughts and feelings as '*first person action inquiry*'. Marshall (2008) advocated writing as a process of self-inquiry and I had started writing reflective journals in 2005 when visiting New Zealand. Maintaining a journal also enabled me to capture and consider examples of social action that happened within the uncontrived organisation on a day-to-day basis, offering an element of triangulation with the contrived fieldwork. Tracy (2012) defined this method of data collection as a '*naturalistic inquiry*'. The importance of maintaining a journal was

grounded in Polanyi's (1966) theory that human knowledge involves us knowing more than we can tell. It enabled and required the exploration of internal, tacit knowledge, making it tangible to others and myself through written articulation. *"Self-reflective researchers examine their impact on the scene and note others' reactions to them"* (Tracy, 2012, p842). A sample entry from my first journal (2005) is shown in Table 3:1 below.

Table 3:1 Journal Entry Made on Study Visit to New Zealand (March 2005)

Visit to Cosgrove Constance Kindergarten Auckland 22.3.05	Reflection
This was a superb place to visit. It was alive with fun, excitement and vitality. Children were having the time of their life. They had so much freedom to explore and shape their own learning. Initially I was very concerned about the health and safety risks – children in bare feet, climbing over hard surfaces, hanging upside down etc. After observing for some time I began to feel really sad. What have we done to children in our nurseries? I was very impressed by all the staff and parents that we spoke to in that they all shared a philosophy on how children learn and develop. This was so apparent in the way the teaching and learning went on. At the heart of all this was head/leader who was the centre's personality. Fun loving, lives life to the full and won't be put off or restricted without a fight. She told me about some of the issues with parents when she first came to the nursery, e.g. Boys dressing up in dresses, children going home dirty. She has stuck to what she believes and promoted that practice.	This visit really made me reflect upon my own nursery practice. I began to think about why I had developed other services, what had been the main principles behind that development. How much had I been steered by external circumstances? How had I kept to my beliefs? Although I knew I had fought for many things I had succumbed to most. Why had I let myself be swayed? I have justified developments with a lack of truthfulness to myself. This is very painful to admit.

As stated in Chapter Two, McGregor (1960) urged those in authority to seek out their implicit and explicit assumptions in order to manage people effectively. Tracy (2013) proposed that maintaining personal field notes helps to address misinterpretations made by the ethnocentrism of researchers engaged in observation.

Ethnography, described by Reeves, Kuper and Hodges (2008) as the study of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions occurring within organisations, aims to provide rich, holistic insights into people's views and actions. More recent developments of auto-ethnography as a research method captures researchers' thoughts and perspectives from their social interactions that pertain to their studies. Maintaining field notes in the form of a personal journal was selected to provide an auto-ethnographical account and identify possible issues of researcher bias. Reeves, Kuper & Hodges, (2008) reported that by describing the researcher's ideas and experiences within a research the report, the researcher enables the reader to judge possible influences on the study for themselves.

The stories and critical incidents encountered and recorded by myself as a designated leader were deconstructed and analysed in order to understand how they had been transformed into my experiential knowledge. Deconstruction and analysis usually took place within a community-learning group of fellow Doctoral students. Through documenting my transformational learning journey as a leader-researcher undertaking this study, I became aware of and acknowledged the subjectivity of my research. Discussing feminism with regard to epistemology, Harding (1993) points out that knowledge is socially situated and to ignore this fact would lessen research objectivity.

Maintaining a personal journal enabled *'investigator triangulation'* (Denzin, 1970). I was able to share evidence with Doctoral Study Group colleagues and with members of the organisation in order to generate a range of different perspectives. This method also enabled *'theory triangulation'* (Denzin, 1970) in that different theories were tested out through a process of constructive reflection.

3.8.2 Second Person Action Research – Membership of a Doctoral Study Community Learning Group

Torbert (2004) termed sharing experiences and thoughts with others, inviting their perspectives in order to deepen understanding as 'second person action research'. I undertook this Doctoral study as part of a practitioner-led action research Doctoral student group (The PhD group). There were seven group members, two tutors and five setting leaders, all involved in working with practitioner-led action research learning sets in their work community. At the start of the Doctoral study a third, much valued tutor, Patrick Whitaker was also a member of the group. Sadly, Patrick Whitaker died at the start of 2010, but he remained a posthumous member of the group as his wise, insightful words were often recalled, in particular "*trust the process*".

Meeting at Pen Green Research Base, Northamptonshire, approximately every two months, the Doctoral Study Group paid attention to process, allowing participants to share personal and professional thoughts and feelings, recognising that the individual's experiential development is holistic and has been constructed through the individual's experiences. Integral to the learning community was the discussion, dialogue and peer support as members shared experiences of their Doctoral studies, questioning, challenging and finding connections that enabled us to take our learning conceptually deeper. 'Chatham House Rules' applied

creating a safe environment in which I felt able to be honest and make myself vulnerable and therefore open to transformation. The group developed a community-learning contract (Appendix One) identifying goals and boundaries, which enabled feedback to be received and used in the spirit in which it was given, resulting in experiential, isomorphic learning.

Importantly, Doctoral Study Group members were all attentive, careful listeners. When listening to a group member, feedback cards were written by the other participants and handed to the speaker at the end of their account. I used the feedback from these cards extensively, to inform how I shaped my role as an action researcher in the development of co-operative practice-based research, as the focus for my Doctoral study within the Children's Centre. Table 3:2 shows examples of feedback cards written by Doctoral Study Group members when I was deliberating my role in a purposefully selected inquiry group as the first stage of planned fieldwork.

Table 3:2 Feedback Cards from Doctoral Study Group Members

Card 1 "This is what I want <u>us </u>to be. *Compare this to:* This is what <u>we </u>want us to be".
Card 2 "Where does the knowledge that you want to acquire reside? Story telling amongst staff members holds much knowledge. Staff are co-constructors of ethical agreements, group issues and the topic for inquiry."
Card 3 "A suggestion would be the use of critical incident analysis to develop

reflective practitioners."

Card 4

"Consider motivators for the group.

Be an equal partner in the group.

Make clear, your voice is no stronger than others' in the group.

Establish a learning contract with the group to develop values.

Internal motivator – to improve practice.

External motivator – team member effectiveness – job satisfaction."

The Doctoral Study Group stimulated new ideas and thoughts, helped me to critically reflect on my actions, thoughts and feelings, offered opportunities for uncertainties to be discussed and provided a safe environment in which ideas and thoughts could be explored. Diagram 3.1 illustrates the methods used for leadership inquiry.

Inquiry Based Leadership Diagram

Acting/Taking Action
(Re-constructing behaviour and actions

Theory

Journaling
(Writing an account involves
an interpretation

Formulating new
knowledge and beliefs

3rd Person
Action
Research

Experiential
Learning in the
Leadership Role

1st Person
Action
Research

Reflecting
(Questioning, considering,
exploring)

Discussing with work
colleagues, testing out
ideas

2nd Person Action
Research

Articulating to Others
(Involves selection, framing
an account

Analysing
(Considering others' views/Perspectives)

Theory

Diagram 3.1 Inquiry Based Leadership

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As leader-researcher within the organisation, I recognised the need to consider personal biases through being an 'insider' (Wilmot, 2003). Whilst Wilmot purported that as an insider, decisions might be made to discard information, thinking it too subjective, Harding (1993) argued that contextual social knowledge was extremely helpful to understanding findings. Harding's (1993) argument was based on the belief that nothing happens in isolation, and contrived research cannot account for wider influences. I addressed the possibility of bias affecting my behaviour, actions and interpretation of findings by constantly testing out my ideas, thoughts, actions and findings with the Doctoral Study Group colleagues who were able to offer an external 'outsider' perspective. I also tested out my claims with research participants. The socially situated contextual knowledge, referred to by Harding (1993) as an asset, is acknowledged and referenced to my personal journal field notes in order to enable the reader to be aware of the 'insider' perspective, and auto-ethnographical nature of the account.

Engaging an External Facilitator served to further promote a wider perspective. The Facilitator was able to enquire about participants' thoughts and feelings without imposing my views upon them. This also addressed the issue of power differentials inevitable when the researcher is designated leader of the organisation. Adopting a position of constructivism Dewey (1910) and Reeves (2008), a belief that the reality we perceive is constructed by our social, historical, and individual contexts, means that other field researchers cannot test the findings from this study. The unique nature of the Centre's learning community, the parallel Doctoral Study Group, and their individual members prevents the replication of this study. Indeed Torbert and colleagues (2004) claimed that 'action-inquiry' could not be imitated. It was therefore imperative to

ensure that issues of possible bias and subjectivity were addressed.

3.9 STAGE ONE

3.9.1 Original Research Proposal – Theoretical Construct Sampling

Following discussion with Doctoral Study Group members, the first planned fieldwork of the study was to establish and study a 'Centre Inquiry Group' followed by semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews. The group was encouraged and supported to engage in practice-based research over a two-year period. Guided by my initial theory I expected this method to generate data that would help me better understand the social and emotional phenomena of the organisation. The proposal was to research the journey travelled by this purposefully selected sample group of staff, the 'Centre Inquiry Group', as I worked to engage them in practice-based research.

The group was to provide a systematic way of exploring practitioners' emotions, feelings, cognitive challenges and skills, evoked by the introduction of practice-based research. I saw them in Reason's (1988) terms as *"experiential researchers"*, a group set up for the purpose of inquiry, who would be *"action inquirers"*, reflecting on their experiences in social action and *"participatory researchers"*, sharing dialogue as a group. I intended that the group would provide an insight, as *"cultural experts in their setting"* (Stringer, 1999, p8), into the understanding of how and why things happened within the organisation as the concept of practice-based action research was introduced.

I planned to select sample group participants according to the theoretical notion of 'curious practitioners', i.e. those showing an interest in further study. I expected to learn from participants exploring their inner experiences during the process of engaging with practice-based research, and as a result I would identify their needs and how I could

support them. I planned to write field notes following 'Centre Inquiry Group' meetings, narrating my observations. Field notes were perceived to be important for purposes of reflection, triangulation and addressing bias. I planned to conduct one-to-one semi-structured audio-recorded interviews after one year of working with the sample group as a method of gathering data in relation to the tentative theories I held. Audio-recorded interviews were to be transcribed in a written note form.

3.9.2 Proposed Theoretical Thematic Analysis of Purposeful Sample – Centre Inquiry Group – Semi-Structured Interview Data

I planned to undertake a thematic analysis of the data compiled from semi-structured interviews conducted with group members. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was the method identified for analysing the data generated by the semi-structured interviews with 'Centre Inquiry Group' participants. A thematic analysis of interview transcripts was expected to generate data that would help me to understand the social and emotional needs of participants as they engaged in practice-based research. I planned to use colour coding as an initial means of systematising the transcript data, cutting and pasting the emerging themes into a table format. Individual confidentiality was to be protected, as names would not used. The table would then be shared for discussion with the 'Centre Inquiry Group'.

3.9.3 Methods Used

A Purposefully Selected Sample Group – The Centre 'Inquiry Group'

The 'Centre Inquiry Group' consisted of six, highly credible practitioners, or emergent leaders, from across the Centre teams. They were all undertaking or planning to undertake a course of further study.   The selection criteria for the 'Centre Inquiry Group' membership were based on the theoretical hypothesis that those engaged in further study courses were most likely to engage positively in a process of self-reflective and co-operative learning. Table 3.3 provides a [pseudonymous] list of

members of the Centre Inquiry Group, along with their level of qualification, whether they held a leadership role, used the professional library, their length of employment in the Centre, ages and brief self-descriptions.

Table 3:3 Participant Information - Professional Biography of Centre Inquiry Group Members in 2008

Participant Pseudonym	Qualification Level	Designated Leader Role	Staff Team	Using Professional Library	Length of Employment in the Centre	Age In Years	Self-description
Samantha	5	Yes	Centre & School	Yes	2 years	38	Married with two children. Left school after re-sitting 'A' levels. Huge lack in self-confidence although able to present as being confident. Had low self-esteem when leaving college. Had the option of one college only due to 'A' level results. Feel 'not very clever' and that 'everyone else is much more intelligent and capable'.
Amanda	3	Yes	Outreach		12 years	36	Full time worker and single parent of an 8 year old child. Left school at 16. Low self-confidence in abilities as a learner when leaving school, feeling full potential had been reached.
Kendra	5		Outreach	Yes	2 years	46	Full time worker, running family home and supporting son with his first child. Very family orientated. Likes to support the

							under-dog. Does not like confrontation. A keen learner if it involves something of personal interest. Started factory work at age 15. Trained as a Nursery Nurse after having a family. Left school with a very negative self-perception as a learner but loved reading.
Carol	3	Yes	Day Care		5 years	27	Living at home with parents. Quite strong willed, determined, caring and friendly. Like to be organised and a bit of a perfectionist. Sometimes lack confidence in ability. Left school after GCSEs and went to college to do Diploma in Nursery Nursing. Failed to get maths GCSE and regrets not re-taking. Enjoys written work but can feel nervous and anxious about the thought of further learning.
Bethany	3		School	Yes	2 years	45	Married with two teenage daughters. Left school to take full time secretarial course. Found school difficult, challenged to remember things. Achieved what was

							required but had to work hard. Always valued learning. Returned to education at age 41 to do BTech Level 3. Qualified in 2006. Felt surprised at ability to engage in academic learning. No desire to continue study. Feels nervous in new situations with a need to do everything right. Hated not being able or thinking she couldn't do something.
Harriet	5		School		3 years		Married with one child, pregnant with second child. Further education was interrupted by pregnancy. Following the birth of a child, worked as a Teaching Assistant before returning to study in order to gain a degree with Qualified Teacher Status. Can feel threatened by those who appear knowledgeable.

Participants were invited to take part in the group by a letter and consent form [Appendix Three], followed up by one-to-one discussions. Their selection defined them as a two-year longitudinal case study group within the organisation.

I explained that as a group, they would decide a focus for their inquiry. This would be based on something that they were questioning from their practice. Something they would like to know more about, something that really interested them. The aim would be to learn from the inquiry enabling informed actions to be planned in order to improve practice. Once an inquiry focus had been agreed, the group would be asked to identify an appropriate methodology and how the findings would be reported. I outlined that after each session, individual group members would be asked to make notes in a personal journal from their reflections on how they felt, their thoughts, what excited or frustrated them, during the time they were working together.

An outline of the study was provided to the group. This stated that I was working on trying to develop the Centre in a way that would enable staff to be leaders of practice. I explained that my vision was driven by the recognition that the Centre's staff team had grown very rapidly and in order for leadership to be sustainable it needed to be systemic, or bottom up. My desire was for staff teams:

- to be self-motivating in continually seeking to improve practice through being reflective in their work.
- to be able to identify and formulate a question related to their practice.
- to be equipped with the skills, knowledge and resources to carry out collaborative inquiries into practice to inform changes.

Initially the group met once per week at the end of the day. After the fourth meeting they asked to meet once a month for a full or half day in order to facilitate a deeper level of reflection and analysis. Subsequently the group met approximately once a month over a two-year period and have chosen to continue meeting.

The group's first meeting was held on 5.11.09. I began by tentatively explaining my vision of practitioners within the centre seeking to improve practice by collaborating to identify and investigate questions related to their work. As noted above in ethical considterations, I explained that I was keen for leadership to come from the group, but I was conscious of my role as 'designated leader'. I suggested to them that I could withdraw and use a video camera to provide me with the data for my research. However, they were keen for me to remain, and we agreed that I would be a participant in the group, but the opportunity for them to ask that I withdraw would be reviewed each time we met. The use of video recording was abandoned because of the anxieties expressed by group members, leading me to conclude that it would be inhibiting and therefore might skew the findings.

Following discussions at the initial meeting about the concepts of co-operative inquiry, journaling and reflection, I asked participants to keep a journal that would remain confidential to them. I suggested that the journals might help as an aide-memoire when discussing their thoughts and feelings about engaging in co-operative practice-based research. Prompts for consideration when journaling, based on the work of Fisher, Rooke and Torbert (2003), were given to members of the 'Inquiry Group'. These are shown in Table 3:4.

Table 3:4 Reflective Journal Questions Prompts given to the Centre Inquiry Group

Briefly describe the circumstances surrounding the situation you are thinking about.
What were your goals or intentions in this situation?
What strategies had you been pursuing?
What actions have you taken? What results, if any, have arisen?
How skilful were your actions? Can you identify the critical points when you acted? Would you change your behaviour if you could go back?
In hindsight, do your plans and strategies make sense? Could you change them in a any way to get a better outcome?
Given the outcome, how do your original intentions now look? Were they realistic?

After four sessions discussing the concepts of co-operative practice-based research, journaling and reflection, the group decided they wanted to identify an area of focus for their inquiry. Reason (1988) described the stimulus for co-operative inquiry as usually coming from one or two people who have a passion for an inquiry and are joined by others who show an interest. One participant suggested each member write a post-it note on what aspect of their work they were most anxious to explore. As a result, the group chose to look at children's separation from parents at times of transition as their research focus. *'How can we improve the process of children separating from parents when starting nursery better for children, parents and staff?'* was the research question formulated by the group.

Whilst the Group were trying to decide a first step of action or method in the cyclical process of their practice-based research, they began discussing some of their memories of being separated from their parents. Taking on the role of Facilitator, options for research method were

described. Following the Inquiry Group's decision to employ auto-ethnography as part of its research methodology for exploring attachment and separation, all staff members were invited to write stories from their memories of being separated from their parents as children. Stories collected were made anonymous before being shared.

3.9.4 One-to-one Semi-Structured Interviews with Centre Inquiry Group Members

After twelve months I conducted and audio recorded individual semi-structured interviews with each Inquiry Group member. Questions were given to participants in advance of the interviews and are listed in Table 3.5 below. One and a half hours were allocated to each interview in a comfortable area of the Centre building, which afforded privacy and removed the possibility of interruptions. Transcriptions in written note form were made from the audio recording as soon as possible after the interviews took place. Transcriptions were made at the end of the day. I recognised that transcription has implications for the interpretation of data and consequent findings (Lapadat & Lindsay 1999). Every attempt was made to capture complete and accurate data. This involved stopping and starting the audio-recordings after each sentence and noting the interviewee's responses in the order they were given. No responses were ignored.

The decision to conduct the interviews with individuals rather than as a co-operative group was made following a full Inquiry Group discussion and agreed plan of action. I had taken to the Group my need to understand how individual members perceived their development as a result of the work we had undertaken and how they saw their role in further Centre action research work. Questions were formulated through discussion with Doctoral Study Group colleagues.

Table 3.5 Semi-Structured Interview Questions Asked of Centre Inquiry Group Members: November 2010

1.	How did you feel when I invited you to become a member of the inquiry group?
2.	What were your reasons for agreeing to be a member?
3.	What do you feel about being a member?
4.	What has it meant to you?
5.	What do you think other staff feel about you being a member of the group?
6.	Have there been any tensions arising from you being in the group? Where do you think these came from and why?
7.	When we first began to meet I am aware that you felt uncertain because I did not provide you with a clear outline of what we were going to do and how we were going to do it. What are your thoughts about this now?
8.	Have there been things that you have struggled with? Where did you go for help or support?
9.	Have you ever felt any tensions within the inquiry group? Where do you think these came from and why?
10.	How well do you feel your contributions to the group have been valued?
11.	Looking back at my role in the inquiry group: What would you change and what would you keep?
12.	How conscious are you about the change in your perceptions as a result of the action-based research you have undertaken?
13.	What have these changes made you feel or think about?
14.	To what extent do you think the work of the inquiry group has impacted on children and families?
15.	What do you feel about this?
16.	How did you feel about sharing the inquiry group learning with the other staff?
17.	To what extent did you feel people were willing to talk about practice and consider different viewpoints?
18.	Were there any signs of defensiveness and if so, have you thought about why?
19.	To what extent did you need to feel approval from others and how was this balanced against your drive to implement the beliefs that had become important to you through the research?
20.	What do you think you have learned about action-based research?
21.	Do you feel more able to lead/develop practice within our organisation?
22.	What do you think my role has been in enabling you to feel like this?

23. How are you feeling now?
24. What do you want to happen now?
25. What can I do to support you in achieving this?
26. How would you like to see the inquiry group develop or progress? (If at all)
27. What are your thoughts about how we can develop action-based research into practice across the centre?
28. What role, if any, would you feel able to take in this?
29. What has enabled/supported or hindered you to make you feel this?
30.   I aimed to empower you as a leader of practice, able to effect change through being a participant in this experiential group. To what extent do you think I have succeeded?

3.9.5 Thematic Analysis of Semi-structured Interviews

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was the method used for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within the semi-structured interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) described the method of thematic analysis as a 'constructivist, theoretical approach'. However, to some extent, pre-determined questions meant that when analysing data from the interviews, themes emerging were determined by my theoretical constructs as a researcher. Responses felt to be pertinent to the research purpose were highlighted, and recurrent or similar opinions were listed as emerging themes.

> "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82).

3.9.6 Learning from and Limitations of Stage One

Reviewing the overall approach and methods of analysis as part of the action research cycle in Stage One, I realised that I had employed a constructivist, theoretical approach.   Using a purposefully selected research group, and questions asked in the semi-structured interviews,

were based on my preconceptions. This resulted in limited, relatively shallow data. The use of a written note form of transcription from each of the semi-structured interviews was in itself was an interpretative act (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding for the thematic analysis was based on the theories and questions held. Nevertheless, as the findings in Chapter Four show, we learned a good deal about undertaking practitioner-led action research in an Early Years setting. In addition, despite the limitations, positive developments in work with children and families resulted from the efforts of the Centre Inquiry Group's efforts in Stage One.

3.10 STAGE TWO

Following a review of the original research method, in the true nature of cyclical action research, the methodology evolved. Analysis of the evidence gathered from Stage One was discussed with the Centre Inquiry group and the Doctoral Study Group. The requirement for a more inclusive approach was identified. The second stage employed a 'random sampling' approach (Tracy, 2013). Every member of the organisation had an equal opportunity to participate. The proposal involved commissioning and processing two Focus Group discussion days, facilitated by a carefully selected External Facilitator, to which all staff members were invited by letter (Appendix Three). The Focus Group discussions were held one year apart in July 2011 and May 2012. The aim of the second day was to explore some of the issues highlighted on the first day.

3.10.1 Design and Method of the Focus Groups

The focus group discussions were much more open-ended in their remit and staff were invited to form their own agenda. The purpose was to explore the tacit knowledge, experiences and feelings of working in the organisation. Following lengthy discussions with the Facilitator, it was agreed that the first day of focus group discussions (July 2011) would aim

to provide an opportunity for staff to:

1. Explore experiences of change at the Centre
2. Express views about the development of the Centre as a place to work and as a provider of quality child care services to the community
3. Offer proposals for further developments they would like to see at the Centre.

3.10.2 Methods Used

The first Focus Group discussion day consisted of two Focus Groups held, each of three hours' duration. Discussions took place within small sub-groups and were then fed back to the larger group. The External Facilitator provided a structure for the groups. The Facilitator recorded points arising from the discussions and drafted a report of the outcome from each of the Focus Group discussions. The draft report was sent to participants for comment. The report as amended by comments was then sent to participants for final agreement. Staff were invited to participate on the basis that the final reports would not disclose the identity of, nor attribute comments to, any named individual. The final reports were submitted to myself, the leader-researcher after the participants had agreed the final version.

Areas for discussion were open-ended. The focus groups were introduced as an opportunity for staff to say whatever they wanted. Questions in Table 3:6 show some areas suggested to staff by the Facilitator that they might have wished to think about for discussion during the first Focus Group day:

Table 3.6: Suggested Questions for Consideration by Staff During Focus Group One 21.7.11.

In your view as a member of staff, what has been the most important thing that has happened since you started working here? What makes this the most important thing?
The Centre has seen real change over the years, what has been your experience of that? What is the most significant change that has taken place in your time here? Why this? What has been the most positive change? What has been the most difficult change?
What is your view of the way the school is managed? What do you think of the leadership style here? What is your experience of the Head?
What is the single most important thing you would like to see happen in the centre? This may be about the centre itself, the services provided, the way the centre is run or your role within the centre.
What frustrates you about *The Centre*? What excites you about *The Centre*? What are you most proud of as a member of staff here?
What has been your personal experience of learning and development? What, if anything, do you need from *The Centre* to assist you to achieve your aims for personal development? What, if anything, gets in the way of your personal development?
How do you see your role developing within the Centre? How would you like your role to develop? What do you need to assist you to achieve this?
What is your vision for the Centre in five years time? What will be your part in achieving that vision?
What else would you like to say?

The aim of the second day of Focus Group discussions (4th May 2012) was to continue to explore some of the issues highlighted during the first day, a year earlier. Again, all staff were invited to attend via a letter. I suggested to staff that they might want to re-visit the Report from 21st July 2011 so that the things that had been said were fresh in their mind. I assured them that they had made very important comments and that I was keen to learn more from them and in particular:

1. What helped them to identify changes they wanted to make in their job or team that would give a better outcome or experience

for the children and their families?

