

**PRACTITIONER TO PROFESSIONAL: DE- AND
RECONSTRUCTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES IN THE
EARLY YEARS WORKFORCE**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester**

**by
Gillian McGillivray
Newman University College
and
School of Education
University of Leicester**

October 2010

Gillian McGillivray

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Abstract

The use of the term 'professional identities' proliferates among those working in children's services in England as recent policy has focused on workforce reform and integrated working. Subsequent debates reveal hegemonic discourses about 'quality', 'professionalism' and 'professionalisation' but these are contestable terms, shaped by multiple social, political and historical influences. For decades demands for increased pay and status have been made on behalf of, but not by, the early years workforce but to no avail. Agency, gender and power are thus significant forces in an ecological model of macro-, meso- and micro- levels of influence on how individual early years workers construct professional identities.

The aim of this research was to explore how professional identities are constructed within the early years workforce in England, and to understand what factors contribute to the construction of such identities. It set out to investigate how members of the early years workforce themselves shape the construction of their professional identities, and how professional identities impact on practice. An interpretive paradigm, informed by feminist and Marxist perspectives, determined the methodological approach. Interviews, focus group conversations and documentary analysis generated discourse from early years workers, decision makers, students and texts for dialectic, hermeneutic analysis.

Findings reveal multiple, recurring and competing professional identities for early years workers which are shaped by powerful forces in the home, the workplace and wider communities through subjugation and feminised, not feminist, performativities. The dialectical, multi-levelled positions of participants in the research were congruent with the multi-layered ecological model of professional identity construction. Through this model recurring identities as feminine child-carer and passive -resistant worker were evident in the data. These identities were reproduced by workers, their families and decision makers at meso- and macro-levels of influence.

Early years workers' identity of resistance to hegemonic professional identities is not futile however. Through resistance to imposed identities they have the agency to construct new professional identities for themselves.

Acknowledgements

This is the most humbling section to write. Peoples' generosity of time, gestures and words of support, expertise and goodwill have been overwhelming. I am appreciative of all these to my colleague and first supervisor, Professor Stan Tucker and my second supervisor, Dr Dave Trotman. Their artful guidance has extended my professional learning in many ways. Thank you to colleagues in the Early Years subject area for their support and encouragement. I owe much to colleagues who diligently processed transcriptions. Thank you to all participants for sharing your views, ideas and experiences with me. Thank you, Karen and Teresa, for your patience, reassurance and wise words.

This work is dedicated to my family, Dave, Sarah and Fiona, for their love and support in numerous ways. It would not have been completed without you.

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Abbreviations

CACE	Central Advisory Council for Education
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council (for England)
DCFS	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status
FEC	Further Education College
HEI	Higher Education Institution
NPQICL	National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership

Chapter One: Introduction

This study investigates factors that contribute to the construction of professional identities in the early years workforce in England. It takes an ecological perspective of influences on early years workers' professional identities, using the model of meso-, micro- and macro-levels to identify factors and also to inform its methodology. Multi-levelled voices contribute to powerful hegemonic discourses that shape professional identities as feminised and passive in early years work.

This chapter sets out academic and professional reasons for undertaking the research. In addition, aspects of policy, the idea of profession, identity and feminism contextualise reasons why the research should be done. These themes locate the contemporary research and social theoretical context for the study and are developed in Chapter Two. The chapter concludes with a rationale for the formulation of the aims of the research.

An interest in the notion of professional identity construction in the early years workforce emerged from conversations between the researcher and early years students in a further education college. Students included young people embarking on level two or level three courses on a full time basis and experienced but unqualified practitioners seeking work-based accreditation of knowledge and experience through National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Level three qualifications are the benchmark for being qualified to work unsupervised in England (DfES 2005). Students were from culturally and socially diverse backgrounds, and nearly all female. Conversations about careers revealed that

choices made by female students who were parents with young children of school age were often determined by convenience. Others' reasons for choosing early years courses were characterised more by ambivalence than altruism. This is confirmed in research reported by Cooke and Lawton (2008). Such conversations created curiosity and interest in exploring how early years workers interpreted the apparent divergence between what was expected of them in policy rhetoric (a well-trained, professional, altruistic and reflective workforce) and the demands made on them by family life.

Some early years students in the same college talked of a decision imposed on them as female pupils when choosing options at fourteen or sixteen years of age by school teachers and careers advisers who regarded childcare as an option for girls who were low achievers. This concurs with the findings of Sauve Bell (2004a). There were also cultural reasons as to why childcare was favoured by parents of some girls, predominantly from Asian ethnic minority groups, as they would be in a female dominated, gendered environment. A male presence was reported as being undesirable for these groups. Parents, teachers, families and careers advisers were inadvertently perpetuating the gendered, low academic status of early years work. They were making decisions on behalf of female pupils and students that reinforced wider societal perceptions at a macro-level (Goldstein 1998; Penn 2000). Gender stereotypes as a critical influence on choice and identity were evident for these groups of students as they were embarking on their careers, and it recurs throughout the research.

These conversations with students in further education are anecdotal, but they interested the researcher and generated a desire for further investigation. The conversations took place over a period of time starting in the 1990s, and recurred with other students. There was consistency in how they constructed notions of early years work and their emerging identity as an early years worker. Choices made by early years workers were apparently influenced by their own family, by teachers and by their own ambitions but what demanded interrogation was dissonance between aspirations to champion outcomes for children, to progress to higher levels of work in the sector and ambivalence towards early years work. The researcher was curious about how students reconciled low pay, poor progression and low status with maintaining their self-esteem and justification for two years hard study and training.

When the researcher moved to a post in higher education, opportunities and space for research became available. Teaching students in higher education in early years compared to those in further education, on part time and full time courses, provided more opportunities for conversations. Some of the themes and influences for career choice that had been apparent in the discourse of further education students persisted. The researcher retained the interest in exploring career choices in early years work, but this extended to a desire to explore professional identities *per se* for two significant reasons. Firstly, the researcher was learning about the work of others in the field of professional identities, and how they were investigating and contesting such notions (Miller 2008b; Moss 2006; Tucker 2004, for example). The apparent ephemeral idea of professional identities appealed to the researcher as new interpretations were possible.

Secondly, the emerging policy of early years workforce reform in England generated interest from those connected to the workforce in terms of education, training and qualifications at local and national levels, in research and in practice.

The researcher's position was also influenced by studying Psychology at first degree level in terms of what psychological theory may contribute to an investigation into professional identities. The researcher considered there to be potential to extend others' research into professional identities through investigating the interface between self identity and professional identity. Dispositions and self (Mead 1934) and action theory (Parsons and Shils 2001) particularly offered psychological and social theoretical perspectives for analysis. In addition, the researcher's experiences in a multi-disciplinary environment in higher education have also been significant. Colleagues whose academic disciplines are located in sociology, social policy and education studies have extended and challenged the researcher's epistemological position. Associated methodological and theoretical possibilities within these disciplines have contributed to the shaping of this study.

An insight into early years students' perceptions of their professional identities, and how others perceive them, has informed learning and teaching in the researcher's academic work. An epistemology of factors that shape the construction of professional identities contributes to the body of academic work within early years as well as across other sectors connected to the re-configuration and reform of the children's workforce. Debate as to what is meant by 'professional identities' can prompt new understandings of the complexity of what

it means to be ‘an early years worker’ in new territories of multi-agency and inter-professional working.

This research is timely, with national, policy initiatives in place at the time of writing for workforce reform in the early years sector. Reform opens opportunities for new identities to be forged, and therefore the chance to explore how and what these may be as well as investigating any willingness or reluctance to change. Intrinsic and extrinsic influences arguably shape professional identities, so while the government has imposed reform of and on the early years workforce, the reality for individuals in their daily lives working with children should not be ignored. Research has the potential to disturb and deconstruct the day to day lives of groups or individuals to reveal the struggles of such lives. As Tucker (2004: 82) argues, political change brings about ‘a need to understand not only the nature of that change, but also how it impacts on professional work and the identities adopted by particular individuals and groups’. Convergence or divergence between macro-level reform and the micro-experiences of early years workers was deemed a site for investigation. The ecological model, attributable to Bronfenbrenner (1979), of macro- (state or national level), meso- (local or community) and micro- (the individual) levels of influence offered potential to assist with interpretations of identity construction in ways explained in Chapter Two.

Therefore, the need to use a methodology that has potential to produce multi-voiced, multi-positioned dialogic discourses, or *heteroglossia* (Bakhtin 1981) was essential. Heteroglossia ‘represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of

the past, between different socio-ideological groups' (Bakhtin 1981: 291). For this reason an interpretive methodology was chosen (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

Multi-voiced discourses have the potential to establish whether there is congruence of views at macro-, meso- and micro-levels of influence on the vision for a 'professional' workforce. Conversations reveal dialectical, discursive perspectives: what is being said, by whom and why, in relation to the early years workforce. 'Discourse comes from the decisive role of language in the process of constructing the world, rather than simply a means of representing or copying reality' according to Dahlberg *et al.* (2007: 31). Of specific pertinence are feminist debates and the gendered context of early years work which emerged from conversations with students in further education. Language generated through associated methodologies and an interpretive paradigm can reveal competing, congruent or contested positions and associated tensions arising from where power is potentially located.

So far, the researcher has used past experiences to show how particular social and gender factors have influenced early years workers, but this is based on some members of the workforce, in a particular location, undertaking some courses in further or higher education. In a post-structural context, her position is speculative and based on subjective interpretations and is thus open to challenge and debate. It nevertheless provided the impetus for this research and its methodology. Initial analysis of the biographical context led the author to draw out the themes that structure this chapter. Policy has been shown to contribute to external macro-forces, and thus contemporary policy

developments in early years workforce reform are outlined next for the purpose of contextualisation of the study.

1.1 A brief political context

Since 2000, policy initiatives have been introduced to reform the early years workforce, driven by a need for 'conditions both for competing economically in an increasing globalised and marketised capitalism' (Moss 2006: 30). This was a workforce about whom information was scarce; issues of gender, status, values and aspirations were taken for granted and perpetuated through the regimes of careers advice in schools, occupational cultures and pay and conditions in the workplace (Colley 2006; Penn 2000). The embedded regimes and discourse prompted the researcher to question the position of early years workers themselves, as they were fore-grounded by policy change.

Recent policy initiatives relating to children, young people and families include Every Child Matters, workforce reform and the reconfiguration of children's services (DCFS 2007, 2008, 2009; DfES 2003, 2004b, 2005; HM Treasury 2004), partly driven by serious child protection cases (Baldock *et al.* 2009; Parton 2006) as well as the capitalist agenda behind the childcare market (Moss 2006). Those working alongside students and employees within the children's workforce, in higher and further education for example, have been prompted to question the impact of potential initiative fatigue (Coffield 2002) on frontline workers. Issues of agency and power and ways in which individual workers, as well as those working alongside them, interpret and respond to policy initiatives become pertinent in identity construction (Day *et al.* 2006). Passion, as asserted by Moyles (2001),

may exist in the reification of daily work and interactions with children, but not extend to the political arena. Indeed, passion may be replaced by passive resistance to policy change or new identities and opportunities. Changes in society resulting in different parental needs for childcare and education are critical too in their contemporary influence on the early years workforce (David 1990; Moyles, 2001). Members of the early years workforce have had to adapt to the impact of capitalism in the marketisation of early years work (Dahlberg and Moss 2005; Penn 2007) as well as the Every Child Matters agendas. The policy landscape is elaborated in Chapter Two, but neo-liberalism is evident through such market forces in the private daycare sector and associated tensions between the rhetoric of parental access to affordable childcare and continued low pay for the workers.

The researcher has already reported anecdotal evidence that childcare is perceived as a job not a career by some, and research carried out by Penn (2000) concurs. Market forces have sustained childcare as a commodity not worthy of investment and this is accepted by both parents and workers (Colley 2006). At the time of writing, the early years workforce in England had access to government funding to undertake degrees and assessment against the standards for Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). The policy of introducing new 'statuses' into education such as the Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) and EYPS creates associate professionals (Edmond and Price 2009), subservient to teachers (Adams 2008). Even though EYPS was intended to have equivalent status to teachers (DfES 2005; HM Treasury 2004), it does not in terms of national pay scales or conditions of service, despite calls for this to be addressed (Murray 2009; Watson 2008 and see Chapter Four). The power of those wishing to

maintain privileged positions and status is evident (Robins and Silcock 2001). Similarly, policy intervention is designed to 'up-skill' the workforce and has provided funding for education and training (DfES 2005). The target at the time of writing was for every children's centre to have employed an early years graduate by 2010, and for every childcare setting to have a graduate in post by 2015. CWDC was also seeking to expand those with level two and level three qualifications (DCSF 2008, DfES 2005).

These developments can be explained in Gramscian terms of how hegemonic discourse becomes visible. The need for an improved, better trained early years workforce reinforces the notion of a poorly educated workforce at present; a workforce that is not 'good enough' and therefore is subjugated into the models of professionalised workforces promulgated by government rhetoric (Gramsci 1971). The impact of this political context on identity for early years workers, specifically how notions of divide and rule are evident in policy and practice, offers a site for investigation. If the research is to investigate professional identities, an exploration of notions of 'profession' as well as 'identity' is essential to understand how they can be applied and interpreted in a workforce that has already been characterised as poorly paid with low level qualifications.

1.2 The idea of profession

It is beyond the scope of this section to enter fully into the debate of the 'idea of a profession' (Hoyle and John 1995: 1) and how it is contested; instead the reader is directed to Beck and Young (2005); Eraut (1994); Evetts (2003); Freidson (2001);

Hoyle (2001); Hoyle and John (1995) and Johnson (1972). Both Miller (2008a) and Urban (2008) note how the term professional in an early years context is neither uncontentious nor static due to debates about status, qualifications and identity. However, the author needs to state why 'profession' as opposed to 'occupation' was favoured in this study. Freidson (2001) differentiates between profession, occupation, and indeed technician, in terms of their specialisation, skill, formal and/or practical knowledge, mental and/or manual work. His view is that professions have, as a powerful elite, privileged status, monopoly and control over their work. In contrast, others suggest that 'professions are to be distinguished from other occupations by their altruism' and service to the benefit of the community and individuals (Johnson 1972: 13). Hoyle and John (1995) talk of the sociological context for professions as well as 'nearly professions' similar to the associate professions (Edmond and Price 2009) already noted in terms of HLTA and EYPS. Altruism and ethics versus bureaucracy and technicianist labour, clearly underpinned by issues of power and elitism (Wright Mills 1956), compete in determining the difference between a profession and an occupation.

Early years as a profession, and distinctive from an occupation, has been selected for the purpose of this research for three reasons. Firstly, because of its specialism and college training (Eraut 1994); secondly, it provides services to children and their families (Johnson 1972); thirdly, the idea of profession conveys an ideological position: exploring ideologies and altruistic aspirations in early years work thus offer a line of inquiry for this research. The contradictory nature of early years as a profession is evident at the outset as the policy section has already highlighted its low value, low pay position and associated *lack* of power or privilege.

The term 'professionalisation' is understood to be the process by which a workforce makes a transition to becoming 'professional' (Eraut 1994). According to Eraut (1994: 1) professionalisation is the 'process by which occupations seek to gain status and privilege in accord with that ideology' (of professionalism). In 2001, raising the qualification thresholds was intended to contribute to 'professionalisation and making this [early years] a more demanding occupation to pursue' according to the Early Years National Training Organisation (2001: 25). Of pertinence to this research is how early years workers articulate an ideology of early years professionalism as well as their interpretation of professionalisation. Professionalisation, arguably imposed rather than sought, created a timely opportunity for research with early years workers as the policies of workforce reform were underway. It is an example of how conditions for professional identities are subject to change with the possibility of new constructions; their foregrounding created opportunities for investigation.

National occupational standards, license to practice, occupational regulation and statutory membership of occupational organizations are examples of requirements of some children's workforce professions in England, for example nursing, social work and youth work. These forms of professional regulation in early years exist in terms of qualifications and awards such as national occupational standards at levels two, three and four, the CWDC Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree, an Integrated Qualifications Framework, Early Childhood Studies benchmark statements and the EYPS standards, but not in any form of professional regulation. This begs the question as to why the early years workforce stands

apart in this respect. Foucault's notions of 'regulatory gaze' and resistance (Foucault 1982) cannot be ignored in this context,

Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are.....The political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try and liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualisation which is linked to the state (Foucault 1982: 216).

Foucault's position prompts reflection on how groups or individuals respond to change. The Marxist position of resisting what is imposed by the state (more people in the early years workforce, more men, a better qualified workforce) can be extended to a position of denying being an individual, according to Foucault. This appears contradictory, but has been interpreted in the context of the early years workforce as seeking homogeneity, establishing a unified identity. They resisted dominant discourses of perpetuating self interests which were a feature of right-wing political government in Britain in the 1980s. The researcher was interested in exploring the impact of imposed workforce reform, specifically its 'professionalisation', on an unknown, invisible, unregulated workforce with members who joined for reasons of convenience more than altruism.

Another theme apparent in the conversations with students in further education was gender. Gender is constructed on the basis of social difference (Gilligan 1982) and relates to the notion of professional identities in the early years workforce through social traditions and contemporary trends of family life and labour (Crompton 1997). Use of the terms 'gender' and 'feminism' are intentional and should not be conflated. Chapter Two elaborates on both but the next section

asserts the rationale for locating identity and feminism in a social theoretical context in this study.

1.3 Identity and feminism

The archetypal early years worker is socially constructed as maternal and caring with patience in abundance (Goldstein 1998; Moss 2006). Such personal dispositions and characteristics are shared through media, in schools and in families and young people are subjected to these discursive constructs of the personal pre-requisites for early years work. To avoid dissonance arising from conflicting constructs, students embarking on a career in early years work have constructed a self-identity of being warm, caring, maternal and patient but also servile because of the low value of early years work (Goldstein 1998); an idealised identity for the early years worker emerges. Scripts, stories we tell ourselves and the influence of language internally and externally are critical in how we construct a self identity and manage potentially competing roles (Archer 2003; Goffman 1959). Such discursive power is *reproduced* through educational systems, its routines, curriculum and hidden curriculum according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990). Some early years workers are inculcated into these reproductive systems as children in primary, secondary and tertiary establishments and then as adults. They remain in education settings through placement and employment.

Structuration theory (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984) explains the relation between social routines, systems and structures and the individual as a contributor to those systems, routines and structures. Bourdieu (1990: 55) identified habitus as 'an

infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production'. Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus and the acquisition of dispositions and behaviours through structuration explain how early years workers' 'ways of being' and 'ways of doing' are reinforced through their work with children and families in the cultural and social context of the work setting (Dahlberg and Moss 2005). Social theory therefore has significant potential, with particular reference to gender, to explain how identities are constructed.

The researcher's biographical experiences showed how students made career decisions on the basis of family need. Students' needs arose from the female role of mother or daughter, for example, but these roles required students to manage competing female identities with being an employee and income earner. Employment needed to be compatible with the demands of family roles. Self identities are actively constructed through personal understandings of who we are in multiple contexts (Giddens 1991). They are reflexively constructed in response to external and internal influences as a narrative, through scripts, stories and similar discourse. Aspects of self also emerge within the concept of performativity (ways of being and ways of doing) in early years work. Conventions and language contribute to performativity according to Butler (1990) and feminine (but not necessarily female) performativity as an early years worker is congruent with that of being a mother, daughter, aunt or sister. Dissonance is thus avoided.

These points are made to demonstrate the power of gender, language and social environment interacting with notions of self to construct identities. As already

noted, there is a risk of conflating terms relating to gender, femininity and feminism, but it is evident that feminist debates emerge from an exploration of gendered identities in early years work, attributable to the social influences of family, education regimes, political rhetoric and culture. A note about terminology is apposite here: 'gendered' has been used already to signify that women are in the majority in the early years workforce, but 'gendered' does not communicate which gender. From this point, the term 'feminised' will be used to communicate more explicitly the social, cultural and historical context of the influence of women in the early years workforce. The implications are examined in 'the socio-political landscape' section in Chapter Two.

In addition to how gender influences identity, it is compounded by confusion over nomenclature (Adams 2008; Robins and Silcock 2001). The interpellation of how those working with young children are known: nursery nurse, early years practitioner, nursery assistant and child care worker, for example, indicate the range and uncertainty as to who or what they are in their own minds and the minds of others. Likewise, the spaces and places in England where those working with young children are located remain varied in terms of marketisation, funding and sustainability (Clark and Waller 2007; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD 2006). These points are reinforced by Cameron (2004: 17), 'There is no one model for the 'workers' in the childcare sector or job title to describe what they do'. This study has built on previous research (McGillivray 2008) into how interpellation, or the terms by which early years workers are called, influences the identities of the practitioners within the sector to be associated with the hegemony of low value work in patriarchal regimes. That work was literature

based; developing it created further possibilities of entering the social spaces and places where early years workers constructed their identities.

1.4 Parameters

This research is located in England and refers to policy in England. The absence of a consistent title for members of the workforce has already been noted, so in order to adopt an inclusive and suitably generic term, the researcher has chosen 'early years worker' to refer to members of the early years workforce who are not teachers. Teachers in England are required to achieve Qualified Teacher Status and be a graduate. The early years workforce includes those who work in private, voluntary, independent and statutory settings. Usually, this includes home based care, such as childminding or nannying; however, this research did not include members of the workforce who provided home-based care. It was decided that such provision and associated role, responsibilities and day-to-day lived experience may create a qualitatively different professional identity compared to those who provide group-based care, and thus would have introduced a dimension that needed to be taken account of separately (and thus poses an opportunity for further study). The author acknowledges the risk of perpetuating segregation by separating some from others to be included in the research; also it will be difficult to generalize from this research to those who provide home-based care.

The terms 'early years workforce' and 'early years workers' will be used in this research for the purpose of examining what literature has revealed about those who work with young children. Early years worker avoids favouring either care or

education. The inherent difficulty of grouping all such workers under one title is contentious in its assumed homogeneity but is justified for the purpose of clarity and consistency.

From birth to six years has defined the age range for early years work in research undertaken by others (Bertram and Pascal 2001, for example) and is therefore applied in this research too. This age range also defines those working with children within the parameters of the statutory curriculum and daycare standards of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007). However, the variability and multiplicity of early years work contexts across private, voluntary, maintained and independent provision within the Early Years Foundation Stage contribute to the heterogeneity of the early years sector (Nicholson *et al.* 2008). Such variability in types of provision offered the opportunity for a range of participants to contribute to the study. Having set the scene thematically in terms of aspects of policy, the idea of profession, identity and feminism, the next section synthesizes the positions and debates in a formulation of the research aims.

1.5 Framing the research aims

The rationale for undertaking this research has partly been framed by national initiatives and research but the researcher is mindful of the contribution of the international community too. Professionalism as well as professional identities in early years work has been investigated by Miller (2008a) and Osgood (2006a, 2006b) within the UK and internationally by Dalli (2008); Kinoshita (2008); Oberhuemer (2005) and Urban (2008) for example. Their work validates research into professional identities in early years work as worthy of investigation. 'This is a

good time to be examining the workforce and the model of the worker' (Cameron 2004: 3). Research into the professional identity of other professions (Carpenter 1995; Dent and Whitehead 2002; Fealy 2004; Gillis 1981; Hextall *et al.* 2007; Lingard *et al.* 2002; Tucker 2004, for example) and research related to inter-agency working and the re-configuration of children's services is also the focus for others' research (Daniels and Edwards 2006; Frost 2005). As already noted, such work has been useful to this research, methodologically and theoretically, and Daniels and Edwards (2006: 6) add to its validation by asserting that,

There is a need to focus on the ways in which professional knowledge, relationships and identities incorporate learning 'who', 'how', 'what', 'why' and 'when'. Moreover, it is important to explore the dynamic, relational ways in which professional learning and professional practice unfold.

Inevitably, relationships and inter-personal dynamics recur in the examination of influences on professional identities due to their socially situated construction. Research into the development of the early years workforce has been needed for some years according to Ball (1994); Cameron *et al.* (2001) and Moss (2006). Models of how professional identities are constructed, shaped, acted on and resisted by the early years workforce can contribute to its development. An interpretive approach can be inclusive of understandings of diversity, heterogeneity, aspirations and experiences in their contribution to any shared professional identities within and beyond the early years workforce. With the emergence of a 'new professional' group, research offers space to challenge the hegemonic discourses of standards, regulation and similar regimes, and question the oft-cited evidence based practice lauded in government rhetoric (Biesta 2007).

These points add to the justification for undertaking the study and reinforce the potential for the research to use notions of macro-, meso- and micro-levels to frame its methodology.

The aim of this introductory chapter has been to set out the reasons for undertaking the study from personal, professional and epistemological perspectives. The discussion has intended, without being overly reductive, to show how the researcher has conceptualized the debates, and subsumed them into manageable questions to direct the research. The underpinning theme of the research aim relates to the notion of professional identities *per se* and what contributes to their construction in the early years workforce.

Therefore, the aim of the research is to explore how professional identities emerge within the early years workforce, and to understand what factors contribute to the construction of such identities. Findings may be useful in understanding how professional identities emerge in similar workforces that share characteristics of being gendered, having low status and are undergoing reform. The research seeks to locate a sense of historical, cultural and social-political discourse related to early years work. The discursive context for the research is essential if social theory is to inform the analysis. As already noted, the epistemological and ontological positions of those on the periphery of the early years workforce also have potential impact on the construction of professional identities, as power-brokers and promulgators of hegemonic discourses. The methodology was therefore designed to take these positions into account in seeking factors that

contribute to the construction of professional identities in the early years workforce.

The study also seeks to investigate how members of the early years workforce shape the construction of their professional identities; they are at the core of the study. It was conversations with students and early years workers that initiated the idea for the research, so the methodology needs to provide a means whereby their discourse and meaning can be shared. Influence of self, how we mediate our positions, feminised roles and performativities have potential to contribute to identity construction, thus early years workers' ontological and epistemological positions are critical.

It is also essential that the research examines how professional identities impact on the reification of the day to day work that early years workers undertake. The implications for and on practice in the field has pertinence to those within the meso- level of experience for early years workers, that is, children, their families, colleagues and other professionals. The impact on children and their families, if not as direct participants in the research, needs to be made visible as members of early years communities.

In summary, the research aim is to explore how professional identities emerge within the early years workforce, and understand what factors contribute to the construction of such identities. Subsumed into the overarching aim are three questions. First, what contributes to the construction of professional identities in the early years workforce? Second, how do members of the early years workforce

themselves shape the construction of their professional identities? Third, how do professional identities impact on practice?

1.6 Chapter outline

The next chapter, the literature review, sets out a critical consideration of what others have said or researched that has a potential contribution to understanding aspects of professional identities. It elaborates the themes introduced in this chapter. It also includes consideration of theoretical frameworks and how they can assist an understanding of the construction of professional identities. Chapter Three justifies the interpretive research paradigm and methodology that has been selected to gather and analyse data in response to the research aim and questions. Chapter Four sets out a deconstruction of research findings and associated analysis; Chapter Five offers a final response to the research questions through a reconstruction of professional identities; Chapter Six concludes the thesis with an evaluation of the study. Appendices and bibliography follow thereafter.

Chapter Two: A review of the literature

Chapter One set out the rationale for the study, and identified the themes of policy, the idea of profession, identity and feminism as central to its context. This chapter aims to present a critical review of literature that contributes to debates as to how professional identities are constructed and defined. It starts with an examination of literature relating to professional identities *per se*, and debates political and social theoretical influences on both identity construction and the early years workforce. Theoretical positions lead to a critique of an ecological model of professional identity construction in its contribution to this study followed by a consideration of self and agency at the micro-level of experience. This theme recurs throughout the chapter with different emphases.

The chapter then proceeds to examine a genealogy of the early years workforce, followed by its contemporary landscape at the macro-level of influence. The socio-political influences of gender and feminism, status and power; epistemological and ideological influences; roles cultures and communities of practice are themes that have emerged from the literature as being similarly critical to the construction of professional identities at the meso- and macro-levels of experience. These themes have created the structure for the chapter, and have intentionally considered various perspectives from micro-, macro- and meso-positions.

A thematic approach allows for each to have some interface and overlap with another; they are not mutually exclusive, but at least provide a structure. Sources from various disciplines, such as education, psychology and sociology have been

consulted to inform the literature review; each has an identity and disciplinary culture which needed to be grappled with to inform this chapter.

The literature review begins with consideration of what has been said about how professional identities are constructed, what might define them and contribute to them. The term 'professional identities', intentionally plural, reinforces multiplicity that arises from the contribution that self, diverse roles and contexts have to play in the construction of professional identities.

Identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions (Hall 2000:17).

Constructions of self identity inevitably interface with professional identities, and Hall's quote sets the scene; he reinforces inherent complexities in working with such pluralities as demonstrated by the students in the conversations cited in Chapter One.

2.1 Professional identities

The contestable notions of professionalism, professionalisation and being 'a professional' have been the focus of a range of literature, such as Broadbent *et al.* (1997); Eraut (1994); Hoyle and John (1995); Freidson (2001); Johnson (1972) and Stronach *et al.* (2002), and have been briefly considered in Chapter One. These authors confirm the uncertainty about the notion of 'profession' and what

defines being 'a professional' in terms of privilege, power, ideological positions and epistemologies. The literature around professionalism and professional identities in education suggests there has been more interest in identities of *teachers* working with young children (Egan 2004; Siraj-Blatchford 1993; Woods and Jeffrey 2002, for example) as opposed to staff working as teaching assistants (Tucker 2009) or nursery nurses, but the literature makes valuable contributions nevertheless and has informed the review. The lack of literature relating to early years work is arguably indicative of the more traditional, familiar and visible constructs and discourse of teacher as a focus for previous research and investigation.

Also, the term professional identities in the context of early years work has been cited by Moss (2006) and Osgood (2006a, 2006b) for example, but there is scope for a more detailed exposition as to how identities are constructed and what contributes to them. Inferences will be made from such literature, informed by Miller (2008b) and Tucker (1999, 2004) who have written more extensively on professional identities. For example, with reference to the professional identity of those working with young people, Tucker (2004) proposes that,

Any framework that attempts to assist reflection on matters of professional identity construction must be able to:

1. explore the impact of 'ideological effects' on the socio-political terrain and the conditions of existence for those working with young people;
2. assist analysis of those forms of discourse that are used to define particular forms of work;
3. show how ideas are struggled over and contested at various levels of experience;

4. demonstrate how such matters directly impact upon the professional identities which individuals and groups adopt in their everyday work (Tucker 2004: 84).

It has already been noted in Chapter One that the contemporary political terrain is fore-grounded with workforce reform in the early years, so the nature of the influence of forms of discourse, forms of work and struggles are helpful starting points for discussion. Ideological effects and the impact of identities on everyday work are returned to later in this chapter in 'epistemological and ideological influences' and 'roles, cultures and communities of practice' to elaborate on how ideologies are pertinent to professional identity construction. Neo-liberal forces have also been outlined in Chapter One and how the commodification and mixed economy of childcare reflects capitalist influences in the sector. Dahlberg and Moss (2005: 37) refer to capitalism in the early years as a 'star player on a global stage' and they argue that such capitalism requires a new kind of workforce, a labour force that meets the need for flexibility and affordability. This brings its own challenges for members of the workforce as a result of such subjectification (Osgood 2006a, 2006b; Miller and Cable 2008; Urban 2008) and the macro-level influence of economic determinism on professional identities (Tucker 2004).

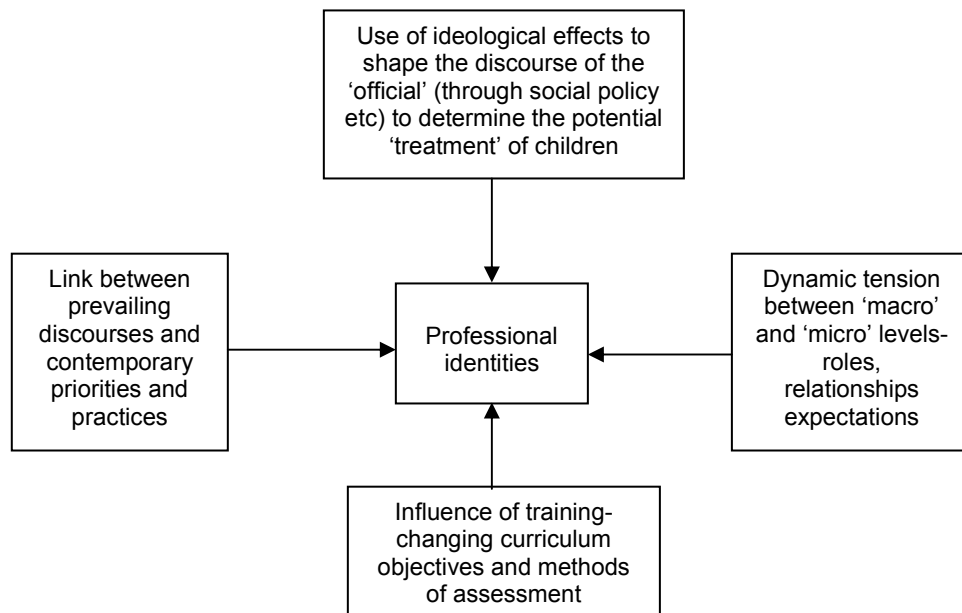
Some struggles that characterise early years work, such as being exploited by employers, being subject to regulatory gaze or surveillance (Foucault 1979) and the associated implicit criticism of not being good enough are noted by Colley (2006), Dahlberg and Moss (2005) and Osgood (2006a, 2006b). Their conclusions suggest that more research is needed to understand the complexities of the struggles and identities in early years work generated by the socially situated

context of their work but resistance and passivity are implicit. Researchers therefore should have a critical perspective on the dominant discourses within the early years sector such as workforce reform; professionalisation of the workforce; improving outcomes for children; integrated services, flexible childcare, for example, and their impact on members of the workforce. It is argued that as the macro-political influence of workforce reform filters through to the meso- and micro-spheres of workers' day-to-day lives (Evetts 2003; Parsons and Shils 2001; Rosenthal 2003), then we should examine ways in which power relations are shifted or sustained, and how these may illuminate notions of professional identities.

The status of client groups and how 'stakeholders' lay claim to having their best interests at heart through policy, codes of practice and work practices similarly contribute to the discourse of professional work: 'groups of professionals are assigned the task of controlling, gate-keeping, guiding and educating these particular groups' (Tucker 2004: 82). A direct comparison between those working with young people and those working with young children is justified as both workforce groups are subject to workforce reform and both client groups in contemporary English society are subject to media demonization (Goldson 2003; Prout 2003) creating 'dual problematisation' (Tucker 1999). The impact for the workforce is increased surveillance and hegemonic policy discourse promulgating interventionist regimes that promote positive outcomes for children, inspection and control through curriculum frameworks. How the workforce reacts to interventionist regimes and the implications for their shared or individual professional identities is

therefore pertinent to this study. Tucker's proposals (2004) are formulated into a model of factors that influence professional identities illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Factors involved in the construction of professional identity (Tucker 2004: 88)



Similar influences are also identified by Miller (2008b). She proposes that specialist bodies of knowledge and skills, made explicit in the workplace through defined roles and standards, impose themselves on the day-to-day lives of practitioners and thus contribute to the construction of professional identities. Practices and performativities (ways of being and ways of doing), implicit and explicit, can be specific to professional cultures at the meso- level, such as communities of practice (Wenger 1998) within individual early years settings (see later section 'roles, cultures and communities of practice'). Specialist bodies of knowledge at macro- level are presented in the form of National Occupational Standards or Subject Benchmark Statements, for example, and contribute to prevailing discourses in workforce reform through assessment regimes. The term 'official' discourse, used by Tucker (2004) in Figure 2.1, identifies discourses that

‘reinforce liberal ideological values’ (Tucker 2004: 85). In other words, policy initiatives such as workforce reform and childcare provision need to be critically examined for ways in which they convey hegemonic discourses at the macro-level about early years work (see Chapter Three ‘discourse analysis’) as well as how they are interpreted by the workforce at the meso-level of experience.

Early years work can be characterised by uncertainty (Tucker and Trotman 2010); it is a ‘messy business’ (Urban 2008: 144), arising from the chaotic lives of the children and families they work with, instead of the order and predictability that policy makers, decision makers and managers aspire to. Early years workers have to respond, often as a matter of urgency, to the needs of parents, carers and children in crisis due to homelessness, redundancy, child protection issues, domestic violence, for example. How workers respond can be determined by national or local policy, their perceived level of experience, confidence, expectation or ability, autonomy, practices in the work community and so on. In the context of integrated children’s services, Stone and Rixon (2008) acknowledged how implicit and explicit practices impact on professional identities. They suggest that professional identity is ‘how professionals understand themselves and their role including the more informal and implicit aspects of professional cultures’ (Stone and Rixon 2008: 110).

Stronach *et al.* (2002: 109) similarly point to macro-forces in their examination of identities of teacher and nurse, suggesting that they are ‘located in a complicated nexus between policy, ideology and practice’. The deconstruction of professionalism and professional identities as presented in Stronach *et al.*’s (2002)

paper is helpful as it confirms the seemingly ephemeral complexity of what might be a basis for agreement on what constitutes professional identities. They also articulate how 'economies of performance' as manifested in the dominant discourses of standards, audit and accountability, interact with 'ecologies of practice', the practices, knowledge and beliefs adopted, acquired and implemented by those undertaking specific professional roles (and an ecological context is elaborated in the next section). Economies of performance also recur within the themes of policy, professionalisation and professional knowledge and can be compared to what Dahlberg and Moss (2005) reinforce as the subjectification of the early years workforce and the dilemmas that prevail in their work. Subjectification is understood to be 'all those heterogeneous processes and practices by which human beings come to relate themselves and others as subjects of a certain type' (Rose 2000: 314).

The interface between aspects of the micro--level of experience and meso-level structures needs to be explored for what it reveals about the impact of communities on identities. The role of self is critical in terms of self-awareness, confidence and experience in identity construction (Beijaard *et al.* 2000). Similarly dispositions, biographies and motivations are critical elements of identity formation (Lieberman 2007, Wenger 1998). Identity construction will inevitably be a ruptured and disrupted process, as individuals react to experiences that are contradictory, unsettling and rarely linear.

So far the literature suggests a consensus that professional identities are shaped by multiple internal and external forces at macro-, meso- and micro-levels, such as

political and economic factors; cultures and practices; self and dispositions respectively. This shows the potential of an ecological model, which is considered next.

2.2 An ecological model of professional identity construction

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of child development emerged from his comparative research in kindergartens and equivalent childcare and education environments in the USA and former USSR. These two countries offered quite different political and sociological contexts; the term 'ecology' derives from Greek words for environment and knowledge and the systems theory takes account of how knowledge and practice emerge from political and social realities (Urban 2008). The interaction of five systems: the micro-system, meso-system, exo-system, macro-system and chrono-system took account of networks, the child's place and agency within those networks in cultural, social, political and historical contexts. The salience of this model, specifically the meso-system, in terms of its application to adults was not overlooked by Bronfenbrenner (1979: 210). He described it as 'a set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates.....for an adult, among family, work and social life'.

The chrono-system, in other words, changes that occur over time and historical influence, is applied to the construction of professional identities in the genealogy section later in this chapter. Exo-systems however are not considered in this study; they relate to those places and networks to which the

individual is not directly connected (Härkönen 2007), and are beyond the scope of the study, as is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) consideration of biological factors. It is therefore three of Bronfenbrenner's systems (1979), the micro-, meso- and macro-systems, that create a useful framework for this study. They illuminate the connectedness of psycho-social experiences, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979) and the way the environment and people within and beyond it shape the development of children and their families (Härkönen 2007; Swick and Williams 2006).

How individuals shape their identities alongside how identities are shaped by others and the multiple systems in which they are located are the key concepts applied to this study. Specifically, the macro-system of individual early years workers takes account of how they work within the structures of national government policy in the sector, historical and social constructs of early years work, class systems in which they have been brought up and economies of performance (see previous section). The meso-system recognises ecologies of practice (Stronach *et al.* 2002) in early years work, the impact on identity of socialisation at work, at home and in wider work-based networks (see Figure 2.2 on page 75).

Micro-systems operate at the level of the individual and their active participation in the environment and its reciprocity of social systems (Härkönen 2007, Penn 2005). In addition to the ecological systems model, other social theoretical explanations of how individuals construct self and professional identities

contribute to this knowledge. The following section delves further into the theme of self and agency, as it contributes significantly to identity construction.

2.3 Self and agency

This section starts with a brief outline of structuration theory, followed by a critique and analysis of its potential contribution to the construction of professional identities. Theories that explore the significance of the socially, personally situated nature of self identity include the reflexive project of the self (Giddens 1991), the social self (Mead 1934), internal conversations (Archer 2003) and action theory (Parsons and Shils 2001). These are critical in elaborating the influence of self on identity construction and are considered in turn.

As noted in Chapter One, structuration theory (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984) explains how individuals mediate between the internal sphere of self and agency and the external sphere of social structures. Giddens (1984: 14) describes agency as the 'capacity to make a difference' or transformative capacity; structures are the rules and resources of signification, domination and legitimation. Some critics of structuration theory (Archer 2003; Stones 2001, for example) argue that it over-emphasises the dualistic relationship between structure and agency and underplays their ontological articulation, or that it avoids explicit engagement with Marxist tenets (Gane 1983) even though they are implicit in Giddens' writing. Gregory (1994) and Thrift (1996) argue that culture is also absent in Giddens' explication of structuration theory, and it is for these reasons that it has limitations in the context of this research and alternative theoretical perspectives such as

feminist theory and communities of practice are turned to later in this chapter. Although structuration raises questions about how individuals respond to social structures through their actions, the influence of personal motivations, dispositions and desires are underplayed.

Giddens (1991) goes some way to address this in his discussion of self in the context of modernity. He presents a narrative and focuses in part on ontological and existential influences on the self, arguing that self-identity is influenced by media, mass communication and globalization against the backdrop of modernity. Giddens argues that the narratives and auto-biographies we construct about 'the reflexive project of the self' (Giddens 1991: 5) are what we know and anticipate ourselves to be. What is pertinent to this study is how Giddens positions self identity as contingent on trust, power and capacity or 'life politics': 'a politics of life decisions' (Giddens 1991: 215). The intersection between selves who are early years workers and the narratives that are constructed through the life politics of the home, the workplace, the culture of the workplace, the influence of others, and the nature of the work tasks undertaken have been shown to be pertinent to professional identity construction by Williams (2007).

The role of others becomes apparent in the construction of professional identities and their influence on a day-to-day basis on self and agency, evident through decisions about career choices for example. Giddens' (1991) notion of self-identity emphasises the role of significant people in contributing to the narrative of who we are. Parents, other close relatives and partners behave and react to individuals, in part determined by their own personality and dispositions, but the notion of self is

constructed from the responses and reactions of others. This is the 'generalised other' according to Mead (1934). Families may reinforce a construct of self as caring and good with children on the basis of family childcare arrangements that include 'babysitting'. In turn, if the stereotypes of being female and a low academic achiever are perpetuated, this becomes a reason for, and expectation of, choosing childcare as a career. Particular forms of 'self' are thus attracted to work in early years. Agency or transformative capacity that have the potential to be realised through caring for vulnerable other drives individuals with commensurate histories, stories and self-narratives into early years work. Colley (2006) and Penn (2000) concur with this view, but there is a need for more research beyond childcare surveys such as those reported by Cameron *et al.* (2001); Cooke and Lawton (2008); Nicholson *et al.* (2008); Sauve-Bell (2004a, 2004b).

Although Mead's work preceded Giddens' writing about self identity, his emphasis on the behaviours of others is a significant dimension in identity construction. Mead (1934: 138) proposed that 'the individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individuals members of the same social group as a whole to which he belongs'. Mead continues, reinforcing how it is the position of the individual in a socially situated context that permits us to construct a self on the basis of the attitudes, gestures, behaviour and language of others. These symbols of behaviours and how they are interpreted for meaning in the context of the social self became known as 'symbolic interactionism' (Burkitt 2008: 37), a way in which shared meaning is constructed for any group, facilitating 'mediation in social relations and activities'. Such symbols, acquired and propagated by individuals provide the glue that binds

social groups such as workers together through shared identities. Structuration, or how workers mediate between self and such symbols, reinforce and reproduce identities and habitus in the workplace (see Chapter One).

The 'generalised other' (Mead 1934) is constructed through increased self-awareness of how others may view us, and in turn we adopt a stance that views ourselves from that position. First person plural – we, us, our – will be used in the context of individuals in general, not early years workers specifically, here for the purpose of clarity of writing; this address was also adopted by Giddens (1991); Goffman (1959) and Mead (1934). The generalised other and symbolic interactionism together can construct, in the minds of individuals, ways in which the norms, rules and laws represent groups to which the self belongs (Burkitt 2008), equivalent to the notion, in a work context, of professional habitus (Beck and Young 2005; see 'professionalisation' section later in this chapter). Mead's notion of the social self is optimistic: we use our dynamic interpretation of our social selves to adapt to change thus avoiding stagnation. Stagnation is subjective however, and the need for ontological security and protection is essential for us to cope with risk and anxiety, according to Giddens (1991).

Mead's social self takes account of how we construct professional identities in response to the ever-changing influences at micro-, meso- and macro-levels: we refer to new meanings, new interpretations and new encounters. However, the complexity of motivations, dispositions and imperatives that create multiple and competing reconstructed identities demands consideration. The position or referent of 'I' may seek stability through the generalised other, but it will be

contingent on these multiple forces. Also, Mead does not anticipate how we respond to destructive emotions about ourselves. Therefore, in addition to Giddens' (1991) acknowledgement of how risk and anxiety shape self identity, other intrinsic drives and motivations have to be taken into account in understanding factors that determine individual agency.

Mead's suggestion that internal conversations mediate between self and the social world was developed by Archer (2003). Archer (2003) extended structuration theory, arguing that internal conversations and stories we tell ourselves are also a form of mediation between structure and agency. Similarly, Giddens (1991) suggests self identities are stable if we have the ability to sustain a personal narrative, and that this integrates aspects of the real-world with aspects of self. This concurs to an extent with Mead (1934) in that stability can be established through a responsive, dynamic narrative. Archer (2003), through her analysis of three in-depth interviews, proposed that private knowledge, internal deliberations and levels of reflexivity engage with the macro-level of influence to shape our actions. How we internally mediate between self, agency and structures goes beyond the Cartesian mind-body dualism, according to Archer (2003). Such mediations are conscious and open to self-examination, even if sometimes only passively deliberated.

Archer (2003: 27) suggests that 'our personal identities derive from the pattern of our concerns together with how we believe that we can live it [our *modus Vivendi*] out.' The very existence of a *modus Vivendi*, according to Archer, predicates self-knowledge, an awareness of what is important to us and what we care about.

Archer clearly asserts that it is not a process of introspection that we engage with to develop a self-awareness and self-knowledge to determine agency. Self examination emerges instead through ontological, subjective, private and personal thoughts which are not accessible to anyone else. If internal conversations provide a basis for exploration of how early years workers may construct a self-awareness of what is important to them in their working relationships and their identities, but internal conversations are defined by being personal, private and unspoken, then appropriate methodological strategies are challenged. For now however, the potential of internal conversations as a means to explain ways in which we mediate between the self and the social world is useful, and returned to in Chapter Four.

Action theory takes account of psychological influences that may determine agency. The three system-levels that are posited by Parsons and Shils (2001) as conceptual structures in action theory - the personality system; the social system and the cultural system - draw on aspects of psychological behaviourist principles to explain actions in terms of motives, goals and values. Parsons describes the social system as,

A plurality of individual actors interacting with each other in a situation which has at least a physical or environmental aspect, actors who are motivated in terms of a tendency to the 'optimisation of gratification' and whose relation to their situations, including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of culturally structured and shared symbols (Parsons 1951: 5-6).

Action theory therefore constructs a bridge between social theory and aspects of personality and motivation (Marshall 2000) as well as reinforcing the model of macro-, meso- and micro-influences on individuals, illustrated in Figure 2.2 on page 75. Nuances of psycho-analysis, articulated by Giddens (1984), also exist in structuration theory, in terms of how the sub-conscious interacts with routine habits and behaviours in our daily existence. The conjunction of the socially located nature of identity, the psychologically located and contested nature of personality and the philosophically located nature of ethics, resonates with the multi-disciplinary nature of this research.

This section has mapped out some theoretical perspectives on how the self interacts with, and is shaped by, its social world. Simplistically, agency is determined not just by conscious, unconscious and sub-conscious desires, motivations and dispositions, but also biography and the influence of others. How professional identities are constructed through the mediation of structures, symbols and rules produced and reproduced by early years workers is central to this study. It supports the argument that identities in early years are influenced and shaped by signs and symbols such as class and hegemony. Reproduction is returned to in the following section; a genealogy presents compelling evidence of the structures that have been instrumental in shaping the early years workforce.

The genealogy of the early years workforce since the 1900s contextualizes the historical landscape of power and policy for early years workers. The strength of genealogy, according to Alvesson (2002: 60), is that it 'takes an interest in historical study as a way of understanding the present'. A genealogy offers a

critical examination of the evolution of the early years workforce, through a Foucauldian lens (Rabinow 1982), that is, to seek any themes of recurring power, rupture or subversion. It offers a juxtaposition of macro-forces against the micro-forces of self and self identity. It takes account of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) chronosystem in an ecological systems theory model of professional identity development.

2.4 A genealogy of the early years workforce

The researcher has drawn on Foucault (1972) to justify a genealogical approach to one line of inquiry for this literature review. It allows an insight into how and why the early years workforce in England has become what it is today and a search of the literature indicates this has not been done before. Gillis (1981) and Griffin (1993) show how history shapes identities, so a genealogical perspective on the early years workforce from early in the nineteenth century to the present day is justified as an original analysis of social historical influences on the professional identities over past decades. A caution against the assumption that histories are linear is offered by Lather (1991), who summarises a postmodern view of history as 'non-linear, cyclical, indeterminant, discontinuous, contingent (*sic*)' (Lather 1991: 161). Even though a linear perspective has been taken in this section, cycles emerge in the form of repeated subjectification and oppression of a feminised workforce. Oppressive forces are evident in the hierarchies and ruling classes who supervise and regulate early years workers.

Hall (2000) proposes that discursive practices revealed by an exposition of historical discourses contribute to the identification of 'subjects'. In the case of this research, the subjects are the early years workforce. A genealogy permits the author to posit how the social construction of early years work and early years workers can be interpreted through aspects of social theory. It reveals the development of a workforce that has emerged as a result of primarily economic and social forces and thus supports hegemonic influences (Gramsci 2002). Hegemony, Gramsci (2002) argued, is whereby

Dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the 'spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups (Strinati 1995: 165).

Applying this to early years work needs to be done through the economic determinants of costs of childcare, and the pay of those who provide it. Hegemony is created by the actions of the ruling classes, in this case, those who pay for childcare and those who regulate it, although the working classes can also create their own hegemony. It persuades other classes to accept its social, moral, political and cultural values as represented through institutions such as the law, the education system and the family (Jewkes 2004). Hegemony developed the Marxist view of the working classes having responsibility to meet the social and economic demands of the ruling classes and this argument is applied to the development of the early years workforce. The economic determinants can be identified as the need for children to be looked after while their mothers work and contribute to the national economy (Baldock *et al.* 2009; Bertram and Pascal 2001). This situation belies the complexity of underlying assumptions and

ideologies about 'mother-work', childcare, maternalism, feminism and motherhood (Ladd-Taylor 1995) which are re-visited in later sections.