2. What needed to happen so that they were able to initiate these changes?

3. What needed to happen to ensure that the process of change was a positive experience for everyone working at the Centre?

Analysis of information from the day was undertaken in the same manner as previously. The same External Facilitator recorded points arising from the discussions and drafted a report of the outcome of the discussions. The draft report was sent directly to home addresses for comment. The report amended by their comments was then sent to participants for final agreement. Once again, staff were invited to participate on the basis that the final report would not disclose the identity or attribute comments to any named individual. Participants were informed that the final report would only be submitted to me after they had agreed the final version. I explained to participants that the findings would be used to inform our further development as a Centre of excellence.

3.10.3 Thematic Analysis of Random Sample Focus Group Discussions

The method of thematic analysis employed to analyse the Focus Group Discussion Reports was that which Braun & Clarke (2006) termed an 'inductive approach'.   The open nature of the discussion groups meant that when analysing data from the discussion groups, themes emerging were not determined by my theoretical constructs as a researcher. I studied the reports several times and shared them for discussion with my PhD Group colleagues. I highlighted responses that I felt were pertinent to the research purpose and began to list recurrent or similar opinions as emerging themes. Published theories and research findings relevant to emerging themes were then studied in an attempt to understand potential explanations for underlying feelings expressed by the participants. The reports were then reviewed and scrutinised for further

evidence, confirmation or contradictions. The depth and richness of the data from these analyses proved to provide the main research findings. Resultant theories were then taken to participants for discussion during staff meetings. Discussions relevant to the research question were captured in my personal journal field notes.

3.11 STAGE THREE

Following the analysis of the two Focus Group Discussion Reports (4.5.11 and 21.7.12) compiled by the External Facilitator in Stage Two of the research, the importance of a fully inclusive inquiry method was identified. Findings from Stage Two also indicated the importance of employing further research methods that valued practitioners' knowledge, skills and abilities. Consideration of the appropriate methodology was discussed with my Professional Supervisor and the Doctoral Study Learning Group.

3.11.1 Design and Method

After carefully considered discussions at a series of Centre practitioner staff meetings, I realised that further attempts to engage staff in practice-based research needed to be non-threatening. A decision was made to offer all Centre staff the opportunity to engage in co-operative practice-based research over a one-year period (2013-2014). For practitioners choosing to participate, two staff training days were allocated as staff leave entitlement with the agreement that the equivalent twelve hours would be given to research activities. The time and place for the research work was to be decided co-operatively by those involved.

The research method consequently selected was 'Observation', described by Lofland & Lofland (1984) as systematic description of behaviour and incidents that occur in the researcher's social setting. I took the decision to be an observer as opposed to a participant. The intention was to stand back from the activities and actions taken by participants, observe and record observations in my (Personal Journal)

field notes. This method was selected to avoid influencing participants and to allow me as a researcher to capture the complexity of the situation. It was planned that after one year, participants would be invited to share their research work with each other in a market place evening. How they shared their findings would be up to them. Feedback on the process and experiences would be invited through anonymous post it notes.

3.11.2 Methods Used

In September 2013 all staff were invited to an evening where food was provided. All full time staff attended. The importance of feelings expressed by staff during Focus Group Discussion days (4.5.11 and 21.7.12) was acknowledged. An explanation of the aim of the research was articulated as a belief that practitioners working together to find out about an area of work that interested or fascinated them would enable them to be better informed and consequently lead changes to their practice. The opportunity was offered as being completely voluntary. It was explained that the work was an experiment to find out whether practitioners felt that engaging in practice-based research was an effective approach to self-evaluation and further improvement. It was stressed that there was no right or wrong approach to this work. At the end of the year they would be invited to give feedback and decide whether they wanted to use training days to engage in practice-based research in the future or return to traditional training opportunities.

Practitioners who opted to engage were asked to pin their written fascinations or areas of interest onto a research board placed in the staff room. A full month was allocated to this task, allowing time for thought and informal discussion. A further evening meeting was held in October 2013. The proposed research titles were placed around the room and practitioners were asked to stand next to the title that interested them. They were then asked to think about how they would work as a group,

and when and where they would meet. The questions shown below were made available to practitioners as guidance for optional consideration.

1. **Project title:** *What is you area of interest?*
2. **Statement of purpose:** *What do you want to find out?*
3. **Actions:** *What will you do?*
4. **Theory:** *What might/did you read?*
5. **Ethical code:** *How will you/did you protect and respect those involved?*
6. **Findings:** *What did you learn?*
7. **Implications for practice:** *What should we do as a result of your learning?*

Forty practitioners, 92.5% of staff employed at this date chose to engage in practice-based research. Thirty-nine worked in co-operative inquiry groups whilst one practitioner worked alone citing family commitments as a barrier to meeting with others. Practitioners were asked to maintain a log of the time they spent working on their project.

3.12 Methods Summary

Table 3.7 provides a summary of the timing, participants and methods involved throughout and at each stage of the study.

Table 3.7: Summary of Research Timing, Participants and Methods

Dates	Participants	Methods
Continual Process of Inquiry		
February 2008 to September 2012	Headteacher/leader-researcher	First Person Action Research – reflection on personal learning journal
November 2009	Headteacher/leader-researcher	Participation in semi-structured interview followed by thematic analysis
February 2008 to 2013	PhD Learning Community Group (5 students, 2 tutors)	Second Person Action Research – co-operative inquiry – discussion
Stage One		
November 2009 to September 2012	Inquiry Group (6 staff)	Purposeful Sample Group Co-operative Inquiry (used auto-ethnography as an inquiry method) – study of process/experiences
December 2010 February 2011	Inquiry Group (6 staff)	Semi-structured interviews, use of personal journals Theoretical thematic analysis
Stage Two		
July 2011 May 2012	Focus Group meetings 29 staff 27 staff	Third Person Action Research Discussion focus groups led by an External Facilitator Followed by inductive thematic analysis
Stage Three		
September 2013 to July 2014	92.5 % of Centre staff (40 staff) voluntarily engaged in 'inquiry groups'	Co-operative practice based research
July 2014	Market place – sharing	Feedback on the process

	inquiry groups' research work – evening. 39 practitioners attended.	of engaging in practice based action research was invited in the form of written post it note comments. Followed by inductive thematic analysis.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were informed by the literary theories of Burgess (1989) and Kent (2000). The following code of ethics was identified:

1. Ensure that individual participants are informed and able to give informed consent.

2. Provide accurate information about the study's research, ensuring that data is open and accountable to the study's participants.

3. Respect the rights of the individual by offering and maintaining confidentiality, trusting and believing participants' answers.

4. Seek out findings that can be used to improve practice.

5. Cause no harm to participants of the research.

3.13.1 Governing Body Permission

The Local Authority informed me that they did not have a research ethics board and that school- or centre-based research would need to be agreed by the organisation's governing body. The governing body of 2007 supported my application to undertake centre-based research, recognised as rigorous self-evaluation for this Doctoral study and gave permission for the research to progress. Prior to submission, governors were consulted on the content and presentation of information, at the Spring Term Governing Body meeting 2014. This was also crucial in developing an understanding of leadership as a culture of learning together.

3.13.2 University of Leicester - Pen Green Research, PhD Upgrade & Ethics Review Report

In October 2011, as part of my formal request for transfer from APG to PhD status, I competed a summary report of my research design, methodology, ethical considerations and measures taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. Appendix Four contains a copy of that report.

3.13.3 Research Participation – A Co-operative Approach

The first ethical issue raised by this study was how to stay true to Heron's (1999) imperative and ensure that the research was undertaken *with participants* and not done to them. This was addressed initially by engaging the Centre Inquiry Group participants co-operatively in the process of developing their research question and methodology. My concerns about my influence as Facilitator of this Group were recognised and shared with the Group. Being mindful and conscious of my own behaviour whilst engaging with the Group was an attempt to ensure the process was democratic and truly co-operative. Becoming aware that I was treating them as subjects of my research was part of a different method, one that I attempted to apply inclusively in Stage Two of the research. Recognition of my role and biases as researcher, including how this influenced participation in Stage One, informed the iterative process in Stage Two.

3.13.4 The Issue of Power

The differential in power with regard to my role as Headteacher asking staff members to become research participants was recognised. This was addressed through written and verbal reassurances regarding choice and absence of negative repercussions. Invitations to join the Centre Inquiry Group were made in the form of a letter (Appendix Two) outlining the purpose and aim of the group. A consent form was attached to the letter. At the start of each Centre Inquiry Group meeting I reminded

participants of their right to withdraw. The letter stated that participants would be able to read the thesis prior to it being submitted and would have the opportunity to ask that comments be amended or removed. It was also agreed that participants would be anonymous and names would be replaced with pseudonyms.

3.13.5 Negotiating Methods of Capturing Data

Originally it was intended to record the Inquiry Group meetings using a video camera. This would have captured the verbal and non-verbal communications between Group members. At this stage it was my intention not to be present when the Group worked together in order to remove hierarchical power differentials. However, the Doctoral Study Group convinced me that I should participate, and I put the proposals to the Centre Inquiry Group for them to make the decision. They said they felt I should be part of the Group but it was agreed that I would withdraw at times to enable them to discuss their reflections and feed back to me collectively. Participants expressed concern about being video recorded and were worried about who might see the recordings during analyses. Following discussion I decided not to use any form of digital recording but to write up detailed notes during and immediately after the Inquiry Group sessions.

Twelve months after establishing the Centre Inquiry Group, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the individual participants. Questions for consideration were given to participants in advance to enable them to feel prepared. The interviews were conducted in spaces that afforded confidentiality and the audio recordings were down loaded onto a computer and were password protected. The digital recorder was immediately cleared. Collated information from the interviews was made anonymous for Inquiry Group discussion. Transcripts made from the audio recordings were not verbatim but kept true to the original nature. This

was verified through the group discussion when exploring the collated information.

The Inquiry Group's development of methods in researching children's transitions involved collecting and analysing stories, volunteered by staff members. Stories were submitted on a voluntary basis and had names removed prior to being shared with the Group. Staff members were invited to submit stories anonymously. Parents were also invited to write journals during their child's transition into nursery as part of the Inquiry Group's research methodology. Again, anonymity was assured through the use of pseudonyms.

In the true nature of a co-operative inquiry, the information gained from this practice-based research was reported by the Group in the form of a policy document that could be used to help students, volunteers, new staff, other agency staff and parents understand the research undertaken on children's transitions [Appendix Five]. Parents were asked to feed back their thoughts, comments and suggestions. In further developments of Centre Inquiry Groups and my work with colleagues, ethical codes of behaviour in the form of Learning Community Contracts were always co-constructed and agreed [Appendix Six].

3.13.6 Duty of Care

In Stage Two of the research, when seeking to capture the full range of views, thoughts and feelings of staff members across the broad spectrum of work roles and experiences within the Centre, I was mindful of my Headteacher's duty of care. I wanted to create an opportunity for the 'difficult' things to be said – things that were sometimes thought but not said, that might be considered controversial. To protect staff members from any fear of reprisals, I engaged an External Facilitator and discussed at length the need for participants' anonymity. I asked the Facilitator to

work with participants at the start of the discussions to agree ground rules. The Facilitator's reports were to be written to keep faith with the way of working agreed by participants and the overarching remit of the day. The mechanisms for ensuring anonymity were as follows:

- The Deputy Headteacher and I were not present during the staff workshops
- In the week following the discussions, the draft report was circulated directly from the Facilitator by hard copy mail direct to each participant for comment
- Participants then forwarded comments directly to the Facilitator
- Feedback was incorporated into an amended draft and this was circulated directly to Participants by hard copy mail for comment
- The Final Report captured all feedback and was then sent to me
- The draft and final reports did not disclose the identity nor attribute comments to any named individual. In order to ensure that the voices of the participants were included wherever possible, the report relied very heavily on verbatim comments.

I decided to re-engage the Facilitator, in order to ensure that staff members felt no negative repercussions in a follow-up exploration of specific aspects of the first report. Again, participation was on a voluntary basis with anonymous feedback gained under the same procedures.

3.13.7 Anonymity - Pseudonyms

References to academic studies, undertaken by members of the organisation in which the study took place have been used. In order to protect the identity of staff members, names have been replaced with pseudonyms. The name of the Children's Centre has also been removed and replaced with 'YYY'. Centre Inquiry Group participant names have also been replaced with pseudonyms.

3.13.8 Personal Biographies

When compiling professional biographies for the Centre Inquiry Group members, I asked them to write a short description of themselves, including how they regarded their engagement with further learning since leaving full time education. This approach was planned to protect against descriptions containing judgements that may have been inaccurate or uncomfortable for members to read.

3.14 Summary

Typical of a cyclical action research approach, the selection and development of methods was an iterative process. This Chapter has described that iteration. It has identified how initial planned research methods employed in Stage One of the study informed methods used in Stage Two. At the outset, it was expected that the purposeful sample 'Centre Inquiry Group' work would surface the tacit knowledge sought. However, the pre-conceived theories upon which the semi-structured interview questions were based limited the depth of data produced. Selecting a purposeful sample 'Centre Inquiry Group' resulted in feelings of inequality amongst other staff. The more inclusive, open Focus Group discussion group work, facilitated and reported by the External Facilitator in Stage Two, proved to be data rich when an inductive thematic analysis was undertaken. Finally, in Stage Three, all staff members were invited to take part in cooperative practice-based research inquiry groups researching areas and/or aspects of their practice that interested them. Stage Three provided a setting-wide source of data – with 92.5% of all staff members, predominantly non-graduates, taking part – and evidence of the effectiveness of introducing practice-based research opportunities as a means of shifting leadership, improving practice and improving services for children and families.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This Chapter sets out the findings from the three stages of research, including the development of my understanding of the Early Years field, the complexities of leading practice and of the process of undertaking action research within the workplace. Evidence for the findings come from the data sources:

- **Stage One,** Centre Inquiry Group members' journal entries offered as feedback at the end of each session, in conjunction with semi-structured interviews conducted with five of the six individual members of the Centre Inquiry Group, a purposefully selected sample group

- **Stage Two,** reports compiled by an External Facilitator, following two Focus Group discussions held one year apart, to which twenty-nine staff members outside the Senior Leadership Team were invited to take part

- **Stage Three,** feedback on the process of 39 practitioners undertaking practice-based research projects

- **Throughout** all research stages, uncontrived evidence of development of my *systemic leadership*, recorded as field notes in my personal learning journal.

4.1 Findings from Stage One: the Centre Inquiry Group

The research question at this stage was: How can I motivate and support staff to lead practice developments through practice-based research within the Early Years setting?

The purposefully selected sample group, the 'Centre Inquiry Group' began meeting on 5.11.09. A timetable and content of their meetings is shown below in Table 4:1. Following the first three meetings the Inquiry

Group determined the timing, format and content of the meetings as shown in Table 4:1.

Table 4:1 Timetable and Content of Centre Inquiry Group Meetings

Date	Area of Focus
5.11.09	Introductory session to clarify the purpose of the group, outline the focus of my PhD study.
19.11.09	Share experiences of involvement in undertaking research, changing practice or an area of work. Use critical incident techniques.
26.11.09	Inquiry group reflections and questions
2.12.09	Sharing fascinations, concerns and ideas in order to identify an area of focus for research / inquiry.
10.12.09	Formulating the research question.
7.1.10	Reviewing progress. Formulating sub-questions. Introduction of relevant articles/theory. Review time and length of meetings. Planning research methods.
4.2.10	Group asked to consider their experiences to date of both process and task. Suggested articles for reading were shared.
11.2.10	Sharing experiences of reading theory on attachment. Sharing learning / knowledge gained from literature.
23.3.10	Analysis of staff stories – their memories of separation. Developing an ethical agreement for engaging others in research.
25.5.10	Analysis of staff journals. Planning for sharing work with colleagues.
28.5.10	Training day – sharing work with other practitioners.
24.6.10	Reflecting on the training day (28.5.10) Planning methods for measuring the impact of revised nursery induction procedures.
4.10.10	Discussing semi-structured interviews, agreeing dates for individual interviews.
11.11.10	Reviewing staff and parent journals. Consideration of children's well-being and involvement.
6.12.11	Sharing and discussing thematic analysis from semi-structured interviews. Sharing individual's plans to instigate co-operative inquiry into practice.
27.6.11	Formulating the future role of the Inquiry Group.

4.1.1 Stage 1: Theme A: Group members' emotional well-being challenged by participation

Early on, Centre Inquiry Group members' journal entries and feedback at the end of each session revealed that even amongst this purposefully selected group these Early Years practitioners' sense of emotional well-being was challenged by their engagement in the process of practice-based research. Four of the six participants from the Centre Inquiry Group reported feeling a sense of anxiety and inadequacy prior to the task (inquiry focus) being identified. All participants said they felt more confident once they had a task, i.e. had identified a research focus. All participants reported that they felt more unified as a group once the task had been identified. Indeed, once the research focus had been identified the group became much more animated and took initiative regarding when they met and the agenda for the meetings. Recognition that practice might not be effective in meeting children's needs brought a sense of urgency to make changes among practitioners. This was recorded in my field notes made during the Group meeting held on 23.3.10:

> *"Discussions took place about feelings of guilt. Carol, Amanda and Bethany expressed 'feeling bad' as they had a better understanding of children's emotional needs when separating from their parents. They said they 'felt bad' because they had not met children's needs as well as they should have done in the past. They discussed individual children whom they remembered struggling to leave their parents and how sometimes this had made them feel frustrated with children"* (Personal Journal, 23.3.10).

One group member commented that when she was first asked to join the Group she "*felt inferior because she felt she was the least qualified*

person.” During the third meeting, one member asked, '*are we where you want us to be?”* suggesting that the group saw themselves as subjects of my research. Another group member, the Deputy, had been designated to voice the concerns of the group. They expressed their anxiety about not knowing what was going to be the focus for their inquiry. It was agreed that at the next meeting the group would work to identify the area they would research. An inquiry focus was identified at the fourth meeting. Finding a common focus was an initial concern for the group members as they all felt their job roles to be quite different and struggled to see how they would be able to identify an inquiry that would be relevant and meaningful to all of them. Group members did not recognise at this stage a sense of shared, common purpose in their work at the Centre. The focus for the group's collaborative inquiry came from one member's suggestion for everyone to write on post-it notes the issues that most concerned them. From the notes the group were able to identify children's separation from parents as a common theme.

Prior to identifying the task, a research focus, I noted in my journal observations that practitioners appeared tense and appeared to be lacking in confidence. I wrote the following questions:

> - "Am I unskilled at working as a group facilitator?
> - Are people unclear because I have been unclear in my communication to them?
> - How can I get them to identify a focus for their work without taking the role of group leader?" (Personal Journal, 26.11.09)

I revisited the journal entry above and still suffered feelings of anxiety about the effectiveness of my role in the Group as a facilitator. Realistically, I recognised that Group members were not familiar with me taking a role where I did not act to suggest or provide answers. I decided to describe my intentions metaphorically to communicate my perception of the facilitator role to group participants. I suggested that we were

going on a journey together. We did not yet know the destination but once the group identified a focus for their research, we would know where we were going. How we got there, where we stopped and collected luggage we wanted would be how we got there. I also suggested that we might change our path because of signposts we met along the way. I explained to the group that I wanted to write about how the travellers experienced the journey but it was up to them to drive the bus. This metaphorical description is captured by Kolb's (1984) four-stage cyclical learning process [Diagram 3.2). As Inquiry Group participants they would plan, carry out actions, review what they learned from those actions and then plan further actions informed by their learning.
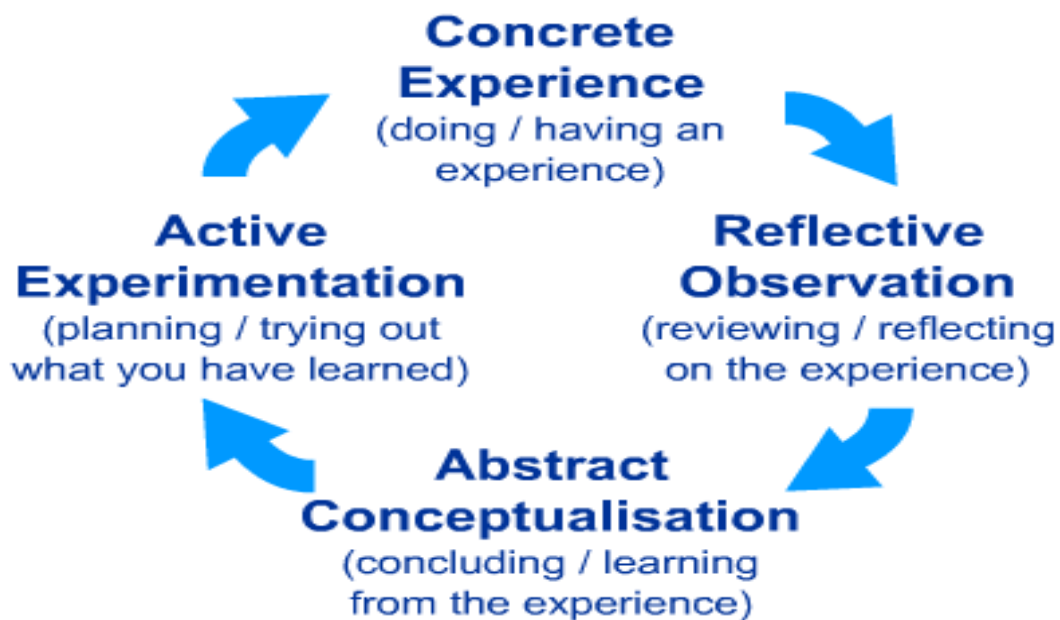
Diagram 4.2 Kolb's Four-Stage Learning Process

At the end of the fourth meeting, group members reported that they felt much better. Identifying a focus appeared to bring the much-needed security to individuals. Group reflection the following week brought comments such as:

"Things clicked at the end of last week."
"Pooling our ideas helped us to see the connections between our work."

> "I feel much better now. I was worrying that I was the only one not getting it" (Personal Journal, 3.12.09).

The Deputy explained how she had felt under pressure from the Group because they had assumed she knew more than she was telling (Personal Journal, 3.12.09). Heron (1999) refers to the anxieties of participants in co-operative research as; 'Acceptance Anxiety' (Will I be liked?), 'Orientation' (Will I understand?) and "Performance' (Will I be competent?). The psychological needs, required by individuals for working effectively within groups, were explored in Chapter Two. They are best summarised by Lew & Bettner's (1996) four Crucial Cs. Individuals need to feel connected, feel that they count, feel capable and feel courageous. These can also be aligned with Senge's (1990) four requirements for Systems Thinking, Team Learning, Building a Shared Vision, Personal Mastery and Mental Models. During semi-structured interviews conducted after one year of the group working together, all participants mentioned their concerns over finding a focus common to all.

At a Group meeting on 23.3.10, one group member expressed feeling overwhelmed by the realisation of the importance attached to ensuring children's separation from parents at times of transitions were improved. She said:

> *"I felt bogged down with the breadth of the research we need to do and I now feel worried that we need to do something quickly. I know things are not right for children at the moment and it is making me feel worried"* (Personal Journal, 23.3.10).

Another group member commented that:

> *"we take too many things for granted. We need to think more carefully about what we are doing"* (Personal Journal, 23.3.10).

As the group discussed their thoughts they voiced their concerns that they needed to do something to ensure changes were made prior to the next group of children starting nursery.

A Group reflection (11.2.10) undertaken when I was not present presented the following two statements:

> *"There is a sense of urgency to get on with the task in order to have an impact on new children starting in September."*
>
> *"The group would like to have a pilot in place for the new academic year"* (Personal Journal, 11.2.10).

Whilst sharing reflections from personal journals during the meeting held on 3.12.09, two group members expressed their experiences of losing confidence following their attempts to read journal papers that I and other group members had provided. Amanda said:

> *"I felt really good last week when you all went with my idea about using post-it notes to help us identify a focus. Now I feel deflated. I just couldn't understand what I was reading and gave up"* (Personal Journal, 3.12.09).

Carol said:

> *"I couldn't read it either. I kept going back to the beginning because I lost concentration. It didn't make sense to me"*(Personal Journal, 3.12.09).

The other group members appeared to respect such a level of honesty from Amanda and Carol and began to discuss how they had understood the reading as an offer of support and explanation. Feedback from group reflection, when I had withdrawn, summarised that:

> *"Some elements of the reading were very difficult to understand"* (Personal Journal, 11.2.10).

4.2.2 Stage 1: Theme B: Awareness of ethical values promoted through the participation in co-operative action research

When asked to consider ethical responsibilities towards participants the group were intending to engage in their research, only two Inquiry Group members expressed an awareness of such a requirement. One member stated that she "*would never have thought about this side of things*" (Personal Journal, 23.3.10). The Group discussed the level of honesty that could be sought. They concluded that they would have to trust people to provide information at a level with which they felt comfortable. The Group held a lengthy discussion, negotiating and questioning what each of them meant when they stated what they thought should be included in an ethical agreement. They defined the following ethical principles when conducting their research.

- All participants should be fully informed about the process
- All participants' voices should be listened to carefully and with respect
- Researchers should act to make sure that all those involved feel their contributions are valuable and worthwhile
- Methodology should be non-threatening to those participating
- Methods used should not be onerous to participants
- A collaborative approach involving participants rather than treating participants as subjects of the research should be used
- Findings should be reported and shared with others in a manner that makes the participants anonymous
- Researchers should strive to ensure participants feel safe
- The researchers should respect emotional sensitivities that may be shared
- Researchers should be non-judgemental in their approach
- All participation should be voluntary.

4.2.3 Stage 1: Theme C: Centre Inquiry Group members' language began to suggest they were distancing themselves as a group from their other work colleagues

During the sixth Centre Inquiry Group meeting two members expressed their desire to engage *'other staff'* in their inquiry. They said they felt it was essential that they now *'got others to understand about children's attachment and separation'*. Pronouns referring to the Centre Inquiry Group consisted of *'us'*, *'we'* and *'our'*. Pronouns used in reference to their team colleagues consisted of *'them'*, *'they'* and *'their'*.

One group member asked:

*'How do **we** get them to change **thei**r practice? How can **we** disseminate **our** learning from this group in a way that will mean something to **them** in the way this work has been so powerful in changing how **we** feel?"*(Personal Journal, 23.3.10)

During the semi-structured interviews later conducted and summarised below, Centre Inquiry Group members expressed frustrations about their colleagues making comments, for example:

"Still feels there is some work to be done with some staff"
(Bethany, 2.12.10).

4.3 Findings from One-to-One Semi-structured Interviews with Centre Inquiry Group Members

As indicated in Chapter Three and in Table 4:1, after twelve months of the Inquiry Group meeting, in November 2010, I conducted and audio recorded individual semi-structured interviews with five Inquiry Group members. One of the six Group members was on maternity leave.

Questions were given to participants in advance of the interviews. I analysed the interviews using thematic colour coding. Themes emerging were summarised, shared and discussed with the Group, and the summary of this feedback appears in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2 Feedback to Centre Inquiry Group Following Individual Interviews

Children's Centre Culture	- People are supportive and helpful to each other. - There is a culture of reflection. - People listen to each other respectfully and give each other time to speak. This is related to the Community learning Contract. - Inquiry into practice/practice based action research is seen as something that is extra work. It is not integral.
Inquiry Group Development	- Group members felt initially very uncertain. - Initially the group looked to the lead for containment and safety. - Knowledge of members' work and relationships were not in place when the group first met but this grew over time. - Group members were supportive of each other. - Some group members held discussions outside the meetings. - The lack of tensions can lead to lack of challenge. - The group grew in strength and confidence. - The presence of the initial leader became less important.
Time and Process	- Time again comes through as being very important. - The time span over which the research took place was felt to be beneficial. - Time is needed for new information to be digested, for thinking and assimilating.

	• Time was needed for group members to develop relationships, trust and levels of honesty.
	• Time to dialogue about reading outside the group meetings was needed but this was limited.
	• Time given to the inquiry was seen as an issue by colleagues.
	• The group worried about having a task and identifying something that would be pertinent to all members.
	• Deciding the focus of the inquiry as a group gave ownership of the task. This gave the group decision-making power. This was seen as better than being told to do something.
Emotional Needs	• Initial uncertainty in not knowing the expectations.
	• Worry about fulfilling expectations.
	• Feelings of being an imposter.
	• Feeling privileged, valued and trusted.
	• Feeling challenged but rewarded.
	• Growing confidence levels.
	• Feeling empowered and motivated.
	• Feeling disappointed in others.
	• Internal emotional turmoil resulting from self-reflection.
	• Feelings of guilt about previous practice.
Development of Practice	• The cross team membership of the group has improved relationships and helped the understanding of each other's work.
	• It was recognised as being important to move practice forward.
	• Personal involvement in the learning process has had a strong impact and is seen as life-long learning.
	• It is now recognised that learning is better if you are part of the process.
	• The inquiry work has led to:
	Recognition of the need to dig below the

	surface.
	Heightened awareness of the need to explore practice.
	Raised more questions
	Given a thirst for knowledge
	Deeper thinking
Research Methodology	• Stories were felt to be very powerful and a good way of involving others, relating to individuals.
	• Good housekeeping regarding support for individual's emotional needs is required.
	• Members are now aware of ethical considerations.
	• Methods need to be developed to meet the needs of those involved.
	• Reading discussion opportunities are important.
	• Journals help to remember and reflect on things otherwise forgotten.
	• Group learning through dialogue and reflecting from different viewpoints is valuable.
Individual Considerations	• Some people need longer to think before speaking/acting.
	• There were some internal struggles from some members regarding the direction of travel.
	• Some members had dilemmas about making their voice heard due to own personal learning awareness.
	• Those in a nominated leadership position are aware of the dilemma this causes when working towards developing leadership in others.
	• There is a recognition that some individuals for various reasons are defensive and not open to change.
Future Implications	• Inquiry into practice/practice based action research is seen as something that is extra work.
	• Supervision has an important role to play.
	• People need to feel excited by the research focus.

	• There is a need to involve more people.
	• There is a need for a leader/initial catalyst at the start.
	• One-to-one initial discussions could help set the scene for the group process.
	• There is a proposal for a hub and spoke/ trunk and branch model.
	• All members of the group expressed a desire to continue to work as a group.

4.3.1 Overall Findings from the Thematic Analysis of Semi-structured Interviews Conducted with Individual Members of the Centre Inquiry Group

As Table 4.2 shows, findings from initial thematic analysis of the audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews were consistent with Group members' journal entries and feedback at the end of each session. This provided triangulation for the findings of this study.

4.3.2 Stage 1: Theme D: The selection of credible practitioners as 'Inquiry Group' members created a sense of social division

One group member, Carol, described the message given to those selected to be in the Centre Inquiry Group as being highly valued:

"You are sort of honoured at being asked to be in 'the group.'"

Another member said she felt I must have thought she had something to contribute if I had asked her.

Inadvertently, the message given to staff not selected was that they did not belong, they did not count, and they felt distanced from the Inquiry Group work. All five Inquiry Group participants made reference to other staff using language that suggested feelings of being marginalised.

"Others obviously say things about the group, e.g. Well I'm glad I'm not

> *in the group. It seems like there is a lot of work to do".*
>
> *"Resistance was at the training day. It was a sort of 'I don't want to know'".*
>
> *"They think it is some sort of secret society, the chosen special ones".*
>
> *"One or two people sometimes seem a bit defensive".*
>
> *"One of the Outreach team members quizzed me."*
>
> *" There was an initial interest from staff but then a lull".*

4.3.3 Stage 1: Theme E: Inquiry Group members recognised that their experiences and feelings could not be used as representative of the wider staff

Establishing a purposefully selected sample group (The centre Inquiry Group) resulted in contrived research conditions. One interviewee remarked on the difficulty of finding out the true feelings of those who were not Centre Inquiry Group members.

> *"You will need to go back and question those people but whether you will get answers that are truthful I don't know. "* (Samantha, 9.12.10)

Following discussion with a senior work colleague about the semi-structured interviews, I recorded her comments in my field-notes.

> *"Almost like laboratory conditions testing because they wanted to do their best for you, didn't they?"*
>
> *"If you had set it up as a group and hadn't said it was anything to do with your PhD it might have been easier because people wouldn't have felt it was part of a special thing"* (Personal Journal, 9.12.10).

Two Inquiry Group interviewees responded that they had been seeking to fulfil a role that they felt I had expected from them. The following comments suggested a feeling of obligation to meet my needs, suspicion of a preconceived, planned agenda, rather than an open agenda.

> *"I was nervous because I didn't know what you wanted me to do and what role you wanted me to play"* (Bethany, 2.12.10).
> *"I had thought you had in mind what you wanted the group to do"* (Carol, 27.11.10).

4.3.4 Stage 1: Theme F: Engagement in co-operative practice-based research was described as having a positive impact on practitioners' sense of self-efficacy

In my field notes (23.3.10) I had commented that the Inquiry group were growing in confidence, talking freely to each other about their work and concerns. They discussed their recognition that policy and practice in regard to children's transitions needed to be better and were determined to improve them. One member of the group, Samantha commented:

> *"we are lucky because our work environment is one of constantly seeking improvement."*

I asked the group what they felt my role was in this environment. They responded with four answers:

1. Giving people opportunities.
2. Supporting people.
3. Being willing to let go of things.
4. Creating a culture of sharing knowledge.

Following the further development of the Centre's policy and practice for children's induction into nursery, Inquiry Group interviewees stated:

> *"You can use evidence to back up what you are saying. It makes you feel more confident."*
> *"People can tell you things but until you have actually experienced it yourself it does not have the same meaning"* (Amanda, 2.12.10).
> *"The Inquiry Group work has supported my own professional development and approach to practice"* (Kendra, 24.11.10).

Bethany described how she felt much more confident having participated in the Centre Inquiry Group. She also said that writing and using a journal for reflection had helped her confidence.

4.3.5 Stage 1: Theme G: Inquiry Group participants recognised that engaging in practice-based research led to improvements in practice

Members of the Group commented on how engaging in experiential work over a period of time was important as it had really meant something to them. The five interviewees made the following statements.

> *"Impact on practice is already showing."*
>
> *"The Inquiry Group work has made a huge impact on the Nursery School."*
>
> *"Staff are able to relate their knowledge to the children in nursery. This shows they are really thinking and it has improved things for children and the parents."*
>
> *"Action-based research is a lot of self-reflection. It leaves you wanting to know more. It helps people understand more but it opens up more questions."*

One interviewee from the Outreach team gave the following description of personal change:

> *"I feel I have changed a lot. I previously thought I had a good understanding, particularly as a parent. I feel I've learned from what we found. I see now that experiences are life long – they stay with you all your life. This has had the biggest impact on me and how I think about my work with children and families. Impact on practice is already showing e.g. Crèches – we are now finding out more about the children and parents, prior to groups starting etc. Better understanding of the children we have in crèches now,*

> *e.g. what comforts them. Talking more deeply to parents who are attending groups and using crèche facilities. I have not had feedback on this change from parents, as they are new but recognise how new approaches are working well with traveller families. Definitely been a worthwhile thing to do"* (Amanda, 2.12.10).

4.3.6 Stage 1: Theme H: Participants recognised the importance of practice-based research coming from participants' area of interest

When discussing the future role of co-operative inquiry in the Centre and the role of the initial Centre Inquiry Group, participants recognised the need for genuine interest in the focus research in order to secure engagement. One group member stated during her interview:

> *"Looking back, working as a group to decide the starting point was the best way to do it. If you had told us it wouldn't have been ours, it would have been someone else's. Because we came up with it ourselves we had ownership and were genuinely interested in it. It felt important and we wanted to do it"* (Bethany, 2.12.10).

Following one year of working together, I withdrew from the Inquiry Group whilst they reflected upon their journey, prompted by questions I asked. They fed back collaboratively in Table 4:3 shown below.

Table 4:3 Notes from Reflections – 4.2.10

Process	Task
Question: **Was there a time/moment that made you feel good?**	**Question:** **What if anything has shifted your thinking? Provoked new thoughts?**
• Exploring attachment theory and our practice will have a big impact on the work we do with children and families. • Deciding on a focus for the inquiry felt reassuring/safe. • Excitement at gaining a deeper understanding of how children feel through exploring our own stories/experiences. • The idea of using stories to gain a deeper understanding was a revelation.	• The focus/subject of the research focus we have chosen is much bigger than we initially thought. • Attachment experiences have a much greater impact on the whole person than we had perhaps imagined. • The group now feels more comfortable and established. • Initial uncertainties have eased. • Now feel excited by the uncertainties feeling happy from the surprises. Willing now to go off in any direction. Not feeling the need to know the set path.
Question: **Was there a time when you felt uncomfortable or uncertain?**	**Question:** **What are your concerns/what is challenging you about the inquiry?**
• Revisiting personal experiences/memories. • Place in the group. The idea of reading brought uncomfortable feelings and questions: How, When? The question of time?	• How are we going to present the findings with the staff and work with them to change practice? • What are the next steps?

4.3.7 Stage 1: Theme I: Working as part of a co-operative inquiry group was described as a good way of developing relationships and a more holistic understanding across organisational teams

An entry in my field notes captured the notion that practice-based research held the potential to bring Early Years practitioners working within a multi-functional Children's Centre together, promoting a sense of professional understanding and respect.

> *"The focus for the group's co-operative inquiry came from all the Individuals writing on post-it notes the issues that most concerned them from which we were able to identify the common theme. Finding a common focus was an initial concern for the group members as they all felt their job roles to be quite different and struggled to see how they would be able to identify an inquiry that would be relevant and meaningful to them all and relate to their area of work"* (Personal Journal, 1.3.11).

Lambert's (1998) conceptualisation of leadership as learning collectively to construct new meanings, and the critical requirement to develop trusted relationships, was clearly evidenced in the following comments made by Inquiry Group interviewees.

> *"Sitting and listening until you can put things right in your own head and having the opportunity to dialogue as support when needed is important."*
>
> *"Mixing teams up has really helped the understanding of work and has made the whole team stronger by strengthening relationships."*
>
> *"Further groups should be cross team. Otherwise may focus more on what benefits own area of work only."*
>
> *"It was obviously important to go across centre when working as*

> *an inquiry group because of different views and comments."*
>
> *"Once you're a group you don't always have a leader do you? – because you are a group?"*
>
> *"An important part of the Inquiry Group work has been the supportiveness across different teams."*
>
> *"Group membership has made me more inquisitive."*

These comments also pointed to Whitaker's (1997, 2009) suggested loose, fluid organic organisational structure, inspired by Systems Theory. Fluid task-focused temporary teams, coming together to focus on a job of work. Whitaker observed that the most common organisational structures were hierarchical, and that in schools there was usually a senior leadership team. He highlighted the fact that this resulted in senior staff having more opportunities to develop collaborative practice than those who do not have leadership responsibilities, and proposed a more organic network of groups drawing inspiration from Systems Theory. Whitaker suggested:

> *"....placing the head at the centre of a constantly changing pattern of small, task focused temporary teams. The pattern changes according to the organisational and developmental needs of the moment. The key feature is adhocracy – teams are created, contingent on the current tasks and demands experienced within the school. A job of work becomes necessary, the task is defined, a team is set up, the job is done, the team disperses* (Whitaker, 2009, p32).

However, all Inquiry Group members expressed a desire to stay together as a working group in the future, feeling secure in the trusted relationships established. The requirement for trusted relationships across the whole staff team, as Lambert (1998) suggests, is evidently critical for Whitaker's fluid group structure to work effectively.

> *"Opportunities to dialogue about what you are learning are important"* (Kendra, 24.11.10).
>
> *"A cross team group helps understanding from different view points"* (Carol, 27.11.10).
>
> *"My role in group – feeling changed over time. Levels of honesty grew with me there"* (Bethany, 2.12.10).
>
> *"Learning as a group is supportive"* (Samantha, 9.12.10).
>
> *"It was valuable to be able to talk to others about reading"*
>
> (Amanda, 2.12.10).

4.3.8 Stage 1: Theme J: Participation in co-operative practice-based research was felt to be a supportive approach to practitioners' further learning

When asked about the possibility of expanding the co-operative inquiry group approach across the Centre one participant stated:

> *"an important part of the Inquiry Group work has been the supportiveness across different teams"* (Carol, 27.11.10).

Another participant said she felt the contributions she has made in the group had been accepted. She felt it was good that everyone took the time to listen to each other and that:

> *"[she] never felt silly asking a question*."
>
> *"Everyone seemed to listen and respect what we said"* (Bethany, 2.12.10).

A different group member commented on the development of the group as a learning community:

> *"Change in levels of contribution – I noticed Harriet has grown in confidence. I thought she seemed uneasy at the start"* (Kendra, 24.11.10).

Another described how she felt that her contributions had been valued. She felt the Group had gelled well together and everyone had respected each other. She liked the fact that people listened to each other and shared their thoughts and feeling. She said she never felt silly asking a question. One group member said she *"felt they had all learned from each other."*

4.3.9 Stage 1: Theme K: Setting an unintended norm for behaviour through the model of the Centre Inquiry Group was reported by participants to cause other staff members to disconnect with them

Inquiry Group members expressed their awareness and frustration with other staff members when they had been working to implement the revised policy and practice changes regarding children's induction into nursery. One Group member said she *"thought there were some staff who were trying to lead things in a different direction"* and blamed this on one person's dominance of the team.

A different Group member expressed her belief that the challenges arising from developing an action research approach to leadership came from people's *"defensiveness and vulnerability"*.

> *"It involves people having to question themselves and talk about practice and they might find something missing. It can be uncomfortable"* (Amanda, 2.12.10).

A designated leader within the Centre and member of the Group stated:

> *"through supervision we have a lot of work to do to get people to understand the difference between personal and professional challenge*

> *in order to be more open to challenge and research"* (Samantha, 9.12.10).

Working co-operatively to seek out new knowledge transcended designated leadership roles, but this in itself appeared to cause new challenges and became a source of conflict. Analysis of the semi-structured interviews with Inquiry Group members provided an indication of the challenges faced in trying to promote an egalitarian organisation for Early Years practitioners. This became more evident when analysing the Focus Group Discussion Reports in Stage Two of the Research.

4.3.10 Stage 1: Theme L: The engagement of Early Years practitioners in co-operative practice-based action research resulted in improved outcomes for children and families

As already noted, the Inquiry Group chose as their research focus to look at children's separation from parents at times of transition. Their research was carried out over a period of one year, commencing in December 2009. Group members were concerned because only forty-eight per cent of children entering nursery that year had shown high levels of well-being as measured on the Leuven scales of emotional engagement, developed by Ferre Laevers (2003). Social Support workers had also identified this as an issue for parents.

'How can we make the process of children separating from parents when starting nursery better for children, parents and staff?' was the research question formulated by the group. The group formulated the following sub-questions:

1. What are the staff's perceptions/beliefs about children's separation from parents and their subsequent needs?
2. What are the parent's perceptions/beliefs about the process of separation when starting nursery provision?

3. What do children feel and experience on separating from their parents?

4. What do previous research and theory tell us? How much do we know?

5. What are our theories regarding socialisation for the child when entering nursery organisation/provision?

Methods of inquiry selected by the Group involved inviting staff and parents to write personal journals at the time of children's induction into the Nursery setting and inviting staff to write personal stories from memories of parental separation.

Twenty-two parents maintained journals and returned these to the practitioners once their child had settled at Nursery. The Inquiry Group used colour coding to extract emergent themes from the journals. Fifty-six per cent of parents wrote about their concerns following their children's lack of willingness to move away from them when they were visiting. Parents worried that their child would not make friends, making comments such as:

"Naeem only played with me or on his own next to me today. I wonder if he will ever play with other children or make friends."
"Will he ever play with other children?"
"I worry about him not playing with other children or making friends."
"I want her to make friends" (Parents' Journals, 2010).

As a result of knowledge acquired through analysing parent and staff journals and reading an article on early childhood transitions by Dalli (1999), the Inquiry Group planned a day to share their learning with other practitioners and engage them in formulating an induction programme. This included an information leaflet for parents, discussion with parents on home visits about parent security and attachment for children and the child's need to feel secure in the new environment prior to them

accessing nursery independently. Activities for parents were planned due to the fact that staff diaries illustrated frustration when parents appeared disengaged during visits. Practitioners agreed that parents should be encouraged to stay with their child for a minimum period of one week and longer should this be needed.

Observations and scoring children on the Leuven scales of well-being and involvement had routinely been undertaken each year since 2006 when children entered Nursery. The Leuven scores of well-being for 100 children who entered Nursery in the following intake showed that 96% of children had high levels of well-being on entry to Nursery. This was an increase of 49% from the previous year.

4.4 Summary of Learning about the Action Research Process from Stage One

During Stage One, answers to my question 'How can I motivate and support staff to lead practice developments through practice-based research within the Early Years setting?' were sought from a purposefully selected group of highly credible practitioners. A conscious decision was made to position myself as a facilitator and participant in the group. Group members' knowledge that they had been gathered together as part of my Doctoral research, resulted in them viewing me as 'researcher' and themselves as subjects of my research.

Semi-structured interviews conducted with Inquiry Group members after one year of research work consisted of questions based on finding out what I could do to help those in the Group. Again, this inadvertently placed participants as research subjects. Reflecting and learning from the semi-structured interviews allowed recognition of the need for a more open, inductive approach when seeking emotional knowledge. The use of pronouns 'I' and 'you' had moved the interview approach away from the participatory co-operative approach I had sought to develop. It was

recognised that there would have been more value in asking the Inquiry Group to formulate the questions or inviting them to hold an open discussion. This would also have been in keeping with the methodology of co-operative action research (Heron, 1999).

Tracy (2013) claimed that good qualitative researchers always engage in purposeful sampling, purposefully chosen to generate data that fits the research project. I now concur with Glaser (1978) who identified this as problematic in research methodology, in that selection of a group believed to have the most potential in providing the information sought is likely to restrict findings. Reflecting and learning from the initial planned fieldwork resulted in recognition of the need for a more open, inductive approach when seeking emotional knowledge.

One participant from the Group stated during the semi-structured interview that colleagues saw the 'Centre Inquiry Group' as: "*some sort of secret society, the chosen special ones*". Goffman (1989) recognised a further flaw later discussed by Harding (1993), which was that researchers wanting to study people who are most marginalised should start with those people rather than move down a socially hierarchical system. Harding (1993) recognised that those who are marginalised in an organisation provide a good starting point in helping researchers identify the questions they need to be asking. She stated that researchers tend to look to those who are policy makers, driving political values, whilst those lower in the hierarchy offer a source of objectivity by raising further questions. I had started with a sample group selected by their engagement in further study rather than a group who appeared resistant to engaging in processes of practice-based inquiry. A more inclusive approach would have helped to identify questions most relevant to the research aims. Those perceived as being least likely to engage in practice based research held the answers to the original research question.

In retrospect, I recognised that as leader-researcher I had positioned myself as an enabler and supporter. I had envisaged that I would formulate a list of practical ways in which a leader could support practitioners in their research. This position was one of researcher, doing research on others rather than involving them as equal participants. The 'hidden problem' was how I had positioned myself as an emancipator rather than as a social equal within the organisation. I was a member of the organisation but had failed to position myself as a, *'complete participant'* (Spradley, 1980).

At the start of this study I was unaware of the unconscious images I held about others or about myself, a position recognised by Polanyi (1966). Such images were therefore not taken into account when formulating the original research question and fieldwork. Engaging with social philosophies and psychological theories of Dreikurs (1972), Giddens (1988), Deci (1995) and John (2000) relating to democracy and equality, helped inform my understanding of the data I had gathered. Subsequently, this understanding resulted in my recognition that the real question was about how I could create *conditions* for emancipated working rather than how I could act as an emancipator. Furthermore, I came to appreciate Taysum's (2010) caution that educational leaders may recognise or misrecognise their power to contribute to organisational values and culture.

Thematic analysis, part of the grounded theory method developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967), of the semi-structured interview transcripts was expected to generate data that would help me to understand the social phenomena of the organisation. At this stage in my research, I was unaware of Braun & Clarke's (2006) work on using thematic analysis. They considered the researcher's active role in identifying patterns or themes. In what they term 'theoretical thematic analysis', the researcher's interests and preconceptions drive the analysis. The researcher's

interpretation of the data means that it has already been theorised. As interviewer I had exerted an element of power and control, a phenomenon recognised by Oakley (1981).

Indeed, establishing a purposefully selected 'Centre Inquiry Group' appeared to destabilise the value framework in which members of the organisation worked. This is discussed further in the analysis of the Focus Group Discussion Reports, later in this Chapter. Journal field notes showed that during the period of working with the Centre Inquiry Group, a growing number of incidents involving a lack of co-operative working between staff had come to my attention. This was discussed with Doctoral colleagues, resulting in the following conclusion.

> *"Today, discussing with the PhD Group, my frustrations about staff behaviours in regard to working collaboratively, I expressed my feeling that this behaviour threatened the viability of my study but worst of all the future of the organisation as a learning community. A group member suggested that it would be a legitimate question to ask those resisting, what were they up to? Another member asked what were the things that I was holding in my mind?"* (Personal Journal, 21.1.12)

This particular journal entry was revisited several times over a period of weeks giving consideration to my own behaviour as a leader-researcher, rather than that of others. I reflected upon the tendency to move into antagonistic situations with a problem-solving mindset, rather than to move out of the situation and make a purposeful consideration of my own behaviour. Rather than '**what**' I was holding in mind, I gave thought to '**how**' I was holding 'resisters' in mind. How I behaved in response to 'resisters' became an inquiry, which I tracked in my field notes. This helped to identify the requirement to learn from those I perceived as 'resisters'.