The development of the early years workforce in England has arguably been influenced by the historical separation of those who care for babies and young children and those who educate them (Blackstone 1971; Cohen *et al.* 2004; Sylva and Pugh 2005). The separation can be attributed to a legacy from the First World War when day nurseries were provided for children who needed care, as opposed to nursery education. The divide is perpetuated in other ways, such as how data have been gathered as the pre-school statutory sector has not always been included in childcare reports (DfES 2002; Clemens *et al.* 2006, for example), despite attempts to address this (DfES 2004a). This could be seen as a lack of will on behalf of the government and local authorities to allocate the resources necessary to gather such data, particularly as the diversity of provision across sectors, agencies and types has exacerbated its complexity. The most significant aspect of this division was the inequitable pay and conditions across the workforce (Sylva and Pugh 2005).

Some of the earliest forms of pre-school education existed at the beginning of the nineteenth century as monitorial schools accepted children as young as four. Most children under the age of seven from poorer families, whose mothers worked, went to dame schools which were often located in impoverished urban areas. Dame schools were a very informal, unregulated form of child-minding in crowded, insanitary conditions in the women's own homes (Blackstone 1971). Such provision was in response to women needing affordable care for their young children while they worked. There was no other provision available to them.

Hegemonic forces created employment for the working classes to meet the needs of the ruling classes as well as providing education for children (Rose 1993). Gender became more tightly woven into the social constructions of early childhood, care and education at this time too:

The mother-child theme immediately appealed to the Victorian literary public of Dickens' era, and became the focus of English and American child psychology for a century. His over-statement of the young child's need for women teachers was unquestioningly accepted at a time when teaching was one of the few careers open to women (Whitbread 1972:34).

There was a tension between recognition that mothers who needed (or wanted) to work expecting an acceptable level of care for their children, and the belief held by many that the best place for a young child is at home with their mother. This tension was evident in policy and debate from the late Victorian era, at least to the Plowden report (Central Advisory Council for Education, CACE 1967), and was even reinforced later by the 'new right' government position in the 1980s and 1990s. Provision was also influenced by other economic and historical events.

The years between the start of the twentieth century and its middle decades included two World Wars and therefore influenced significant change in education and care provision for young children. The long economic depression between the wars brought no expansion of formal child care or nursery provision but there had to be a rapid expansion of childcare provision in order for mothers to be able to contribute to the war effort during the Second World War. Post war until the 1950s, women were discouraged by government from working (Crompton 1997); thus

pre-school care and education provision declined again (Bertram and Pascal 2001).

The Plowden report published by CACE in 1967 was the result of a government investigation into primary education. It conveys a sense of children of working mothers in need of compensatory care and intervention promulgating a deficit model of families with working mothers,

Some of those who have studied in detail the mother-child relationship in the early years hold that harm may come to some children through removal from their mother's care and companionship at too early an age (CACE 1967: 121).

Ambivalent views are reinforced by economic determinants, such as the limited resources and capacity of staff to be employed in any new nursery provision. However, the Plowden report recommended a substantial expansion in nursery education for children aged three to five, including both the number of places available for children and the number of staff (nursery teachers, teaching aides and nursery assistants). The report also recommended that nursery assistants and teaching aides should undertake a two year training programme (awarded then by the National Nursery Examination Board) including practical experience, in order to become qualified (CACE 1967).

The legacy of the 1960s for early years care and education, as promulgated in the Plowden report, persists. Hierarchical positions in education settings in England and outdated workforce models prevailed (Cameron 2004; Hargreaves and Hopper 2006; Osgood, 2006b). The low positions of those who undertook

assistant roles in education settings, such as primary schools, nursery schools, nursery classes and nursery units perpetuated a hierarchical structure for those in power to retain and exert their authority and assert their position (Mayall and Petrie 1983). Indeed, schools have traditionally operated and relied on structures that have clear demarcations of lines of responsibility and authority, and these have not favoured any shift towards autonomy for early years workers who are not teachers (Robins and Silcock 2001). Status, hierarchy and position are significant influences in the research, and are returned to in the section on the socio-political landscape later in this chapter.

The impact of the Plowden report was also significant in the field of research and interest in early years care and education, but not in terms of increased provision. There was still no appetite for an expansion of childcare and education; implications for funding precluded any real investment in services for decades to come. However, research was undertaken in the early 1970s to investigate provision in nursery schools, nursery classes, child-minding and pre-schools in order to prepare the ground for the anticipated expansion, and resulted in several publications: Blackstone (1971); Goldsworthy (1972); Parry and Archer (1974); Taylor *et al.* (1972) and Tizard (1974) for example. There is some consensus in the findings from these studies, and common threads are firstly the importance of appropriate pedagogical practices for young children to grow and learn; secondly the perception that early interventions provided by nursery education may be beneficial to children and their families and thirdly that family circumstances have a significant impact on children's well-being. This ideology is promulgated in contemporary government sponsored contemporary research (such as research

into the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education, or EPPE project, Sylva *et al* (2004).

It is indicative of the approach taken by researchers into nursery education in the decades up until the 1970s, that there is limited mention of the workforce who are not qualified teachers. Despite Margaret Thatcher's White paper 'Education: A framework for expansion' (Department of Education and Sciences, DES, 1972), the proposed development of nursery education stalled again; arguably due to right-wing politics and agendas. There was no desire amongst politicians to extend provision due to maternalistic ideologies that the best place for children is at home with their mothers. This was despite the increasing voice of feminism and recognition of the low status of both women and children in society at this time (Crompton 1997; Mayall 2002; Wyness 2006).

Nursery education was subject to policy and decisions by the government department with responsibility for education whereas social services day nurseries were subject to the policy and priorities by government departments with responsibility for health and social services. The division of purpose in early years between care and education was apparent in the later decades of the twentieth century. Nursery education was available to parents of children aged three to five for a limited number of hours each day, with a focus on education, as opposed to the care on offer in day nurseries for parents who had usually been referred for social reasons. Whilst staff working in each type of setting had generally the same qualifications, the role they were expected to take on with the children and parents was qualitatively different (Kellmer Pringle and Naidoo 1975).

In education, the focus was on learning and preparation for the next stage of education. Although staff were not well paid, the working day and holiday entitlement remained better than their peers working in day nurseries. The role of workers in day nurseries was interventionist, compensatory and custodial, intended to meet the social and emotional needs of the babies and young children in their care because the parents were deemed unable to do so. Some integrated children's services attempted to close the divide between care and education (Jamieson and Owen 2000) but such re-organization was not universal. The divide between care and education was, and remains, inequitable for those employed in each in terms of job description and conditions of service.

The 1970s marked other developments within the early years sector with the advent of national organizations such as the Pre-school Learning Alliance; the National Child-minders Association; the National Childcare Trust and the National Children's Bureau. The extent to which these organizations offered a conduit for practitioners to participate in developments, to be consulted and influence policy however is uncertain. Despite these developments during the 1970s, the training, education, status and visibility of early years workers retained the status quo.

An exception in the 1970s was a research project started by Martin Woodhead, and completed by Clift *et al.* in 1980 on behalf of the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales. It specifically investigated 'The Aims, Role and Deployment of Staff in the Nursery'. In the introduction they state, 'The use of the term 'staff' is important. Unlike most other stages of education, nursery education is staffed not just by one group of professionals,

but by two: nursery teachers and nursery assistants' (Clift *et al.* 1980:13). They acknowledge that the aim of the research was to inform future training of both nursery teachers and nursery assistants, and that difference and discrepancies between them should be attended to. They reported that,

Since these groups of professionals start out from very different educational levels, arrive at the nursery by very different training routes, and are paid substantially different salaries, what they characteristically do and what their responsibilities are, is of much more than academic interest (Clift *et al.* 1980:14).

The (long-running) discourse is interesting here: almost a curiosity is aroused, the novelty of realization of a workforce about which little was known and an acknowledgement of its inequities. Clift *et al.* (1980) used a multi-method approach with interviews, observations, rating scales and questionnaires. Eighty staff in forty nurseries contributed to the research and key findings included some dissatisfaction with status expressed by the nursery assistants about ways in which tasks were delegated and the respective roles of teachers and nursery assistants in promoting children's learning. Assistants spent more time on welfare tasks, while teachers planned, interacted with children directly and undertook administrative work, a model that prevails in education (GMB 2003).

As this seems to be the only research into the early years workforce, who were not teachers, in England from the 1980s, epistemological perspectives on any sense of professional identity of the workforce is limited. Indeed, Kellmer Pringle and Naidoo (1975) identified 'The long-standing neglect of developmental studies is reflected in the fact that there is not one university department of child

development in Britain devoted solely to this vital subject' (Kellmer Pringle and Naidoo 1975:169). A corpus of knowledge of early years care and education did not exist other than work with a specific medical, educational, psychological or sociological focus. The implications of this for professional identities are returned to in the section on 'epistemological and ideological influences'.

In the 1980s, private provision of child care for mothers who had to or wanted to work expanded rapidly in line with changing roles of women. The early years workforce expanded to meet employers' needs (Cohen *et al.* 2004). Some parents could afford to pay the fees charged by private day care providers but for parents who could not, but still needed to work, family or other informal care provided by a friend, family or neighbour was the only solution (Cohen *et al.* 2004). The expansion of private, for-profit childcare introduced market forces and the implications for the workforce were significant in terms of inequities in training and qualifications for example.

In the 1980s, there were inspection, statutory and other regulatory frameworks for maintained settings within health and education authorities; however, for staff employed in the private sector, there was no requirement to have achieved a specific level of education or qualification. The lack of workforce data, other than labour force data, throughout the 1980s and 1990s means that it is difficult to be certain about the numbers of staff, their education and training or their movement into and out of the early years workforce during this period. However Cohen *et al.* (2004) compiled data that suggest a 141% increase in the number of childcare places in private day nurseries in the period from 1989 to 1993. Those entering the

workforce became a member of an invisible group which was relatively free from national regulation, standardization and surveillance; practice would be shaped by local need, priorities and leadership. Supervision and regulation by matrons and head-teachers existed at a local level. The lack of national regulation suggests that the government had no desire to invest, or to address issues of inequity and quality of early years provision; it was deemed adequate in meeting the needs of young children and their families. In turn, the workforce experienced a level of freedom and agency in their day-to-day work, and professional identities were likely to be constructed with minimal intervention from any macro-level of influence.

Feminists would argue that the genealogical narrative perpetuates the myth of women only being suited to the maternal aspects of early years work (see Colley 2006; Goldstein 1998; Osgood 2006a; 2006b) and such debates are returned to later in this chapter. The socially constructed world of early years care and education was one of surveillance through supervision by matrons, teachers and advisers. It remained subjected to low status and low pay imposed by economic forces. Most workers were unqualified women, low paid with poor conditions of employment, under-resourced by government and unknown. There is scant data to challenge such a negative and oppressive landscape. Early years workers' sense of professional identity was likely to be shaped by those who supervised them, and the mundane, routine care and cleaning tasks ascribed to them.

The low value ascribed to their work by themselves and by their managers is commensurate with labour in Marxist terms, created by industrialisation, an

expanding workforce and commodification. A dominant maternalistic ideology of early years workers being substitute mothers meant that they would not require any significant level of education or training. This draws on supposition and speculation, not a comfortable position in academic work, but any detail that informs us more specifically about the professional identities, cultures and positions is not available. It remains elusive and unknown.

If the workforce was not visible in research until the 1970s, then what is known about it now? The next section provides a profile of characteristics of the early years workforce that assist with an understanding of its contemporary ecology.

2.5 A contemporary landscape

It is not intended to present a further account or critique here of recent policy developments that relate to the children's workforce reform arising from the reconfiguration of children's services. They are provided by Baldock *et al.* (2009); Cohen *et al.* (2004); Jamieson and Owen (2000); Luck (2008); Miller and Cable (2008) and Moss and Petrie (2002). However, to provide a contemporary context in addition to history, some recent changes at the macro-level of influence are noteworthy. The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) was created in 2005 to lead on children's workforce reform in response to the government agenda of reconfiguration of children's services. Statutory, private, voluntary and independent sector bodies and organizations that have any connection or responsibility in relation to working with children and young people are represented on the Council. The task of beginning to define who the early years

workforce is today was not begun until 2001, and some data remain elusive. The CWDC has itself acknowledged 'there are very few data sources currently available that have been broken down or analyzed at the appropriate sector or occupation level, particularly in relation to the children's workforce' (CWDC 2007b: 1).

The data are therefore variable and uncertain in terms of who may belong to the early years workforce. Most recent data have been collated from surveys such as those reported by Butt *et al.* (2007); CWDC (2007); Daycare Trust (2008) and UNISON (2006). Although the Daycare Trust report is the most recent available at the time of writing, it draws heavily on an extensive survey conducted in 2007 by Nicholson *et al.* (2008) who also compare workforce data, where available, for 2006, 2005, 2003 and 2001. Nicholson *et al.* (2008) note that data were collected separately from childcare and early years education provision. This demonstrates the continuing divide between childcare and early years provision. However, data presented here have been collated from the Nicholson *et al.* (2008) survey to foreground pertinent characteristics of the early years workforce that contribute to its identity on the basis of forces noted already in this chapter.

In 2007, data show that numbers of both qualified and unqualified staff had increased in all sectors. There was a 33% increase, for example, in full day care (mostly privately run settings) and the age profile for this group was 31% under 25 years. The school-based workforce tended to have an older age profile than the childcare sector. 1% of the workforce reported a disability, 98% of the workforce was female and approximately half worked part time overall. Full day care

provision did not record ethnicity of staff but for school based provision, the ethnicity of staff ranged from 12% in nursery schools to 2% in primary reception classes.

Table 2.1 illustrates the total number of staff working in different types of provision, and also number of paid and unpaid staff. It shows that of the un-paid staff in full day care, 6% were students and 3% were volunteers: 15,000 staff were therefore supernumerary, nearly 1 in 10 (Nicholson *et al.* 2008). This figure exemplifies a dependency on unpaid workers for the delivery of services and provision; it contributes to the identity of the workforce and it is evident where majorities and trends exist. (Totals do not necessarily tally, as it was noted by the report authors that some double counting had taken place).

Table 2.1 Numbers in the workforce by provision and associated number of staff paid and unpaid (source: Nicholson *et al.* 2008)

Provision	2007	2006
Full day care, paid and unpaid	165,200	159,300
Paid	154,600	143,900
Unpaid	15,000	15,400
Full day care in children's centres	14,000	10,500
Paid	13,300	9,400
Unpaid	1,400	1,100
Nursery schools	5,900	5,500
Paid	5,000	4,600
Unpaid	1,000	1,200
Primary schools with nursery and reception classes or reception classes only	118,400	106,300
Paid	90,900	74,200
Unpaid	29,100	32,100

Table 2.2 illustrates variables that influence the pay of those working in full day care. The national minimum wage was raised in 2007 to £5.52 per hour. The median UK take home pay was £10.91 for women in 2008 (ONS 2008, cited by Wills 2008). In fact, investigations in 2006 revealed evidence that childcare workers were frequently paid less than the minimum wage (Daycare Trust 2008; UNISON 2006). Not only are there differences across the childcare and school-based sectors, but also within the childcare sector itself, comparing those working in full day care with those in full day care in children's centres.

Table 2.2 Variables that influence pay for staff working in full day care (source: Nicholson *et al.* 2008)

Variable by:		Pay per hour		Pay per hour
Region	London	£8.10	East Midlands	£6.40
Status	Children's centre	£8.70	Not children's centre	£6.80
Graduate led	With graduate	£7.80	Without graduate	£6.80
For / not for profit	Not for profit	£6.10	For profit	£5.80
Role	Supervisor	£7.10	Other paid staff	£5.90

It is also worth noting parallels with similar groups of workers who care for others: employees who care for the elderly, teaching assistants, those in youth work, those who work with looked after children, for example. It is evident that those who work with groups with low status in society are by association low status themselves, and this is reflected in pay (Brannen *et al.* 2007; GMB 2003; Hanlon 1998; Tucker 1999).

The data in Table 2.2 indicate that those who work in the statutory, school-based sector continue to be better paid and have better terms and conditions of

employment (Cohen *et al.* 2004; DfES 2005; Sauve Bell 2004a; Sylva and Pugh 2005), contributing to the continuing inequality within the workforce. An attempt to integrate social services day care and nursery education was written into the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE 1998) of which Moss and Petrie (2002) offer an interesting discourse analysis. Cameron (2004) and Cohen *et al.* (2004) reflect on the changes in the early years workforces that started to emerge as Labour policies were implemented such as local SureStart programmes and an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree (Miller *et al.* 2005). However the attempt to introduce vertical structures in order to create clearer progression routes for early years workers beyond level three qualifications was limited in the following ways.

Firstly, the apparent title of Senior Practitioner conferred on those who achieved the Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree was never established in practice or in its status, so no additional pay or associated roles and responsibilities were attached to it (Miller 2004, 2008b). Also Foundation Degrees were not understood by employers or students (Wilson Sherriif 2008). Secondly, the increasing numbers in the workforce were working in the private sector where employers claimed to be unable to afford rates of pay equal to those in the statutory sector (Penn 2007). Commodification thus became a significant driver in the workforce. Thirdly, there was no single union or professional association for those who were not teachers who worked in early years. Union membership for early years workers was generally low (Cohen *et al.* 2004), and the position of teaching unions was, and remains, to keep teaching as a graduate profession. Those undertaking support or assistant work are denied membership. Other

unions were vocal in their advocacy for more equal pay and conditions, to no avail (GMB 2003, UNISON 2006).

Fourthly, changes in children's services were made at local, not national, level so authorities' reconfiguration of education, health and social care departments at this time were dependent on local needs and resources (DCSF 2007). There was no national agreement on pay and conditions as a minimum standard for those working in childcare. Differences in local authorities' resource capacity, local needs, potential professional 'protectionism' all contributed to tensions between those working in the private, statutory and voluntary sectors in childcare (SEFDEY 2009). Paradoxically, all these reinforce ways in which the early years workforce has been subjugated into hierarchical structures that impose restrictions rather than permit the vertical movement that was the 'official' intention (Cooke and Lawton 2008; Wilson Sherrif 2008).

Furthermore, the qualification profile provides another indicator of who the workforce is and how its comparatively low level qualifications perpetuates a similarly ascribed position in the labour market. Table 2.3 on page 56 shows 61% of the workforce in childcare provision had at least a level three qualification, a decrease of 3% from 2006 data (Nicholson *et al.* 2008). The benchmark of a level three qualification for a member of staff working in early years to be accepted as 'qualified', as set by the regulating and inspection body Ofsted is a target for all members of the workforce at the time of writing (DCSF 2009).

Table 2.3 Qualifications achieved by level for staff working in full day care
(source: Nicholson *et al.* 2008)

Qualification by level in 2007	%
No qualification	9%
Achieved level 2	16%
Achieved level 3	61%
Achieved level 4	5%
Achieved level 5 or above	6%

Approximately one in ten members of the early years workforce in full daycare was unqualified in 2007 (Nicholson *et al.* 2008) but other countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, New Zealand, for example) require early years educators to have studied to degree level or equivalent if they lead provision in settings (OECD 2006). Value is ascribed to higher level education in these countries. It is also noteworthy that in England level 3 appears to be the ceiling for qualification achievement. Similarly, Table 2.4 illustrates the level of qualification being worked towards by staff working in full day care; it shows a significant proportion not working towards any qualification.

Table 2.4 Qualifications being worked towards by level for staff working in full day care (source: Nicholson *et al.* 2008)

Qualification by level in 2007	%
Working towards level 2	4%
Working towards level 3	13%
Working towards level 4	7%
Working towards level 5 or above	8%
Not working towards a qualification	65%

There must be rewards other than pay that attract young people into the workforce or there are other forces that lead them to childcare careers. Early years workers were certainly vociferous in berating their low pay in research reported by

Cameron *et al.* (2001); GMB (2003) and UNISON 2006. However, Penn (2000: 104) contends that 'recruitment into childcare training in the UK is aimed at a particular group of women with low academic achievements and from mainly disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds' because there are limited career opportunities for such groups. She continues,

childcare students in training tend to see themselves as 'naturals', building on their personal experiences in looking after children, and see their strength as lying in their everyday practice, rather than in the acquisition and application of knowledge about children (Penn 2000: 104).

Indeed, current publicity information available on the CWCD website (CWDC 2010) seeks individuals with the following requisites, among others, for work in early years: 'a genuine liking for and interest in children and their development; patience and professionalism; a helpful, caring and understanding nature and a sense of fun.'

Penn's argument is compelling; most recent data suggest that trends established decades ago are proving stubborn to shift in terms of gender and academic achievement but they reinforce significant hegemonic influences. Cooke and Lawton (2008) reinforce Penn's proposition as to why young women choose the profession, in other words, for reasons of class and this line of inquiry offers a site for further research to explore perceptions, experiences, discourses and power at the interface between macro-level and micro-level influences. The next section considers specific structures and impositions of workforce reform, an example of macro-level influence.

2.6 Current workforce reform

Policy documents that set out children's workforce reform (HM Treasury 2004; DfES 2005, 2006, 2007), state the intention for graduates to lead early years provision in all settings with children from birth to five by 2015 and in children's centres by 2010. A consultation on the proposals for workforce reform took place between February and July 2005 (DfES 2005). Boddy *et al.* (2005) wrote a joint response from a group of researchers at the Thomas Coram Research Unit as did representatives from the Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree in Early Years (SEFDEY) and Early Childhood Studies (ECS) national networks. The government's response to the consultation (DfES 2006) does not provide any details about the participants who responded other than claims of support for *their* vision of workforce reform. What is also noteworthy is that Margaret Hodge, then Minister for Children and Families, revealed in 2004, ahead of the consultation period, during a speech delivered to delegates at the SureStart National Conference, that 'we want to develop a new role, a new early years professional' (Hodge 2004).

The name by which the new group of graduates was to be known was part of the consultation, and the term pedagogue, although not familiar in the public domain, was favoured by some academics and members of national networks as it conveys a sense of the therapeutic, holistic approach that underpins what early years workers do (Boddy *et al.* 2005). The outcome was the title Early Years Professional, with status attached but not a qualification.

New structures such as EYPS raise questions about who has access to consultation, information and decision making in critical decisions about the direction of travel for workforce reform. Through reform, various structures such as standards and assessment regimes are extended to a new group of workers. The impact on professional identities can be explained through Bourdieu's (1998) theory of reproduction of identities and social practices. Positions ascribe privilege, and those who have social capital are able to seek access to, and make use of, information that exerts power on those without equivalent capital (Mulford 2007).

Bernstein (2000); Stronach *et al.* (2002) and Wolf *et al.* (2006) acknowledge how interventionist policy interferes with curriculum, content, standards and professional development to the detriment of professional autonomy and integrity. Since 1997, those working in management and leadership positions in education have been encouraged to undertake higher level qualifications delivered by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services. This has recently been extended to those who manage children's centres as they are required to complete the National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL).

Structures such as Early Years Professional Status and NPQICL reinforce control and reproduce official ideology. Tendering processes for approval to award EYPS privilege those organizations which are successful then lauded as beacons of good practice. They are complicit in 'toeing the party line' in delivering such programmes. The power-brokers in these forms of intervention are those on the periphery of the early years workforce itself, who are given approval to deliver

such programmes, or who hold budgets and can agree or decline applications for funding for training or education made by individual early years workers, or who may have the power to make a decision as to who should, or should not, have access to professional development. These are powerful positions; those who occupy them are the ruling classes (Freidson 2001; Johnson 1972). The contentious issues of power and power-brokers at the meso-level of influence are extended throughout the study, but an exposition of the structures of professionalisation in early years is considered next in order to demonstrate associated tensions and difficulties.

2.7 Professionalisation

In Chapter One, the reason for choosing the term 'profession', not 'occupation' in this study was stated to be due to the specialist training for early years work (Eraut 1994) alongside its altruistic and service elements (Johnson 1972) and ideologies. A characteristic of professions identified by Middlehurst and Kennie (1997: 51) is 'advanced learning, usually represented by higher education qualifications'. These views concur with Evetts (2003:397) who suggests that professions are 'the knowledge-based category of occupations which usually follow a period of tertiary education and vocational training and experience'. Evetts (2003) considers how occupations such as social work and caring for adults and children are claiming to be professions but this brings normative and social control through structures and state apparatus. EYPS in early years work is such a means of control and regulation.

Introducing the graduate status of EYP (Early Years Professional) enforces normative practices within the early years workforce through a competence model of training and education (Stronach *et al.* 2002). It introduces a group of workers who have been assessed against the 39 EYPS standards set by government (CWDC 2006), one of which is to hold a degree. Such workforce reform could be seen by cynical onlookers to be just 'yet another round of institutional restructuring without radical reform' (Coffield 2002: 492). The genealogy section noted repeated calls for workforce reform in early years, but its absence has so far been explained in several ways. Firstly it can be attributed to the power of the teaching profession in refusing early years workers equal status. Secondly early years workers have not been powerful enough in seeking it for themselves. Thirdly, government has not been willing to invest in the early years workforce. EYPS could be said to appease those who have demanded workforce reform, but it fails to address issues of pay and status for the majority members of workforce. It stalls workforce reform and investment.

Professionalisation forces professions to justify their position in response to government policy of accountability, marketisation forces and external regulation, according to Beck and Young (2005). The extent to which early years workers articulate their position in response to the status of EYP is worthy of investigation. Beck and Young (2005) also offer an analysis of the relationships between the 'inner' and the 'outer' spheres of professional groups and 'in particular how orderings of knowledge and forms of pedagogic transmission had consequences for *identity* and identity change' (Beck and Young 2005:184, original italicization). Inner and outer spheres of professional groups resonate with the positions of

different participant groups selected for this study. The presence of professional bodies can be an indicator of a group being eligible to be known as professionals. In fact the creation of such a body (a national Early Years Practitioners' Board) was a recommendation from research undertaken with fifty-three early years practitioners (Cooke and Lawton 2008), but there has been no move to create such a group, despite the emergence of members of a new group of early years workers: those with EYPS. Reasons may be similar to those listed in the previous paragraph.

The conditions that characterize the established professions of medicine, law and teaching for example, include collegiate autonomy; certification to practice; self-definition of the boundaries of professional knowledge corpus; the creation and implementation of their own code of ethics and finally a professional habitus, according to Beck and Young (2005). Habitus was cited in Chapter One as a form of structuration according to Bourdieu (1977); professional habitus is thus determined by ways in which early years workers are agents *before* they enter the field, as they enter it and once they are inculcated within it. Professional habitus is reproduced within the communities of practice that are early years workplaces, by *all* those who work there: apprentices, newcomers, decision makers, apprentice-masters, children, parents and so on. This form of habitus is owned by members of the profession and defines their values, standards, judgment and integrity, according to Beck and Young (2005). The development and manifestation of professional habitus in early years work offers a line of inquiry for further research; it is also returned to in the next section in the context of gender and feminism; power and status.

Oberheumer (2005) has debated professionalisation of early years work and warns of the temptation to adopt a codified, outcomes-focused approach to early years care and education. She offers a model of 'democratic professionalism' through which the workforce should not be 'transmitters of selected cultural knowledge' but 'critical thinkers and habitual researchers of everyday pedagogy' Oberheumer (2005:14). This concurs with concerns voiced by Ecclestone *et al.* (2005:12) who ask whether policy initiatives 'pathologise particular groups as failing to take advantage of 'opportunities', thereby requiring professional intervention' thus sustaining problematisation of the 'not good enough' workforces in official discourses (Tucker 1999, noted in Chapter One). The actions and intentions of managers for example, and their interpretation of official discourse further emphasise links between macro- and meso- levels of influence on the construction of professional identities and they are considered next.

There is a need for leadership capacity building in early years, as the historically low qualification profile means there are fewer workers with higher level qualifications, although this is changing (Nicholson *et al.* 2008). Those in a position to influence workers through their leadership styles, ideologies, strategies and structures in the workplace offer a site for inquiry in terms of how they shape professional identities through their leadership. Aubrey (2007); Moyles (2006) and Rodd (2006) have written most extensively on leadership in early childhood settings and along with Bottle (2007); Jones and Pound (2010); Muijs *et al.* (2004) and Pound (2008). An emerging body of literature presents day-to-day challenges for leaders in terms of managing teams, children's learning and working with parents.

There is also a need for a critical examination of how leaders and managers understand social and political issues within the early years workforce during reform and change. Factors such as a paucity of research, as well as the need to expand capacity within the workforce to take on management and leadership (Hartle *et al.* 2008); limited access to education and training on issues of management and leadership (Moyles 2006) and a need to begin the process of conceptualization, away from patriarchal management models, of leadership in early years (Aubrey 2007), all point to a landscape of uncertainty. Those who are forging new management and leadership positions may resort to the official NPQICL regimes, or what they have learnt from their apprentice-masters and micro-cultures of experience (Wenger 1998). How they create and construct communities of practice and learning becomes critical, and is returned to later in the chapter in the section on 'roles, cultures and communities of practice'.

How managers and leaders construct their own professional identities will be shaped by their biographical experiences (Giddens 1991), associated personal imperatives, class and ideological positions. Their subsequent impact on colleagues' construction of professional identities is critical and noted by Frost (2005); Lieberman (2007) and Wenger (1998). Professional identities will be shaped by the structures and practices in work settings; if leaders articulate aspirations for colleagues to become graduates, for example, and time, finance and mentor support are in place to facilitate access to higher education, then a degree becomes achievable. Such matters need to inform the research aims and analysis reported here: examining the discourse of early years workers, and those who have influence on them, can reveal ideologies in terms of what type of early

years worker is privileged by whom and how: that of maternal substitute, transmitter, technician or critical thinker.

These elements of workforce reform set the scene for what appears to be key influences on the construction of professional identities located in the literature: genealogical epistemologies and ideological influences. A working definition of professional identities is emerging from the biographical experiences and themes located in Chapter One as well as the findings and positions of others in the literature so far. Professional identities are socially situated, influenced by elements of self identity and external impositions. A sense of who we are, the self at work, the identities we shape and are shaped into through interactions with others in our work are construed as professional identities. The working definition will be returned to and modified as the study evolves.

The next section starts with some unravelling of the complex forces of gender, feminism, status and power, located at intersections of macro-, meso- and micro-levels of influence. The chapter started with an examination of how self and self identity contributes to the construction of professional identities, followed by macro-influences. The following sections of the chapter focus on meso-levels of influence.

2.8 The socio-political landscape: gender and feminism; status and power

2.8.1 Gender and feminism

This review has already demonstrated how historical and social macro-forces have shaped identities in the early years workforce. References to 'gender', 'feminine', 'maternal' and 'feminism' suggest a benign influence so far but now the author sets each apart and explains how they relate to this study. All are socially constructed, but gender usually distinguishes individuals as male or female, on the basis of how they align themselves, socially and psychologically if not biologically. Feminisation, and indeed masculinisation, describes normative behaviours and practices that propagate stereotypes, thus they are culturally and socially specific.

The growing body of work that contributes to debates about the binary nature of men and women teachers, boys and girls, masculinity and femininity in schools tackles issues of dominant discourses for teachers, their identities and reification of their work (Francis 2008; Jones and Myhill 2007; Martino *et al.* 2009; Skelton 2002, 2009). In the context of this study, their work offers significant insight into macro- forces that are apparent in schools such as boys' achievement, men teachers' career progression and sexualities. They reveal micro-level resistances and problematisation on behalf of teaching and managerial staff to boys' traditional masculine role behaviours such as boisterousness.

However, in early years work, the macro-forces in terms of masculinisation and feminisation appear more specifically in the forms of roles, traits and dispositions that are deemed pre-requisites in the care of young children such as being caring, warm and maternal. Thus, maternal behaviours, maternalism and mothering

introduce ideologies distinctly divergent from feminism as emphasised by Ladd-Taylor (1995: 3): 'Maternalists were wedded to an ideology rooted in the nineteenth century doctrine of separate spheres and to a presumption of women's economic and social dependence on men'.

Feminism occupies multiple positions determined by culture, language, history, race and politics. Feminism, in the context of this study, is a post-structuralist perspective that takes the researcher into the politics, power and patriarchal dimensions of early years work. Feminism moves the researcher to a position of being able to *legitimately* examine these forces. It is liberating in one sense, but troubling in terms of how forces are exposed as dominant and enduring. Post-structuralism removes the stable elements of self as subject, and shifts positions to those of the plurality of social meanings constructed through language and discourse (Dressman 2008); the following paragraphs pursue the complex interplay of gender, feminisation and feminism.

Careers guidance practice in schools reinforces myths of child care being easy work and for less able girls (Beck *et al.* 2006, Penn 2000). Incentives for mothers to return to work and the policy in England of a comparatively young school starting age conflict with guilt generated from maternalistic ideologies for mothers who want to stay at home. The policy of a young school starting age perpetuates a perceived need for maternal substitutes to care for such young children (Cohen *et al.* 2004).

A tension therefore arises from the dichotomy between a workforce that is socially and historically construed as caring, maternal and feminised, as opposed to the government rhetoric of creating a workforce that is professional, highly trained, well-qualified, equal to teachers and nurses in pay and status but which is also, paradoxically, feminised in recruitment campaigns (CWDC 2010). It is argued that similar social influences on the early years workforce arise from the discourses that prevail in television, newspapers, magazines, government information, and careers information in schools. As Tucker (1999) notes, problematisation arises from historical influence, media, research and policy portrayal and these forces contribute to how the public view the early years workforce, including those who are consumers or potential workers themselves.

These influences exist as discourses, and the discourses of the actors, or workers in this study, have a part to play in constructing identity. In relation to nurses, a similarly feminised workforce, Fealy (2004) found that stereotypes, values and ideologies were perpetuated in public discourses, but also that there was a 'lack of feminist consciousness on the part of Irish nurses that might be explained by the broader insecurity of Irish women working in a patriarchal systems' (Fealy 2004: 654). A feminised, but not a feminist, workforce is likely to reproduce stereotypical feminine behaviours and practices. Similar perspectives are noted by Leonard (2003) in roles within the British National Health Service, particularly enacted by nurses and doctors when workforce re-structuring reinforced subjectification for nurses particularly, suggesting gender and power remain key drivers in workplace dynamics. Feminised identities are reinforced by Field and Malcolm (2006) who argue that the caring nature of women is not natural, but derives from their inferior

status compared to men, their class and emotional labour of what they do (Colley 2006).

Issues of gender and status are exacerbated by the age of children worked with as noted by Goldstein (1998). She berates the 'erroneous conception of early childhood educators as somehow not as professional or not as intelligent as teachers of older children' (Goldstein 1998: 245). She finds the issues of 'less pay, less status, less visibility for the causes we endorse' as 'troubling' and continues by stating 'Contempt for caring and the care-giving professions continues to be widespread in Western culture' (Goldstein 1998: 259). She attributes this to the higher status of the scientific curriculum which is seen as a legitimate curriculum compared to the humanistic philosophy that underpins caring and education. Paetcher poses a similar argument,

Some forms of knowledge are quite clearly labelled by gender, and, of these, those signified as masculine are usually the more powerful. Women and girls have traditionally been excluded from such forms, initially simply through curriculum exclusion, and, more recently, by their being marked in ways that adolescents in particular find difficult to reconcile with their sense of self (Paetcher 2001:14).

The position of men as childcarers thus poses a challenge for the workforce. The argument that boys need male role models has been challenged by Robb (2001). He interviewed men working in childcare and concluded that the contradictory discourses about gender and childcare work often polarized views between men and women in the workplace. The constructs held by women of male early years workers, and vice versa, indicated disunity in Robb's (2001) research, and raises

questions about where resistance to more men in childcare is situated. Both Sumsion (2000) in her analysis of the case study of Bill, a male early childhood educator in Australia, and Cameron *et al.* (1999) debate gender stereotypes and their impact on early years workers' attitudes. The implicit resistance to any unsettling of the maternal, caring, feminine stereotypical discourses should not be underestimated, at all levels of influence: macro-, meso- and micro- (Cameron *et al.* 1999). Such is the deep-rootedness of these expectations and forces, that data show no increase in the numbers of men in the workforce since records started (Nicholson *et al.* 2008).

In order to understand further how gender issues may influence professional identities, both Gilligan's (1982) exploration of gender and dispositions, and Noddings' (2003) writing about caring, specifically the roles of 'cared-for' and 'one-caring' (Noddings 2003: 4), deconstruct stereotypes of those who care for others. Gilligan states,

While for men, identity precedes intimacy and generativity in the optimal cycle of human separation and attachment, for women these tasks seem instead to be fused. Intimacy goes along with identity, as the female comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others (Gilligan 1982: 12).

Gilligan suggests that it is on the basis of how we construct our relationships with others that influences our identity. Noddings (2003: 5) takes an arguably ideological, ethical and moral stance: the role of 'one-caring' is interpreted as one whose efforts are 'directed to the maintenance of conditions that will permit caring to flourish'. The one 'cared-for' is thus positioned as one who receives care,

responds to care, and in effect enters into a relationship of being cared for. Ethical and moral imperatives are significant in terms of how individuals interpret their roles and responsibilities in childcare work and in the family as mother, daughter and sister (Goldstein 1998). These were explicit influences for the students whom the author worked with in further education (see Chapter One.)

Performativities, already noted in Chapter One, are critical to gender and identity, according to Butler (1990). She emphasises how language and social and cultural convention have a critical role in perpetuating ways in which we perform gender. Feminised performativities therefore reinforce the status quo and thus hegemonies of oppression and maternalistic ideologies in early years work. Cameron *et al.* (2001) also noted competing caring roles and issues of class in their research with childcare students,

There is the issue of the attitudes of childcare workers towards mothering in general and their own mothering in particular, and the practices they adopt in the care of their own children. [...] Women who do most of the caring work (ie: nursery workers and childminders) are more likely to have lower levels of education and to work in lower status and lower paid jobs (eg: childcare of various kinds) (Cameron *et al.* 2001: 104).

Conflict arises between caring roles at work and caring roles at home and the long working hours that keeps early years workers away from their families; how early years workers manage competing identities as carer in the home and carer in the workplace is pertinent to this study.

Using the post-structuralist language of 'other' was also used by Cameron *et al.* (1999: 21),

Other groups can be appropriated or assimilated by the dominant party. The marking of Other is not just a method of providing a distinction between two groups, but a way of institutionalizing hierarchical difference and power: an Other can be reduced to a 'nobody'.

Men are the 'other' in early years work. Power is being asserted by women in their resistance to men becoming part of the early years workforce (Robb 2001). Women are able to adopt a dominant position at the meso-level, if not at the macro-level. They are a significant majority of the early years workforce. Managers and leaders who are women are more likely to be making decisions about new recruits and appointments, the organization of settings, and therefore reproducing the routines and systems that perpetuate patriarchal regimes.

Creating shared identities through common performativities at the meso-level permits a resistance to the structures and reproduction of patriarchy. Othering men in the early years workforce is exacerbated by specialist media, fanning concerns that associate men, not women, with child abuse (Jones 2007); such socially determined constructions of gender are apparent in specialist education and early years periodicals (Defries 2010; Gaunt 2009; Ward 2009, for example). However a paucity of data and research into the underlying issues of gender influences in the early years workforce limits further substantiation and suggests an opening for future research (Vandenbroeck and Peeters 2008; Sumsion 2000).

Feminist debates (Butler 1990; Hekman 1990; Lather 1991; Noddings 2003; Paetcher 2001) have significant potential to illuminate ways in which discourses can help us understand factors that contribute to the construction of identities. Thus far, such debates relate to how feminisation of the early years workforce reproduces associations between caring, class and academic ability. It seems that social, cultural, historical and discursive influences suggest the early years workforce offers resistance to men working at the meso-level of the workplace (Sumsion 2000), as a means of exerting power; that competing ideologies exist between role as carer in the home and carer in the workplace; and that performativities by workers and their managers perpetuate feminised behaviours and practices in the workplace. These prevailing influences reinforce feminised, but not feminist, professional identities, thus the status quo of traditional identities in early years is maintained. It is issues of status and power, continuing the theme of socio-political influences, which are considered next.

2.8.2 Status and power

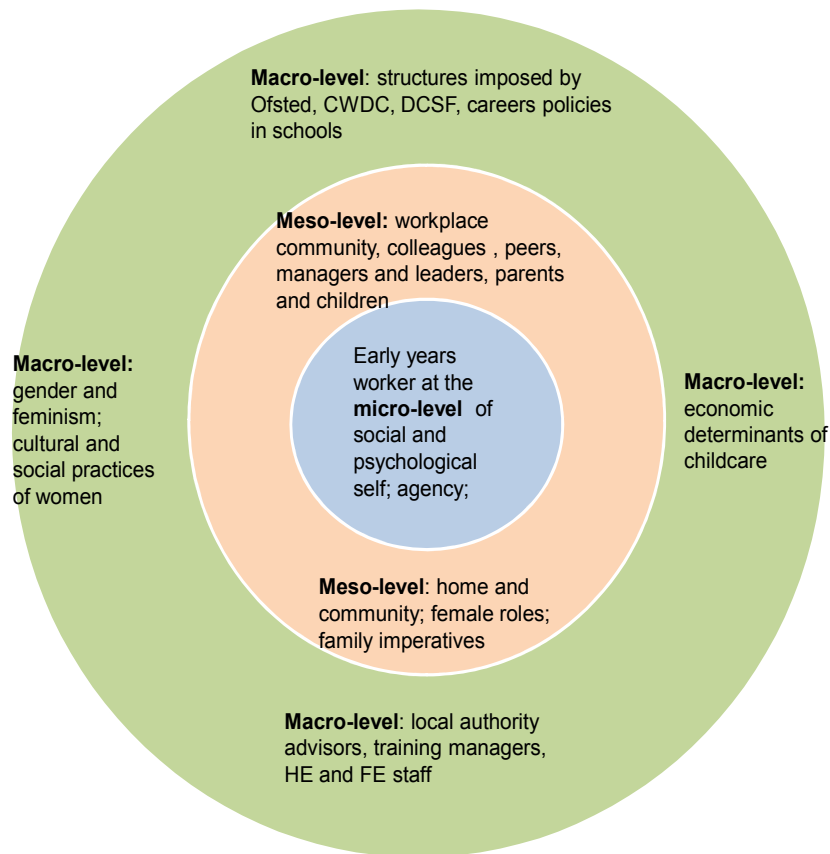
Eraut (1994) points to the view that the status of the client served by the worker determines the status of the worker, and Tucker's (1999) identification of dual problematisation of both workers and their clients has already been noted. 'Status' in this research is not synonymous with 'power' or 'role' but it is argued that any examination of status or position should take account of the structures that support it. Forces on early years workers at the micro-, meso- and macro-level, illustrated in Figure 2.2 on page 75, exert influence on each other, determined by individual workers, their dispositions and biographies, the socially situated context of their

work, geographical constraints, economic forces and national policies, for example, as located in the literature.

Status is reinforced by structures such as market forces that keep pay costs as low as possible for early years workers in the private sector (see Table 2.2 on page 53). Individuals may acquire capital that permits movement between levels; they acquire position, privilege and power so they can, if desired, exert influence at meso-, micro- or macro- levels. An example might be a local authority manager who has responsibility for processing applications made by children's centre managers within their authority for Transformation Fund money (CWDC 2008) to support an employee to begin the Sector Endorsed Early Years Foundation Degree (Daycare Trust 2008; Nicholson *et al.* 2008). The local authority manager is a power-broker at the macro-level, interpreting national policy that has an impact at the meso-level of the setting as well as the micro-level of the individual employee. They subjectify early years workers, and thus reproduce power relationships, control and authority according to Foucault (1982) through forms of subjugation.

Figure 2.2 on page 75 has been constructed to represent an ecological systems model (after Bronfenbrenner 1979; see section 2.2, pages 30-32) of early years work with significant and indicative factors at each level of micro-, meso- and macro-systems. It is informed by the literature reviewed so far, and emphasises factors of self, family, work communities, national policy structures and institutions, for example.

Figure 2.2 An ecological model of early years work



An examination of how status contributes to the construction of professional identities reveals positions in terms of who is where and why. Status, in the context of this research, is conceptualised as Marshall (2000: 308) describes it, 'Status emphasises the position, as conceived by the group or society that sustains it'. Status denotes a position in both education and labour hierarchies. Although Marshall objects to the association of status and hierarchy, such an association will be made here to explore ways in which status is ascribed. The genealogy has shown the low status position of early years workers in school hierarchies. In the labour market, pay and conditions place many early years workers barely above the minimum wage (see Table 2.2, page 53). The way in which individuals are able to move from a position of low pay in education has

been shown to be through further and higher education, gaining additional qualifications, and / or though having requisite social capital (Cooke and Lawton 2008; Urban 2008). The influence of desire, motivation and resistance to oppressive structures has to be taken into account too, to show how self is critical in the accumulation of capital.

A premise of the research is that relative positions of power influence professional identities through the reproduction of structures and hegemonic discourses. The researcher needed a term to identify those who operated within meso- or macro-levels in early years work. Decision maker was chosen as it conveyed the position of power without pejorative connotations. The positions of decision makers, such as local authority advisers raises questions firstly about their own perceived status and professional identity; secondly how early years workers and decision makers ascribe status to each other and how it is enacted, and thirdly, the route by which decision makers arrive at their position. For example, decision makers who may be ex-early years workers may have acquired capital through qualifications, networks and professional experience.

Credentialism contributes to this debate, in terms of the extent to which an individual is seen, and by whom, to be 'employable'. Freidson (2001: 106) argues that 'The ideal-typical ideology of professionalism is concerned with justifying the privileged position of the institutions of an occupation in the political economy as well as the authority and status of its members'. Alternatively, decision makers may move from other associated fields of work such as teaching into decision

making roles, seeking further accumulation of power and capital to secure their position. Where sites of power are located is considered by Paetcher (2001: 3),

Central to Foucault's conception of the relationship between power and knowledge is the idea that power is to be found throughout society in a complex network of micro-powers, with corresponding micro-resistances. Power, in this formulation, becomes distributed, built into the minutiae of human relations, the assumptions of our discourses, the development of our bodies and the fabric of our buildings.

Paetcher (2001) interprets Foucault's idea that power as resistance within small groups of individuals, or pervading micro-powers, is as important as struggles within wider networks. An example was provided earlier as the resistance of women to men working in childcare. Foucault proposed that by examining forms of resistance, power relations become more apparent, but also that there 'is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case' (Foucault 1978: 96). He used oppositions as a means of locating power: 'opposition to the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live' (Foucault 1982: 211).

Foucault (1982) suggested that these power differentials are not antiauthority struggles, but that they have features in common that demonstrate how they arise from the desire of individuals to be allowed to be individuals. Power offers the means by which individuals enact or perform to reinforce their individuality. The common features include the effects of power differentials on individuals that might

compromise agency and the way in which individuals will seek to resist power by directing their resistance towards those most immediate to them.

Foucault also identifies contradictory struggles: the way in which individuals desire to be 'an individual' and to be recognized as such, but simultaneously, may resist any attempts to be separated from others (family, colleagues, neighbours). Foucault suggests that 'These struggles are not exactly for or against the "individual", but rather they are struggles against the "government of individualization"' (Foucault 1982: 212), a point already made. Such propositions may be useful in understanding power struggles. Resistance may be evident in how members of the early years workforce respond to any government vision for workforce reform and the means by which it is implemented (Stronach *et al.* 2002).

Resistance that may already exist or may emerge from a model of imposed requirements to acquire specific statuses or qualifications may reinforce Foucault's ideas of power and resistance. In exploring where and whether resistance occurs, Mills (2003: 41) proposes that 'in order to analyse a power relation, we must analyse the total relations of power, the hidden transcripts as well as the public performance'. Herein lies a challenge for this research: to seek any hidden transcripts of what discourses may be public as well as what may be personal.

The genealogy of the early years workforce earlier in this chapter included data that demonstrate how the recent demand for privately owned and managed childcare has had an impact on the workforce through maintaining lower wages, a younger age profile and lower qualification profile compared to the statutory sector

(Nicholson *et al.* 2008; Penn 2007). The impact of an increase in demand for private childcare arising from more women returning to work is significant, and further fragments childcare (Ball and Vincent 2005). Ball and Vincent (2005) argue that current policy cannot work due to the tension that arises from parents seeking and paying for childcare as a commodity but at the same time, having to address the human and inter-personal dimensions of establishing relationships with staff who provide the care for their child.

Such tensions created by the divide between public and private provision, in what Hanlon (1998) called service level occupations, create cleavage and fissure. In early years work, divisions exist between care and education as well as its mixed economy. Osgood (2006b) suggests that this allows government policy to 'divide and rule' for their convenience, and consequently the workforce is pushed to react from a position of isolation and defensiveness. What is interesting is that a position of isolation can paradoxically create unity at this level of resistance within the workforce, according to Foucault (1982) and Gramsci (2002).

A scenario of a staff team of early years workers located in the private sector, employed by the owner of a single nursery illustrates the argument. Little was known about this sector of the workforce for reasons posited earlier. With the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE 1998) attempts were made to draw all providers into partnership, but the scale of the task was significant. The imaginary staff team remained isolated and autonomous at this time, but subjugated into a business that operates for profit. However, as a result of the Childcare Act 2006 in the form of inspection and workforce reform, employees in the private sector have come

under the gaze of local authority advisers, inspectors and assessors. It is from this position that one of defence and resistance may be adopted within such teams in the private sector. Whether this is mirrored in the statutory sector and children's centres is also worthy of investigation. This is returned to in the next section which examines ideologies, promulgated through the model of children's centres for example, and how they become pertinent to competing identities and identity construction.

This section has offered an analysis of social theoretical perspectives of gender and feminism; power and status, drawing significantly on the work of Foucault and against a backdrop of contemporary policy. It has examined what literature suggests as to how early years workers can position themselves to exert power through resistance, passive or otherwise, at micro-, meso- and macro-levels of influence. Issues of power and status; gender and feminism for professional identity construction in the early years workforce are shown to be connected to issues of epistemology and ideology, which are the focus for the next section.

2.9 Epistemological and ideological influences

Ideologies, if interpreted in the spirit of Marx (1995) and Althusser (1971), are founded on class, individualism and capital and their sociological representation. Class and commodification in the context of early years work are already apparent in this chapter in their influence on early years work. Ideologies are an 'inverted, truncated, distorted reflection of reality' according to Lefebvre (1968: 64). He discusses the opacity of ideologies and the paradox of their reality being

constructed through illusions. Ways in which ideological constructs of childcarer emerge are attributed to genealogical forces, combined with public and official discourse. Althusser's (1971) emphasis on interpellation in terms of how an individual comes to construct an identity from the social practices that signify or make reference to them, is useful in understanding how the language of childcarer, nursery nurse, nursery assistant has come to convey a level of subservience and service class in early years work.

Those who become a childcarer or early years worker may have already assumed the mantle, or identity, of a low class worker, through capital acquired through the ecology of their own childhood learning (Bourdieu 2000; Bronfenbrenner 1979). For example, class was identified by Field and Malcolm (2006) as a factor in learning identities in relation to the level of emotional investment women put into their work. Similarly, Ecclestone *et al.* (2005) noted tensions between idealised and realised identities, specifically that 'in vocational cultures with strong identities and norms such as childcare, people have to manage and reconcile these tensions in order to fit in and succeed' (Ecclestone *et al.* 2005:11), and that class and gender will have a bearing on how individuals fare in this.