A decision was made in collaboration with the Inquiry Group to refine the methodology. Inquiry Group members expressed their feelings that

everyone should be involved in the next stage of the research. Recognition of how I positioned myself as an emancipator, looking outwards to seek answers, rather than as a researcher of equal social status, looking inwards was made. A more inductive method used in the subsequent Focus Group discussions was planned.

4.5 Findings from Stage Two: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The research question at this stage was: How can I create an organisational culture and conditions within which others are self-motivated to lead practice developments through practice-based research within the Early Years setting?

"When you say you know something it is not only your brain or some part of it that knows. It is you, as a person. Knowing is more than cognitive activity, although it involves cognitive activity. It is whole-body practice. When we consider a person's claim to knowledge we do not study their brain; we consider what they do" (McNiff with Whitehead, 2002, p106).

In Stage One I had tested out my proposition, a theoretical notion, and found it to be far more complex in reality. Seeking to understand the complexities was where the new knowledge and further learning resided. As I analysed the Facilitator's reports, I recognised that there were occasions when I needed to offer possible explanations for staff members' comments. I did so with the knowledge that my personal 'knowing' as described by McNiff (2002) and 'socially situated knowledge' identified by Harding (1993) was a contributing factor. My field note journals captured incidents providing the 'socially situated' knowledge. The action research conducted could not offer complete or final truths. It offered an account over a period in time. In Stage Two of the research I also became a subject of the experiential research, described by Reason (1988, p164) as focusing on the "*direct experience*

of the person/researcher." The data from this process was considered as part of the analysis of the Focus Group Discussion Reports.

All 42 Early Years practitioners currently working in the setting were invited, and 29 took part, in the first Focus Group Discussion on the 21st of July 2011. Just under a year later, again all 42 Early Years staff members were invited and 27 participated in the 4 May 2012 Focus Group Discussion. The Deputy Headteacher was not invited to participate in order to guard against issues of hierarchical power influence. The Caretaker, Chefs and Lunch Assistants chose not to participate due to other work commitments. Four staff had taken annual leave and 2 were absent through illness.

4.5.1 Stage 2: Theme A: Hierarchical leadership structures promoted a sense of safety for Early Years practitioners, and working to develop systemic leadership threatened Early Years practitioners' feelings of safety within the workplace

When participants first met with the External Facilitator on the 21 July 2011, feelings of safety provided by perceptions of a hierarchical leadership structure were expressed. Vocabulary used to describe feelings of working at the Centre included *'appreciated',' supported', 'positive'* and 'encouraging'. During the consultation about the draft report, the following comments were submitted to the Facilitator:

> *"As a team we don't think that the Leadership could be improved upon"*
> *"(We) feel Liz has exemplary leadership qualities/skills and don't see a need to change style. Liz has overseen many changes and developments of the Centre"* (External Facilitator's Report, 21.7.11).

There was strong, evident support for the leadership team reflected in this example taken from the Focus Group Discussion Report 21.7.11.

> *"I don't want to change the way we're managed and I really value the inclusive leadership we have but if we continue to grow like this, we'll need a different staffing structure and different style of leadership".*

One year later, the second Focus Group Discussion Report (4 May 2012) evidenced an unsettling change in how practitioners felt. This Report followed a two and half year period of promoting self-evaluative inquiry group work across the Centre and the introduction of one-to-one professional supervisions in which senior leaders made conscious attempts to encourage practitioners to seek out their own answers through self-reflection and co-operative work within their staff teams. There was a strong feeling of frustration that the organisation's senior leadership was no longer acting as the provider of solutions, even though the structure of formal staff meetings and line management had not changed. This is evidenced in participants' comments shown below. The first comment relates to the physical position of offices used by designated senior leaders in the upstairs of the building.

> *"Lack of communications between upstairs to downstairs."*
>
> *"Voices not being heard – no opportunity to have your say."*
>
> *"Managers need to listen. They need to accept different views and outcomes"*
>
> *"Management and leaders need to listen so that a (good) decision can be made"* (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

4.5.2 Stage 2: Theme B: Striving to reposition leadership in an Early Years context served to unsettle practitioners' feelings of unity and stability

The External Facilitator reported that during the First Discussion Groups: Listening to You: 21.7.11 participants were "*extremely lively with every individual participating.*"

"A consistent thread was the great pride and enjoyment that staff experienced working at the Centre. In particular, the following was mentioned:

- *the standards attained by the Centre*
- *the sustained focus on the welfare and well-being of the children*
- *the achievements of the children*
- *the trust that parents have in the Centre*
- *the reputation of the Centre within the Community*
- *the outcome of OFSTED inspection*
- *the enjoyment and fulfilment that staff experience working at the Centre*
- *the respect, humour and rapport staff enjoy working with their colleagues*
- *the support staff give and receive from each other*" External Facilitator's report, 21.7.11).

The Facilitator reported that:

"An extremely prominent theme present throughout the day was how much staff valued each other and enjoyed working at the Centre. Several participants specifically commented on their recognition that a significant aspect of the culture of respect and positive regard that thrived in the Centre was led from the top and saw this as a reflection of the senior managers' leadership in

> *demonstrating these values in their own behaviours"* (External
> Facilitator's Report, 21.7.11).

However, during the first Focus Group discussion day, the Facilitator also reported that:

> *"Some participants took the view that the culture did not support*
> *staff speaking out and that there continued to be a reluctance for*
> *staff to put forward views that were regarded as 'difficult' or 'not*
> *what was expected "* (External Facilitator's Report, 21.7.11).

In the second Focus Group Discussion Report, compiled one year later (May 2012) many comments were made that suggested practitioner relationships within the setting were challenging. This suggested that the earlier feelings of coercion within the Centre had begun to be challenged.

> *"Sometimes many voices are important rather than just having one*
> *voice. Sometimes, we just don't get heard even if we speak – we're not*
> *listened to."*
> *"Some lack of listening within teams and then lack of issues being*
> *transmitted to management."*
> *"What's needed? Respect what others need to say. Treat others as you*
> *want to be treated. An equal chance of sharing views and ideas*
> *without being shot down."*
> *"Something getting in way of people being able to be open and*
> *honest."*
> *"Careful about how you speak to staff – sometimes our ideas are not*
> *listened to – knock people's confidence – don't give ideas again."*
> *"Needs to be awareness of each other's well being and how other*
> *people's actions (or lack of) affects everybody including the children."*
> *"People skills - some are naturals with other people some have to work*
> *on it. This is not just management; this is about individuals*

communicating with each other. Also about making the Learning Community Contract work" (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

There were also perceptions held by some practitioners about different people holding and not sharing knowledge. This appeared to cause feelings of inequality.

"There's a sharing of information between (within?) cliques but not with others."

"Some people get to know and others don't. Then people worry about why not told" (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

The External Facilitator's report stated that:

"The experience of team working [was] deteriorating and personal tensions increasing: Concerns about tensions in staff working relationships were variously reflected in comments ...."a separateness", "not joined up-ness between X team and Y team", "have them and us still" (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

Participants' comments included the following:

"Certain teams haven't worked as a team."

"As staff we need to respect each other and recognise efforts and differences in experience"

"It is up to individuals to remain professional and develop respectful relationships" (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

Working relationships and team effectiveness had clearly deteriorated. Using my field notes to situate the knowledge from this report I attributed

the establishment of further Centre Inquiry Groups by members of the original sample group to have contributed to the feelings of social inequality being articulated in the second Focus Group Discussion Report. I also concluded that increased co-operative group work was beginning to promote practitioners' willingness to challenge more dominant voices. This was a theme that was being identified through reviews of the Centre supervision processes. Whilst not naming supervisees, supervisors reported that they had been encouraging practitioners to make their voices heard. When supervisees expressed frustrations about their voice not being heard, Supervisors asked them what they felt they could do about this and suggested phrases they might use to avoid simply accepting more dominant viewpoints.

4.5.3 Stage 2: Theme C: Using Supervision to encourage individuals' readiness to take on higher levels of responsibility and accountability for their own work caused strong negative reactions for some practitioners

Developing a democratic learning organisation requires its members to take responsibility for their selves and for the organisation to which they belong (Dreikurs, 1971). It requires individuals to actively behave in a responsible manner. It appeared that the impact of encouraging practitioners to take responsibility for leading their own practice had for some felt threatening. The External Facilitator's report (4.5.12), referencing practitioners' experiences of professional supervision, stated:

> *"There were very mixed views expressed about staff experience of supervision. A significant number of staff expressed concerns about the way supervision and supervisory sessions [were] perceived to be developing more as a meeting to assess performance rather than as a support mechanism for staff. For those staff experiencing this shift, the sense of let down and frustration evoked were reflected by the following comment 'Not what it says on the tin'".*

The development of Supervision across the Centre had been constantly revisited and reviewed as an action-based inquiry involving all six Supervisors. Documentation tracking the implementation and development of Supervision across the Centre from 2010 showed that when initially introduced, Supervision had focussed on staff members' emotional needs within the work place. As time progressed, a conscious move had been made to encourage practitioners to focus discussions on their effectiveness of working with children and families. The shift in focus, possibly accentuated by the findings from Stage One of this study's research, appeared to have resulted in some staff feeling unhappy about supervision. This is illustrated in the following comments from the second report.

> *"When started, [supervision] was our time to talk about what we wanted to talk about, now more about appraisal – why haven't you done this…"*
>
> *"Supervisors – how they have changed – feeling tested."*
>
> *"Feels like a paper exercise."*
>
> *"Not for 'us', already have an agenda written for us"* (External Facilitator's report, 4.5.12).

There also appeared to be a lack of confidence in the level of trust regarding confidentiality around discussions taking place in supervision sessions. This had been voiced during the first Focus Group Discussion day and was reiterated a year later.

> *"Told discussions are confidential – but don't believe that anymore. I feel I'm being tested when I go into my supervision. Like being back in my interview"* (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

Many participants no longer viewed the supervision sessions as being supportive and focussed on the element of challenge.

> *"Like being tested, like constantly having to prove myself"*
>
> *"Not what meant to be now. Meant to be link with people on shop floor. For some, supervision has become more of a performance review – come out with list of jobs. You go in with an idea of what you want to talk about but they have an idea of what they want to talk about and they use supervision to nudge you towards their idea."*
>
> *"They've turned into performance – a testing"*
>
> *"Dread going to mine now, nervous, mine is next week and panicking already – when come out, its like 'thank God for that, done it'".*
>
> *"Feel that what we're doing isn't good enough."*
>
> *"Feel like being tested – more performance based – didn't know what I should have known"* (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

4.5.4 Stage 2: Theme D: Practitioners held mixed perceptions about learning and development

In the Focus Group Report (21.7.11) the Facilitator wrote that practitioners *"expressed great appreciation of the encouragement and support provided by the Centre"* but also expressed frustrations. The recorded comments appeared to suggest a separation by practitioners between theory and practice:

> *"An important part of learning and development is putting what you've leant into practice rather than just going onto the next thing – I want to be valued for what I'm doing now."*
>
> *"All very well to have academic ideas informing practice but*

> *practice needs to inform ideas as well."*
>
> *"When written down, does not always work in practice"*(External Facilitator's Report, 21.7.11).

The following comments suggested that some practitioners did not see themselves as learners in the traditional academically accredited educational model. There was also a suggestion in these comments that practitioners regarded learning as a pathway to gaining different or progressive job roles, rather than as an approach to improving practice.

> *"Not everyone's academic."*
>
> *"There are loads of opportunities for learning and development – but it's important to go at your own pace."*
>
> *"As much as we see our learning and development as being important, some staff are happy in their current role."*
>
> *"I get a bit cross – care is a big part of what we do – learning and other stuff is on top – the balance is forgotten about"* (External Facilitator's Report, 21.7.11).

4.5.5 Stage 2: Theme E: Tensions existed between concepts of leadership responsibilities and values across the Centre

Using findings from practice-based research to lead developments and leading strategic organisational developments clearly needed to be given further consideration when working to develop systemic leadership. This was highlighted in the May 2012 report when the Facilitator suggested the participants might like to discuss their experiences of 'change' in the Centre. A pertinent participant comment was:

> *"They want us to be leaders in things as long as it's the way they want"* (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

The Facilitator reported that:

> *"There seemed to be a real understanding of the importance of individual staff taking the lead in learning from evidence based practice about what works best and then leading change in developing their own practice. Several participants made this point very clearly. This was reflected in the comment 'Leadership is something that comes from everyone.' Participants discussed a tension between the notion of individual leadership and change being imposed without discussion. As far as some were concerned, there is a perceived gap between what is said about individual responsibility for leading change and what happens on a day to day basis"* (External Facilitator Report, 4.5.12).

This was particularly poignant as the intent of this study was to develop emancipated practitioners who could become reflexive and lead changes in practice. Focus Discussion Group participants appeared to develop a growing sense of freedom to speak about their emotional experiences without restraint:

> *"We're being asked to make our own decisions but when we do sometimes those decisions are over-ruled – they may have reasons for doing this but then this is not discussed and worked through – leaves a difficult taste"* (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

Reflecting upon this statement, I returned to the field notes to identify actions I or other designated leaders had taken that might have served as a provocation. Two possible critical incidents recorded in my Personal Journal were identified. One journal entry recorded (23.7.11) involved a decision by a nursery staff team to organise the children's leaving day as a presentation of their portfolios in a graduation style ceremony. Having been informed of this decision, and asked the day before, to present the

portfolios I had pointed out that children and parents would be crammed into a small space and have to sit for a long period. I had stated that this was not in children's best interests and suggested that the portfolios be presented in family key groups. I had predicted that many children would be unlikely to understand what was happening. Whilst reasons for stopping the graduation ceremony had been shared, I had noted recognition that actions taken were asserting a dominant, authoritative position.

Value judgments inevitably are involved in deciding what is best. Staff members' comments about their frustration and feeling that they could not voice different opinions suggested that the Centre's culture and value base lacked a cohesion that could contribute to the ongoing dynamism of the organisation. It raised the question: *What behaviours and consequential experiences are authorised unconsciously by the organisation?*

The second incident identified from the field notes was directly referred to in the May 2012 report.

> *"What happened with the change in Nursery School, use of rooms and using outside (space) was difficult. Needed to talk about this first. Talking about this would have helped. I did understand why the change was going to happen but we had no chance to adapt or to discuss at staff meetings. We had to sort something out, out of nowhere"* (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

The incident had involved a reorganisation of Nursery learning areas following a half term re-decoration. An invitation was made to the staff team of nine people who worked in the area to organise the learning areas ready for re-opening. Three staff members worked for half a day but left with the rooms unfinished. As a result of the provision not being

ready to re-open after the holiday, the Deputy had completed the refurbishment and made some changes to the organisation. She had recounted feeling worried about making changes when staff were not present but had felt the changes necessary to promote children's safety. The staff voice suggested clear resentment of the designated senior leader's intervention.

4.5.6 Stage 2: Theme F: Some practitioners developed feelings of no longer being valued

Working to reposition leadership of practice from the bottom up:

> *"There is a perceived **absence of appreciation** or minimising of the contribution of staff"* (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

This was reflected in practitioners' comments:

> *'Way things are said and done – feel we're not appreciated.'*
>
> *'We need to be valued and encouraged (when we) do good things.'*
>
> *'Way things are said and done (is not good sometimes) – staff need to be appreciated for what has been done.'*
>
> *'Issue is how things are being handled – getting impression that staff are not doing good enough. This adds to stress and pressure – just keeps going and going.'*
>
> *'Put a lot of effort into doing something but your best is not good enough.'*
>
> *'The way it's done doesn't always help.'*
>
> *'Need to feel valued.'*
>
> *'Feeling of not achieving what needs to be done due to workload and unrealistic targets"* (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

4.5.7 Stage 2: Theme G: The concerns expressed by some staff, about individual opinions not being those widely held, suggested a lack of consideration being given to the viewpoints of individuals within the organisation

A possible organisational culture of coercion and conformity was mentioned earlier in the findings from Stage Two. In her covering letter for the first Report, the Facilitator stated that when the draft Report was sent out to participants as part of the consultation process, a number of comments were generated expressing *"concern about the need to distinguish individual views from those views that some may consider are more widely held"* (External Facilitator's Report, 21.7.12). Repeating the disregard of individual viewpoints, the Facilitator reported in the Second Report that:

"During the consultation on the first draft of the Report, some participants expressed concerns about the Discussion Day process and their perception that some participants had "used" the day in a particular way and what this meant for the content and "emphasis" of the Report:

'I feel that the management do a really good job and are always looking for funding to improve the Centre, and to build on the services we offer. Not everyone sees the bigger picture. I felt that some of the staff used the session to have a moan and did not use the session for what it was supposed to be for.'

'…the negativity on the day meant that the {positive} comments seemed to be in the minority and so less emphasis has been placed on them. I felt shocked on the day by some people's attitudes ….feel this was someone just having a gripe and putting their own interpretation on what happens,'

'Some of the 'conflict' that seems to be going on….needs to be dealt with but the staff …need to take responsibility of this and be

> *mature adults. (They have created the problems they are having)'"* (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

Views that were regarded as '*difficult*' or '*not what was expected'* appeared to include feelings about behaviours within staff teams, not just comments about my own and other senior managers' leadership styles. This was implied by comments in the Report such as:

> *"Some staff members are not pulling their weight/sharing responsibilities."*
>
> *"Get really irritated with staff not tidying their things away", "others undermining what you do"* (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

A further Report comment contributing to the notion of individuals being able to have a voice and not feel coerced by others was: *"I don't like confrontation, who does?"*

4.5.8 Stage 2: Theme: H: Actions intended to promote democratic leadership were sometimes unintentionally hypocritical resulting in members' feelings of disconnection, insignificance or incompetence

The perception of hypocrisy in the promotion of democratic learning leadership led to negative attitudes and behaviours amongst those who felt disconnected, including their displaying defensive behaviour and putting pressure on other group members. To some extent, those of us who held designated leadership roles became the perceived enemy because we were looking to individuals to take responsibility for leading their own practice. Democracy requires a sense of belonging and humanistic codes of behaviour that requires individuals to take responsibility for their own actions (Dreikurs, 1971). The result of being expected to behave in such a way paradoxically appeared to have led to child-like, rebellious behaviour. The angst of practitioners, recorded in

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the Second Focus Group Discussion Report (4.5.12) suggested that as leader-researcher intent on developing systemic leadership I had failed to take account of the individuals' internal emotional readiness to take responsibility for leading their own practice developments. The following practitioner comments reflected the strength of feelings about designated leaders and their perceived disconnection.

> *"Sense that no back up. No support, issues not taken seriously when raised by team meetings. Leads to unrest because nothing happens. Need to give support rather than being fobbed off - then unrest."*
>
> *"Do feel that we are encouraged to voice our feelings and then doubt what gets done. You talk and nothing happens. Then don't feel like talking again."*
>
> *"Do they ever ask you 'how things are going'? Yes, but I'm never ready for the question so never ready with the answer."*
>
> *"Here's us feeling gutted about stuff – do you tell X and Y? Needs to be a channel between shop floor and higher management – some sort of way to get how staff are feeling up the chain."*
>
> *"Used to have X or Y popping into staff meetings – don't do that anymore – really important that they understand our views."*
>
> *"To go up there, must be a big deal" (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).*

A further comment made about designated leaders following distribution of the report for consultation suggested that the angst felt by some was not shared by everyone, strengthening the possibility of negative comments emerging from feelings of rebelliousness.

> *"The comments of 'to go up there, must be a big deal' meaning the oval table office I feel are unfair. I have had to go and speak*

> *to X or Y on occasion and I have never felt uncomfortable, and I feel that I have been listened to and my views or opinions have been respected"* (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

4.5.9 Stage 2: Theme I: The issue of organisational culture is important

Following the Second Focus Group Report (4.5.12), the Facilitator summarised a level of anxiety held by practitioners about how their views were perceived.

> *"A significant number of contributions during the discussion day contained the sentiment captured by the words 'I'm not being negative'. In exploring this, staff made clear their anxiety and their perception that any expression of views or concerns experienced by the other as 'not falling in line' with whatever was being discussed or proposed are, in their mind, written off as 'negative' rather than as a contribution to meaningful discussion and problem solving. This appears to be a strongly held view"* (External Facilitator's Report, 4.5.12).

The culture of the organisation regarding how differences were perceived, handled and worked through clearly needed to be developed. The Facilitator reported that tensions arose from: *"Different styles and approaches that exist[ed] within the staff."*

4.6 Working to Develop a Learning Culture within the Organisation

Following the second Focus Group Report, which clearly showed a deterioration in staff morale, the designated Senior Leadership Team discussed the report and planned meetings with all staff to formulate actions that should be taken to address issues identified through the Focus Group Discussions. Table 4:4 shows what actions were taken leading up to Stage Three of the research.

Table 4:4 Work Undertaken to Date as a Result of this Study

Hierarchical leadership structure	*All staff were engaged in this process.* Terms of reference for the Leadership Team were discussed and agreed. These included: Setting the agenda and how it is arranged Frequency of meetings Staff involvement and voices heard How information will be published/ minutes etc Feeding back of information to all staff Making strategic decisions Voting to make decisions Decision to invite all staff to form task groups that come together for a specific purpose The purpose/role has been discussed, articulated and agreed. Members' responsibilities have been identified. The role of the Chair explored and agreed. A Chair has been democratically elected.
Staff recruitment and induction	When recruiting new staff, expectations are made clear from the start. All posts advertised state in the person specifications that there is a requirement to engage in collaborative based action research. To have a creative and innovative approach, being prepared to develop practice informed by action based research Act upon advice and feedback and be open to coaching and mentoring Willing to take part in practice based research Commitment to undertake in-service development including regular supervision. This concept is explored further in the interview process. When staff inductions take place, the idea of practice based action research is discussed further. New staff are introduced to the electronic professional library. Reference to action based research engagement is also made in staff handbooks.
Continuous professional	Professional portfolios have been developed. They comprise 'The Image of the Child' and required 'Pedagogical Strategies' that

development	were developed and agreed by staff teams and network childminders during planned development days. This sets a clear community purpose that has been negotiated and agreed by all staff. The portfolios also include a copy of the re-negotiated community-learning contract. Teacher Standards, Leadership Standards and Early Educator Standards are also in the portfolios. There are sections for staff to document work they are proud of, their personal learning, and notes on any theory they have engaged with or training.
Learning Community Contracts	The work on reconstituting the community-learning contract was undertaken by all staff, split into three groups. It was done through a process of individuals identifying six core requisites for them, writing each on an individual card and then pairing up with another staff member to negotiate the twelve cards down to six. This process was then repeated until there were eight people in a group with six cards between them. The group feedback was then discussed and meanings further explored until everyone agreed the contract.
Supervision	A co-operative review of Supervision policy and practice was instigated.
Engagement of all staff in practice based co-operative inquiry	Each team leader discussed the proposition of inquiry days as an experiment with their team. They asked that if anyone had a particular area of interest they pin it up on the staff room 'inquiry' display board. In September 2013, a centre market place evening was held in the staff room. Staff were asked to go around the room, read the inquiry titles and position next to the title of their choice. This resulted in small groups of staff forming organic groups to undertake an identified job of work. The groups were cross team collaborations, united by a defined area of interest, tasked with finding out more about this aspect. When the inquiry was completed the groups could disperse. Two professional development days in the academic year 2013 to 2014 were left free with groups free to use the time as and when they choose for the purpose of their inquiry. It was stressed to all staff that this was an experiment that gave them an opportunity to look in more

	depth at an area of their work. It was emphasised that:
	The process of working together and agreeing how and when they worked was up to each group to decide.
	Their experience of working in this way was what was most important and they needed to make a decision as to whether they wished to work in this way in the future.
	If they did wish to work collaboratively on inquiry projects as part of their future professional development it would be helpful to know what worked well, what caused challenges and what they might have done differently.

4.7 STAGE THREE: ALL PRACTITIONERS INVITED TO ENGAGE IN CO-OPERATIVE PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH

Following the analysis and identification of the deeper findings gained from the two Focus Group discussions, I recognised the moral responsibility and requirement upon me as a leader-researcher to ensure that any further inquiry methods were fully inclusive and valued all practitioners' knowledge, skills and abilities. Following the period of turbulence attributed to my aspiration to reposition leadership, it was essential that the next planned methods were supportive of individuals whilst promoting a whole community spirit. The unrest that had developed needed to be addressed. A decision was made to offer all Centre staff the opportunity to engage in co-operative practice-based research over a one-year period (2013 – 2014). It was stressed that this was voluntary and experimental to see if people felt it was a worthwhile approach to self-evaluation and further improvement. It was promoted as an opportunity for people to find out more about something that interested or fascinated them. Participants put their areas of interest up on a notice board in the staff room and then worked to form themselves into small inquiry groups during an evening session when food was provided.