The idealised identity of childcarer has been consistently constituted as maternal, caring, warm and feminised in Western societies (Goldstein 1998). The site for investigation is the impact of competing ideologies of early years work are constructed by those at different levels, positions or classes in Figure 2.2, page 75. Early years workers' conceptualization of the 'one-caring' (Noddings 2003: 4) may in fact be removed from and qualitatively different compared to how decision

makers and bureaucrats conceptualise caring, for reasons that Noddings (2003) explores.

Noddings (2003) attributes reasons for caring to be motivation, investment and actualization for example, but she makes clear the difficulty of using these as criteria for caring due to their complexity and how caring is enacted by and for individuals. Becoming the 'one-caring' and being able to demonstrate commensurate qualities may be the requisites for the idealised identity of the early years worker as far as employers are concerned, but this is different from the idealised identity of the early years workers as far as promulgators of government hegemony are concerned, and also different again from idealised identities constructed by early years workers themselves.

To continue the discussion of class and divisions, the concept of divide and rule, according to Gramsci (2002), was manifested in how schools were divided into classical and vocational for the state's purpose to propagate privilege and prestige. This is pertinent in terms of students and pupils considering a career in early years. If ideologies are perpetuated through cultural, normative and structural regimes of the ruling classes as well as the interpellation of those who undertake early years work (Adams 2008; Urban 2008), then certain ideologies arise from the processes of workforce reform through normative practice systems, values and controlling ideologies (Evetts 2003).

The ideologies, she argues, operate at 'macro- (societal, state and market), meso- (organizations and institutions) and micro- (groups and actors) levels' (Evetts

2003:399) corresponding to positions and influences illustrated in Figure 2.2, page 75. The questions emerging here in relation to influences on the construction of professional identities are whose ideologies prevail, where, how, why, as well as discovering what form the ideologies take and any congruence between them. Resistance to dominant discourses and ideologies and points of divergence in research findings however can be even more revealing.

The impact of specific aspects of social policy and the ideologies that underpin them such as neo-liberal policies, particularly communitarianism, third way policies (Giddens 2000) and the myth of choice, is visible in the context of children's centres (Moss 2006). The policy initiative relating to children's centres is returned to in the next section, but communitarianism is evident in the model of children's centres in its intention to provide targeted services for children and families inter-professional teams. If communitarianism promotes the consolidation of communities, with an intention to overcome the impact of marketisation (Giddens 2000), then the ideology of children's centres, and those who work in them, is assumed to be shared and collective.

The communities served by children's centres should determine the services on offer; the client groups are designated the power to decide, and the workforce responds. The impact on professional identities could become evident in the shift in power to parents and the implementation of associated structures to accommodate this shift. Subsequent change in the sites of power may cause conflict as early years provision has historically been determined by teachers, headteachers and similar professionals and their interpretation of policy (Barnes *et*

al. 2007; Fox 2005); passing power to parents may be met with resistance by some.

Alongside the commodification and marketisation of childcare, other neo-liberal intentions are significantly apparent in the form of official discourses (Tucker 2004). Those working in early years are provided with frameworks (QCA 2000); DfES 2003 , 2007) and the discourse, regimes and regulations imposed by such frameworks convey instructional, managerial regimes (Kostogriz 2007) and perpetuate the technicianist approach to care and education as opposed to creative pedagogy (Moss 2006; Stronach *et al.* 2002). Professional identities are at risk of being subjugated into such discourses and regimes (see Dahlberg *et al.* (2007). Normalisation and compliance into technicianist regimes can take place almost by stealth. As Ransom (1997: 30-31) suggests, 'the goal is to persuade groups of individuals to behave in a certain way without provoking them into thinking critically about what they are being asked to do'. Thus any official discourses of choice, quality and flexibility have to be examined critically for such neo-liberal agendas and intentions.

The extent to which privilege and ideologies are critical to being professional and professionalism were briefly considered in Chapter One alongside professional habitus. These notions are pertinent in terms of choices, aspirations, careers and progression in the early years workforce. How new recruits mediate their position as firmly located within the workforce, connected to others in terms of shared ideologies and epistemologies, has potential in the construction of emerging professional identities. For example, Cameron *et al.* (2001: 19) found in a

childcare student survey that participants shared 'high levels of commitment to childcare and a comparatively high degree of job satisfaction', but they also noted competing roles as carers and attitudes to mothering. Such implicit ideologies related to maternalism, professionalism and feminism are pertinent to the aim of this study.

Data in Table 2.4, page 56, show the number of unqualified staff in early years work (Nicholson *et al.* 2008) and they suggest that staff enter work in the early years sector not expecting to be a lifelong learner, nor to continue to develop in their professional career. Indeed, on-going learning, ranging from short training courses to degrees, is viewed with suspicion (Adams 2008) and even hostility (Cooke and Lawton 2008). Privileged epistemologies, curriculum in further and higher education and interventionist measures such as EYPS and NPQICL are at risk of becoming instruments of control, as already noted, rather than development; a transmission model of learning is imposed on a resistant workforce. Privileged epistemologies are written into policy documents and lauded as the way to promote effective learning, both in terms of curriculum for young children's learning as well as for early years students' learning. The value ascribed to 'education' as opposed to 'training' and tensions between education and training in the field of early years is a debate that emerges here, and is pursued in following paragraphs.

The recent approval of new benchmarks for Early Childhood Studies (QAA 2007) formalizes the existence of a body of knowledge indicative of the knowledge and skills that should be demonstrated by graduates with Early Childhood Studies (or

similar) degrees. This development may signal a move towards the validation of early years as a profession, and contribute to the status of those with early childhood degrees, or it may have currency only within the academic community and not beyond. Bernstein (2000) used the term 'singulars' to apply to socially constructed knowledge structures; the corpus of academic knowledge in early years is expanding, but for now it struggles for recognition in higher education for reasons considered in the 'genealogy' section related to privileged epistemologies. The role of genericism should be noted here. Bernstein considered genericism to be a new kind of knowledge structure, emerging from pre-university level linked to a more vocational focus on the academic curriculum in response to certain occupations and further education and school curricula. Indeed, Penn (no date: 2) is explicit in how students moving from further to higher education have to 'unlearn the simplistic notions that have governed their vocational education and their practice' exacerbating confusion about professional expectations, epistemologies, habitus and identities.

Also, Penn (no date) was concerned at how students in further education are didactically instructed of the developmental, empirical and positivistic discourse of child development without recourse to debate alternative discourses or reflect on how they are constructed in the first place. A critique of 'what is theory' is also usually absent for such students, so when they move to higher education, confusion and contradiction create challenges for their interpretation of previous epistemologies. They find this unsettling. Similarly, O'Keefe and Tait (2004) point to the inequitable experiences for trainees at levels two and three, determined by the route they take. Difference between vocational training (such as NVQs,

National Vocational Qualifications) and more college based courses such as BTEC National Diplomas and CACHE Diplomas, according to O'Keefe and Tait (2004), prepare students differently for higher education level study and for critical reflection on practice at work. Multiplicities of training routes at lower levels, epistemologies and outcomes are likely to create a sense of uncertainty as to what is expected, desired or required in order to become an early years worker. Current workforce reform exacerbates these uncertainties for early years workers; it perpetuates tensions between education and training when there are limited outcomes in terms of pay and progression and stereotypes of childcarers persist in the public domain.

As this section concludes, the implications of ideologies and epistemologies for the study become more clearly defined. It is apparent that epistemological hierarchies exist and that early childhood studies struggle for recognition as a legitimate in the academy due to its vocational associations. Early years students are faced with competing pedagogies and epistemologies at different levels of study; they are also wary of higher level study. Competing ideologies, tensions between idealised and realised identities contribute to uncertainty and confusion. It is therefore essential that the researcher seeks methodological paradigms that allow an exploration of what has been identified as ideological and epistemological factors, at both macro- and meso-levels, which contribute to the construction of professional identities.

The next section examines influences at the meso-level of experience, specifically how normative practices, roles and relationships with others are reproduced in

early years communities and cultures. Such an examination illuminates how ideologies and idealised identities are enacted in reality.

2.10 Roles, cultures and communities of practice

In the section 'self and agency' earlier in this chapter, with reference to the work of Mead (1934), it was noted that socially situated contexts facilitate the construction of a social self from the attitudes, gestures, behaviour and language of others. Symbolic interactionism is the process by which shared meaning is constructed for any group through mediation and discourse. This can provide the glue that binds social groups such as workers together as it reinforces and reproduces identities, habitus and socialisation practices in the workplace. Socialisation practices within meso-communities, such as early years settings, arguably shape behaviours, attitudes and identities of those who work there. This section explores what communities of practice (Wenger 1998); scripts (Goffman 1959), performativities (Butler 1990) and professional habitus (Beck and Young 2005) have to contribute in the context of places and spaces where early years workers undertake their everyday roles and responsibilities.

Roles and practices in the place of work are critical to the construction of professional identities; an understanding of what we do determines who we are, according to Stone and Rixon (2008). O'Keefe and Tait (2004) investigated early years roles in workplaces in Scotland and reported one student's journal entry after reflecting on a typical day. The roles she undertook were being a member of non-teaching staff; nurse; mother; nursery nurse; organiser; planner; deliverer of

specialized speech and language programmes; dinner supervisor; story teller and finally deliverer of additional literacy support. Robins and Silcock (2001) reported similar findings from research undertaken with early years workers in England. They emphasised the 'assistant' role often undertaken by early years workers, thus influencing professional identity as not being autonomous, but as subservient to the teacher. There were similar findings in their conversations with nursery nurses working in schools who were expected to undertake tasks ranging from menial (washing paint pots) to complex (contributing to planning for children's learning; Robins and Silcock 2001). They found that more complex tasks were often not written into job descriptions, and many participants commented on this specifically. The research confirmed that the participants were 'contributing team members, not ancillaries, helpers, or, just carers' (Robins and Silcock 2001:32). Findings confirm both the impact of interpellation (cited in Chapter One and returned to shortly) and Keltchermans' (1993) aspects of the 'professional self'.

Butt *et al.* (2007) and GMB (2003) reported discontent and invisibility being frequently cited by early years practitioners as well as confusion about their role, not dissimilar to Clift *et al.* in 1980. Lack of professional development opportunities and career development were also sources of frustration. Such findings highlight how language in job titles, contracts, conditions and the meniality of tasks reinforce how certain professional identities are shaped and constructed through roles and day to day tasks at work. Symbolic interactionism and similar shared narratives, interpretations and meaning contribute to uncertainty and confusion about roles in early years workplace communities.

Similarly, Goffman (1959) wrote about 'fronts', 'performances' and 'appearances'. Government intervention perpetuates such 'fronts' in their regulation of certain standards that, it could be argued, perpetuate the scripts early years workers follow in their stereotypical performances for children and families. Actions have to be seen by managers and clients to be meeting the needs of client groups.

In terms of day to day work, Goffman suggests that workers undertake routine tasks with signals to show 'dramatic realisation' of the work, or other visual signals that convey the purpose of being and doing, or walking the walk (Urban 2008). Performances, or performativities, are 'socialised, moulded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented' (Goffman 1959:44). For early years workers, everyday performativities are undertaken with each other, with children and with parents. The shape of interactions is determined by the routines that are considered to be 'those from which his occupational reputation derives' (Goffman 1959:43).

What is of interest in terms of professional identities is what determines priorities for 'occupational reputation'. The official discourses that construct normative 'occupational reputation' in early years are promulgated through standards (EYPS, NPQICL), regulations (EYFS, ECM) and intervention (Ofsted and similar inspection regimes). These are likewise reinforced by managers of the communities and settings where early years workers construct their identities. Everyday practices and performativities are at risk of being normatively controlled through regulation and standards as opposed to generated by critical,

autonomous agents. It becomes difficult to locate where any site of autonomy exists.

Interpellation, as takes place in any workplace community, has been shown to be critical to professional identity construction. Adams (2008), Oberhuemer (2005), Robins and Silcock (2001) and preliminary work undertaken by the author for the research reported here (McGillivray 2008) have all considered the influence of terminology on professional identities. Inconsistencies, trends, connotations and associations proliferate amongst the names by which early years workers have been known. 'Teacher', 'nurse' and 'doctor' are arguably less ambiguous than any title ascribed to those who work with young children. Policy documents convey a sense of not knowing who the workforce was, so 'catch all' terms such as 'workers' 'adults' 'practitioners' and 'new' teachers are used (McGillivray 2008: 248), contributing to uncertain and confused identities for early years workers.

In consideration of roles, cultures and communities, the positions of workers in terms of being a new recruit or an 'old-timer' (Lave and Wenger 1991: 57) in socialisation practices has pertinence too. Socialisation practices are a form of structuration, or mediation, that the individual undertakes between self and the structures imposed at meso- and macro-level. In this context, it includes performances (Goffman 1959), performativities (Butler 2003) or learning the trade. It connects to the notion of being an apprentice in a field of work. Within Wenger's (1998) communities of practice apprentices or newcomers become included through 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger 1991).

The notion of apprentice and apprentice-master signifies interchanging relations in social learning at work on the basis of role, position and participation. The term apprentice will be used hereafter to denote the role and position of individuals who are learning the trade as newcomers or as new recruits.

Apprentice-masters are those in positions and roles as old timers, as mentors or educators for example, within meso-communities. Positioning individuals on a continuum such as being an apprentice or an apprentice-master is not without difficulties in terms of shared understanding of positions, power, intrinsic and/or extrinsic variables that shift peoples' positions for example. However, these terms are convenient and useful in communicating such positions and roles. Similarly, legitimate peripheral participation suggests that a community of practice is accessible for newcomers for them to observe the ways in which it operates, and also who operates within it, and how. For an individual to be on a trajectory that takes them towards the community of practice as opposed to being on the periphery, Wenger (1998) states the pre-requisites as 'being useful, being sponsored, being feared, being the right kind of person, having the right birth' (Wenger 1998:101).

How these pre-requisite notions can be applied in an early years context, whether these ideas begin to suggest that there are requirements, implicit or otherwise that bind early years workers together to create a community, and how they contribute to professional cultures and micro-practices at the level of individual settings raises interesting questions for research. It suggests that the role of mentors and supervisors, as apprentice-masters, who inevitably

contribute to the socialisation and learning of performativities in the workplace, is critical to the construction of newcomers' professional identities.

It is known that newcomers to early years work are committed to working with children and that they see their work as being rewarding (Cooke and Lawton 2008). To gain entry to the workplace, they have been successful in demonstrating to others that they can perform or have the potential to perform the work that meets the requisite standards; but whose standards are they, and does everyone subscribe to them? Conversely other data suggest that retention and recruitment are problematic in the private sector within the early years workforce (Nicholson *et al.* 2008).

It is also known that workers need to have access to progression opportunities in order to want to stay in the workforce (Cooke and Lawton 2008) but that access to professional development opportunities is difficult for some (Butt *et al.* 2007, GMB 2003). It could therefore be argued that conditions for newcomers are unpredictable, dependent on type of setting and location of setting, for example. It could be that early years workers discover they do not like the work, and actually do not like working with children. Indeed, Purcell *et al.* (2005) reported on research undertaken with teachers exiting the profession and found that some had entered the profession for economic or circumstantial reasons, without examining their affinity for the children and families in the first place.

There is resonance here with the reasons for undertaking this study; conversations with some students in further education revealed convenience more than altruism determined career decisions. Key points emerging from the

literature suggest that newcomers are entering the field with limited access to professional development; have multiple roles but ambiguous identities and that any desire to seek higher level qualifications is resisted by colleagues (Adams 2008). These circumstances have historically characterised the culture of early years work (see 'genealogy' section) and illustrate how apprentice-masters shape and influence practices, performativities and identities.

Policy that created children's centres has already been briefly considered in relation to political ideologies in the previous section. It is returned to here, as it is pertinent in terms of how communities have changed with the introduction of children's centres through a conjoining of the statutory, private, voluntary and independent sectors. It offers an example of how structures at the macro-level of government policy impacts on the meso-level of a workplace community. As part of the Labour government's strategy to develop targeted services to reduce child poverty (see DCSF 2007, 2009), the first children's centres were set up in the most deprived areas in England, and evolved to offer services to meet the needs of local families with children under five years of age, including childcare.

Each children's centre is distinctive because of this model and it necessarily means that there will be a variety of provision for local parents and families, such as crèches, stay and play, full day care, nursery school education and breakfast clubs for example in one location. Children's centres are responding to workforce reform alongside other initiatives intended to meet the community's needs such as working with fathers, supporting parents' health, education, training, relationships and managing finances.

Many children's centres have created new teams of early years workers by merging existing groups of staff. Merged teams have often consisted of those who were previously employed in the private, voluntary and statutory sector, therefore have had quite different contracts and terms of employment. Some children's centres have been built from new, appointing new staff teams. Others have emerged from existing provision, where staff co-existed in neighbouring private and maintained provision, but the children's centre has been created through building modification.

Research undertaken with new teams working in a children's centre reported by Barnes *et al.* (2007) and Fox (2005) found that matters of identity were significant for those who were working in new inter-professional teams in a children's centre, particularly influenced by professional, cultural practices. This concurs with the findings of Frost (2005); professional cultures and institutional practices are determined by rituals, routines, and the demarcation of clear roles and responsibilities; in turn these practices perpetuate professional identities, with individuals or groups adopting the socially situated position ascribed to them by others in the meso-community, or the community of practice (Wenger 1998) which is now returned to.

Wenger's notion of communities of practice offers a pertinent theoretical perspective to the structures that have created multiple teams with different positions, status, routines and practices that constitute children's centres. Wenger (1998) proposed that a social theory of learning be applied to workplace learning (as well as learning in other social contexts). Such learning,

already acknowledged in terms of socialisation practices, contributes to who we are as noted in 'self and agency' earlier in this chapter. Wenger (1998) identifies the inter-connected and mutually defining components of a social theory of learning as being meaning; practice; community and identity. Literature concurs that these are contingent factors (Frost 2005, Giddens 1984, Goffman 1959, for example).

Eraut (2000) also explored learning in the workplace, and proposed that 'codified knowledge' and 'personal knowledge' are critical in understanding ways in which professionals work and how discourse within settings can serve latent purposes, such as to impede understanding or to disguise uncertainty and risk. His points therefore reinforce how professional identities in early years settings are influenced by mentors, supervisors and the cultures of the workplace. In other words, socialisation contributes to professional habitus,

Knowledge of contexts and organizations is often acquired through a process of socialisation through observation, induction and increasing participation rather than formal inquiry. Thus norms, local discourse and other aspects of an organizational or occupational culture are acquired over a significant period of time by processes which implicitly add meaning to what are explicitly interpreted as routine activities (Eraut 2000: 6).

The notions of apprentice and apprentice-master are again critical in the context of who learns from whom, what and how in early years settings. Those in respective positions of apprentice or apprentice-master find ways to construct a sense of self and identity despite, or because of, imposed macro-structures. The cultures, practices and regimes engendered by those with power and

influence in settings will shape the performativities of newcomers. The socially situated nature of how we construct professional identities is apparent.

Similarly, client groups will also have an impact on the social interactions and interpretations of who we are at work. Client groups and work groups, boundary crossing and various social contexts in which we work are all influential in how early years workers become socialised into the workplace and construct constituent professional identities (Goffman 1959; Guile and Young 2001; Lave and Wenger 1991). The multiplicity of places across the private, voluntary, statutory and independent sector however contributes to the heterogeneity of experiences at the hands of those who manage and lead them, and offers a site for investigation.

Early years workers have, in effect, two client groups: children and parents. Both are 'consumers' of the service provided by early years workers. The potential dominance of one group (parents as the purveyors of the service) as opposed to children (consumers of the service), reinforced by government discourse and marketisation forces, sustains a confusion of identities. Some sites of conflict in relationships with 'consumers' have already been noted in terms of power and status, but what becomes pertinent in this debate is how early years workers construct a professional identity in the arena of interactions with parents, children and other professionals. Applying Goffman's (1959) ideas suggests scripts or discourse may be adopted that convey a socially constructed persona, in effect, a differently constructed identity, shaped and

determined by the various spheres of interaction either with children, with parents or with colleagues.

Styles of communication, priorities and ideologies may be differentiated according to context and audience, to suit what is understood to be the expectations or needs of the audience. The review of literature and findings in this section so far suggests a complex layering and interplay of influences on professional identity construction in multiple social contexts. They are summarised as roles; interpellation; positions as newcomer or old timer, apprentice or apprentice-master, socialisation practices and arenas; acquired feminised performativities (Butler 1990; Colley 2006) and cultures.

In addition, Wenger's (1998) parallels between practice and identity, illustrated in Table 2.5 on page 98, are helpful in explaining research findings of Oberhuemer (2005), O'Keefe and Tait (2004) and Robins and Silcock (2001). Negotiated meanings of self and experience through participation and reification through discourse concur with how self identity is constructed according to Giddens (1984), and are not dissimilar to dramatic realisations (Goffman 1959). These approaches have certainly informed research into the professional identities of teachers (Beijaard *et al.* 2000; Day *et al.* 2006, Keltchermans 2003).

Table 2.5 Wenger's Parallels between Practice and Identity (Wenger 1998: 150)

Practice as...	Identity as....
Negotiation of meaning in terms of participation and reification Community Shared history of learning Boundary and landscape Constellations (groups or communities that may be related but not necessarily by proximity)	Negotiated experience of self in terms of participation and reification Membership Learning trajectory Nexus of multi-membership Belonging defined globally but experienced locally

Thus Wenger (1998) suggests that identity in practice is lived, negotiated, social and a learning process. Opportunities for the construction of a shared, collective identity emerge in places such as children's centres where teams of staff may work together with shared goals (Barnes *et al.* 2007) but similarly individuals may experience isolation and fractured identities (Clemans 2007). The reification of early years work is interpreted in this research as the form that is given to the work that is done with children and with colleagues and is commensurate with Wenger's definition of reification (Barton and Hamilton 2005).

Wenger (1998) emphasises the social learning aspects of identity, but there are limitations in his explanations of identity construction: structures, reproduction and ideologies at a macro-level influence professional identities exert more influence than Wenger suggests. The macro-level influences on professional identities in the early years workforce in terms of how identity and practice are interwoven have been made apparent through features of membership; discursive traditions, class and status, for example and have to be taken into account. Also, Wenger's (1998) theory does not explain how groups or

individuals remain on the periphery in isolation, through their own actions or the actions of others, and thus excluded from full participation.

However, Wenger's emphasis on how social practices contribute to identity resonates with the notion of professional habitus (see 'professionalisation' earlier in this chapter). It is apposite that the notion of habitus, Bourdieu's (1977) explanation as to how we mediate between self and structure, concludes this penultimate section of the chapter. It was central to the theme of self and identity in Chapter One, and emphasises the complexity of the interface between structures as macro-levels of influence and self at the micro-level in their contribution to the construction of professional identities.

2.11 Conclusion

The purpose of the chapter was to present a critical review of literature that contributes to debates as to how professional identities are constructed and defined with reference to an ecological systems model. It seems reductive to attempt to summarise critical influences on professional identity construction due to their complexity and inter-connectedness, but the threads that seem to be most compelling are located within a social theoretical perspective alongside an ecological model. The genealogy of the early years workforce illuminated the patriarchal regimes that dominated an invisible and unknown workforce. Repeated calls for improved conditions, pay and status have not been heeded, so the contemporary workforce continues to undertake low value work.

It is a feminised workforce, and competing ideologies of maternalism and professionalism create conflict for early years workers in their roles as either 'mother' or 'childcarer' for example. Sites of power also create conflict for the early years workforce. Sites of power pervade all levels: the individual through individuation and resistance; meso-communities and their managers, leaders, mentors and apprentice-masters; the macro-level of neo-liberalism, hegemony, policy rhetoric and dominant discourses. These structures perpetuate traditions, privileged epistemologies and status. How individuals respond to them is through forms of mediation, such as internal conversations, resistance and the acquisition of professional habitus. Stories, narratives and interpretations are critical in the construction of identities.

What is apparent in this summary is that the model of micro-, meso- and macro-levels of influence *has* facilitated an examination from multiple perspectives. It demonstrates the value of an ecology systems model (Bronfenbrenner 1979) in explaining influences on professional identities, of forces exerted on and by the individual, at meso-, macro- and micro-levels. It is these that interest the researcher, and have informed the articulation of the research questions alongside the rationale presented in Chapter One.

Gaps in the literature suggest a site for interrogation is with individuals at all levels and how they construct professional identities in the field of early years work in its nascent form (Cameron 2004; Moss 2006; Oberhuemer 2005). With the spotlight of workforce reform on those who work with children, young people and families, the ways in which research may in turn illuminate processes and

practices that shape professional identities has pertinence to practitioners, mediators such as decision makers and policy advisers.

The research process seeks to redress the historical tradition of invisibility of the early years workforce through appropriate methodological paradigms. Feminist research methodology has a significant role to play if seeking to give representation to early years workers, who are mostly women, who are poorly paid and have low status. Thus how members of the early years workforce themselves shape, fashion and mould professional identities, as well as their interpretation of what influences them, offers a rich seam for investigation. Finally, the applied nature of this research must not exclude the children themselves; any reification of professional identities constructs an interface between early years workers and children.

The working definition requires amendment in the light of what has been discussed in the literature review. Professional identities are socially situated, influenced by elements of self identity, external impositions and cultural context; they are multiple and dynamic, as these influences shift depending on conditions, culture and community. A sense of who we are, the self at work, the identities we shape and are shaped into through interactions with others in our work are construed as professional identities.

If the research aim is to explore how professional identities emerge within the early years workforce, and understand what factors contribute to the construction of such identities, then the literature review has initiated a

response. The research aim and rationale as predicated in Chapter One, gaps in literature and openings in the field of early years have led the researcher to construct the three research questions as follows: what factors contribute to the construction of professional identities in the early years workforce? How do early years workers contribute to the construction of their professional identities? How do professional identities impact on practice?