4.8 Practitioners' Year-long Involvement in Co-operative Practice-based Research

Table 4.5 provides a summary of the co-operative practice-based research projects undertaken by practitioners over a year-long period in 2013-14, the number of staff involved in each and key findings and outcomes.

Table 4:5 Practitioners' Co-operative Practice-based Research Projects

Research Focus	Number of practitioners	Key Findings & Outcomes
Looking at reflective practice in our daily lives, work, theory and theorists and how this can enhance our work and self-awareness and continued professional development.	4	Some practitioners engaged in this project reported finding the engagement with theory difficult and have expressed a wish to engage in a more child-focussed project this year. Two practitioners said that understanding the purpose of reflection was helping them think more carefully about their day-to- day practice. One group member said that she has learned to use reflection to help regulate her thoughts and emotions. One practitioner said time was often an obstacle to undertaking reflection.
To research the most successful forms of publicity currently used by the centre as a whole, other nurseries and children's centres.	5	Face book communication with parents for promotion of services and keeping in touch with them is essential. Telephone directory advertising is no longer effective. The Centre web-site has been renewed to appear more professional and meet Ofsted requirements. Geographical and demographic gaps have been identified. 97% of families in the Centre reach area are now registered with the Centre. This has increased by 21%.
Looking at why boys,	1	This practitioner freely reports that she has

particularly from such a young age, enjoy climbing and continue to enjoy it through childhood and sometimes beyond.		developed a much better of understanding about boys' needs to climb. Children climb because they are inquisitive and are striving to get to their goal. Physical opportunities in the working environment have been improved to facilitate climbing. A pause, prompt and praise method to promote developmental stages involved in climbing has been introduced into the nursery practice.
Looking at the advantages of Forest School learning.	3	Land has been leased adjacent to the school. The Forest School group of staff have successfully bid for funding to develop the site. Members of the community have become involved and there is now a volunteer gardening and growing food group established.
Identifying barriers for and benefits of children and their families with additional needs in attending mainstream settings. Researching strategies that will help to engage with local Polish and other EAL families.	7	Information about cultural traditions and parents' anxieties around issues such as cold milk have been shared and disseminated with staff. Practitioners commented that they now discuss concerns with greater sensitivity when inducting children into nursery and communicating with parents. The importance of key worker relationships with parents, trust and open communication was identified. Four practitioners recognised the value of children with additional needs being in mainstream settings because of how they learned from their peers. Practitioners recognised the levels of independence
Looking closely at creative activities	4	How natural resources can be used to promote creativity has been identified.

outdoors and how they can be extended for all children		An ideas book for creativity in the outdoor environment has been developed for staff use. Practitioners said they had found *'exciting and attractive resources.'* Observations of teaching in the outdoor environment show children engaging well with creative activities.
Children who are fitters and not flitters - How do children learn – learning styles	3	Practitioners identified that there were many reasons why children may appear to flit including age, stage of development, number of sessions being attended, adult support, and schematic play. One practitioner said children often flit more when the environment is very busy. Two practitioners said their research had introduced them to knowledge and understanding of schemas and they now wish to learn more about schemas. Learning stories written about children are no longer only undertaken when a child is deeply engaged in an activity. Staff are recognising children's schemas and using these in their learning stories.
Looking at how practitioners can best support the learning and development of two year olds in the prime areas.	6	The provision has been re-organised. Children no longer have a transition from one area to another when they become three and they retain the same key worker.
Learning through stories and using all areas to extend play (initiating a theme and learning stories).	4	Core books have been identified across the nursery and centre provision. These are used to help unite communal areas of learning and to engage parents.
Totals	**37/40 (92.5%)**	**9/10 positive practice outcomes**

Table 4.5 shows, 37 or 92.5% of full time staff members engaged in a practice-based research group, and that there was a wide breadth of interests amongst the practitioners. Nine of the 10 groups of practitioners reported positive practice outcomes. The one exception was the group of practitioners who engaged in the project focussed on exploring theories about 'reflection', which proved to be less motivated than other groups and reported struggling to maintain their interest.

Practitioners did not form groups purely within their day-to-day working staff teams. One practitioner felt unable to work as part of a group due to family commitments. She has discussed her recognition that she missed the opportunity to dialogue with colleagues about her reading and thoughts. This discussion was captured in the field notes (9.9.14).

4.9 Practitioners' Evaluation of their Engagement in Co-operative Practice-based Research

On the 14th of July 2014 all Centre staff were invited to share their research projects with other staff in a market place style. They were invited to share their thoughts and feelings about engaging in co-operative practice-based research. They were told that the outcome of the feedback would be used to inform decisions on allocating time and resources to this self-evaluation and improvement approach for the following year. It was stated that should staff not wish to work in co-operative practice-based research groups in the future, we would go back to more formal training sessions and that this was perfectly alright. Feedback was given in the form of post it notes, allowing anonymity. Participants were asked to consider the following points:

- How had they found the experience of arranging and organising their research groups?
- What had been the challenges and benefits of working as a co-operative group?

- What had they learned about the process of working as a co-operative group?
- What did they feel were the challenges, struggles and benefits?
- How did they feel about their research experience?

Thirty-seven written responses were made.

4.10.1 Stage 3: Theme A: Engaging Early Years practitioners in co-operative practice-based research builds professional attributes required for systemic leadership

Nine practitioners commented on the benefits of working with staff, in particular the opportunities to find out and consider different perspectives.

> *"It gave you an opportunity to look into an area, looking at different perspectives, bouncing off each other" (Practitioner Feedback, 14.7.14).*

Encouraged consideration of colleagues' perspectives

Three practitioners commented positively about the process of working co-operatively.

> *"I enjoyed working in a group, sharing ideas and thoughts."*
>
> *"It was good to work as a group to get different ideas and this moved the research forward in new directions."*
>
> *"When working in a group it was good to bounce ideas off each other – working together as a team" (Practitioner Feedback, 14.7.14).*

Promoted working for a shared purpose

Three practitioners made comments about working together to achieve a shared purpose when moving practice forward.

> *"It gave us the chance to discuss, research and find out as a smaller team. Creates a bonding time – all working towards a common goal."*
>
> *"Listening to and sharing ideas and experiences. Moving forward together."*
>
> *"It gave us the chance to work alongside and with other colleagues from other areas of the Centre"   (Practitioner Feedback, 14.7.14).*

Improved confidence and self-efficacy

Practitioners' comments suggested they felt more informed and knowledgeable about how they would move practice forward, suggesting the process had enhanced their confidence. Referring to the co-operative research process one practitioner commented:

> *"It felt like a daunting task initially, but after a couple of meetings we realised that we needed to change direction. We then became more focused and found the research informative, enjoyable and rewarding" (Practitioner Feedback, 14.7.14).*

Another practitioner recognised how it had resulted in better outcomes for children.

> *"More informed to enhance children's learning further" (Practitioner Feedback, 14.7.14).*

Practitioners commented positively about their own learning experiences.

> *"Lots of thoughts and work. Found it interesting and learned a lot. I think it has been good for us."*
>
> *"It was a very good learning experience. It raised some very*

> *good questions.”*
>
> *“After learning about reflective practice I have found it useful to use in my day to day practice.”*
>
> *“I really enjoyed the experience of doing research. I was worried at the beginning about how it would go, but it went really well and I gained a lot from it” (Practitioner Feedback, 14.7.14).*

Helped to build on and promote individual interests and self-motivation towards work

Practitioners appeared to recognise the importance of allowing the process of action-based research to evolve.

> *“I enjoyed the process. Have to keep an open mind as our direction changed throughout the process. Much more to continue and developing.”*
>
> *“I really enjoyed the process and getting involved with an interest.”*
>
> *“It was a fantastic experience, worthwhile to do. Didn't have enough time to complete it. However, the journey was amazing. Would do it again next year” (Practitioner Feedback, 14.7.14).*

Appreciation for being able to focus on an area of work that was of interest to them was shown.

> *“I enjoyed looking into something that I had an interest in further, in more depth.”*
>
> *“I think it was interesting to complete a piece of research. It made me think about my area of work” (Practitioner Feedback, 14.7.14).*

4.10.2 Stage 3: Theme B: Finding time to take part in co-operative practice-based research was a challenge for the Early Years practitioners

Practitioners were paid for the equivalent of two professional development days' work, which were left to the groups to organise as and when they chose for the purpose of their inquiry. This proved problematic because of practitioners' busy domestic responsibilities. Seventeen practitioners mentioned time as a challenge on the process.

"Difficult to arrange time to meet with those who have family commitments although we did manage to meet."

"It was difficult to meet up as a group because of childcare arrangements but it was well worth it."

"Timing was not very well laid out, difficult to get together in teams due to family commitments and work time."

"Difficult to get all staff together at the same time."

"Sometimes challenging to find time when everyone is free but everyone compromised with each other."

"Challenges of a bigger group being able to meet at the same time."

"Enjoyed the experience – difficult fitting it all in but worthwhile" (Practitioner Feedback, 14.7.14).

Four practitioners suggested using training days as the times for engaging in research.

4.11 Summary

This Chapter has illustrated the challenge and complexities of implementing leadership theories in practice. Drawing from the research evidence it has identified that intent to develop an egalitarian culture in an Early Years setting is fraught with difficulties. This is accentuated by the

self-perceptions, feelings, level of development and needs regarding academic capabilities held by individual Early Years practitioners.

The aim to develop a research culture in order to empower staff to be leaders of their practice was a noble intention but was ultimately flawed. A culture cannot be imposed upon an organisation, it must be created through a systemic approach if it is to be sustainable. This research exemplifies the difference in working to promote a sense of empowerment and agency in Early Years practitioners as opposed to being able to empower them.

Inquiring into my own theory of leadership through studying its implementation in practice elaborated theories on social equality within Early Years leadership. It enabled me to identify the requirement for leadership in practice to be treated as a continual process of inquiry, creating opportunities for generating and acting on feedback.

4.11.1 Summary of Findings:

Perhaps the most powerful overarching finding of this study is that in order to develop empowered Early Years practitioners, designated leaders need to consider how they can actively promote an organisational learning culture regarding leadership as a process of inquiry. Using an iterative approach, each stage of the study provided evidence of precisely how this might be achieved and what might impede such efforts. Table 4.6 provides a summary of the key findings from each stage of the research. These findings have enabled the formulation of four recommendations based upon the four democratic processes and process elements that were found necessary to support the development of Systemic Leadership across the organisation.

Table 4.6: Summary of Research Findings from Stages 1,2 and 3.

Findings		
Stage One: Exploration & exposure of bias	**Stage Two: Digging deeper & revision**	**Stage Three: Finding a way that worked**
• Emotional well-being was challenged by Inquiry Group participation	• Supervision to encourage individuals' responsibility and accountability caused strong negative reactions for some practitioners • Feelings of safety within the workplace were threatened by the introduction of research • Tensions existed between concepts of leadership responsibilities and values across the Centre	• Engaging in Inquiry processes was initially daunting
• Awareness of ethical values was recognised	• The issue of organisational culture is important	
• Engaging in practice based research was regarded as something 'extra'.	• Engaging in practice-based research was regarded as something 'extra'.	• Dedicating time for participation in co-operative practice-based research challenged practitioners • Considering an aspect of work over a longer period of time led to deeper thinking
The selection of credible practitioners as	Selecting a Centre Inquiry Group served to:	A fully inclusive invitation to engage in

'Centre Inquiry Group members': • Created a sense of social division • Set an unintended norm for behaviour • Caused other staff members to disconnect with the Group	• Unsettle feelings of unity and stability • Develop feelings of no longer being valued, disconnection, insignificance or incompetence	research resulted in: • Intrinsic motivation • Relationships • Feelings of self-efficacy
• Identified that group experiences and feelings could not be used as representative of the wider staff	• Identified a lack of consideration being given to individual viewpoints	
• Identified the importance of Inquiry coming from participants' interest	• Identified mixed perceptions held about learning and development	• Helped build Individual interests and self-motivation towards work
Engagement in co-operative practice-based research: • Had a positive impact on practitioners' sense of self-efficacy • Supported approach to practitioners' further learning • Developed relationships • Improved holistic understanding across organisational teams		Engagement in co-operative practice-based research: • Improved confidence and self-efficacy • Promoted working for a shared purpose • Encouraged consideration of colleagues' perspectives

Engaging in practice-based research led to • Improvements in practice • Improved outcomes for children and families		Engaging in practice-based research resulted in: • Better outcomes for children.

Four themes aligned to Senge's (1990) systems thinking, shown in Table 4.7, emerged from consideration of the collective findings.

Team Learning – Relationships were challenged and enhanced. Different viewpoints were surfaced and recognised. Issues regarding dominant voices, coercion and conformity emerged. Emotional turbulence and feelings of self-efficacy were challenged.

Building a Shared Vision – Communicating and agreeing a shared vision had not been established. Designated leader actions set unintentional value frameworks. Tensions regarding leadership responsibility were identified. The identification of a shared purpose across teams was promoted. Understanding of others' perspectives and work improved across teams.

Mental Models – Insight into others' viewpoints and emotional intelligence was gained. Implicit value frameworks were surfaced.

Personal Mastery – Feelings of self-efficacy, adequacy and confidence were both challenged and promoted. Interest, curiosity and motivation to engage in further learning regarding work developed. Deeper thinking over time resulted in improved practice and outcomes for children.

Table 4:7 Findings aligned to four themes of systems thinking

Disciplines Required for Systems Thinking (Senge 1990)	Findings
Team Learning (the ability for all members to learn collaboratively).	**Engaging in practice-based research:** • Was initially daunting • Was regarded as something 'extra'. • Had a positive impact on practitioners' sense of self-efficacy • Supported approach to practitioners' further learning • Developed relationships Emotional well-being was challenged **Selecting a Centre Inquiry Group served to:**

	• Unsettle feelings of unity and stability
	• Develop feelings of no longer being valued, disconnection, insignificance or incompetence
	• Improvements in practice
	• Improved outcomes for children and families
Building Shared Vision – a shared picture of the future that we seek to create, a genuine vision compared to a vision statement,	Organisational culture is important Tensions existed between concepts of leadership responsibilities and values across the Centre Improved holistic understanding across organisational teams Promoted working for a shared purpose Identified that group experiences and feelings could not be used as representative of the wider staff
Mental Models (an ability to look at internalised images and review them from others' perspectives),	Identified a lack of consideration being given to individual viewpoints Encouraged consideration of colleagues' perspectives
Personal Mastery (a commitment to personal learning), a sense of the mission,	Feelings of safety within the workplace were threatened by the introduction of research Supervision to encourage individuals' responsibility and accountability caused strong negative reactions for some practitioners Helped build Individual interests and self-motivation towards work Identified mixed perceptions held about learning and development Identified the importance of Inquiry coming from participants' interest Considering an aspect of work over a longer period of time led to deeper thinking

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

This final chapter discusses the research findings in relation to theories of social equality, democracy, systems thinking and systemic leadership. The research findings illustrate the challenges of supporting the learning and development of Early Years practitioners. It marks the conclusion of what has been learned from the study of leadership as a process of inquiry. Recommendations are then made for further research regarding the development of systemic leadership in organisations comprised of predominantly non-graduate Early Years practitioners.

The intention of this study was to explore leadership behaviours required to encourage mostly non-graduate Early Years practitioners to become leaders of their own practice and to develop their own sense of agency through engaging with co-operative practice-based research. The proposition was that this would lead to improvements in services and outcomes for children and families.

The findings from this six and a half year research investigation suggest a new model for implementing systemic leadership in practice. Four democratic processes required for the development of Systemic Leadership are identified and are aligned with the research aims and theoretical disciplines.

Leaders in other organisations where members regard themselves as 'non-academic' may adopt the four processes identified by this study in order to facilitate the development of a systemic leadership culture. They are not tangible work plans that can be replicated but rather models for carefully considering values, beliefs, emotional intelligence and behaviour within a learning organisation. The requirement to regard leadership as a process of inquiry, exemplified by this research, will

support those who hold such positions to engage in similar journeys of exploration.

5.1 Research Aims

1. Explore the leadership approach in developing a co-operative practice-based research culture within a Children's Centre in order to emancipate practitioners from a hierarchical leadership structure and energise practice.

2. Study the continual process of leadership as action-based research.

3. Understand the complexities of systemic frameworks within the organisation in order to help other designated leaders become more reflective in their approach to leadership.

4. Provide opportunities for emergent leaders to explore, test and apply theoretical concepts relevant to their roles.

5.2 Pedagogical Propositions

The pedagogical propositions that informed the research were that:

1. In order to be effective, those involved in leading the learning need to be active participants in the process of its development.

2. Leaders of learning are required to help surface and cooperatively explore their tacit knowledge through action-based research as part of everyday practice.

3. To lead learning, practitioners need to become action researchers, engage with theory and become involved in developing theory through actively researching their practice. This may also be described as co-operative practice-based research.

5.3 Initial Research Question

How can I motivate and support staff to lead practice developments through practice-based research within the Early Years setting?

5.4 The Research Question Informed by Learning from this Study

How can I create an organisational culture and conditions within which others are self-motivated to lead practice developments through practice-based research within the Early Years setting?

The research question that evolved from the initial findings marked a significant shift forward from the preliminary question. The more in-depth study has resulted in new knowledge and understanding about the complexity and enormity of the vision for systemic leadership in an organisation comprised of staff members who mostly regarded themselves as non-academic. Four democratic processes to support the development of Systemic Leadership have been identified, which are discussed in detail in later sections:

1. Participate in action research to develop a co-operative research culture that surfaces explicit and implicit assumptions.
2. Develop democratic leadership behaviour – self-inquiry, paying attention to issues of power, equality, social justice, value frameworks and opportunities to take responsibility.
3. Develop hierarchical organisational structures that provide containment for emotional turbulence and promote professional relationships.
4. Develop systems that promote individuals' feelings of self-efficacy, self-confidence and courage to take responsibility when opportunities are offered.

5.5 Methodological Implications

Tracy (2010, p840) proposed eight markers for judging the quality of qualitative research. These are:
1. Worthy topic – relevant, timely, significant, interesting.
2. Rigour – sufficient and appropriate theoretical constructs, time, data, sample, context.

3. Sincerity – self-reflexivity, biases, subjectivity.

4. Credibility – thick description, triangulation, multi-vocality, member reflections.

5. Resonance – moves readers through evocative representations.

6. Significant contribution - conceptually, practically, morally, methodologically, heuristically.

7. Ethical – procedural, situational, relational, exiting.

8. Meaningful coherence – achieves its purpose, methods fit stated goals, interconnects with meaningful literature.

Writing a retrospective account of this *Doctoral* thesis, I decided to reflect upon the quality of the research by questioning how it met the markers outlined by Tracy (2010).

5.5.1 Worthy Topic

The topic of leadership in the Early Years sector is particularly relevant at the current time. Nutbrown's (2012) review of the quality of early education and childcare made twelve urgent recommendations. The Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition government, did not adopt her recommendations. They introduced a free Early Years entitlement for disadvantaged two year olds. The newly elected Conservative government has pledged in its 2015 Manifesto to provide thirty hours of free childcare per week. The continuing expansion of childcare, in times of financial austerity is likely to place further challenges on the quality of childcare. Leadership in the Early Years sector needs to be considered.

5.5.2 Rigour

This study has taken place over a time span of six and a half years. Three stages of research were undertaken, each informed by findings from the previous stage. Evidence from all three stages was used to identify the findings and new knowledge. During this time I remained immersed in the socially situated research, engaging with and continually returning to

a wide source of relevant literature. I have provided the reader with an explanation of how the raw data was analysed and transformed.

5.5.3 Sincerity

At all stages of this research I have remained dedicated to the method design and data collection. The research has been about my work in a setting to which I have devoted twenty-three years. The research proposition was formed from a transformational international study trip that caused feelings of personal and professional turbulence. The desire to develop Systemic Leadership for future sustainability was genuine.

5.5.4 Credibility

The three stages of research, including the on-going process of maintaining field notes in the form of a personal journal for first and second person inquiry work have been triangulated. The historical, social and political context of Centre where the field research was conducted has been described. The study incorporates the voices of its thirty-nine participants.

5.5.5 Resonance

Undertaking this study has affected my work as a designated leader. I have discussed my learning with Headteacher colleagues who I support in the role of local authority Associate Adviser. This has been shared at times when colleagues are struggling to understand what is happening in their own organisations. Colleagues have tried some of the processes identified by the research and they have found my suggestions helpful.

5.5.6 Significant Contribution

This research has offered new knowledge in identifying four democratic processes that support the development of Systemic Leadership. Importantly, it has resulted in new knowledge and understanding about the complexity and enormity of the vision for Systemic Leadership in an

organisation comprised of members who mostly regarded themselves as non-academic.

5.5.7 Ethics

Ethical considerations were discussed in Chapter Three of this study. Following Stage One of the research, I identified the unintended consequences of using a selected sample group of practitioners. In the true nature of cyclical action-research, I responded to these early findings. I invited all Centre practitioners to participate in an inquiry into the emotional constructs that had developed as a result of the *Stage One* discriminatory method. Findings from this Stage Two work, the Focus Group Discussions facilitated by an external facilitator were used to inform Stage Three. The study has had a positive impact on practitioners' feelings of self-efficacy and the work with children and families.

5.5.8 Meaningful Coherence

Recounting this study retrospectively has enabled the messiness and complexity researching the development of Systemic Leadership through engaging practitioners in co-operative practice based research to be unraveled and put into a meaningful framework. The story has been recounted in a coherent manner to enable transferability. The study has achieved its purpose in working to reposition leadership in the Early Years setting where it was undertaken.

5.6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Chapter Two, reference was made to Fullan's (2005) contention that there had been a lack of progression in implementing Senge's (1990) philosophy on systems theory into leadership practice. This research provides an original, documented account of work undertaken in an Early Years setting to develop 'Systemic Leadership', a leadership model Whitaker (2009) identified as based on systems theory. The account demonstrates the messiness and complexity encountered by a

designated leader-researcher working to develop an organic systemic leadership model.

Findings from the research show that Systemic Leadership promotes future sustainability and improves outcomes for children and families. Ninety-two percent of practitioners engaged in co-operative practice research with positive practice outcomes in 9 out of 10 cases. Furthermore, changes made as a result of the initial Centre Inquiry Group's research regarding how transitions to Nursery were supported, five years before Stage Three began, continue to be reviewed and strengthened by practitioners.

The tacit aspect of Systemic Leadership surfaced by this research showed that 'Systems Theory' relates to the culture of an organisation, rather than a tangible plan of work.   The research into leadership practice revealed that working to create a culture for systemic leadership required developing processes that supported the theoretical disciplines identified by Senge (1990).   Working to create a systemic leadership culture involved changes in the organisation's values framework, which initially threatened individual liberty (Giddens, 1988) and sense of adequacy. It resulted in some practitioners feeling they were *'not good enough', 'why not picked me?' 'What will this mean for me and my job?'* (External Facilitator's Report, 21.7.11). It required the emotional perceptions and needs of individual members within the organisation to be understood. Stage Two of the research showed that the inquiry needed to use fully inclusive methods to seek out and encourage individuals to articulate mental frameworks that had unconsciously been constructed over time. This contradicts Senge's (1990) philosophy that the organisation must be seen as a whole and that we should stop trying to take it apart.   However, it also was

important to consider the whole at all times, as working to understand the Centre Inquiry Group - one part of the organisation - had unintended consequences for other members of the organisation.

The following four sections offer recommendations based upon the four democratic processes and process elements that were found necessary to support the development of Systemic Leadership across the organisation.

5.7 Recommendation 1 – Participate in action research to develop a co-operative research culture that surfaces explicit and implicit assumptions.

This recommendation is drawn from the process that involves 'Team Learning', identified by (Senge, 1990) as a discipline required for systems thinking. It demands that all members of the organisation, including the designated leader, learn collaboratively, recognising each other as equal participants (Dreikurs, 1971). Participants must have a sense of social interest (Adler, 1938), courage – able to express their needs and handle challenges (Lew & Bettner, 1996) – and be able to belong without having to conform (Dreikurs, 1971). It involves getting to know and understand the organisation rather than making assumptions about each other. Geertz (1973) described this approach as an interpretative process that is in search of meaning from analysis of human action. Nine process elements were found to be essential aspects of developing a genuinely cooperative research culture.

5.7.1 Aim for Responsible Authority

As cited in Chapter Two, Taysum (2010, p43) drew attention to the fact that "*school leaders have the power to recognise or misrecognise their own contribution to an educational community and that of others in the community.*" Taking an attitude of inquiry expands knowledge and promotes a sense of responsible authority as a leader. This leads to

leadership recognised by John (2012) that is authoritative rather than authoritarian. Inquiry into leadership enables learning from experiences, exploring what we know and believe. Insights and understanding the impact of leadership behaviour enables further actions to be more carefully considered, informed by the learning that has taken place.

5.7.2 Have Courage to Engage in the Process of Action Research

Wendy Lee, a New Zealand Early Years professional quoted a Maori proverb: "*He toa traumata rau*". Translated this says: "*Bravery has many resting places*". In other words, it is easier to do things as we have always done them than to go into new and frightening waters (Wendy Lee: Keynote speaker, Pen Green Conference, Corby 12.5.12). A willingness to be open to feedback, which may be personally challenging is required. Torbert (1972) recognised the human tendency to reject feedback that we do not like. Participating in action inquiry requires acceptances that the voices sought are inevitably the emotional constructs of the participants. Dreikurs (1971) recognised that emotions represented an expression of real beliefs. Courage to hear 'real beliefs', which may be about the unintended consequences of your own leadership behavior, is required.

5.7.3 Trust in the process

Undertaking action research requires acting out the verbal guidance offered by a trusted tutor and member of the Doctoral study group, Patrick Whitaker, '*trust the process'*. It also requires, valuing the process, inquiring about the process and learning from the process. Marshall (2007) suggested, through living life as an inquiry, nothing can be fixed, the route cannot be marked, and the destination may be unknown. The iterative process of this research exemplified this.

5.7.4 Gather Data from Leadership Cues

Leaders, who participate in action research, gathering data from

leadership cues, the analysis of human action (Geertz, 1973), will be able to surface and gain some understanding of the organisation's emotional intelligence. Intentionally working to change an organisation's culture causes emotional turbulence. Stage One of this study demonstrated how carefully deliberated leadership actions can have unintended consequences. Members of the Centre Inquiry Group suffered feelings of anxiety when they recognised the need to change Nursery practice. Those who were not Centre Inquiry Group members experienced feelings of being under-valued. Gathering data from all those affected in the form of a personal journal enabled triangulation (Denzin, 1970) and supported the identification of often-tacit emotional consequences and this informed further planning.

5.7.5 Adopt the Position of Participant Researcher

This study showed that in order to surface implicit and explicit assumptions a leader needs to become a systemic player within the organisation, with a willingness to become an equal 'participant researcher' (Reason, 1988). Harding (1993) recognised that a researcher who is a member of an organisation engaged in research will inevitably hold 'socially situated knowledge'. Exploring this knowledge through an analytical approach, triangulating evidence with the evidence from the three stages of the research, changed its value, enabling it to become purposeful.

5.7.6 Capture Socially Situated Knowledge

Maintaining field notes in the form of a dated personal journal, and identifying relevant theoretical framework helps to understand and value participants' emotional constructs as a rich source of data, rather than rejecting them. Triangulating research data with recorded incidents and theory offers an opportunity to undertake considered analysis and identify possible findings. This may be done co-operatively with members of the organisation, resulting in a progression from what

Reason (1988) termed 'experiential research' to 'participatory' cooperative research. Further actions can be co-operatively agreed. Such a cyclical process of action inquiry requires the leader to be open, reflective, responsive and flexible. These qualities are discussed further under the heading 'Recommendation 2'.

5.7.7 Consider Engaging an External Facilitator

Leaders may wish to consider engaging a trusted external facilitator in order to gain more sensitive feedback from members of their organisation. Coghlin (2000) recognised that where the researcher holds a hierarchically designated 'superior' title within an organisation, participants may be reticent in providing accurate information. The engagement of an experienced external facilitator for the Focus Group discussion sessions enabled sensitive information to be brought to the inquiry. This approach respects participants' anonymity and surfaces possible feelings of conformity. When such work has been undertaken it is imperative that the feedback is not rejected but used to inform subsequent actions. The negative side of this approach is that the leader cannot identify and follow up individuals' views.

5.7.8 Employ Fully Inclusive Methods

Coyne (1997) outlined the concept that any sample, intentionally selected is made in order to fulfil a direct purpose. Selection criteria by which choices are made are discriminatory, developed to meet the intended purpose. Glaser (1978) identified this as a pattern of behaviour in research. Selection of a group believed to have the most potential in providing the information sought. Considering Dreikur's (1971) principle that humans can only participate and contribute if they feel that they belong explains the problems caused by a leader's selection of a purposeful sample group within their organisation. This was evidenced by the negative impact on members of the wider organisation when a purposeful sample group – the Centre Inquiry Group - was selected.

Systemic leaders need to promote feelings of social equality so that individuals can feel confident in their social status, free of the fear of not belonging. Giddens' (1988, p42) theory that *'inequalities can threaten social cohesion'* was illustrated by this study. The selection of Centre Inquiry Group members served to destabilise the emotional well-being of other practitioners. As some practitioners' sense of adequacy through the Inquiry group work grew, other practitioners felt that their work wasn't valued and felt they were '*not good enough.*'

Inviting all practitioners to engage in practice-based research as an experimental, non-threatening approach proved much more positive. Lambert (1998) claimed that Systemic Leadership is about learning together, constructing meaning and knowledge collaboratively. She identified the need for organisations to continually link their conversations to the shared purpose of their work through small group discussions. She described this as a process of reflection within a group, encouraging the rethinking of practice. The findings from this study suggest that co-operative inquiry groups enabled staff to learn together, holding such conversations and supporting each other in developing their knowledge. Having taken part in co-operative inquiry work, participants frequently commented on the benefits of hearing other people's viewpoints and ideas. Lambert (2009) referred to the need for purposeful reciprocal learning as a requirement for co-constructing leadership.

5.7.9 Establish Membership in a Community-Learning Group

Leaders intent on engaging in action research into their practice should consider addressing issues of personal bias and perspective. Establishing membership in a trusted learning community group of like-minded people facilitates articulation of thoughts and feelings, defined by Torbert (2004) as '*second person action inquiry*'. Mezirow (2000, p19)

described transformational learning as change brought about by "*reconstructing the dominant narratives*". The method involves trying on another person's point of view in order to examine and interpret or transform how we perceive our own experience. Membership of a community learning group facilitates such work.

5.8 Recommendation 2 – Develop democratic leadership behaviour – self-inquiry, paying attention to issues of power, equality, social justice, value frameworks and opportunities to take responsibility.

Jaworski (1996, p182) described paying attention to leadership as a process of inquiry as '*the deeper territory of leadership*'. Dreikurs (1971, p180) argued that belonging to a community *"involves the obligation to think about the kind of community it should be."* Reflecting on the research undertaken in this study, *I* had determined what '*kind of community*' *I* thought the organisation should be, and set out to develop a learning community. This proved problematic as many members of the organisation did not see themselves as learners and did not initially share the cultural vision. This was reflected by a practitioner's comment, "*not everyone's academic*", "*Managers need to listen*" (External Facilitator's Report, 21.7.11). I was aiming for a leadership style, which the research enabled me to recognise as 'systemic democratic leadership', but had recognised that "*Only a society of equals can build democracy*" (Dreikurs, 1971, preface). The 'hidden problem' was how I had positioned myself as an emancipator rather than as a social equal within the organisation. Consequently, my behaviour and actions in the first stage of this research had unintended consequences. Twelve process elements were found to be essential aspects of developing democratic leadership behaviour.

5.8.1 Regard Leadership as a Process of Inquiry

To be able to claim moral authority as a designated leader it is essential to actively seek feedback from those for whom responsibility is held. This study exemplified how inquiring into the effect of actions and behaviours taken as a leader, unintentional messages transmitted to members of the organisation were surfaced. As a result inquiry served to inform further actions in order to achieve leadership intentions. Schön (1983, p299) saw this as a '*continuing process of self-education.*' Hidden unintentional messages are delivered by the actions of persons who organisational members look to for confirmation. Systemic leadership requires the designated leader to consider the impact of their behaviour on all individuals, making connections in line with Senge's (1990) Systems Theory.

> "*Professional knowledge is created in use as professionals who face ill-defined, unique, and changing problems decide on courses of action*" (Sergiovanni, 2001, p44).

Leaders may choose to use inquiry into their practice in order to bring theory, research and practice together. Sergiovanni (2001, p343) discusses the '*heart, head and hand*' of leadership. Through engaging in processes of inquiry leaders may consciously pay attention to the heart, seeking to surface the emotions that drive them, the head, engaging with theory in order to understand what they uncover, and the hand, the actions they take. Such an approach allows an opening up and at the same time, taking control of thinking. This serves to promote ethical leadership, paying attention to the process involved in reaching a goal, what this means for the inner self as a leader, and what it means for those for whom responsibility is held.

5.8.2 Consider Perceptions about Others

Polanyi (1966) discussed the conscious and unconscious images held by people in relation to others with whom they have a level of

connectedness. Findings from the three stages of this study's research suggest it is only when an organisation's members are functioning in a manner that shows mutual respect, trust and consideration to each other can co-operative action-based research succeed as an agent of social change. It is therefore essential to explore the images held by people in relation to others, including the images held as a designated leader and researcher.

> "We can't see people as they really are because we're too busy reacting to our own internal experiences of what they evoke in us, so we rarely actually relate to reality" (Jaworski, 1996, p8).

5.8.3 Seek out Multiple Views

Seeking out multiple views and perspectives, considering who holds the knowledge being sought proved to be challenging and complex. This involved encouraging members of the organisation to articulate mental frameworks that have unconsciously been constructed over time. Goffman (1989) and Harding (1993) advocated the consideration of voices from those whose job titles placed them at the lowest level of the organisation's hierarchy. The engagement of an external facilitator allowed difficult things to be voiced without repercussion. This enabled perceptions about others to be surfaced.

5.8.4 Be Open and Receptive to Feedback

Torbert (2004) discussed the power that action inquiry holds in enabling anyone within an organisation to experience transformational learning, but stressed that first the person needs to be open to learning from the feedback received from others. He described this as making yourself vulnerable. Torbert (1972) recognised people's paradoxical behaviour of seeking feedback only to defend their selves against it, preventing isomorphic or experiential learning from taking place. The open nature of cyclical research methodology allows research actions to be constantly revised and influences the direction of travel. In this study, methods used

were informed by the findings from the previous cycle of the research. The evidence sought was painful to receive, but in order to learn from the evidence, it was essential to remain receptive. Baldwin (2002) recognised the requirement for courage and determination from all those involved.

5.8.5 Engage in Purposeful Reflection

Learning from feedback requires purposeful reflection on actions taken as a designated leader-researcher. Clough & colleagues (1992) *saw "reflection as a key action research quality indicator, but also recognised that it is not easy to talk about."* Johns (1999, p6) described those able to make a commitment to reflection, as '*Being open…not defensive, but curious and ready to consider new possibilities.*' This describes the ideal state for leaders intent on engaging in action research into their leadership. There is a need for designated leaders to open their eyes to the behaviours around them in order to be aware of consequences as a result of actions and behaviour. Being open to feedback requires being at ease with different thoughts, ideas and perspectives, rather than regarding those termed by Zoller & Fairhurst (2007) 'dissenters' as the problem. Marshall (2000) described this as a leader's systemic internal process of reasoning and action.

5.8.6 Adopt a Willingness to be Flexible

Regarding leadership as a process of inquiry requires a willingness to release the sense of control and destination. Marshall (2007, p371) described "*Researching [as] an emergent process*". Again, the open nature of cyclical research methodology allows the research actions to be constantly revised and influences the direction of travel. Within an action research cycle, exemplified by this study, the analysis of findings constantly raises new questions. Work shifts as the learning occurs. The problem appears to surface raising further questions or theories. In this study, the initial research question shifted. The willingness to be flexible

and take the pathway directed by the research is essential when engaging in processes of inquiry within a real life organisation. Boulton & Allen's (2006) *work on 'complexity theory'* helped to explain some of the phenomena that were at work in this study. Complexity theory recognises that everyday events and interactions occur within the workplace, meaning that nothing is fixed. As a result, the envisaged destination may continually change.

5.8.7 Consider Issues of Power

Leading cultural change needs to involve people as research participants rather than as subjects of research in order to acknowledge and address hierarchical power differentials. Designated leaders hold the power and authority to allocate and control available resources Conger & Kanungo, (1988). The instigator of such work has to give considerable thought to their role within the action research. I worried that possible alienation caused by the adoption of a hierarchical position in this process could undermine the intent. If I adopted a top down approach there was a danger that the participants would become dependent learners, and as a result, a possible sense of helplessness could develop. This was likely to prevent the intention that they would be empowered, able to instigate and embed action-based research as a means of leading practice developments. Marshall (1999) reminded us that research is a political process influenced by power holders who decide what is researched.

Conger & Kanungo (1988), writing about processes of empowerment, stated that the possession of control over resources provides a feeling of power. They continued by claiming that those who have power in an organisation are more likely to achieve their desired outcomes. Having employed discriminatory practice by selecting Inquiry Group members, actions were unconsciously used in a manner that Reason (2002)

described as power to initiate and influence the value of the Group. In this study, time and space for the Centre Inquiry Group meetings were readily allocated when members asked if they could meet for a full or half day, rather than an hour each week after work. Using power to make such decisions transmitted a value-forming message to other members of the organisation. This was that their designated leader valued work perceived as 'academic' to be more valuable than working with the children.

5.8.8 Engage all Staff in Meaningful Discourse to Re-establish the Organisation's Aims and Values

"Action research is explicitly value-orientated" (Marshall, 2007, p371). Sergiovanni (2001) purported that the need to recognise and accept the validity of others' viewpoints is a requirement for social justice. He stated that this leads to a deeply democratic approach to developing the culture of an organisation that is more likely to satisfy the individual's basic needs. The development of an improved holistic understanding of the organisation as a result of this study, contributed to the sense of a shared common purpose, essential for democratic, systemic leadership. Leaders intent on developing democratic, systemic leadership may consider the allocation of professional development periods when all practitioners can be available to work co-operatively. Creating opportunities for the entire staff team to explore their differences in values and needs through processes of co-operative inquiry helped to explore and re-establish the organisation's values.

5.8.9 Consider Language for Learning – what is valued?

Promotion of a 'growth mindset' identified by Dweck (1999, 2012) through paying attention to what is valued and celebrated in the organisation is likely to encourage practitioners to regard themselves as learners. As stated in Chapter Four a question worth asking is: *"What behaviours and consequential experiences are authorised unconsciously*

by the organisation?" Consequently, I would suggest that positive learning dispositions such as perseverance and curiosity should be valued in the organisation above attaining formal institutionalised academic learning qualifications. Findings from this research suggest that practitioners engaged in self-selected co-operative inquiry group processes began to regard themselves as learners.

Following the work undertaken in *Stage Three* of the research, one staff member wrote:

> " *I can feel anxious about the thought of further learning, but having become involved in the research group, I enjoy it and realise how beneficial it has been for me and how much I have learned" (Practitioner Feedback, 14.7.14).*

Another staff member wrote:

> *"I would describe myself as being more confident and willing to engage in further academic work" (Practitioner feedback, 14.7.14).*

Dreikurs (1971) suggested that feelings of inferiority deter social functioning. As previously discussed and illustrated by this study's Centre Inquiry group members' self-descriptions, Early Years practitioners frequently hold self-perceptions of academic inferiority, destructive to the openness required for co-operative inquiry into practice. John (2011, p148) reminded us that *"our sense of smallness, inadequacy and vulnerability can lead to defensiveness … .rather than co-operating with others."* A conscious decision to praise and celebrate practitioners' learning dispositions rather than formal academic achievements, in line with the '*Early Years Foundation Stage'* (2012) Characteristics of Effective Learning, is likely to encourage practitioners to develop feelings of adequacy.

5.8.10 Honour Emotional Constructs as Constructed Truths

Honouring and valuing each individual's emotions as their constructed truth (Dreikurs, 1971) promotes an understanding of feelings and tensions lying below the organisation's surface. It helps to understand the behaviour of individual practitioners, which can prevent co-operative inquiry into practice. Evidence gathered in *Stage Two* of this research, portrayed practitioners' emotional truths, many of which were at odds with what I perceived to be reality. Adlerian psychologists Boldt & Mosak's (1998) viewed each memory acquired by a person to be stored as a story that shapes the person's life. This fits well with Dewey's (1910) theories of experiential learning and constructivism. If people's stories shape the way they receive new information and experiences leaders are required to seek out and accept as true, staffs' emotional constructs.

Referring to the work of Kleinian psychoanalysts, Pitt-Atkins & Thomas-Ellis (1989) John (2012, p108) explained how our sense of belonging and efficacy are "*emotionally felt rather than cognitively known*". As Lewin (1948, p107) states: "*Every action one performs has some specific 'background', and is determined by that background*". Leaders engaging in action-research into leadership may wish to consider 'auto-ethnography' as a research tool. Haug (1983), writing about feminism in Germany, recognised the value of writing stories, sharing them within a group and inviting members to re-write the stories using different perspectives in order to explore the emotional constructs. Similarly, Dewey (2010) stated that reflection needed to happen through interaction with others if it was to have a purpose.

Perceptions held on learning and development by participants in this study was clearly connected to emotional feelings formed by previous experiences. Practitioners often regarded themselves as non-academic.

Fears of inferiority arose when some practitioners were selected for the Centre Inquiry Group by the criteria that they were engaging in further academic studies. The turbulence caused was emotionally felt rather than cognitively known. Findings from the process of action research enabled informed leadership choices to be made that acknowledged the emotional impact of actions taken. This study illustrated how individuals whose sense of adequacy feels threatened can lead to them pulling against those who are seeking to implement changes.

5.8.11 Explore Concepts of Leadership Held by Middle Leaders of the Organisation

The need for leaders to seek out the extent to which values are understood by middle leaders and the wider organisation's members emerged from this study. Working co-operatively to develop knowledge transcends designated leader roles. In a complex organisation necessitating distributed leadership, engaging in a quest to understand leadership involves inquiry into the effects of others' leadership behaviours in the organisation. Designated team leaders who hold responsibility for others need to understand their authority and be able to negotiate the differences and tensions that exist within their teams. Work undertaken by the National College of Leadership for Schools and Children's Services (NCSL, 2011) recommended that the middle leader's role is to clearly articulate values and moral principles, interpret and apply those principles, work to negotiate agreements, invest time in ensuring that aspirations are translated into actual experience, and affirm appropriate behaviour. NCSL further recommended that Middle Leaders play a part in reviewing and renewing the personal and organisational value systems.

All designated leaders involved in developing systemic leadership need to continually inquire about the effect of their behaviour and pay close

attention to the value culture within their organisation. It may be helpful to continually ask themselves and the organisation's members: What is seen as worthy? It is helpful to be aware of the messages that action research or any intention to reposition the leadership is giving to the organisation. This requires finding out what value messages their behaviour and actions are transmitting.

5.8.12 Inquire About the Impact of Individualism on the Whole

Developing systemic leadership of an organisation requires the individual and the whole to be considered at all times. This is in line with Boulton and Allen's (2006) complexity theory. Cummins *et al* (2007) referred to relational developments within a place as '*constellations of connections'* that result in constantly evolving characteristics. Each individual is influenced by conditions in the multiple places they access.

Returning to Senge's (1990) 'Sytems Theory', movement in one part of the organisation's web will vibrate across the whole structure. Contrary to Senge's (1990) belief that we should stop taking the whole apart, Giddens (1988) pointed out that individualism, or self-fulfilment could prevent an organisation reaching its goals. Individualism is defined as, the concern for self-fulfilment or fulfilment of potential.

Adler (1927) regarded social interest as a sense that an individual is connected to others. He identified that some people are self-preoccupied and thus have a lack of social interest, and that this impacts on both the individual and the group. It is important therefore, to consider the theories that explore the complexities of the unique individual. Whilst this may appear ironic, when systems theory requires a consideration of the whole jigsaw, it is important to consider, what shapes each piece of that jigsaw.

Findings from this study suggest that leaders intent on developing systemic leadership should pay careful attention to how groups are functioning. In other words, inquiring into group functioning must become part of the continual process of systemic leadership. Without paying attention to group dynamics, Giddens (1988, p100) recognised that "*Equality and individual liberty can come into conflict.*" Liberation of the individual, from pressures towards conformity proved to be necessary for developing systemic work. Buckingham (2004, p3) suggested that "*The great organisation must not only accommodate the fact that each employee is different, it must capitalise on these differences.*" Designated leaders may wish to consider the extent to which they can manage and affect systemic leadership as individuals bring their own influences.

5.9 Recommendation 3 – Develop hierarchical organisational structures that provide containment for emotional turbulence and promote professional relationships.

Mezirow (2000) recognised that failure to integrate new experiences results in feelings of chaos and anxiety. Looking for safety from such a state, John (2000) recognised the pattern of behaviour is to look for protection from the person seen as the most powerful individual, attributing great significance to designated leadership job titles. Learning from this study, regulation is required to provide a sense of containment, justice, and opportunities for individual initiatives; individual rights, obligations and behaviour towards others. If systemic leadership is regarded as evolutionary and creative development, tensions arising from individual challenges must be contained. I suggest this requires a hierarchical structure, its purpose being to bring individuals together as a systemic whole organisation that is moving towards an agreed shared goal, whilst protecting individual rights and mediating different views.

Such a view of a hierarchical organisational structure is very different from that of a top-down decision-making hierarchical leadership model. It is not an authoritarian hierarchical model. The process behaviours outlined below for developing carefully considered hierarchical leadership seek to emancipate rather than dominate. It aims to promote others to become what John (2000, 2012) termed 'authoritative leaders' in a democratic organisation. Six process elements were found to be essential aspects of developing hierarchical organisational structures that contain emotional turbulence and promote co-operation.

5.9.1 Allocate Resources to Facilitate Building a Genuine Shared Vision for the Future

Leaders may wish to consider using their power over resources to regularly allocate time for practitioners from different teams to work and dialogue together. Lambert (1998) recognised learning together as a form of leadership. Participants in this study constantly cited time as a barrier to learning. Weaving together the thinking, ideas and opinions of individual practitioners in order to form an agreed vision and shared values for the future may establish recognition of an obligation to think about the kind of organisation they want to belong to. Dreikurs (1971, p 214) argued that democratic leadership *"makes its influence felt in the ability to negotiate and to clarify until a common ground for action is reached."* Valuing opportunities for purposeful discourse, acting as adjudicators as proposed by Giddens (1988), may help to ensure individuals are working towards an agreed goal. Planning and facilitating opportunities for inter-team working as a discipline of continuing inquiry enabled exploration of individual mental frameworks. As one participant stated:

> *"It gave us the chance to discuss, research and find out as a smaller team. Create[d] a bonding time – all working towards a*

common goal" (Practitioner Feedback, 14.7.14).

This study demonstrated that such an approach encouraged practitioners to interact with their work colleagues, actively seeking feedback and learning from each other. It enabled leading practice to become as Lambert (1998) defined, a shared endeavour.

5.9.2 Promote Professional Awareness of Others Across the Organisation

Creating opportunities for inter-team working by encouraging opportunities for individuals to become connected through areas of interest enabled practitioners to learn and understand about their different roles within the Children's Centre. This appeared to promote mutual respect, trust and consideration of each other. Leaders could consider inviting practitioners to make links with each other through inquiring into individuals' fascinations and curiosities about their work and facilitating co-operative inquiry opportunities as a means of further improvement.

Working in inter-team groups through the co-operative inquiry work enabled practitioners to identify common grounds for their work and view the work on a more holistic basis. This was evidenced by *Stage One* of the research, when participants initially struggled to see how they would identify an area of interest for their inquiry that would be pertinent to them all, yet during the semi-structured interviews the following comment was made:

> *"Further groups should be cross team. Otherwise may focus more on what benefits own area of work only"* (Bethany, 2.12.11).

Further evidence was gathered, following Stage Three of the research with comments such as:

> *"Listening to and sharing ideas and experiences. Moving forward together."*

> *"It gave us the chance to work alongside and with other colleagues from other areas of the Centre"(Practitioner Feedback, 14.7.14).*

This study showed that engaging in co-operative inquiry could strengthen participation in multi-directional channels for discourse.

5.9.3 Guard Against Coercion and Conformity

Stage Three of this research showed that the development of a safe, non-coercive culture can enable people to face challenges and in turn gain satisfaction and happiness. A culture in which individuals feel unable to express different opinions or challenges in order to belong to a group or team is coercive (Lewin, 1948, John, 2000) and does not support systemic progression of practice through action research. Individual rights and responsibilities, within the recognition of interconnectedness and interdependency, need safeguarding.

In practice, the human qualities of individuals, who are the organisation, have the capacity to work towards a common goal, however, their motivation or commitment to do so is what is likely to stop ideologies being realised (Adler, 1927). Writing from a psychologist's perspective on group dynamics John (2000) highlighted the danger of the individual's need to connect easily leading to coercion. She discussed how a group could become an entity in its own right, taking on a group identity. As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, Banet & Hayden (1977, p155) warned of the "*sometimes sinister irrational processes that affect individuals in group life*". The way the group behaves and the beliefs it actively supports may not always reflect the individual's beliefs or behaviour. However, the individual may choose to support the group behaviour because of his or her need to feel a sense of belonging to this group. As a result, individuals within a group may feel an internal conflict or sense of tension. Taken to another level, when a person's needs to

belong and gain a sense of self-esteem are not met, alienation can occur and disruptive behaviour may be displayed. This was evident in Stage Two of this research. This showed a requirement to consider who was being included and who was being marginalised.