The researcher's task next is to work with the research questions in order to develop, design and apply appropriate methodological approaches and research strategies informed by its aim, questions and theoretical perspectives, as set out in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The aim of the methodology is to set out the exploration, selection and justification of the research paradigm and methods deployed in the process of undertaking this research. Ethical considerations and actions are presented as an integral component of the research paradigm and again at the end of this chapter. The previous chapter concluded with an exposition of why the research aim and questions have been articulated as they are, informed by literature. This chapter starts with philosophical deliberations that have been wrestled with as the researcher moved from the framing of the research aim and questions through to methods of data analysis.

The research aim is to explore how professional identities emerge within the early years workforce, and understand what factors contribute to the construction of such identities. The second research question examines how early years workers themselves shape the construction of their professional identities; it seeks to explore social theoretical and post-structuralist perspectives and the third research question explores the impact of professional identities on practice.

Discourse therefore had potential for reflexive consideration of what early years workers and others say about early years work, roles and identities (Langford 2006; Penn 2000). Discourse analysis is a 'method for studying how language gets recruited "on site" to enact specific social activities and social identities' according to Gee (2005: 1). It emphasises the congruence between the socially situated context of discourse and the socially situated context in which professional identities are constructed. The framing of the research questions, as

they are iterated above, demanded epistemological, ontological and methodological considerations. Deliberations of these now follow.

3.1 Searching for a paradigm

The premise for the research is located within an interpretive paradigm; it challenges the researcher to examine multiple assumptions, positions, experiences and perspectives through the research process, starting at the beginning of the 'research story' (Guba and Lincoln 2005; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Seale 1999). The interest that initiated the investigation is attributable to the researcher's previous post in a college of further education as described in Chapter One.

Conversations, or stories from the field (see Table 3.2, page 117) with early years workers who were employed and qualified to work unsupervised suggested that reasons for doing the work, staying in early years work, and how they saw themselves in their work reinforced the maternalistic ideologies. They accepted low status and pay. They responded reluctantly to micro- and meso- level demands but distanced themselves from macro-level influences (see Figure 2.2, page 75). This *is* anecdotal evidence, and susceptible to distortions of interpretation and convenience as stories from the field are constructed and narrated from the subjective position of the narrator (Alvesson 2002; Dressman 2008; Mies 1993).

However these conversations generated a desire to know more about the construction of professional identities of those in the workforce and to understand how the researcher herself was constructing 'the workforce' and their professional identities. This is the fundamental premise for this research. The researcher's understanding of the notion of professional identities was uncertain in these early stages of the research, but it offered possibilities to explore perceptions of what is construed as 'an early years worker' by workers as well as potential workers and related others. This is multi-faceted: the 'ideal' early years worker; the 'day-to-day' worker (the struggles and the stories); 'others' as early years workers; their aspirations for their future as an early years worker offer multiple constructions of professional identities at the micro-level of the individual.

At a meso- level, the notion of professional identities offered possibilities in the research process to examine the influence of family, friends, peers, role models, advisers on degrees of agency within the early years workforce, individually and/or as a group (see Figure 2.2, page 75). Extrapolating the levels of influence to a macro-level, then the influence of government rhetoric and hegemony can similarly be examined for their impact on early years workers and their constructs of professional identities (Moss 2006; Osgood 2006a, 2006b; Stronach *et al.* 2002). The literature reviewed in Chapter Two suggested that socio-political and historical influences, professional cultures and communities contribute to the construction of professional identities. The task of the researcher was to design and articulate a project that combines these strands from multiple perspectives in the research and data analysis process, but with a clear focus on and justification for its core aim.

It was essential to take account of methodology deployed by other researchers in the field of professional identities in the design of this study. Indeed Delamont (1992) advocates this to be one of the basic rules of research. Prior research, noted in Chapter Two, has investigated professional identities, professional lives and similar notions, with reference to teachers, doctors, nurses and early years practitioners. An examination of others' methodologies revealed successes, innovations, worthwhile outcomes as well as pitfalls.

Some researchers used interviews (Moriarty 2000; Robins and Silcock 2001; Woods and Jeffrey 2002); others adopted multi-method approaches (Colley 2006; Edwards 2004; Frost and Robinson 2004) including interviews, focus groups, documentary analysis and journals for example. Action research was undertaken by Burgess-Macey and Rose (1997); Bruni and Gherardi (2002) and Goodfellow (2001). Goldstein (1998) and Keltchermans (1993) deployed the ethnographic methodology of both narrative and biographical accounts in their data gathering. Finally, adopting a somewhat positivist approach, Adams (2008); Beijaard *et al.* (2000); Dalli (2008) and Hargreaves and Hopper (2006) selected questionnaires.

What this summary of others' methodology suggests, although the list is not exhaustive, is that qualitative methods dominated their preferences. Methods often sought data as discourse from practitioners themselves, providing a voice to a group who had arguably been unheard, as well as seeking perspectives from those in positions of power such as tutors and managers. The researcher benefited from an examination of their work; it reinforced the ephemeral notion of professional identities. It also affirmed how the methodology in this study builds on

prior research, continuing to take a socially situated perspective of how professional identities emerge and what contributes to their construction. Why an interpretive paradigm was chosen is now explained in more detail.

3.2 Found: an interpretive paradigm

The researcher wanted to attend to multiple, other perspectives within the selected paradigm; some of these have already been acknowledged in relation to biography, the positions of early years workers and those who advise them and manage them, for example. Interpretive research takes account of other pertinent perspectives too. 'The qualitative research act can no longer be viewed from within a neutral or objective positivist perspective. Class, race, gender and ethnicity shape inquiry, making research a multi-cultural process' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 20). The researcher is white, female, middle class and a member of the majority ethnic group; the implications of such for identity within the research process, for researcher and researched, are acknowledged later in the sections on research strategies and methods of data collection. Some of the participants in this research may choose to categorise themselves similarly or differently, but one certainty is that the majority were female. The gendered nature of the early years workforce as discussed in Chapter Two means that feminist perspectives should not be ignored.

A further position for consideration is as an 'outsider' in relation to the groups from whom participants were drawn (Brown 2004; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006). Other positions for the researcher were as an academic positioned in a higher education

institution with an expectation that this level of research is undertaken; as a lecturer and in a position of unsolicited power; as an observer of (and it could also be argued, a facilitator of manipulated) conversations and choices; as a feminist researcher and finally as an individual in contemporary society who has her own views on political rhetoric. The notions of insider/outsider, power and feminist perspectives are returned to in later sections, but it is pertinent to acknowledge how using terms such as insider and outsider immediately 'others' certain groups and alerts the researcher to the potential of critical theory and post-structural perspectives in determining methodological choices.

Any attempt to claim objectivity as a researcher without bias is therefore not compatible with an interpretive paradigm. The researcher deliberately wanted to use subjective positions (see Table 3.1, page 110) from macro-, meso- and micro-levels and therefore multiple perspectives to inform the research design. Alvesson (2002) argues that subjective interpretive perspectives,

Put emphasis on how pre-understanding, paradigm and metaphor pre-structure our basic conceptualisations of what we want to study. Our approach to, perceptions of and interpretations of what we experience are filtered by a web of assumptions, expectations and vocabularies that guide the entire project and are crucial to the results we arrive at. (Alvesson 2002: 3).

Seale (1999: 21) concurs, 'the interpretivist position....begins from the premise that methodological monism is no basis for the study of the social world'. Thus, it is argued that an interpretive paradigm is compatible with the research aim because of its intent to take account of multiple positions within an ecological model. It is for

these reasons that a positivist or even post-positivist paradigm was deemed inappropriate in the methodological considerations of this research.

Table 3.1 summarises aspects of critical theory and constructivism within an interpretive paradigm. The author referred to Guba and Lincoln (2005) and Denzin and Lincoln (2005) to confirm commensurability within and across critical theory and constructivist paradigms. This table illustrates how a single paradigm cannot be aligned with this research. Indeed, appropriation, or *bricolage*, (Denzin and Lincoln 2005) is evident between critical theory and constructivism, hence the fragmented division. The emboldened text alerts the reader to those aspects of the two paradigms that have been appropriated for this research.

Table 3.1 Aspects of interpretive paradigms Adapted from Basic Beliefs of Alternative Inquiry Paradigms, (Guba and Lincoln 2005: 193, 195) and Interpretive Paradigms, (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 24).

	Interpretive Paradigms	
	Critical theory	Constructivism
Ontology	Historical realism: virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values	Relativism – local and specific constructed and co-constructed realities
Epistemology	Transactional / subjectivist ; value-mediated findings	Transactional / subjectivist: created findings
Methodology	Dialogic / dialectical	Hermeneutic / dialectical
Criteria	Emancipatory theory, dialogical, race, class, gender, reflexivity , praxis, emotion, concrete grounding	Trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, confirmability
Form of theory	Critical, feminist, Marxist , standpoint, historical, economic	Substantive-formal
Types narration	Historical, economic, socio-cultural analyses , essays, stories, experimental writing	Interpretive case studies, ethnographic fiction

The underpinning philosophy of an interpretive paradigm demonstrates why dialogic, dialectical and hermeneutic methods are suitable for this study. However, Alvesson (2002) notes the dilemma or juxtaposition between frequent practice in social science research and postmodern perspectives whereby empirical research is tempted into positivist methodology. This was borne out with reference to some other studies (Adams 2008; Beijgaard et al. 2000 and Hargreaves and Hopper 2006 for example) related to professional identities in their use of questionnaires and surveys,

The critique of positivism and neo-positivism is massive, which does not prevent the majority of researchers from doing normal science more or less as nothing has happened. Questionnaire researchers still assume that the Xs put in small squares by respondents make it possible to determine what goes on in the social world (Alvesson 2002: 4).

Having thus established that the premise for this study warrants qualitative, interpretive research, the complexities of the research process, explored through the lenses of the commensurable philosophies of critical theory and constructivism are considered next.

3.3 Critical theory and constructivism

Critical theory can be applied as a process as well as a theory according to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006: 31) as it 'seeks to reflexively step outside of the dominant ideology (insofar as possible) in order to create space for resistive, counter-hegemonic, knowledge production that de-stabilises the oppressive material and symbolic relations of dominance'. Indeed, Colley (2006), Dahlberg and Moss

(2005) and Osgood (2006a, 2006b) all articulate the ways in which the dominant discourses of early years care and education have been shaped by government rhetoric as noted in Chapter Two. The pertinence of critical theory in this research is to examine such discourses in early years through methods of data collection and analysis, to deconstruct them and their influence on professional identity construction. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) expand on critical theory as a process. They offer a definition of a 'criticalist' as,

a researcher or theorist who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions: that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted.....that certain groups in any society and particular societies are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression that characterises contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable; that oppression has many faces and that focusing on only one at the expense of others (eg: class oppression versus racism) often elides the interconnections among them (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005: 304).

The views of Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) encapsulate many strands pertinent to this research. The framing of the research questions was intended to infer influences of history, sociology, culture, as well as how status, oppression and emancipation are significant in their contribution to professional identity construction (see Chapter Two). With specific reference to methodological decisions, Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) note that research can inadvertently perpetuate oppression through the privileged voices of the researcher. The researcher has already initiated a level of personal critique in the context of privilege through the reflexive, explicit, biographical considerations in the first two

sections of this chapter, as female, as white, as an educator, for example, and these privileges are returned to in later sections on data collection.

Constructivism within an interpretive paradigm however offers a different emphasis as it reinforces the influence of subjectivity in creating a particular version of reality. A constructivist paradigm creates a framework within which the context, the researcher, the researched, the language, the positions and the emotions of the participants are mediated through the research process. The emphasis within the constructivist paradigm on the dialectical nature of experience, ontologically and epistemologically is debated by Alvesson (2002) and Radnor (2002) as well as Dressman (2008). Dressman (2008: 28) proposes that 'within a dialogic world, the collective voices of humanity circulate in speech and writing, appropriating each other's utterances and using them sometimes as they were initially intended, and sometimes differently'.

This connects to notions of structure, agency, construction and deconstruction in a specific social context of language use. Within the communities of early years work, collective ideas and constructs are articulated and enacted (Goffman 1959) and influenced by those with power and influence within those communities (Robins and Silcock 2001). Constructs and discourse about early years work exist as distinctive in individual settings, determined by subjective beliefs and practices of the workers at micro-, meso- and macro- level (Wenger 1998). Shared understandings about what it means to be an early years worker are constructed through the scripts, our own or of others, and expectations and behaviours (Goffman 1959). Dressman's point above on how language can be appropriated,

used, moulded, perpetuated and adapted by others is pertinent too when examining discourse and it is for these reasons that a constructivist paradigm resonates with the research aim.

To summarise, the researcher selected an interpretive paradigm in explicit recognition that subjectivities as well as historical, social, cultural and dialectical influences within both critical theory and constructivism, are congruent with the research aim and questions. The paradigm subsumes elements of both critical theory and constructivism but the overarching paradigm is interpretive. How methods were crafted for the purpose of the research is returned to later in this chapter (see 'methods of data collection' on pages 122-124) but specific perspectives pertinent to the premise of the study within an interpretive paradigm are considered next.

3.4 Perspectives within an interpretive paradigm

Issues of invisibility, gender, status, marginalisation and power in early years work have been examined by Colley (2006); Goldstein (1998); Langford (2006); Osgood (2006a and 2006b) and Robins and Silcock (2001). Methods needed to demonstrate the value-laden, subjective, participative, social and collective influences on the research process as well as identity construction. The way in which Colley (2006) considers a Marxist-feminist perspective as a backdrop to her research into early years work is particularly helpful. She reinforces the point that women, in their work in childcare, cannot escape the expectation that they will

invest their own emotions in what they do. A similar Marxist-feminist position is asserted by Langford (2006) and alluded to by Osgood (2006a, 2006 b).

The researcher asserts that 'dialogic' methods of data collection (Bakhtin 1981), exploring individuals' values ascribed to early years work, had potential to underscore Marxist and feminist perspectives (see Table 3.1, page 110) in the construction of professional identities. Dialogic techniques in this study acknowledge that dialogue in the form of the spoken or written word, generated in the field as part of the research process, does not exist in a vacuum. It is shaped by the context, the past, the people, the place, and interpretation; it is multi-faceted. Research that draws together multiple themes of emotional labour, feminist and Marxist perspectives at micro-, meso- and macro- levels of influence appears to be an under-researched aspect of early years work. Reasons for this are speculative, but they may point to a lack of multi-disciplinary research into professional identities drawing on sociology, social policy and psychology for example, and/or a paucity of interpretive research in the field of early years.

Value attributed to early years work, and thus the desire to use this as a line of inquiry for the methodology, informed the research design. It determined the selection of one group of participants engaged in the labour of caring for children alongside another group of participants who were decision makers occupying positions of relatively greater power and status. The term decision makers reflects Marxist influences on the epistemological position for articulating the research aims as they are. An assumption of political economy underpins the stratification of participants; ways in which Marxist ideas on capitalism perpetuate divisions

between those who are the low paid workers and relatively wealthier civil servants and public sector employees, for example (Marx 1995).

This rationale generated the option of selecting a group of 'élite' participants (see Neal 1995 and Philips 1998), in order to explore more specifically the influence of individuals on the early years workforce. The researcher considered this strategy in selecting senior political personnel, such as those in government office, connected with early years workforce reform, but dismissed it on reflection of the suitability of the range of participants and data collection methods already selected, and the need to allocate time to these methods. Also, at a time of significant change (one might say turmoil, and associated sensitivities) then the contemporary nature of the focus of the research might have prompted resistance and unwillingness to participate.

To summarise, decisions that align this research with an interpretive paradigm were made in order to explore associated feminist positions of value ascribed to early years work in through discourse. The research strategies are outlined next to show in more detail how the interpretive paradigm shaped this aspect of the methodology.

3.5 Research Strategies

This section sets out what strategies were selected, how, and why in order to move the research from the theoretical and philosophical level of debate to the real world of people, places and interactions. Research design 'situates the

researcher in the empirical world and connects him or her to specific sites, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material, including documents and archives' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 5). 'Searching for a paradigm' earlier in this chapter set out the premise for the research aims as well as epistemological and ontological positions of the researcher. Aspects of these are made more explicit in Table 3.2 on page 118 which sets out questions that originated from stories in the field, constituted from conversations with students on early years courses in further and higher education. The questions emerged from reflecting on such conversations; the themes of agency, ideologies, aspirations, drivers and identity that underpin the questions need to inform research strategies.

Table 3.2 Extended questions from stories in the field

What does it mean to 'be' an early years worker?

Why do people choose a career in early years? What are the 'draw' factors?

What are the stories that are behind the choices and decisions?

What and / or who has influenced their decision?

What do they consider suits them to working in early years? Is it experience, dispositions, aspirations, for example?

What aspiration do they have for themselves? For the children and families they work with?

Are aspirations (and thus potential aligned ideologies) articulated and shared with others (colleagues, parents, managers)?

What makes them stay in early years work?

Is there a sense of belonging to a workforce? Is there cohesion within workforces at micro- / meso- / macro- levels of existence? What 'glue' binds early years workers, if they have a sense of belonging?

What, and how, do they 'feel' about their work?

How well-prepared do they feel to do their work when entering the workplace?

What are their views about changes in early years work?

To what extent do they feel politically engaged, and what influences this?

How have any changes affected them / colleagues / their work?

Do they feel empowered to create change for themselves, for their colleagues, for the children and families they work with?

How do they see themselves working at a meso- / macro- level, for example, within multi-professional teams?

How they perceive career opportunities now compared to a few years ago?

What are the current challenges and benefits of early years work (on a daily basis as well as long term)?

The questions demonstrate why the researcher decided to explore the positions, perceptions, experiences and discourses of three groups of individuals specifically: those working in the field of early years, those who work alongside them and those

who are considering early years as a career. Firstly, it is conversations with these groups that triggered the original research idea, so the narrative of the research story has continuity. Secondly, an interpretive paradigm is underpinned by a design that incorporates multiple perspectives. Thirdly, existing work in the field cited in Chapter Two suggests there is potential for multiple perspectives to contribute to the corpus of research already available.

The researcher's interest is in understanding and recording the influences on early years workers' and decision makers' constructions of professional identities in early years work, and to find ways to work with the ephemeral nature of professional identities in the research process. Titchen and Hobson (2005) propose two approaches to phenomenological research: one whereby the researcher adopts a direct approach by 'exploring human knowing through accessing consciousness' or alternatively, the indirect approach which investigates 'human being through accessing the senses and shared background meanings and practices' (Titchen and Hobson 2005:121).

The direct approach was deemed more suitable. It recommended dialogic methods to allow participants to talk about their lived experiences, drawing on memories, perceptions, constructs, actions, intentions, decisions and practice for example. The researcher may be removed or separate from the experiences as they are described. An indirect approach requires the researcher to immerse themselves in the life-world of the participants so that the description of experiences, actions, constructs, actions are co-produced and shared; this

approach was not used by the researcher, again for pragmatic reasons of accessibility and manageability.

As Alvesson (2002:146) suggests, findings from hermeneutic inquiry can be 'looked upon as text, so that one tries to go beyond the 'surface' and look for something less obvious, or less easily revealed in a (quick) coding process'. This, along with the direct approach advocated in the previous paragraph, has congruence with the interpretive paradigm (see Table 3.1, page 110) and reinforces the potential of an examination of multiple positions, perspectives and assumptions in the research process.

Figure 2.2 on page 75 illustrates how individuals or groups can be influential at micro-, meso- and macro- levels of experience for an early years worker. Informed by this model and by conversations with such groups and individuals, the researcher chose to draw on those within each level of experience or influence to become potential participants in the research. The position of the researcher situated her amongst a network of contacts at micro-, meso- and macro- levels that was utilised to locate possible participants in the research at all levels. The researcher was mindful of prior expectations, knowledge, perceptions and positions, kept brief field notes throughout the communication exchanges around participation (initial invitation, negotiations, access via gatekeepers, ethical considerations, briefings, consent, for example) and made decisions reflecting on sensitivities, power and politics throughout (Finlay and Gough 2003; Fontana and Frey 2005).

Such reflections were underpinned by the notions of credibility as the researcher wanted to develop and maintain a credible image to others that generated trust and might influence any subsequent willingness to participate (Rossman and Rallis 2003). The researcher was mindful of subjectivities and self-disclosure too (Delamont 1992; Fontana and Frey 2006) while undertaking field work. For example, offering a level of self-disclosure when it was sought or had potential to 'oil the wheels' of the interview experience was a tactic adopted by the interviewer.

The researcher considered other methods to inform the research design. Ethnographic and case study research had particular potential to develop the premise and research aims into a meaningful investigation. The decision to undertake research in one children's centre, alongside the focus on the notion of professional identities, lent itself to a case study approach, adopting ethnographic methods. A case study approach would have used multi-methods to reveal thick descriptions (Glaser and Strauss 1968) of how a group of practitioners construct their professional identities, with reference to the structures and influences within an individual setting and would therefore also have significant potential within the interpretive paradigm. Drawing on a stratified range of participants within and beyond an individual setting, from a diverse range of professional perspectives, precluded a life historical and / or case study approach.

Bassey (1999) sets out what an educational case study to be, and on consultation of this, and what Stake (2006) and Stark and Torrance (2005) also propose, then the researcher felt her research was too diffuse in its methodological approach to work as a case study. In terms of taking an ethnographic approach, a significant

constraint in the pragmatics of strategy selection was the demand of continuing in full time employment at the same time as conducting the research, specifically the data collection. Ethnographic research requires a commitment of time in order to immerse oneself in places, to observe and talk with people who are able to give time themselves to explore, reflect and interpret data together with the researcher (Angrosino 2006; Delamont 1992). Rossman and Rallis (2003) advocate careful consideration of 'doability' in the selection of research strategies; for reasons of pragmatism once more, the researcher decided to seek alternative strategies to case study and ethnography.

It was deemed that hermeneutic methods offered a means to generate data that was commensurate within an interpretive paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 27) consider hermeneutics to be 'an approach to the analysis of texts that stresses how prior understandings and prejudices shape the interpretive process'. The researcher has asserted that strategies which gather data in the form of talk through interviews and focus group discussions for interpretation (Dressman 2008; Radnor 2002; Titchen and Hobson 2005) from early years workers, early years students and decision makers, are compatible in seeking responses to the research questions and meeting the over-arching aim. As Heywood and Stronach (2005: 117) argue in terms of strategies constructed around hermeneutics, 'the research emerges as a dialectical tacking between theory and data, between the local and the global – and the voice of the researcher and the voices of the other'.

There are shades of post-structuralism here, compatible with the critical theory paradigm. Thus having located a theoretical and pragmatic framework for the

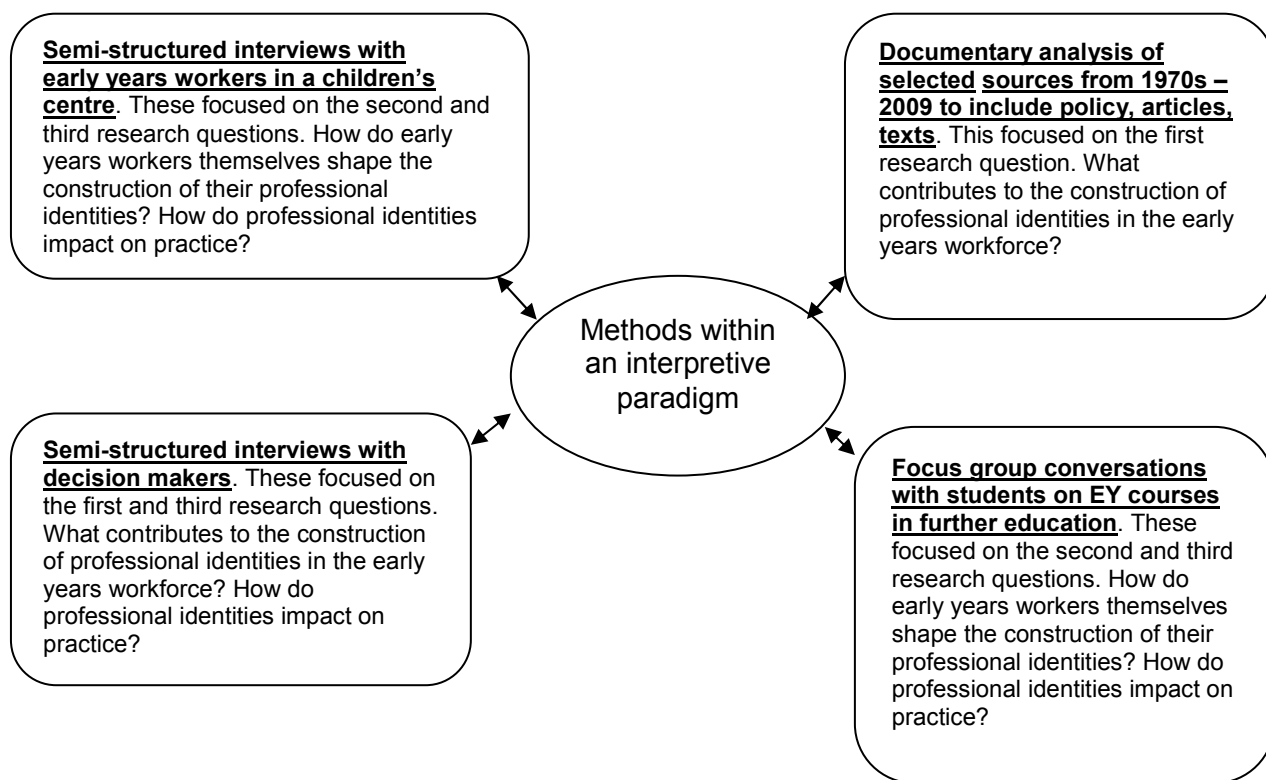
selection of research methods, the next section provides the rationale for methods of data collection supported by a hermeneutic approach.