Purposeful action, resulting from continual discourse around work, requires strong relationships (Lambert, 1998). These must not be based on conformity but an understanding and openness to different perspectives. Leaders may therefore wish to consider working with practitioners to establish agreed principles and behaviours by which they will work in the form of a 'Community Learning Contract'. This serves to prevent the monopolisation of stronger voices. Dominant practitioners have potential to discourage emergent leaders.

5.9.4 Develop Systems that Support Self-inquiry

Changes in practice required individuals and groups in the Centre to make fundamental psychological changes.

> "*Changing one's theory is much more than changing one's clothes or buying a new car. It actually means changing the way one looks at oneself and the world*" (McNiff with Whitehead, 2000, p240).

The Centre where this research was conducted needed to develop a reflective culture that supported people through this process and encouraged feelings of self-efficacy. The co-operative inquiry groups facilitated reflection and discourse. This was evidenced in Chapter Four. "*An important part of the Inquiry Group work has been the supportiveness across different teams*" (p114). All practitioners also accessed professional supervision, which is discussed further under Process Four.

5.9.5 Create Opportunities for Taking Responsibility

The Centre Inquiry Group's work on children's transitions resulted in practitioners feeling a sense of urgency to change practice and they consequently took on the responsibility for making sure this happened. Self-determined co-operative inquiry groups working on self-identified areas of interest have been shown to contribute effectively towards taking responsibility for sustainable improvements. Stage Three of this thesis' fieldwork research method, involving the creation of permeable cross team Inquiry Groups set up to research aspects of practice, resulted in practitioner led practice improvements. Such a model facilitated and promoted opportunities for practitioners at all levels of the organisation to participate in decision making. John (2012, p110) referred to this as a social intent of sharing leadership authority in order to develop a '*participative democracy*'.

Positive results from this work suggest that leaders may wish to consider how they can work to prevent reliance on designated roles of authority. For purposes of acting upon required improvements identified by data sources or external bodies such as Ofsted, the job of work could be advertised to all practitioners with an invitation to form a fluid task group as defined by Whitaker (2009):

> "….*placing the head at the centre of a constantly changing pattern of small, task focused temporary teams. The pattern changes according to the organisational and developmental needs of the moment. The key feature is adhocracy – teams are created, contingent on the current tasks and demands experienced within the school. A job of work becomes necessary, the task is defined, a team is set up, the job is done, the team disperses*" (Whitaker, 2009, p32).

Whitaker's proposed model is attractive in many ways and also appears to sit well with the findings from this study.

5.9.6 Pay Attention to Issues of Trust and Monitoring

Taysum (2008) claimed that for an individual to have a real opportunity, they must be able to recognise it for what it is. Equal rights in making choices for an organisation does not mean that everyone gets what they want. When discussing leadership being developed at all levels of an organisation, Goleman, (2004) proposed that the devolution of authority is likely to require an increased need for accountability, as it necessitates a greater responsibility on organisational members to be open to monitoring and receive feedback. There must be a level of monitoring to ensure that an individual, unable to recognise the opportunity offered to them, does not work to sabotage the work of others.

The ultimate responsibility to meet externally regulated standards still sits with the appointed or designated Centre Manager or Headteacher. A robust process for monitoring and evaluating work carried out by those taking on responsibilities is therefore required. Essentially, leadership when looked at in this context remains hierarchical in a structure of organisationally sanctioned roles. McGregor (1960) referred to the inconsistency in approach of delegation and trust, which often is undermined by policing staff behaviour. Consideration should therefore be given to how such 'policing' is undertaken.

5.10 Recommendation 4 – Develop systems that promote individuals' feelings of self-efficacy, self-confidence and courage

Findings from Stage One of this study suggest that there must be a recognition and promotion of the view that excellence in practice is valued for its contribution in the here and now. That practice at any point in time is simply a stage in a dynamic evolutionary change process.

Previous practice must not be regarded as poor when learning for development takes place. The worries felt by practitioners as they learn was evident in the Centre Inquiry group member's voice recorded as part of the fieldnotes. *"I know things are not right for children at the moment and it is making me feel worried"* (Personal Journal, 23.3.10).

The courage to be imperfect, the development of a 'growth mindset' supported by the works of Adler (1927), Deci & Ryan (1985) and Dweck (1999) are requirements for practitioners' willingness to engage in co-operative practice based research. Designated leaders need to consider how they can nurture and support individuals' emotional learning dispositions. As Anning & Edwards (2003) found, adults' conditions for learning sit alongside those of children. Five process elements were found to be essential aspects of developing systems that promote individuals' feelings of self-efficacy, self-confidence and courage.

5.10.1 Ensure Levels of Challenge are Appropriate to Individuals

Giddens (1988) proposed that an inclusive society must provide for the needs of those who find themselves less able. This study illustrated how transformational learning can cause feelings of turbulence. Practitioners do not automatically regard themselves as having equal opportunities to take part in co-operative practice research because of individual constructs of knowledge, skills and abilities. A non-threatening approach, as used in Stage Three of this research, whilst producing in some cases elementary research, enabled all practitioners to take part and benefit from the process. The Inquiry Groups, working at a level of self-choice, developed the research questions, method design, analysis of evidence and presentation of findings.

I suggest that some individuals within the organisation will need to

maintain high levels of self-protection, and leaders may need to simply accept this emotional requirement whilst continuing to offer non-threatening opportunities. Urban (2010) recognised that Early Years practitioners often feel challenged and that they need to know answers as a form of self-protection. Dweck (1999) identified individuals' avoidance of change because of the need to feel flawless and in possession of all the answers. Leaders may consciously decide to promote feelings of adequacy rather than inadequacy by praising practitioners' willingness to engage in the process of co-operative inquiry work, rather than focussing on the outcomes when embarking on such a journey. This involves accepting the possible elementary nature of practice-based research work undertaken as a starting point, a brave first step on a new learning journey.

5.10.2 Explore Self-perceptions of Professional Development

How individuals perceive professional development is crucial. Gorard & Rees (2002, p18) suggested that, "*Human Capital theory is based on the assumptions that individuals will seek to maximise their material well-being.*" However, they argued that learning is not necessarily driven by economic gain.

Some of the participants in this study initially identified engagement in inquiry or learning processes as an activity for those who were academic and wished to change their job roles rather than seeking feedback from their environment in order to improve their current work. As one practitioner stated, "*Staff are happy in their current role*" (External Facilitator's Report, 21.7.11). They regarded learning as something extra: "*I get a bit cross – care is a big part of what we do – learning and other stuff is on top – the balance is forgotten about*" (External Facilitator's Report, 21.7.11).

Whitaker (2006) recognised that the term 'academic' tended to make people think of cleverness or high intelligence rather than learning. This is of particular relevance to Early Years practitioners who, as previously discussed, often regard themselves as non-academic. He suggested that academic capability is actually a method of thinking about our field of work. Participants in this study appeared to regard learning as something extra to their job role, rather than it being intrinsic to their work. Findings from this research suggest that practitioners engaged in self-selected co-operative inquiry group processes begin to regard themselves as learners. It is important that such a definition of 'academic learning' is clearly articulated and shared at every opportunity across the organisation.

Problems associated with learners taking on the role of being a junior party, identified by Gould, Stapley & Stein, (2004) were expounded further by Berne's (1964) analogy of child-to-parent type responses. Writing from a psychotherapist's perspective on Transactional Analysis, he suggested that when such a learner-dependent organisational culture exists, the designated leader will generally be regarded as the parent, the person turned to when problems arise. Such a model is not systemic. It does not promote the growth of others and actively encourages behaviour that Lambert (1998) described as finding safety by relying on authority and not taking responsibility.

5.10.3 Promote Opportunities for Practitioners to Inquire into Self-selected Aspects of their Work

Whitaker's (2009) proposition that when practitioners are allowed to work towards objectives that are personal to them they show real commitment and take on responsibility for their work has been exemplified by the work of this study. The importance of inquiry coming from participants' interests rather than being externally designated became evident in *Stage Three* of the research.

5.10.4 Plan Opportunities for Engagement in Practice Based Inquiry over a Long Period of Time

Practitioners' feedback from engaging in co-operative practice-based research valued the opportunity to undertake their inquiry over a sustained one-year period. They reported that this promoted a deeper level of thinking and reflection. They also found that working over a sustained time period allowed relationships to flourish and for connections to be made with others in a meaningful way. Participants identified a further benefit of working with a group over time being the development of confidence within that group as they developed relationships. Centre Inquiry Group participants summarised that time was needed for new information to be digested, for thinking and assimilating. They identified the need to dialogue about reading outside the group meetings and found that time for this was limited. Leaders may consider allocating regular times in the annual calendar for co-operative inquiry group work rather than traditional 'taught' professional development sessions.

5.10.5 Provide High Quality Professional Supervision

In this study, attention had to be paid to individuals' sense of adequacy as they engaged with co-operative inquiry. How others positioned themselves within the groups and their work teams as they assimilated new information was important. Anxiety and conflicts arose as individuals within the organisation began to change their beliefs as a result of co-operative practice-based research. Changes happened at different times for individuals. This was exemplified by this study's Centre Inquiry Group work on attachment and transitions for children. As the Centre Inquiry Group became driven by a desire to change the practice to fit with their new beliefs, they also became frustrated with work team colleagues who did not seem to understand their sense of urgency.

Supervision plays an important role in supporting individuals to explore and learn from self-reflection and supports the development of positive learning dispositions. To help develop readiness for learning, Lambert (1998) recommended coaching individuals so that they are able to recognise the influence they can have upon their work place, learn from their behaviour and have the courage to try new ideas, accept and take responsibility for their own actions. The role of professional supervision and allocation of resources to support it could be considered by designated leaders.

The aim of supervision in the Centre where this study was conducted is to support individuals as tensions arise when organisational changes take place. Writing her Master's dissertation, the Centre Deputy defined supervision as:

- *"Supportive or restorative element of supervision is the function that supports staff when they are dealing with a particularly stressful or difficult situation. This could be with the children and families they are working with or a critical incident with colleagues.*
- *The management or normative function deals with ensuring that the work of the supervisee is of a high quality. It is also concerned with the safe guarding of children and families.*
- *The educative or formative function is about supporting staff through professional dialogue and challenge to reflect and consider their work with children and families"* (Walker-Byrne - unpublished Dissertation, 2011: p.17).

I suggest that ensuring such functions are effectively happening falls to all those who hold designated responsibilities for the work of others. Findings from this study indicated the requirement for the quality of professional supervision in the Centre to be reviewed. Professional

supervision alongside opportunities for co-operative practice-based research has the potential to fulfil the required functions for self-inquiry. However, this study suggested it must be monitored and regulated by designated leaders. I suggest an effective method would be to invite members of the organisation to become part of a co-operative inquiry group with the purpose of exploring the effectiveness of current supervision work.

5.11 Changes in the Centre as a Result of this Study

This study has transformed my leadership practice and developed a systemic leadership culture in the Centre where I work. As a result, emergent leaders are excitedly embarking on their second year of self-motivated practice based research. They have organised themselves into inter-team Inquiry Groups making connections through areas of work that they are curious about. Questions they are seeking answers to are directly related to aspects of practice, which are pertinent to further improvement in developing outcomes for children and families. Research titles include exploring schemas in relation to gender, exploring children's communication skills in the outdoor environment, inquiring into how parents and children can develop early mathematical skills and exploring the impact of Forest Schools on children's well-being.

The work of the designated senior leadership hierarchy has been reviewed and is now framed as having the purpose of promoting a learning culture that safeguards individuals whilst looking after the interests and shared common purpose of the whole. Annual calendar plans incorporate co-operative inquiry group research evenings in replacement of two traditional professional development days. Fluid task groups have been implemented following fully inclusive invitations. Practitioners have willingly given up time in the evenings to participate in co-operative discussions used to inform major decisions such as how to

re-organise the nursery provision following a need to substantially increase pupil numbers and age phase.

5.12 Concluding Remarks

To summarise, this study has explored the actions of a leader intent on repositioning the leadership by motivating staff to lead practice developments through engaging in co-operative practice-based research within an Early Years setting. A commitment to developing and sustaining a learning organisation in which Early Years practitioners with predominantly basic level qualifications has been investigated. The study revealed that employing co-operative practice-based research, in order to effect cultural change (towards social equality) is extremely complex in reality.

The study has brought together different theoretical and research literatures, including those examining Individual Psychology and Group Psychology, social equality, democracy, systems thinking and systemic leadership in educational and other contexts, in order to understand these complexities. It has identified four processes that could support other designated leaders intent on developing a more democratic organisation and sustainable systemic leadership approach. Understanding the complexity of working to develop Systemic Leadership in an Early Years setting may support other leaders of similar organisations if they decide to engage with the four processes identified. Within each process the study has identified leadership behaviors and approaches – process elements – that are needed to deliberately develop a culture in which co-operative practice-based research, as a method for Systemic Leadership, can grow.

This research aimed first to **explore the leadership approach in developing a co-operative practice-based research culture within a Children's Centre** in order to emancipate practitioners from a

hierarchical leadership structure and energise practice. Transformation or development of a leadership culture is a complex and challenging concept and undertaking. Individuals affect the whole, and whilst the intent to emancipate practitioners may stem from a moral purpose and social conscience, such a vision cannot be imposed upon members of an organisation. Any vision needs to be developed as a shared vision to which all practitioners are able to subscribe. The leadership approach therefore needs to be democratic, respecting and valuing each individual that comprises the organisation.

The second aim was to **study the continual process of leadership as action research.** This proved to be an essential requirement for claiming leadership authority. Finding methods of gaining meaningful feedback proved challenging and is always likely to prove problematic for those who hold leadership titles. However, those who have courage and are inquisitive enough to engage in this process are likely to become more effective by developing informed leadership behaviour.

Third, this research aimed to **understand the complexities of systemic frameworks within the organisation in order to help other designated leaders become more reflective in their approach to leadership**. It cannot be possible to surface all the emotional perceptions or needs of individuals within the organisation. Systemic frameworks can be visualized as a spider's web. All those who are part of the web will feel any movement or vibration in any other part of it. Emotional constructs developed from such experiences can surface in behaviours that can impede progress. Different methods of inquiry are required to understand such complexities. Socially situated knowledge, residing in each organisation's systemic framework needs to be harnessed and purposefully used to help designated leaders' understanding.

Finally, the fourth aim of this research was ***to provide opportunities for emergent leaders to explore, test and apply theoretical concepts relevant to their roles.*** This needs to be done sensitively in a non-threatening, experimental manner. The result may be that initial research undertaken by practitioners is of an elementary nature but trusting in the process rather than worrying about the level of the work is more likely to encourage emergent leaders to have a growth mindset and have a go.

5.13 Future Research

Other designated leaders may wish to undertake their own action-based research to test out the processes identified by this study. This may enable the processes to be further informed and built upon in order to support professional systemic leadership of complex organisations such as Children's Centres.

Those responsible for Early Years training might benefit from further inquiry into the development of students as emergent leaders of practice. This could be approached through action research into how the organisation could implement the four processes identified, in order to develop a learning culture, which facilitates student engagement in elementary self-initiated processes of practice based research.

Possible future research questions might be: How might the identified processes lead to Early Years practitioners' engagement with formally accredited study courses? How might implementing the processes change leaders' self-perceptions and future leadership behaviour? How might the engagement of practitioners in practice-based research improve Ofsted judgments on leadership of organisations? How might outcomes for children and families in other organisations be improved by adopting systemic leadership processes?

There can be no certainty that the four leadership recommendations identified in this study will result in transformational learning for leaders of other organisations. Readiness for undertaking such an inquiry into leadership will vary across settings owing to many internal and external factors. Engaging in the process of inquiry into leadership has required courage, perseverance, dedication and tenacity. Such a journey cannot be started and abandoned when feedback sought is difficult to hear. This would be detrimental to the future of the organisation. Embarking on such a journey involves constantly stopping to check the impact of actions taken, the current conditions and planning the next steps. All passengers or participants must be respected and equally valued. Leaders conducting research into the leadership of their own organisation must show sensitivity and respect for those willing to take part. Only through facilitating individuals' engagement in meaningful discourse about their work can systemic leadership prevail. As a result of this study, I would suggest that such work is worthwhile and results in more sustainable leadership practice and better outcomes for children and their families.

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APPENDIX ONE
PhD Community Learning Group Contract

Members agreed to recognise and respect the following principles when working together:

- The need for confidentiality

- Listening to others is a big responsibility

- Listening to others requires time to be given

- Individual experiences should be respected

- Everyone's contributions should be valued

- The need to be open and honest when sharing experiences

- Taking responsibility to make our feelings known to others

- Valuing diverse viewpoints and recognising the right to challenge others respectfully

- Recognising that we can learn from differences in opinion if we are open to other viewpoints

- Recognising the need to support each other

APPENDIX TWO
Research Participant Consent

Description of Research Project:

I am currently studying for my PhD with Leicester University in partnership with Pen Green Research Base in Corby, Northamptonshire.

I am committed to developing and sustaining a learning organisation in which staff are supported to reflect individually and collaboratively about their work with children, families and the community. I believe this requires a systemic approach with structured and supported opportunities for ongoing individual and collaborative inquiry research and development opportunities.

I am interested in:

- Moral Leadership – Leading cultural change in a value-led multifunctional organisation in order to develop reflective inquiry into practice resulting in staff and community development and empowerment
- Individual and team strengths and the emotional impact of cultural changes within a multi-professional, multifunctional organisation

The Research Approach:

- To work with centre staff to develop reflection opportunities and tools/methods
- Develop staff partnership/team working to explore critical incidents from their reflections paralleled by an examination of my own reflections about this process
- Engage with staff to document their own learning journeys

- Develop a centre culture that creates and promotes opportunities for co-operative inquiry using storying, semi-focused interviews and journal reflections
- To sample and measure development/impact

Your participation in this research would help me to develop the work of the centre. The research findings may also help you in your future work. I would share my writing with you and ensure that you remain anonymous in this research.

I hope you feel that you would be happy to take part in this research. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Research Participant Consent Form

Have you read the summarised research proposals for my PhD?	Yes/no
Have you had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study?	Yes/no
Have you received enough information about the study?	Yes/no
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study: • At any time? • Without having to give a reason for withdrawing?	 Yes/no Yes/no
Do you agree that your views, when expressed anonymously can be included in any publication, which resulted from this study?	Yes/no
Do you agree to take part in this study?	Yes/no

Signed_____**Date**_____

(Name in block letters)_____

Governor's Consent to Reasearch Form

Have you read the summarised research proposals for my PhD?	Yes/no
Have you had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study?	Yes/no
Have you received enough information about the study?	Yes/no

Do you understand that you are free to request changes to be made to how information is presented in the study?	Yes/no
Do you agree to this study being submitted to the University of Leicester?	Yes/no

Signed_____**Date**_____

(Name in block letters)_____

APPENDIX THREE
LETTERS OF INVITATION TO FIRST FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Dear

I would like to invite you to take part in a workshop group on Thursday 21st July at 9.30am to 12.30pm in the community room.

I believe that the Centre's most important resource for further learning and development is the knowledge and understanding of our past learning experiences. (What has helped us to learn and develop and what has not helped)? As the designated leader of the Centre I cannot consider and respond to individual voices when shaping the future learning community culture if I do not hear them.

A carefully selected and trusted Facilitator, XXX will provide a safe structure for the workshop and will be inviting you to reflect upon your time at YYY and tell your story, warts and all! I genuinely want to know about the positive and negative thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears, worries and frustrations that you have experienced at YYY. I will not be present at the workshops.

Bernadette has asked that you bring something that holds a special meaning to you along to the group, eg. an ornament, memento, photograph.

The Facilitator will record the points arising from the discussions and draft a report of the outcome of the discussions. The draft report will be sent directly to home addresses for comment. The report amended by your comments will then be sent to participants for final agreement. You are invited to participate on the basis that the final report will not disclose the identity or attribute comments to any named individual. The final report will only be submitted to me after participants have agreed the final version. It is my intention to use the findings as part of my PhD research

but most importantly to use the findings to inform our further development. This is particularly important as we face a period of future growth and change, developing as a National Training Centre and developing our work with local Primary Schools.

The aim of the workshop will be for you to explore your experiences of change at YYY, to express your thoughts and feelings about working at YYY and make suggestions about how you want to see YYY develop in the future.

I do hope you feel able to attend the workshop and will make sure you have some nice edible treats! Please feel welcome to discuss with me any questions or concerns you have or let me know if you do not wish to take part in the workshop.

Best wishes

Dear

Following on from the discussions that took place last year on 21st July, I would like to invite you to take part in a further discussion group on Friday 4th May at either 9.15am till 12.15pm or 1.15pm to 4.15pm. Lunch will be available at 12.15pm / 12.45pm. You will recall that a wide variety of views and feelings were expressed during the workshops on 21st July 2011. These were recorded in the Report of the day.

The aim of the sessions on 4th May will be to continue to explore some of the issues highlighted. You may want to look again at the Report from 21st July 2011 so that the things that were said are fresh in your mind. If anyone needs another copy, this can be obtained from reception.

You made very important comments. I am keen to learn more from you and in particular:

(i)   What helps you to identify changes you want to make in your job or team that will give a better outcome or experience for the children and their families

(ii)   What needs to happen so that you are able to initiate these changes

(iii) What needs to happen to ensure that the process of change is a positive experience for everyone working at the Centre

I have asked Bernadette Hilton to work with you to once again to provide a safe structure and environment in which you can explore these sorts of questions and any other points you want to raise.

Procedures for feeding information from the day will be undertaken in the same manner as last time. Bernadette will record the points arising from the discussions and draft a report of the outcome of the discussions. The draft

report will be sent directly to home addresses for comment. The report amended by your comments will then be sent to participants for final agreement. You are invited to participate on the basis that the final report will not disclose the identity or attribute comments to any named individual. The final report will only be submitted to me after participants have agreed the final version. The findings will be used to inform our further development as a Centre of excellence.

Yours truly

Liz Klavins

APPENDIX FOUR

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER – PEN GREEN RESEARCH

LEADERSHIP OF INTEGRATED PROVISION

PHD UPGRADE AND ETHICS REVIEW REPORT

This form needs to be completed as part of the University of Leicester Graduate School 'Request for Transfer from or Extension of APG Status' form. Since the research projects undertaken by advanced postgraduate (APG) students in the Leadership of Integrated Provision Programme at Pen Green are evaluative in nature, and part of the ethical leadership of complex teams and services, they are not subject to the formal University of Leicester, School of Medicine and Social Care Ethics Review process. However, APG students' ethical considerations and procedures are assessed internally, and they are asked to summarise what they have done to ensure the well-being of research participants and to attach copies of participant information and consent forms used as part of their research projects.

Section I: Applicant Details

1. Name of (applicant):	
	Elizabeth Klavins
2. Contact address:	12 Chaigley Court
	Clitheroe
	Lancashire
	BB7 3ND
3. Email address:	head@fairfield.lancs.sch.uk
4. Home telephone	01254 826728

5. Mobile telephone	07738983175
6. Enrolment date:	February 2008
7. Expected submission date	September 2013
8. Pen Green Research Supervisor(s)	Margy Whalley Karen John
9. University of Leicester Supervisor	Judith West

Section II: Research Project Details

1. Project title:

Motivating staff to lead practice developments through action-based research within an early years setting.

2. Statement of research purpose:

This thesis explores, documents and analyses my actions as a leader based upon my belief that developments in early years practice are more successfully embedded when practitioners are part of a learning community within which they are able to critically explore, test and apply theories, concepts and strategies. It is based on the pedagogical observation that those involved in leading the learning need to be active participants in the process, surfacing and collaboratively exploring their tacit knowledge through action-based research as part of everyday practice.

This research analyses and documents my leadership approach as head of a multifunctional children's centre with a multi-professional team. My own and others' leadership is viewed as a continuous process of action-based

research.

- It explores a commitment to developing and sustaining a learning organisation in which staff are supported to reflect individually and collaboratively about their work with children, families and the community in order to be aware of themselves and their learning capacity as individuals and as part of a team.

- It analyses and documents my experience and learning as a leader of a complex and value-driven organisation, as I have sought to develop a systemic leadership model of collaborative action-based research.

- It explores the complexities of my organisation and the implications of maximising practitioners' capacities to be curious about their work and open to feedback, using action-learning groups to explore their inner worlds and review their values and assumptions.

- It analyses individual and organisational shifts in values, self-awareness and self-knowledge, including practitioners' capacity to theorise and weave theory into practice.

- It assesses the impact of collaborative action-based research on outcomes for children and families.

This research is particularly significant at a time when the future of children's centres, an innovative Labour government initiative, is threatened by the current economic crisis and challenged with meeting the new Coalition government's vision for children's centres. This vision identifies a 'Core Purpose' with intent to introduce 'Payment by Results'. Such a hierarchical attempt by the government to strengthen the top down approach marginalises professionals' creativity and first hand knowledge.

3. Project aims / research questions:

Aims

My aims are to:

- Explore the leadership approach of developing a collaborative action-based research culture within a children's centre in order to emancipate practitioners from a hierarchical leadership structure and energise practice.

- Study the continual process of leadership as action-based research.

- Understand the complexities of systemic frameworks within a multi-functional organisation in order to help nominated leaders become more reflective in their approach to leadership.

- Provide opportunities for emergent leaders to explore, test and apply theoretical concepts relevant to their role.

How can a nominated children's centre leader:

- Help practitioners to become conscious of their inner worlds and develop as self-assured individuals within a cooperative team?

- Support a multi-functional children's centre to discover and establish its identity, enabling it to learn from the continuous feedback its environment provides?

- Support the emotional needs of individuals within the setting as they experience disequilibrium from their learning?

- Ensure that practice developments are informed by the findings of collaborative action-based research?

I hope to gain a better understanding, more informed leadership approach in order to maximise the effectiveness of the organisation. In doing so, the practitioners working within the Centre should have their own transformational learning opportunities as individuals and within staff teams. It is hoped that the impact of personal and professional development at all levels will improve practice and subsequent outcomes for children and families using the Centre services.

The thesis is grounded in practitioner, front-line action research and will be of interest to other leaders who are interested in exploring systems leadership and leadership as a continuous process of action research. It is of particular relevance to children's centre leaders, school leaders, *Headteachers* and those involved in androgogical professional development such as the National College of Leadership or Teacher Training Colleges.

4. Background & relationship to published work in chosen area(s) of research:

Published theory and research

Searching for an appropriate, authentic research paradigm I explored published theorists within the social sciences. McNiff and Whitehead (2000) relate inquiries into organisations as the need to understand the individuals involved, pointing out that organisations do not exist if you take the people away. McNiff (2002) argues that one must plan how to gain the maximum participation from individuals undertaking research collaboratively. An essential requirement of this research was promoting self-awareness and self-knowledge of all those involved and recognition of the setting as a learning community.

In his recognition that the consequences of reflection could become troublesome, upsetting the calm inertia brought about by accepting things at face value Dewey (1910), identified a potential consequence of my study, namely that I had a moral duty to consider with regard to the well-being of participants. McNiff (2002) echoes this point and stresses the importance of taking account of emotional needs.

Schon (1987) distinguished the idea of reflecting retrospectively from reflecting in action. John (1999) expounded Schon's theory when he explored the idea of dialoguing with yourself and being aware of the way you are thinking during action as a way of being "mindful". Marshall (1999) is

also intent on recognising and heightening her self-awareness within her work, articulating it to herself and opening it up to others for comment in order to improve her learning. These theorists are particularly relevant to the purpose and methodology of my study as I explore my own self-awareness and how I can support the development of self-awareness and reflective practice of the research participants. The reflective process as a form of first person action research described by Torbert (2004) is an essential part of my research methodology.

Twemlow, Fonagy and Saccom (2005) describe sharing internal experiences with others as a process of "mentalisation". They refer to this as something that an organisational system can develop. They also claim that for an organisation to be creative and avoid coerciveness, "mentalisation" must be strong. This enables us to make sense of our own actions and the actions of others. The sharing of internalisation through articulating the inner world as a form of second person action inquiry as described by Torbert (2004) has been part of the research methodology used in my PhD learning community group and my centre's inquiry group.

Dweck(1999) and her colleagues' programmatic work on self-theories and their role in motivation provides empirical evidence for the earlier theories and observations of Adler (1927). Dweck's comparison of a 'fixed mindset' to a 'growth mindset' is of particular relevance to this research as I explore the concept of action-based research with practitioners in order to further develop practice. The concept is new and alien to the majority of practitioners and those who have a closed or fixed mindset are difficult to engage, preferring to keep themselves safe rather than risk failing in unfamiliar territory.

Csikszentmihalyi (1992) theory on "flow", a period in which people are struggling to overcome challenges but which bring about enjoyment, satisfaction, psychic energy and a feeling of control and reinforces the sense of self, is extremely important in considering how people can be engaged in

co-operative research in order to become part of systemic organisational leadership. Sergiovanni (1992) claims that people perceive work as worthwhile when it is linked to their own system of values and are driven by their emotions and social bonds. My awareness that changes in beliefs brought about by the findings from action-based research could cause high levels of anxiety for some staff, resulting in an alienation or disassociation from the Centre's work, raises questions that must therefore be explored in the study. This links closely to Goleman's (1998) observation that people's emotions motivate their work enthusiasm and participation.

Co-operative inquiry, described by Reason (1998) and Heron ((1971) as a creative process to which all those involved contribute, forms the theoretical philosophy on which my work with the "inquiry group" is based. Co-operative inquiry raises subjective experience to a level of consciousness and takes account of the self-determination of individuals. Heron's refinement into three groups of inquiry: 'participatory', 'action' and experiential' provoked further thinking about the role I hoped inquiry group members would play. I identified very strongly with Heron's (1999) statement, "To do research on people rather than with people is to treat them as less than people"(p. 340).

Torbert (1972) argued that systems theory is essentially feedback from the environment within which the organisation exists, telling it if it is successfully moving towards its goal, but paradoxically people generally defend themselves against such feedback rather than act upon it constructively. This resonated with my experience as a Centre leader. Lemonides (2007) contended that individuals and their environment are interdependent and that feedback cannot be used constructively if the individuals distort or reject the feedback.

Torbert and his colleagues' (2004) supposition of how developing a consciousness in the midst of action could be used to improve and correct actions in mid flow is in line with Twemlow and colleagues' (2005) description

of "mentalisation", which was referred to earlier by Torbert (1972) as "action inquiry'. This fits comfortably with Schon's (1983) "reflection in action" as an epistemology of practice" (p133) or the concept of doing and thinking at the same time.

Action inquiry, is advocated by Torbert (2004), McNiff (2000) and Reason (1988) to promote greater social justice and generate future sustainability. Torbert's theories in particular provide a methodological framework appropriate to my inquiry. His interest in heightening the individual's consciousness in order for them to play a greater role in the inquiry is harmonious with my personal values and beliefs. Senge (1990) proferred that "systems thinking", which he refers to as the "fifth discipline", requires those involved in an organisation to be committed to personal learning, create a genuine shared vision, make their internal pictures open to others and be able to learn as a collaborative group. The exploration of systems leadership through collaborative action-based research must therefore explore these elements of Senge's theory. It is intended that the documentation of this process will add to the field of leadership research by explicating the practicalities of putting theory into front line practice.

The work of the published theorists described above has helped me to formulate and articulate my beliefs and interests, which have been informed by my experience of leading practice for twenty years. These can be summarized as follows:

- Research undertaken in the centre must move practice forward in order to have a positive impact on the lives of children and families.
- Leading cultural change needs to involve people as research participants rather than as subjects of research in order to acknowledge and address hierarchical power differentials.
- Involving people in action based research will result in stronger commitment and impact.

- Changes in practice require individuals and groups to make fundamental psychological changes. An organisation needs to develop a reflective culture that supports people through this process.
- Individual and team strengths can be built upon to promote and support the development and the emotional impact of cultural changes within a multi-professional, multi-functional organisation.
- The development of a safe, non-coercive culture can enable people to face challenges and in turn gain satisfaction and happiness.
- Individual rights and responsibilities within the recognition of interconnectedness and interdependency
- Seeing things from different angles or perspectives in order to gain new, creative ideas.

5. Methodology:

My *Doctoral* study juxtaposes analysis of relevant academic literature and analysis of my own and others' reflections on my work as *Headteacher* of a children's centre. It sits firmly within the paradigm of qualitative, practitioner-led action research. In the true nature of action research the identification and development of the methodology has been constantly revisited and amended as part of a cyclical process.

I have undertaken the study as part of a PhD practitioner-led action learning community group aimed at transforming the dynamics of a traditional course. This group has run as a parallel to a Centre- based learning community group termed the 'inquiry group'. The PhD group has played a significant role in the process of informing my research methodology.

The 'inquiry group' consisted of six, highly credible practitioners – or emergent leaders – from across the Centre teams who were all undertaking or planning to undertake a course of further study.

I took the role of facilitator and participant within the inquiry group, the former role being more dominant at the outset, the latter taking precedence as the group developed. I withdrew regularly to allow for group discussion (second-

person action inquiry) on personal reflections and feedback to be formulated.

As a facilitator I acted as a catalyst by bringing a group of people together, stimulating discussions and lines of research, enabling the work to be undertaken and assisting in developing an ethical methodology by analysing what the group were saying. I aimed to develop a co-operative inquiry group, with all those involved contributing to the whole creative process, of when and how often the group met, how the meetings would be organised and recorded, what would be the focus of the inquiry, how we could make sense of the findings and how we would apply newly acquired propositions to working practice.

The group collaboratively chose 'attachment and separation' as the area of focus for their inquiry into practice.

Initially the group met once per week at the end of the day. After the fourth meeting they asked to meet once a month for a full or half day in order to facilitate a deeper level of reflection and analysis. The group met over a one-year period and have chosen to continue meeting.

As part of a first person action-based research process, group members were encouraged to pay attention to themselves, recording their reflections in personal journals. I also maintained a personal journal and used this, along with previous journal reflections to document and explore my own learning journey in the historical development of the Centre.

Second person action based research, the process of mentalisation, forming and articulating thoughts and feelings to a group in order to receive feedback, ran in parallel between the PhD learning community group and the Centre inquiry group.

After twelve months I conducted and audio recorded individual semi-structured interviews with each inquiry group member. Questions were given to participants in advance of the interviews. The interviews were analysed

with the findings shared and discussed by the group.

After in-depth discussion of my study, an external facilitator led two focus groups with staff members. The aim of the focus groups was to gather the individuals' stories and experiences from memories of working at the Children's Centre and explore their views, thoughts and feelings on recent and future developments. Each of the two discussion groups, consisting of fourteen to fifteen staff members, lasted for three hours each, with twenty-nine staff participating in total. Each group discussed and agreed ground rules for the day as part of considering how they wanted to work. There was an initial discussion within the larger group to identify possible areas for exploration. These were noted. Each group then formed into smaller subgroups. A scribe took notes of the discussion in each smaller subgroup, and someone then fed back to the larger group, where a general discussion took place on the points arising. Participants generously agreed to handover the scribe notes to the facilitator at the end of the discussions.

The facilitator also recorded points arising from the discussions. Participants had agreed that the Facilitator would be free to 'witness' some of the discussions in each of the smaller subgroups. The facilitator took verbatim notes of contributions during observation of the smaller subgroup discussions and during the wider group discussions. All of these data sources were drawn on in the facilitator's draft and final report. The final report was anonymously commented upon and approved by participants before I received it. I shared the report with the PhD community-learning group and invited feedback, which helped me to formulate the next steps in my research. I then asked the facilitator to lead further focus groups to explore how we could work together to move forward. I also worked with the Centre's Leadership Team to de-construct the report's statements in a purposeful manner.

My attention to my role as nominated Centre leader, my awareness of issues relating to power, particularly in my role as the initiating researcher has been documented in my personal journal, the analysis of which has been

supported by reading relevant theory and research. It has also been explored with the PhD learning community group and in part with staff members. My auto ethnographical story is explored and acknowledged as part of the research methodology.

The impact of work undertaken by the co-operative inquiry group was evaluated by observing children in transition from home to nursery and inviting staff and parents to keep journals throughout this period.

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Section IV: Research ethics

1. Criteria and method of recruiting and selecting research participants:

The 'inquiry group' is an action-based research group consisting of six highly credible Centre staff members, whom I had identified through my working knowledge of them as pacemakers. They were invited individually to take part through a letter describing the research intent and proposed methodological plan, accompanied by a consent form. (See Appendix A.) I discussed the proposals with individuals on request and emphasised their right to decline.

Children were observed in transition from home to nursery and from the provision for younger infants as part of the Centre's required self-evaluation. All parents of children commencing nursery provision in 2010/2011 and staff members were invited to contribute to the self-evaluation of the transition process through documenting and sharing with the 'inquiry group' their thoughts and feelings recorded in their personal journals. Following the 'inquiry group's' decision to employ auto-ethnography as part of its research

methodology for exploring attachment and separation, all staff members were invited to write stories from their memories of being separated from their parents as children.

The entire Centre staffs team were invited by letter (see Appendix B) to take part in focus groups led by an external facilitator, which were held during work hours. Three staff members declined the invitation, two of whom were on holiday, and one staff member was on maternity leave.

Further focus groups led by the external facilitator were by invitation to all staff on a voluntary basis outside work hours.

2. Particular ethical issues raised and how these were addressed

The first ethical issue raised by this study was: how could I stay true to Heron's imperative (1999) and ensure that the research was undertaken with participants and not done to them? This was addressed by engaging the 'inquiry group' participants cooperatively in the process of developing my methodology.

I recognised the differential in power with regard to my role as *Headteacher* asking staff members to become research participants. This was addressed through written and verbal reassurances regarding choice and absence of negative repercussions. At the start of each inquiry group meeting I reminded participants of their right to withdraw.

My intention was to record the inquiry group meetings using a video camera. Participants expressed concern about being recorded and were worried about who might see the recordings during analyses. Following discussion I decided not to use any form of digital recording but to write up detailed notes during and immediately after the inquiry group sessions.

Twelve months after establishing the inquiry group I conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants individually. Questions for consideration were given to participants in advance to enable them to feel

prepared. Collated information from the interviews was anonymised for inquiry group discussion.

The inquiry group's development of methods in researching children's transitions involved collecting and analysing stories, volunteered by staff members. Stories were submitted on a voluntary basis and were made anonymised prior to being shared with the group. Parents and staff were also invited to write and submit journals during periods of children's transitions. The inquiry group, prior to any invitations, established an ethical code for volunteers. (See Appendix C).

When seeking to capture the full range of views, thoughts and feelings of staff members across the broad spectrum of work roles and experiences within the Centre, I was mindful of my *Headteacher*'s duty of care. I wanted to create an opportunity for the 'difficult' things to be said – things that are sometimes thought but not said, that may be considered controversial. To protect staff members from any fear of reprisals I engaged an external facilitator and discussed at length the need for participants' anonymity. I asked the facilitator to work with participants at the start of the discussions to agree ground rules. The facilitator's report was to be written to keep faith with the way of working agreed by participants and the overarching remit of the day.

The mechanisms for ensuring anonymity were as follows:

- The deputy *Headteacher* and I were not present during the staff workshops.
- In the week following the discussions, the draft report was circulated directly from the facilitator by hard copy mail direct to each participant for comment.
- Participants then forwarded comments direct to the facilitator.
- Feedback was incorporated into an amended draft and this was circulated direct to Participants by hard copy mail for comment.
- The final report captured all feedback and was then sent to me.
- The draft and final reports do not disclose the identity or attribute

comments to any named individual. In order to ensure that the voices of the participants are included wherever possible, the report relies very heavily on verbatim comments.

I decided to re-engage the facilitator, in order to ensure that staff members felt no negative repercussions-in a follow-up exploration of specific aspects of the report. Again, participation was on a voluntary basis with anonymous feedback.

3. Number of participants:

Inquiry Group: 6

Focus Groups: 29

Children observed: 90

Parents: 12

If you are willing to take part in this research project please return the form on the back page to:

Liz Klavins

YYY Children's Centre

Thank you

Description of Research Project:

I am currently studying for my PhD with Leicester University in partnership with Pen Green Research Base in Corby, Northamptonshire.

I am committed to developing and sustaining a learning organisation in which staff are supported to reflect individually and collaboratively about their work with children, families and the community. I believe this requires a systemic approach with structured and supported opportunities for ongoing individual and collaborative inquiry research and development opportunities.

I am interested in:
- Moral Leadership – Leading cultural change in a value-led multifunctional organisation in order to develop reflective inquiry into practice resulting in staff and community development and empowerment
- Individual and team strengths and the emotional impact of cultural changes within a multi-professional, multifunctional organisation

The Research Approach:
- To work with centre staff to develop reflection opportunities and tools/methods
- Develop staff partnership/team working to explore critical incidents from their reflections paralleled by an examination of my own reflections about this process
- Engage with staff to document their own learning journeys
- Develop a centre culture that creates and promotes opportunities for co-operative inquiry using storying, semi-focused interviews and journal reflections
- To sample and measure development/impact

Your participation in this research would help me to develop the work of the centre. The research findings may also help you in your future work. I would share my writing with you and ensure that you remain anonymous in this research.

I hope you feel that you would be happy to take part in this research. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Liz Klavins
Head of Children's Centre
Tel: 01254 231589

Research Participant Consent Form

Have you read the summarised research proposals for my PhD?	Yes/no
Have you had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study?	Yes/no
Have you received enough information about the study?	Yes/no
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study: • At any time? • Without having to give a reason for withdrawing?	 Yes/no Yes/no

Do you agree that your views, when expressed anonymously can be included in any publication, which resulted from this study?	Yes/no
Do you agree to take part in this study?	Yes/no

Signed_____**Date**_____

(Name in block letters)_____

18th July 2011

Dear

I would like to invite you to take part in a workshop group on Thursday 21st July at 9.30am to 12.30pm in the community room.

I believe that the Centre's most important resource for further learning and development is the knowledge and understanding of our past learning experiences. (What has helped us to learn and develop and what has not helped)? As the nominated leader of the Centre I cannot consider and respond to individual voices when shaping the future learning community culture if I do not hear them.

A carefully selected and trusted facilitator, Bernadette Hilton will provide a safe structure for the workshop and will be inviting you to reflect upon your time at Fairfield and tell your story, warts and all! I genuinely want to know about the positive and negative thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears, worries and frustrations that you have experienced at Fairfield. I will not be present at the workshops.

Bernadette has asked that you bring something that holds a special meaning to you along to the group, eg. An ornament, memento, photograph.

The facilitator will record the points arising from the discussions and draft a report of the outcome of the discussions. The draft report will be sent directly to home addresses for comment. The report amended by your comments will then be sent to participants for final agreement. You are invited to participate on the basis that the final report will not disclose the identity or attribute comments to any named individual. The final report will only be submitted to me after participants have agreed the final version. It is my intention to use the findings as part of my PhD research but most importantly to use the findings to inform our further

development. This is particularly important as we face a period of future growth and change, developing as a National Training Centre and developing our work with local Primary Schools.

The aim of the workshop will be for you to explore your experiences of change at Fairfield, to express your thoughts and feelings about working at Fairfield and make suggestions about how you want to see Fairfield develop in the future.

I do hope you feel able to attend the workshop and will make sure you have some nice edible treats! Please feel welcome to discuss with me any questions or concerns you have or let me know if you do not wish to take part in the workshop.

Best wishes   Liz

Appendix C
Principles for Ethical Agreement

Agreed by Inquiry Group 23.3.10

- All participants should be fully informed about the process
- All participant's voices should be listened to carefully and with respect
- Researchers should act to make sure that all those involved feel their contributions are valuable and worthwhile
- Methodology should be none threatening to those participating
- Methods used should not be onerous to participants
- A collaborative approach involving participants rather than treating participants as subjects of the research should be used
- Findings should be reported and shared with others in a manner that makes the participants anonymous
- Researchers should strive to ensure participants feel safe
- The researchers should respect emotional sensitivities that may be shared
- Researchers should be none judgemental in their approach
- All participants should be on a voluntary basis

Signed_____**Date**_____

(Name in block letters)_____

Student signature ……………………………………….   Date …………….

Centre Policy on Transitions

Children's Centre Transition Policy

Rationale

YYY's understanding of Bowlby's theory of attachment and separation has shaped our understanding of transition. We know it can be a very difficult time for children and that it may impact on their emotional well being, progress and development. At *YYY* we endeavour to ensure that this process is a smooth one that is carefully planned and implemented through the ethos and staff of the centre and in partnership with our parents.

Parent's voices and their involvement during this new phase for themselves and their child are extremely important. Before children begin the transition process, parents will be informed of the planned events and process as this is the basis for working in partnership. A record of the transition time will be kept in the form of a moving on diary (under threes and transition into the threes from Blossom room). This will be an important part of the process for everyone to share in. Children will be encouraged to contribute to the diary with drawings, pieces of work and photographs. This will enhance all areas of building positive relationships between all those involved with the child and their family.

There will also be a transition diary for the centre to enable all staff, including reception staff to be aware of all children in the centre and when they are transferring. This will also include new children to the centre.

Home visits

All new parents will receive a home visit by their key person and a Parent and Child Empowerment Team Visitor. This will support the holistic approach of the centre and enable the reach of *YYY* to increase and promote the profile of the family support. The home visit is a crucial part of the learning journey with parents. A pen portrait under the four principles of the EYFS will be written jointly with the parents (see attached prompts). The questions have been carefully constructed using the EYFS cards and in line with the ethos of the Parent Empowerment Programme. This will provide us with a picture of the child and support the next steps in the children's learning journey. It will be placed at the front of the learning story file; at the end of the year another pen portrait will be written with parents to show the progress and development of the children. Transition diaries are also introduced for families to share in the process and get to know the whole team they will come into contact with.

September Intake of Children

This is a long process as there are approximately 90 children who begin their time at *YYY* each September. A great many of these are new parents and have no experience of *YYY* and the way we approach teaching and learning. We will work with parents to enable them to recognise it is the beginning of our learning journey together. It is organised as follows:

• In May, Key workers personally telephone new families to invite them to the Centre for a tour and introduction to *YYY* and its ethos. The key person will also arrange a suitable day for the family to come back with their child to play during a session time

- During this session, the key person and parents will establish a day and time that will be suitable for the home visit and start date in September

- The importance of children's well being is paramount. *YYY* is a new place for them and they need to feel safe in their new environment. When children start, parents will stay with them for the first week. We know that if children do not have time with parents at *YYY* before they leave, it takes a longer period of time for them to settle and feel safe. During this week there are special jobs for the families to do together, including decorating special books and boxes

- Parents are supported in this week by their key person and the wider staff team. They are encouraged to feel at home, help themselves to a drink find out more about *YYY*. A handbook for parents about this week is shared and given out

Two – three year olds

Children move from the blossom room at the beginning of the term after their third birthday. The six weeks prior to the move consists of careful planned transition experiences led by the transition coordinator:

- Weeks one and two, the children will accompany their key worker into the fern, willow, outdoor and spring areas for a short period of time. Key workers will also visit the blossom room for short sessions, either to complete an activity, play alongside the children, share their special book or read a story.

- Weeks three and four will involve the children joining in with their new key worker for a special planned activity e.g. baking, music session or a planned group time in the fern, willow, outdoor or spring areas.

- Weeks five and six, the children will increase the amount of time spent with their new key worker and their key group. This is a time where they will be able to explore the area both independently and with the support of their new key worker and the wider team

- Before the new key person will arrange to meet with the parents to explain the process and share with them the different ways of working, such as ratios of adults, the larger group of children and the space available to them. Arrangements for writing pen portraits and visits to the nursery during session time will also be made

Transition in the under threes.

The physical transition of our younger children is much easier as they already move freely between the two areas. Key workers meet with parents and complete a pen portrait. Transition diaries are also completed by the key worker to share with parents.

New Children Starting in the Under Threes Provision

As with the September intake of children, parents are contacted and a discussion takes place to establish suitable start dates. Parents are asked to stay with their child for the week to support them in their new surroundings. These visits are flexible and are led by the child and families needs.

Community Learning Contract

Respect each other

There will always be many differences between people in a group.

Some are obvious such as age or race. Some differences are less

obvious. We should feel able to challenge one another if we feel others

are being unfair towards others or us in the group.

Trust and Confidentiality

If people are to share their experiences openly and feel able to

challenge assumptions made about them, they need to feel that others

will listen to them and respect their perspectives. It is important that

confidential information will not be carried outside the group.

Encourage each other

Encouragement is basic to promoting cooperation, Self-confidence and

development. Just like the children we all need encouragement. When

we try new things we may feel afraid or that we will get it wrong. It may

be useful to remember that the person who makes mistakes is the person

who gets involved and tries new things.

Give everyone a chance to speak

A lot of your learning will come from other people. Every person coming into the centre has knowledge and experience to share. We need to share the time we have together. If we feel that someone is monopolising the talk we can check by asking would anybody else like to make comments.

Be responsible for getting your needs met

We have limited time together. Each of us must take responsibility for our own actions, for becoming involved and contributing constructively. A basic principle is that each person is responsible for change in his or her behaviour. What can you do to change the situation you are in?

Be willing to experiment

You will often be faced with new ideas. They will mean more to you if you try them out yourself. If you are open to new ideas they can help you make new approaches and make positive changes in your practice. If something is tried out and does not appear to work it can always be reviewed and amended. Nothing is set in stone.