3.6 Methods of data collection

This chapter has so far established methods of data collection that were commensurable within an interpretive paradigm and generated discourse for hermeneutic analysis (see Table 3.1, page 110). The rationale for the three participant groups: early years workers, early years students and decision makers, was explained briefly in the previous section; the purpose here is to argue for the three selected methods of data collection, that is, semi-structured interviews, focus group conversations and documentary analysis for their hermeneutic potential in this study, with these participants. Alongside the desire to design research that adopted hermeneutic techniques, the researcher's experience as a researcher shaped the methods of data collection. The researcher had some experience in using interviews, focus group discussions and documentary analysis in previous work, and therefore knew of the limitations and possibilities of each. Drawing on those skills and knowledge facilitated a level of confidence beyond novice status, and thus the decision was made to use methods that offered familiarity as well as commensurability.

Figure 3.1 on page 124 sets out each method of data collection aligned to both specific research questions and participant groups (see Appendix 1 for a timeline of the research planning and implementation).

Figure 3.1: Methods of data collection linked to participants and research questions



Interviews and focus group discussions provided opportunities for the researcher to generate discourse pertaining to ontological and epistemological perspectives for all participants. The researcher wanted to know how early years workers constructed personal and professional epistemologies about their work in early years as well as their ontological positions, such as relationships. Three groups of participants and three different methods of data collection provided contrasting positions and perspectives for hermeneutic analysis. This would satisfy positivists as it is a form of triangulation 'between methods' (Delamont 1992: 159).

The model of micro-, meso- and macro- levels of influence (see Figure 2.2, page 75) informed the selection of methods of data collection as well as participant groups inasmuch that the research needed to locate data that were connected to

each level of influence for early years workers. Policy documents and texts are pertinent to macro-level influences, decision makers are influential at the meso-level and perspectives from early years workers offer discourse at the micro-level (see Figure 3.1 on page 124). In turn, these participant groups and methods demonstrate potential in seeking responses to the first and second research questions: what contributes to the construction of professional identities in the early years workforce and how do early years workers themselves shape the construction of their professional identities?

A later section provides a critical justification of the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, both of which are considered as forms of interview for the purpose of this research, followed by an explanation of the process of documentary analysis. A brief rationale for participants groups has already been provided, but the details of access and selection of individual participants within each group in turn is provided in the next section.

3.7 Participants

3.7.1 Participants: early years workers

The selection of participant groups was necessarily informed by the focus of the research being members of the early years workforce, specifically, those working directly with young children in a care and education context. The reform initiatives, particularly the introduction of EYPS, are targeting those who work in the private, voluntary or independent sector, so where workers were located in terms of funding was another factor that informed the selection of participants.

Chapter Two provides a policy context for the model of children's centres and their implications for early years staff such as inequities arising from role, title, pay, conditions and sector funding for example. As children's centres are striving to bring together in one setting, teams of early years workers from, for example, a local nursery school, or local pre-school, or new workers who were parent volunteers, or those who provide voluntary sector funded full day-care, then there was potentially a rich seam of multiple professional and personal perspectives to draw upon for the study. Participants working in children's centres were likely to be heterogeneous in terms of qualification, sector, experience and roles. Stratification was possible in terms of staff who were unqualified to those with degrees (see Table 3.3, page 127), working full or part time, being employed by the private, voluntary or statutory sector and terms and conditions of employment, for example.

A children's centre in the West Midlands known to the researcher was therefore selected, and the researcher communicated with the manager as the gatekeeper (Homan 1991) to begin the process of seeking agreement and consent to undertake this phase of the research with staff in the setting. A face-to-face meeting took place with the manager during which the researcher talked about the research aims, methods, literature, political context and ethical considerations. For ethical reasons, no more detail will be provided in terms of location, context or personnel. The manager was known to the researcher, so the first contact was made on the basis of some prior knowledge and expectation. The researcher explained the preference for individual interviews and its rationale. Options of

place and time of interviews were agreed so as not to disrupt work commitments as well as ethical issues of consent, confidentiality, anonymity and withdrawal.

Significant support and co-operation was offered by the gatekeeper at this meeting, and a further meeting was arranged for the researcher to meet with interested staff at the end of a working day, after a staff meeting. Staying on to meet the researcher was voluntary and at the meeting she explained the aims, purpose and intention of the research. Six staff attended this meeting at the children's centre; further staff were recruited through 'snowballing' through informal conversations with staff. Ten staff in total were interviewed during this phase of the research; three staff were interviewed twice to pursue themes and discussions. Roles and responsibilities are provided in Table 3.3. (Names have been changed, gender has not).

Table 3.3 Names and positions of early years worker participants at Midshires children's centre

Name	Position in Midshires children's centre	Qualifications
Megan	Manager of Midshires children's centre (two interviews)	QTS, NPQICL, MA
Peter	Deputy manager of Midshires children's centre (two interviews)	QTS
Alison	Family support worker (two interviews)	NNEB
Linda	Family support worker	NNEB
Elizabeth	Manager for the private provision attached to Midshires children's centre	FdA
Sarah	Senior Practitioner for the private provision attached to Midshires children's centre (job share with Noreen)	NVQ 3
Monica	Temporary childcare assistant	BA(Hons) Early Years
Noreen	Senior practitioner for the private provision attached to Midshires children's centre (job share with Sarah)	NVQ 3
Thomas	Seconded teacher to support nursery provision	QTS, MA
Janice	Teacher to support nursery provision	NNEB, QTS

The researcher arranged to meet with individuals within the setting, and offered space and time for individual conversations about aspects of their professional work, lives and identities to generate dialogic discourse as data in response to the second research question.

The researcher was aware of political sensitivities during this phase of the research. There were changes taking place in staffing roles and responsibilities. Significantly, the manager, Megan, left after the first thirteen interviews had taken place and a new manager was appointed. The researcher was intending to resume interviews with the same participants; discussions took place with the new manager, but it proved difficult to confirm arrangements for additional interviews despite the expression of support. The researcher decided to withdraw from research in Midshires children's centre in acknowledgement of the sensitivities of arising from a change of manager.

This was a significant disappointment for the researcher, and elicited reflections on the need for sensitivity as well as the impact of political impositions and structural constraints in the research process. The option to initiate negotiations with a new children's centre with a view to start again was considered, but dismissed after personal reflection and discussions with colleagues on what had already been achieved in the children's centre and the potential of the data that had already been gathered. A critical discussion of the planning, design and implementation of the interviews is provided later in this chapter (pages 135-144).

3.7.2 Participants: decision makers

The model of micro-, meso and macro- level of experience and influence on early years workers (see Figure 2.2, page 75) was central to the selection of participants for the research. The researcher decided to seek individuals who had a role and function that influenced early years workers' professional work in four ways. These were either as early years workers' advocates or representatives; or as gatekeepers to funds for courses for professional development; or as promulgators of government policy at national or local level in advisory capacities; or as managers and leaders of children's centres, or some or all of these. These functions achieved a degree of stratification, at national and local level as well as variation in terms of role and position.

Several individuals who undertook these functions were known to the researcher through professional contacts and national and regional network meetings. Conversations at network meetings had revealed inequities and anomalies for funding and access to professional development. The discourse of managers, trainers and local authority representatives alerted the researcher to the potential of inviting participants from varying levels of influence at local and national level to contribute to the research. However, a significant limitation of this group of participants is those who have been omitted from inclusion, such as teachers who offer careers advice in schools and further education colleges, parents and families, and the regional level of children's workforce development organisations.

The reason for their exclusion was access but also manageability; a breadth of role and position was achieved nevertheless. Table 3.4 summarises details of this group of participants (names have been changed, gender has not).

Table 3.4 Names, role and position of decision maker participants

Name	Role and position	Summary of decision making influence
Ann	Local authority early years workforce development officer	Deciding funding for training, qualifications and education; implementation of national funding and policy initiatives at local level
Beatrice	Ex-local authority early years education adviser recently appointed children's centre manager	Deciding training and offering support for EY workers within the authority
Carrie	Local authority early years education adviser	Deciding training and offering support for EY workers within the authority
Diane	Local authority training co-ordinator for children young people and families	Deciding funding for training, qualifications and education; implementation of national funding and policy initiatives at local level
Elsbeth	Trade union officer	National organisation, national level of remit, decision making as a member of national workforce reform groups, representing the workforce
Stephen	Project officer	National organisation,
Georgina	Connexions adviser	National organisation working with young people in schools and colleges to support young people's career choices

The researcher developed a protocol to support the selection of decision maker participants to ensure that there was representation across the four roles and functions (as described in the previous paragraph), at which level of remit (geographically), which level of influence, (meso- / macro-) and the type of organisation they worked for. Ten potential participants were derived from a list of

contacts to whom this protocol was applied. These included individuals by name, or by organisation, or role and responsibility. Eight were selected from this list.

Access negotiations were undertaken directly with the individuals. Some first approaches were made by email (see Appendix 2) that detailed the context, purpose and ethical aspects of the research. Others were made by telephone and one was initiated in a face-to-face conversation; all these were followed up by email to confirm details of the research. Seven of the original eight responded positively. The eighth did not reply. Arrangements were then made to conduct either a face-to-face interview or telephone interview. Telephone interviews were selected by Ann and Elspeth for logistical reasons.

3.7.3 Participants: early years students in further education

The researcher's roles and responsibilities within national and local networks also positioned her to have established contacts with gatekeepers in further education colleges within the locality. An approach was made to a manager who had responsibility for early years courses in a further education college in the West Midlands, inquiring as to whether negotiations could be initiated with colleagues and students to arrange focus group discussions. This was the strategy for gaining access. Students on full time courses at levels two and three were selected: level two is equivalent to school leaving qualifications or working under supervision in a workplace; level three is equivalent to 'A' level qualifications or working unsupervised in a workplace.

Students on level two and three courses could talk of ambitions and intentions beyond the programme they were on, such as aiming for higher education. Full time courses were chosen, as opposed to work-based courses (such as National Vocational Qualifications) as the latter are usually undertaken by more experienced students. It was the views of those yet to enter the workforce that were sought. The selection of the college and the students prompted the researcher to be mindful of the power, position and politics of the interactions throughout this phase of data collection (Barbour and Schostak 2005) and how subjectivities are present in the 'tutor-student' dynamic.

The request from the researcher was relayed via the manager to tutors, and then the researcher contacted tutors directly to make mutually convenient arrangements. Their support was contingent on a level of co-operation within the institution between colleagues but also on a level of trust being placed on the researcher. Trust was essential, as an outsider was being given permission to enter the college, talk to groups of young early years students and seek their views on their choices, ambitions and aspirations (Delamont 1992). The prompt questions for the focus discussion groups were shared with the tutors whose groups were involved to facilitate trust and transparency. They were worded in order to avoid a focus on the institution itself, but to elicit responses about the students' careers, choices, perceptions and aspirations.

Students had already made decisions to study early years at levels two and three, and were making decisions about whether to become an early years worker or not. Their positions, epistemologically and ontologically, have potential in their

contribution to the exploration of how they construe professional identities in early years work, and are thus congruent with interpretive research. The researcher intended to seek ways of recording what, and who, had influenced young people and their construction of agency, position and the value of early years work.

The researcher planned to promote accessibility and understanding as to the aims, purpose and process, as well as to offer clear reassurance that consent was their decision. It was anticipated that this was a novel situation for them, so communication between researcher and potential participants was important in gaining their trust and understanding (Barbour and Schostak 2005) as well as that of the staff in the institution.

Three groups were suggested by the tutors, two of which met the criteria of being in full time study on level two or three courses, with students aged eighteen or over. Arrangements were made for the researcher to attend the college at the same time as the two relevant groups, for her to meet with them, explain the research aims and process, and seek informed, signed consent. It had been agreed that the focus group discussions would take place in the tutors' absence, but tutors were present when the researcher met with the groups initially. This allowed opportunities for clarification, but also so that tutors knew which students were consenting to participate and arrangements were made accordingly.

The further education college was located in an urban area of a city; students who attended the college are from an ethnically diverse population. Many travelled across the city in order to access the college courses. The students who

participated in this phase of the research were all female and the majority were from British Asian families. Ethnicity of this participant group contradicts the national profile of the early years workforce, so either young British Asian women decide a career in early years is not for them, or the demographic is undergoing a change that has not yet been recorded. Reflections on the dynamic of the focus group experience prompted thoughts about identity – as female, as white, as British Asian, as a student, as an early years student, as a research participant being asked questions by a white, female stranger. Which identity (or identities) might have dominated in the minds of the participants in the focus group discussions acknowledges the perspective of the prism and post-structural positioning of self and other (Alvesson 2002), to be taken into account in data analysis (see Chapter Four).

Table 3.5 identifies the courses and initials of the focus group participants. A different form of identification was used with these participants, compared to others, as it made the data more manageable in their analysis.

Table 3.5 Participants in focus group discussions

Group	Course
M, Z, N, R, A and Nt.	Level 2 Certificate in Childcare and Education, CCE. Course completers at the time of the discussion.
C, J, N and K.	Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education, DCE. End of year 1, progressing into year 2 at the time of the discussion.

Ways in which the researcher prepared for and managed the focus group discussions are provided later. Having justified the selection of participants, the

next section moves onto a justification of the use of the interview as a method of data collection.

3.8 Methods of data collection

The aim of this section describes how interviews were designed for data collection, followed by a critical rationale for semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and documentary analysis. Interviews are laden with inherent subjectivities and these need to be acknowledged when working with an interpretive paradigm (see Table 3.1, page 110). Interviews are seductive in their perceived potential to seek views and experiences. However, Silverman (2007) poses a plausible argument against interviews because of the artificial manner in which they are constructed and implemented. He states ‘what I call “manufactured data” (e.g. including interviews and focus groups) should be used only as a last resort – particularly where a quick fix is more important than in depth knowledge of some phenomena’ (Silverman 2007: 9).

Silverman (2007) argues that the potential of such manufactured data can only be redeemed by the quality of their analysis and suggests that it is naturally occurring data that has better intrinsic potential for investigating phenomena. The interview as a method of data collection *is* open to challenge, particularly by those who advocate postmodern, feminist, post-structural methodologies because of the risk of misinterpretation, misunderstanding, appropriation of the words and ideas of others, inherent subjectivities and avoidance contriving to subvert its trustworthiness. The task facing the researcher is to balance such drawbacks

against the other method of data collection through documents, arguably ‘naturally’ occurring data, and the quality of interview data analysis. Despite Silverman’s caution, the researcher selected interviews, but semi-structured interviews specifically, as the format for the interactions with early years workers and decision makers.

Focus group discussion, arguably a form of interview, was used as the method of data collection for early years students. Both methods allowed the researcher to plan certain questions related to the phenomenon under investigation and then ‘guide the conversation to remain, more loosely [than an un-structured interview] on those questions’ (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006: 125). They are commensurable within the interpretive paradigm, as long as the researcher heeds their artificiality and situatedness. A more critical rationale for these forms of interview follows.

3.8.1 Methods of data collection: semi-structured interviews

The participants for whom this method of data collection was selected were early years workers and decision makers. Appendix 1, the timeline for the research process, indicates that the interviews with early years workers took place before those with decision makers. This chronology was determined by logistical time availability as well as the consideration that, as a result of the experience and improved skills gained through the interviews in the children’s centre, then these could be applied to the later phase of interviews with decision makers.

Associated with these considerations is the piloting of interview schedules. The researcher felt well-supported by Megan, the manager of the children’s centre, and

as Megan had experience as a researcher at post-graduate degree level, the first interview was arranged to take place with her. This allowed an exchange at its conclusion for a dialogue regarding the interview process, questions, experience, omissions, and an evaluation from Megan. No changes were made following this discussion between the researcher and Megan.

The position of being indebted to participants for giving consent, for providing their time, for permitting the researcher to pose questions, all contributed to feelings of gratitude and being an invader of private thoughts and views. Such notions of privilege are misplaced, as well as being hard to abandon. The researcher should not view the outcomes of interviews as privileged or private, but only as the situated, subjective exchange and language selected by both parties at that moment in time (Fontana and Frey 2006).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a means to prompt the researcher to introduce what were intended to be pertinent themes in the exchange. The rationale was to facilitate a free-flow of discussion, with the researcher occasionally prompting as needed, but without dominating the conversation. The interviewer was mindful of how social, subjective interactions between two people have their own patterns and choreography. A level of reciprocity and rapport were desired, but the cautions of Silverman (2001, 2007) were a constant reminder to the researcher of the extent to which a game was being played out between interviewee and interviewer, potentially compromising the generation of deep, insightful exchange (Holstein and Gubrium 2005).

The majority of the conversation in each interview was initiated by the interviewee, intentional on behalf of the interviewer, to prompt a hermeneutic 'co-creation of meaning' (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006: 134). Gee (2005) provides a transcript of two contrasting interviews. In both, he comments on the way in which the interviewer interacts with the interviewee to co-construct meaning. This is through sustaining the interview, showing permission, affirmation and allowing space to talk. These were the tactics adopted by the interviewer in this research, attempting to convey an understanding of what was being articulated by the interviewee, but checking for understanding and seeking clarification (asking questions such as 'Do I understand that you mean...?') as needed. In this respect, Fontana and Frey (2006: 697) point out that, 'Asking questions is a much harder task than it may seem at first. The spoken or written word always has a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we word the questions'.

The rationale for the researcher in undertaking this method of data collection was the potential, as already asserted, to explore notions and discourse pertinent to professional identities, ambiguity notwithstanding. The challenge of using semi-structured interviews to gather data on the ephemeral idea of professional identities was problematic. The selection of questions and prompts needed to generate discourse that had potential connection and illumination with the themes located in the literature relating to professional identities, as opposed to asking direct questions about professional identities *per se*. The researcher anticipated that direct questions such as 'what do you consider has contributed to your professional identity?' would have hindered dialogue. Extended iterative dialogue, such as in ethnography, may have created space for such questions, but interview

questions took a broad brush, thematic perspective on professional identities. It was a strategy that gathered meaningful data nevertheless, as presented in Chapter Four.

Two schedules were designed for the semi-structured interviews; one for the early years workers and another for the decision makers (see Appendix 2). The selection of questions and prompts (Gillham 2005; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006; also see Appendix 3) was determined by issues that had emerged from the literature review combined with an intention to engage with each interviewee at an ontological level. The wording of the interview schedules was designed to be open-ended and accessible, with the aim of stimulating conversations, experiences and views that were connected to issues of power and influence, agency and autonomy, ideologies and identities for example.

Tables 3.6 and 3.7 on pages 140 and 142 set out the questions for the early years worker group and the decision maker group linked to the key themes that the researcher wanted to explore through interviews. In turn, the themes, informed by the literature, linked to the second and third research question for the early years workers, and the first and third research questions for the decision makers (see Figure 3.1 on page 124).

Table 3.6 Key themes linked to interview questions for early years workers

Theme	Questions for early years worker participants
Biography, personal history and aspirations	What influenced you to choose to work in early years? Say a little about your background, your qualifications, experience, career choices, and plans for the future.
Identity at micro- and meso-level, belonging to a community of practice within the setting	What is your job title? What does this title mean to you, in terms of your roles and responsibilities? How do you feel about your role as part of the Midshires children's centre team?
Interpretation of dominant discourses and macro-levels of influence	What has been the impact of change on you / colleagues / children / the setting? What changes have been most significant, in your view?
Identity at macro-level, belonging to a community of practice beyond the setting, agency and autonomy	Do you feel part of a workforce? If so, how far does this extend? (In the setting, locally, nationally?) What characterises being part of a workforce? Training, meetings, informal discussions....?)
Identity, construction of a 'professional'	Do you consider yourself a 'professional'? If so, what are the characteristics that are important to you as a professional practitioner?
Identity as a woman / man in a gendered workforce, feminism in terms of socio-cultural and historical perspectives	How does gender affect you and your work? Early years is typically low paid work, undertaken mostly by women. How are you aware of ways in which such trends affect you and what you do?
Aspirations, construct of self and how that has been influenced at meso-levels	Who influences you and what you do professionally? How do they influence you and why?

The interview questions and themes for the early years workers mirror those for the decision makers presented in Table 3.7 on page 142. Although the interviews with early years workers were designed to seek data in response to the second and third research questions, and the interviews with decision makers were designed to seek data in response to the first and third research questions, some commonality (issues of biography, ideologies, influences at micro-, meso- and

macro-levels, self and constructs of being a 'professional') was intentional so as to provide points of comparison and contrast to seek divergence and/or congruence.

The differences between the themes and questions for the two interview participant groups were shaped by reflections on the interviews in the children's centre. Appendix 1, the timeline for the data collection, shows the lapse of time between the interviews with early years workers and the decision makers and this time was valuable for evaluation. Scrutiny of the transcripts of interviews with the manager and deputy manager, alongside stories from the field and issues emerging from the literature review informed the themes and questions shown in Table 3.7 on page 142. The notions of position (inside/outside), resistance/passivity and constructions of the early years workforce were more explicit in the questions posed to decision makers compared to early years workers. The broad brush approach to the articulation of interview questions had appeared effective with early years workers and was continued with decision makers.

Table 3.7 Key themes linked to interview questions for decision makers

Theme	Questions for decision maker participants
Biography, personal history, role and sphere of influence (meso- / macro-)	Please could you outline the context in which you work with / alongside early years workers or those who may be considering a career in early years?
Constructs of the workforce, 'from the outside' and 'from the inside', identities, where there is congruence and / or divergence	My research is investigating aspects of professional identity as held by early years workers. In your experience, how would you describe, overall, how early years workers see themselves (for example, their career aspirations, their relationship with other professionals, their work with children, their work with families)?
Ideologies, socio-cultural, historical shaping of the frontline worker, aspirations for the workforce, micro-level of self in terms of characteristics	What are your views about work in early years (for example, what suits some people to this career; what are the career prospects)?
Resistance, passivity, agency, participation, influence of hegemonic discourse at macro-level	What do you consider are significant factors in how the workforce overall, as well as early years workers you may know individually, is responding to change?
Resistance, passivity, agency, participation, influence of hegemonic discourse at macro-level: congruence or divergence compared to response to previous question	How do you think the changes are seen by others who work with them (managers, advisers, local authority colleagues, the families themselves who early years practitioners work with)?

Initial questions in all interviews were designed to connect to what was familiar for interviewees in order to put them at their ease, promote trust, rapport and dialogue (Holstein and Gubrium 2005). Minor amendments were made to prompts only in acknowledgment of the varied roles and responsibilities of each participant but the interview questions were the same for each group. The reflections from the pilot interview undertaken with Megan were considered in the implementation of this phase of interviews but no changes were made, as already noted. Megan, in her

role as a children's centre manager, is arguably a decision maker, thus the design of questions and style of interview had similarities.

As each interview evolved, and the dynamic between interviewer and interviewee was established, then prompts were either discarded because they had been addressed or introduced in response to a direction in which the conversation was taking. The researcher realised these decisions were an outcome of the subjectivity of the situation, arguably shaped by interpretations, prejudices and expectations (Gillham 2005). For example, the researcher anticipated that Stephen's discourse may be shaped by policy rhetoric and intertextuality (see Table 3.11 on page 168), so she specifically selected prompts that challenged the success of EYPS as perceived by a government 'insider'.

The dynamics of each face-to-face interview was therefore necessarily different as determined by location and environment, time of day, the extent, if any, to which both parties knew each other, political sensitivities, personality, and so on. Gillham (2005: 31) uses the phrase 'seeing yourself being yourself' and this conveys the degree of introspection and reflexivity that the researcher was keen to engage with, both during and after each interview, and it was such thoughts that dominated field notes. However, the choreography of each interview followed a similar sequence to that suggested by Gillham (2005): entry phase, substantive phase and closure phase. 'The fine art of probing' (Gillham 2005: 32) posed particular challenges. The researcher faced the dilemma of hoping for deep and meaningful exchanges, but pragmatically understood the artificiality of the interview situation. The challenge of 'effective' questioning was a particular point of

reflection in field notes, whereby there were frequent comments about how questions could have been worded differently to elicit different responses.

As two interviews with decision makers took place over the telephone, modifications needed to be made in order to accommodate a different dynamic and method. Gillham (2005) advises that a significant disadvantage of telephone interviews is the absence of face-to-face interaction. The nuances of social exchange can be mis-read or unwittingly ignored without the opportunity to see the expression or gesture of the other person. The preparation for the telephone interviews was similar to face-to-face interviews in terms of information, questions, format, consent and other ethical considerations. All decision makers were given the option of a telephone interview. In recognition of anticipated heavy work schedules, a telephone interview offered a specific time within a working day to be mutually agreed in advance. Two participants chose this method for geographical reasons as neither worked in the locality of the researcher. One was recorded, the other not as the technology was not accessible to the researcher for both. Instead, notes were taken and transcribed immediately afterwards.

The researcher had not undertaken telephone interviews previously, but found both to be a more focused means of communication and exchange, contradictory to Gillham's caution (2005). The distraction that arises from face-to-face interviewing, and constantly reading the dynamic of the situation was absent. The researcher felt able to concentrate better on the contribution of the interviewee, and frame the next question or prompt more circumspectly. The dialogic exchange was not compromised, thus this method of interviewing remained congruent, as

were the semi-structured interviews, with the interpretive paradigm. However, a different dynamic again emerged from the focus group discussions and this is considered next.

3.8.2 Methods of data collection: focus group discussions

The value in political and pedagogical research of focus group discussions has been considered by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2006) in terms of how feminist and post-structural perspectives can be explored through focus groups. The use of the word 'focus' is accepted, but requires consideration: it makes an assumption that there *is* a focus, but, in keeping with an interpretive paradigm, the focus is subject to multiple interpretations and directions. Focus group is therefore used for convenience, but does not indicate any strict direction or control by the researcher.

Madriz (1998: 116), who undertook research into the lives of women, states that 'the interaction in focus groups emphasises empathy and commonality of experiences and fosters self-disclosure and self-validation'. The aim of the focus group discussions in this research was to explore the constructs, understanding and interpretations articulated by a specific group of students. The researcher heeded the advice of Fontana and Frey (2006) who suggest that group interviews are carried out in the field, are pre-set, have some direction and are semi-structured. Focus group participants respond to each other and to the researcher and this dynamic was deemed to be desirable for two reasons.

Firstly, the researcher anticipated that students may prefer to co-operate in a group situation as opposed to individually for reasons of familiarity with each other.

This had potential in revealing any group 'sub-culture' too (Gillham 2005), which would contribute to the research in terms of identity, as further education students, as female, as British Asian in some cases, as early years students – pertinent ontological and epistemological perspectives. Secondly, as the researcher was a stranger to them, they may have felt apprehensive being interviewed on a one-to-one basis.

Barbour and Schostak (2005) propose that power, social position, value, trust, meaning, interpretation and uncertainty should be considered in the focus group situation, not dissimilar to interviews. The researcher was conscious that her position could influence the dynamic between herself and college tutors, and also between herself and students. Conversations kept to the aims of the research and participants' potential contribution, making explicit the value placed on their views and why they were sought (Gillham 2005). Meaning is a critical aspect of focus group discussions: 'the meaning heard by one individual may not be the same as that intended by the speaker' (Barbour and Schostak 2005: 42). The skill of the researcher is to note where there may be difference in understanding within the group, and find ways to prompt and probe, without disrupting the flow of the discussion. For example, there was a desire to discuss specific progression routes which briefly distracted from the focus. The skill of the researcher was to not ignore the desire, but to steer back to the aim of the discussion as quickly as possible (Barbour and Schostak 2005) while maintaining rapport.

Group dynamics and encouraging spontaneity posed the most significant challenge in this method of data collection. The researcher noted that there were

some quieter members in both groups and intentionally addressed questions in as gentle and non-intimidating way as possible towards quieter participants. This is a key aspect of the role of the facilitator according to Gillham (2005). The dominance of some individuals over others was not problematic in either group. However, keeping the momentum of discussion going, injecting prompts, mediating and moderating, thus concentrating on the flow, content and participation of all group members was exacting.

Neither focus discussion group is claimed to be totally spontaneous, but there was unpredictability in terms of how the questions were interpreted and responded to and how the participants responded to the researcher (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2005). The researcher was aware that a desire to conform, to offer what participants think the researcher wants or expects to hear, were significant influences in both focus group discussions, but some students were confident in providing a commentary on what had influenced them, and what continued to do so in their choices and perceptions.

Table 3.8 on page 148 sets out the questions that created the framework for the focus group discussion, linked to the themes that the researcher chose to investigate through this method. The key themes, as for the interviews, originated from stories in the field (Table 3.2 on page 118) as well as theoretical and literary sources already debated in this and the previous chapter. They linked to the second and third research questions: how do early years workers themselves (in this case, prospective early years workers) shape the construction of their professional identities, and what is the impact on practice? Arguably, responses

may also contribute to the first research question too: what contributes to the construction of professional identities in the early years workforce?

Table 3.8 Key themes linked to the agenda for the focus group discussions

Theme	Agenda item
Biography, micro- and meso- influences, autonomy and agency in decision making	Why did you choose to do a child care course after you finished compulsory education?
Aspirations, trajectory, identity as a potential 'early years worker'	Are you considering using this course as a starting point into a career working with young children?
Self, characteristics of self, ideologies, socio-political, cultural, historical influences	Please explain what suits you to a career in child care. Aspects such as your own personal qualities, your experiences already with children, the pay and status, may be relevant?
Ideologies, socio-political, cultural, historical influences on constructs of the workforce	What qualities would you say are generally important for people to have who want to work with children?
Epistemological positions, political change and initiatives	What qualifications do you think are needed to work with children as a career?
Status, power, aspiration, constructs of professional	Do you consider working with children as a profession, similar to teaching, for example?
Meso- / macro- levels of influence, identity, power	What influence have other people had on your career choice (parents, other family members, careers advisers, school teachers)?
Meso- / macro- levels of influence, identity, socio-cultural influence	What do your family and friends think about your career choice to work with children?
Ontological positions	What do you think are some of the difficulties that are part of the daily work of child care practitioners?
Aspirations, identity, positioning	What do you see yourself doing in 5 and 10 years time? (Please answer to both.)

Through the interpretive approach to the research and selecting participants in varying positions of influence (see Figure 2.2, page 75), data provided socially, historically, politically and culturally situated perspectives connected to the early years workforce. The third and final method of data collection adhered to the interpretive paradigm, and extended how both critical theory and constructivism informed the methodology. An explanation and justification of how documentary analysis can be worked within an interpretive paradigm now follows.

3.8.3 Methods of data collection: documentary analysis

The rationale and approach to documentary analysis was founded on an understanding that notions of professional identities, as socially constructed, do not exist just in the minds, epistemologically or ontologically, of those to whom the research pertains (early years workers and decision makers, in this case). They also exist in the public domain, visible to all who have access to contemporary media. This method of data analysis therefore connects to the first research question: what has shaped constructs of professional identities of the early years workforce? It is intended to search for the situated, social, cultural and historical context that has shaped how the early years workforce is seen, experienced and understood by those who write about them. As Jupp and Norris (1993: 47) suggest in relation to documentary analysis 'the words and their meanings can differ according to the social relations and the institutional settings within which they are produced, reproduced and sometimes re-shaped'.

Documentary analysis is a method that has been favoured by other investigators of professional identities, in these cases relating to both nurses and early years

workers, such as Colley (2006), Fealey (2004) and Langford (2006). Their aims resonate with those of this research and their methodology was shaped by a desire to explore the dominant, hegemonic discourses of political regimes and historical, cultural and social influences through the examination of journal articles, training resources and text books, for example. Documentary analysis offers the researcher an opportunity to engage with those cultural, historical, political and social dimensions which are key aspects of a critical theory paradigm within interpretivism (Mies 1993, and see Table 3.1 on page 110).

As questions and agendas for interviews and focus group discussions evolved thematically from the stories in the field (Table 3.2, page 118) and the literature review, then the process for documentary analysis also evolved thematically but from preliminary scrutiny of sources. The initial scrutiny of documents resulted in the framework of analysis that was applied to selected documents (see Table 3.9), with the researcher using questions related to four themes to pinpoint sections of text. Themes were terminology; education / training / qualifications; structures and policy; values and ideology. As Table 3.9 on page 151 illustrates, documentary analysis was designed to seek responses to the first research question: what contributes to the construction of professional identities in the early years workforce?

Table 3.9 Key themes to locate text

Themes	Questions to locate text
Ambiguity, identity, labels, feminism, Marxism	What terms are used to identify members of the early years workforce (who are not teachers)?
Epistemology, discourses of 'professionalisation'	What levels of training, qualifications, type of employment, knowledge, understanding and skills and personal qualities are explicit or implicit within the documents?
Structures, macro- level: economic, political, sociological, organisational influences, power and control	What political, sociological and organisational structures and strategies are identified?
Ideology, hegemonic discourses, legitimisation	What values and principles are documented relating to the workforce, implicitly or explicitly, within textual sources?

The decision was made to work with texts published since the 1970s, therefore within a shorter time frame than sources that were consulted for the Genealogy section in Chapter Two. Preliminary searches by the researcher suggested that limited literature prior to the 1970s was available relating to early years education and care. Significant sociological changes in family life, such as women returning to work after having children, introduced different child care needs.

During the 1970s, policy initiatives and reports began to focus on early years, triggering a new field for academics, media and politicians. The scrutiny of documents that span a period of time to reveal cultural and social trends was undertaken by Fealey (2004) into the nursing profession and Peräkylä (2006) recounts work undertaken by David Armstrong from the 1980s through to 2002, in which he examined how death, bodies and illnesses, as well as doctors, nurses and patients, had been represented in medical text books over the past two centuries. Peräkylä (2006: 871) suggests that Armstrong's approach is 'radically

constructionistic; he argued that these objects and subjects – in the sense that we know them now – did not exist before they were constructed through textual and other practices’.

This position is helpful in the exploration of factors that shape professional identities in early years work: feminist debates in the Western world (Gilligan 1982; Ladd-Taylor 1995) construct women differently now compared to several decades ago, for example. The absence of texts pertaining to the early years workforce who were not teachers, signified an invisible, non-existent or even erased group of women if Derrida’s (2000) ideas on deconstruction are applied.

The interface of structures and subjectivities relating to identities can therefore be examined through the discursive analysis of interview data, but also through discursive analysis of certain forms of text. Jupp and Norris (1993) expand on traditions of documentary analysis within a critical theory paradigm. They highlight the potential of documentary analysis to emphasise,

an interest in ideology as a means by which existing structures and social arrangements are legitimated and maintained (and therefore an interest in documents and texts as legitimating devices whose contents seek to achieve such legitimacy by gaining popular consent for the existing state of affairs

(Jupp and Norris 1993: 46).

Similarly, Jupp and Norris (1993: 46) suggest that documentary analysis can allow a ‘not taking for granted what is said’ and the opportunity to examine how a document is positioned ‘in relation to ideology, power and control.’ In their documentary analysis, Colley (2006), Fealey (2004), Langford (2006) and Weber

and Mitchell (1995) selected sources such as curriculum materials, children's drawings, children's literature, classroom talk, journal articles, films, periodicals, textbooks and early years students' assignments. As discourse analysis (explained later in this chapter) was the chosen method of data analysis for all data collected in this research, text based sources were selected to generate a point of contrast; in effect, a process of triangulation (see next section).

The researcher undertook preliminary research, as part of her unpublished Masters degree work, in university libraries, local libraries and the internet to locate where there was mention of early years workers and similar identifiers such as nursery workers, nursery nurses, childcare workers. This resulted in a range of documents being selected for this method of data collection. They were early years text books, reports, historical accounts of nursery education and / or childcare, Hansard and other Houses of Parliament proceedings, training materials, periodicals (such as *Nursery World*), government documents, academic journal articles, newspapers and publicity materials. The researcher searched within the British Library, archives held by the *Nursery World* publication office as well as the catalogues of three university libraries for potentially relevant documents.

Sources were scrutinised for mention of early years in any context. When it was located, the framework (Table 3.9) was applied, and each of the four questions was allocated a colour code (see Appendix 4). What became apparent to the researcher as these processes were worked with, was that there seemed to be a separation of the sources of textual discourses emerging from an authorial

perspective into government sponsored sources and other sources. Subjectivity is apparent and inevitable in the selection of text framed by the questions set out in Table 3.9 on page 151, in the availability of sources in the places that were searched, as well as their accessibility.

Only published sources were scrutinised; conversations, emails, minutes, consultations were omitted from the range, because they were not available or accessible. The text was marked, colour coded to match the colour of the question with which there was a best fit, and noted for potential transcription onto a master table (a section of which is provided in Appendix 4). Figure 3.3 on page 166 illustrates the algorithm applied to process data from documentary analysis.

The questions located a substantial quantity of text. The master table originally had three columns, one for the year, one for early years policy initiatives and one for the excerpts of text. Once the data accumulated, the researcher decided to modify the table to what is illustrated in Appendix 4, by introducing a fourth column, with the third and fourth columns separating text located in government sponsored documents and text located in other sources. This was a method similar to that constructed by Harper (2003) and is asserted to be congruent with Fairclough's 'critical discourse analysis' on 'new capitalism' (Fairclough, 2003: 203) as it was intended to present political commentary juxtaposed with the commentary of others.

In summary, the quantity of text, the range of sources already noted and the framework demonstrate how the researcher adopted techniques that were

trustworthy. The researcher thus ensured that the process of data analysis as applied to documents took account of agendas, positions and subjectivities considered in Chapter Four.

The penultimate section in this chapter details the ethical considerations as well as further measures to make the research trustworthy, before concluding with methods of data analysis.

3.9 Ethical issues and trustworthiness of the research

Some debates that challenge the ethics of research relate to amoral foundations for scientific research, post-positivist paradigms and codified issues related to ethical considerations; informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality and accuracy (Christians, 2006) for example. Disciplines such as education, sociology and psychology, through their professional associations, have drawn up their own codes of ethical guidance and conduct for researchers (Homan 1991) in response to such concerns and debates.

There is not the scope for the detail of the debate here, but what the author has had to wrestle with are feminist perspectives that challenge the procedures that were complied with in order to undertake her research. Ethical considerations therefore exist at two levels: firstly, to meet the requirements of bodies from whom the researcher had to seek approval to proceed, and secondly, from a feminist perspective, both of which are considered next.

Applications to Ethics Committees in two higher education institutions were submitted to seek approval for the conduct of this research as the researcher was registered with one and employed by another. A demonstration of 'satisfactory' ethical practice was one of the pre-requisites for approval. However, in order to make the claim of being a feminist researcher, decisions needed to be informed by the consideration of more complex, nuanced and sensitive ethics: those that embrace the ethic of care and simultaneously acknowledge utilitarian perspectives and power.

Pertinent to this debate is 'informed consent,' a notion contested by Oleson (2005) in terms of how and what constitutes it. Thus, a tension between the two aspects of ethics emerges, as there is conflict between complying with the apparatus that awards approval, and questioning the purpose and power of such apparatuses. Christians (2006: 148) argues, in the contestation of how ethics is defined, that 'the way power and ideology influence social and political institutions is largely ignored' suggesting that such tensions are not widely addressed in the research arena. Steps taken to reconcile these tensions are part of the discussion of the trustworthiness of the research, explored next.

Radnor (2002) proposes that, in order for research to be trustworthy, the researcher should reflexively acknowledge the 'I' in the writing up of the research, in other words, explain ways in which the researcher has influenced the research process. This extends from how participants have been treated without prejudice, listened to and shown respect, to how subjectivities, positions and expectations shape interpretations. Rossman and Rallis (2003) similarly suggest that standards

of competence and ethical conduct determine the trustworthiness of research. Therefore, it is asserted that ethical conduct, feminist perspectives and how these challenge issues of reliability and validity all have to be addressed in the contexts of the trustworthiness of the research.

Feminist perspectives have already been considered in the context of design and methods of data collection earlier in this chapter as well as how they inform the basic premise for the research in, and into, a gendered field of work. The privileged and authorial position of the researcher, the dynamics of relationships through the data gathering processes, the situated, constructed subjectivities that shaped the research premise have informed methodological deliberations aligned with an interpretive paradigm. However, the notions of validity and reliability are contested in their pertinence to qualitative data, having greater value in positivist approaches to research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Thus, it is the responsibility of the researcher to describe how the work has been undertaken in a manner that demonstrates credibility, dependability and trustworthiness, as these are asserted to be more pertinent notions than validity and reliability in an interpretive paradigm. In terms of credibility, Rossman and Rallis (2003) argue that,

the qualitative researcher's task is to render an account of participants' worldviews as honestly and fully as possible....In judging the truth value of a project, readers depend on how adequately multiple understandings (including the researcher's) are presented (Rossman and Rallis 2003: 65-66).

They pose several questions for the researcher to respond to in order to ascertain credibility: 'Does the research derive from participants' views? Does the researcher reflect on her role? Can another researcher follow the internal logic in developing conclusions?' (Rossman and Rallis, 2003: 66). The researcher has taken account of subjectivities and positions where they have particular pertinence, mindful that the positivist notion of objectivity has no place in qualitative, feminist research.

The researcher has described the data analysis process in detail later in this chapter with the intent to demonstrate credibility of data. Similarly, the author asserts that the interpretive paradigm, adopted here and informed by other writers and researchers into notions of professional identity in the field of early years, contributes to the credibility of this research. If reliability is promoted through triangulation, and 'triangulation is the simultaneous display of multiple, refracted realities' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 6), then the decision to use different groups of participants and different methods of data analysis is argued to promote reliability.

Delamont's (1992: 158) advice regarding validity and reliability has been heeded in this respect, in deference to those who seek confirmation of validity and reliability in research methodology. She suggests that 'there are two main strategies for checking reliability and validity in qualitative material which are regularly espoused; respondent validation and triangulation'. She proposes that triangulation is demonstrated through using different methods of data collection, as adopted in this research through the decision to use interviews, focus group

conversations and documentary analysis. However, a hermeneutic approach was preferred as it goes beyond triangulation; it takes account of multiple perspectives.

Respondent validation is interpreted as confirmability for the purpose of this aspect of the methodology, and in this final paragraph, confirmability and aspects of the ethical conduct of the research are considered. Appendix 2 illustrates the formal procedure by which 'informed consent', confidentiality, anonymity, withdrawal and confirmability of participants' contributions were sought and implemented by the researcher. The notion of ethic of care has been attributed to feminist theory (Gilligan 1982; Larrabee 1993) but in this research, an ethic of care was applied through adopting an un-intrusive manner, being sensitive to any nuances of language (verbal and / or body language), accepting the silence of no response as an indicator of the voice of the person who had been approached. All participants in interviews and focus group conversations were asked if they consented to conversations being recorded, where the technology was accessible, and all agreed.

Steps were taken to preserve the identity of participants, to maintain the confidentiality of participants; to store data so only transcriber and interviewer had access, and to inform participants as to how information would be disseminated to them for approval and confirmability before wider dissemination of the research findings. This seemed straightforward in the planning, but became problematic in its implementation as the researcher needed to maintain anonymity of other participants' utterances. The difficulty arose from deciding firstly at what stage of processing data participants should be presented with data for confirmation and

secondly which excerpts from the findings and interpretation chapter should be presented to them for confirmation.

Harper (2003) reassuringly articulated some of the conundrums of this situation, and one that particularly exercised the researcher was how to respond strategically to participants if the author (not the speaker) had invoked 'discourses and ideologies of which they were not actually aware' (Harper 2003: 86). It was decided to provide participants with sections that had their own utterances, with the author's commentary, but edited so that the utterances of others were removed. This created distorted material, but honoured the original ethical undertaking to participants.

Participants were informed as to how the findings were to be used, and their agreement to this was sought (see Appendix 2). Codes of practice that informed ethical procedures were those of the HEIs awarding approval to conduct the study, the British Educational Research Association and the British Psychological Society. The last section of this chapter now outlines the method selected for data analysis: discourse analysis.

3.10 Method of data analysis: discourse analysis

'Raw' data that the research had generated existed in the form of transcripts from the interviews and focus group discussions, and sections of text as selected by the framework for documentary analysis. Discourse analysis was congruent with the paradigms and perspectives that underpinned this research (see Table 3.1 on

page 110) in its potential for dialogic (double-voicedness in Bakhtinian terms, 1981) and hermeneutic analysis, in other words, of both texts and wider social discourse.

As Alvesson (2002: 68) suggests, 'discourse is a highly fashionable word that is used in a variety of ways. In DA [discourse analysis] the task is to study discourse as texts and talk in social practices.' Dressman (2008: 30) concurs, specifically in relation to the work of Bakhtin (1981), and therefore highlights power in discourse analysis,

a central theme in the theorisation of discourse is the way that people's uses of language in both local social contexts and broader, societal contexts determine what is considered true and valuable, and by extension, who has the power to make these determinations.

It has already been asserted that the choice of written texts for documentary analysis was located in a social, cultural and political context, and so issues of power can be examined within the discourse. The talk in the interviews was similarly located in the social, political and cultural contexts of places and spaces where early years workers and decision makers exist and construct identities.

As this research is located in an interpretive paradigm, then the technical and instrumental, arguably post-positivist practice of linguistics, content analysis and semiotics (Silverman, 2001), were deemed to be inappropriate methods. Instead, the researcher sought techniques that promoted an examination of the utterances, text and talk around all issues connected with professional identities informed by

literature and the work of others, and as noted in Tables 3.6, 3.7, 3.8 and 3.9 (pages 140, 142, 148 and 151 respectively) .

A reiteration of the research aim and questions is pertinent at this stage of the methodology as a reminder of what the researcher wants to achieve. The aim is to explore how professional identities emerge within the early years workforce, and to understand what factors contribute to their construction. Research questions seek to explore how professional identities are influenced by, or have influence on, processes, perspectives and practice.

The themes and questions in Tables 3.6, 3.7, 3.8 and 3.9 were designed to elicit discourse through the interviews, focus group conversations and documentary analysis, pertinent to the construction of professional identities. The technique of data processing using discourse analysis had to interrogate data to generate responses to the research aim and questions. Techniques had to interrogate utterances for dominance, appropriation, meaning, stories, scripts and identities. As noted in Chapter Two, Bakhtin's notions of heteroglossia and polyphony (Bakhtin 1981; Dressman 2008; Vice 1997) contribute to an understanding of how dialogism reveals polemics, relationships and power, and these can be examined through discourse analysis.

Gee (2005) proposes that the researcher undertakes a preliminary familiarisation with their data in order to begin the process of discourse analysis. Gee's (2005) guidance resonates with that of Delamont (1992) and Radnor (2002) who likewise suggest that the researcher scrutinises transcripts for situated meanings. Methods

of coding and indexing data were informed by accounts in Delamont (1992), Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) and Radnor (2002) and it is their guidance that has informed the algorithms illustrated in Figure 3.2 and 3.3 on pages 165 and 166, and resulted in the codes and categories shown in Table 3.10 on page 164. At the same time, the researcher was mindful of Harper's reflections on discourse analysis (2003: 80, original italics),

I found that both my codes and categories changed continually and that the connections changed too. In the end I made a selection of three analytic themes for the analysis of the interviews. I can justify this selection in terms of the aims and preoccupations of my study, but this does not get away from the fact that *I had to make a choice.*

Harper's experience resonates with the reflections and experience of the researcher during this phase of the research process. Selecting sections of transcripts and creating codes and categories were all a subjective, biased process informed by the existing constructs and expectations of the researcher. The codes and categories generated from all interview transcripts with early years workers, decision makers and early years students are provided in Table 3.10.

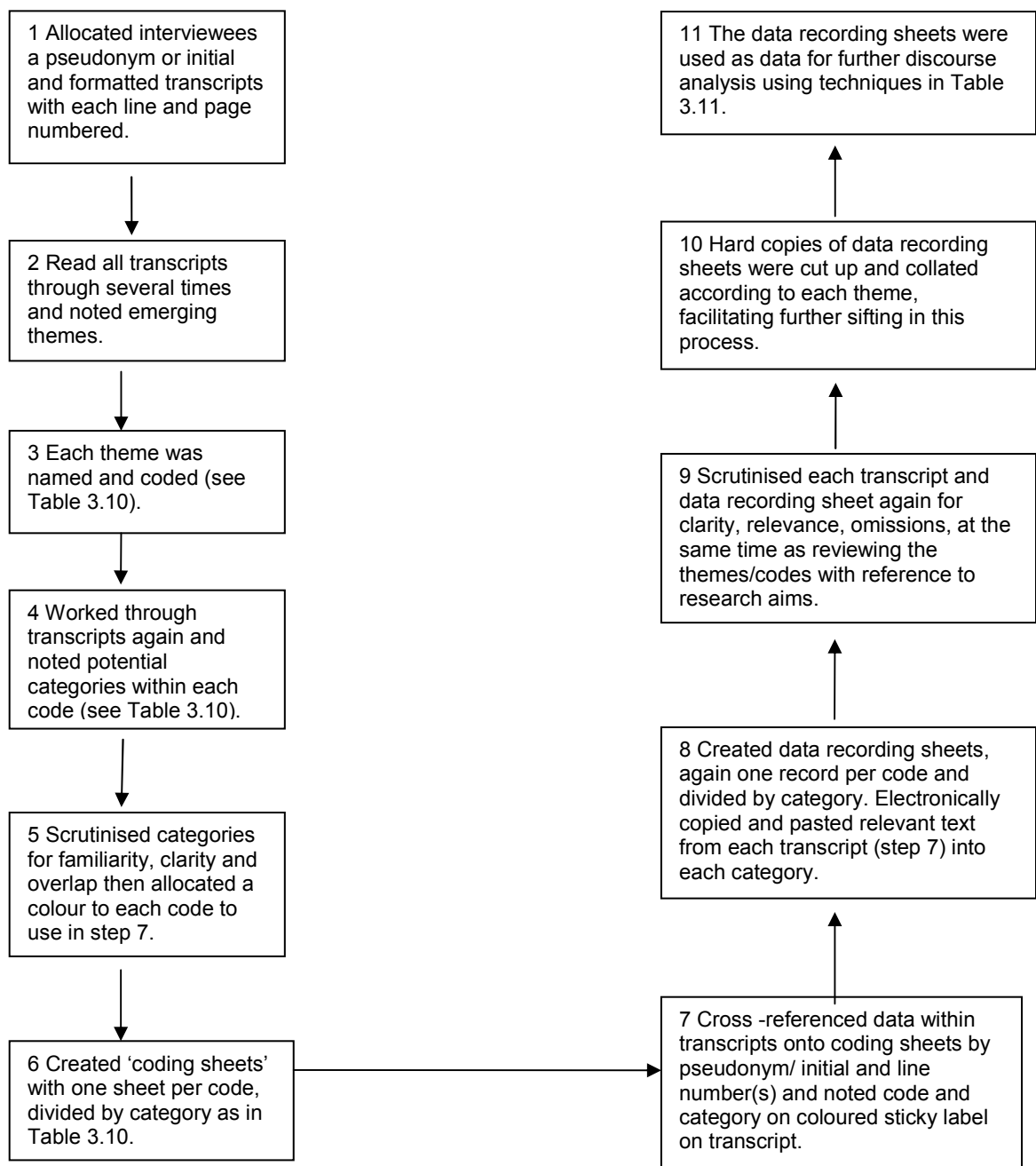
There was some fluidity in the selection of codes, and uncertainty as to whether these were the 'right' ones, specifically with reference to the ephemeral understandings of professional identities and how they are constructed. However, memos, questions, notes and reading the experiences of others assisted and guided the researcher through data analysis as well as frequent reading and re-reading of the coded excerpts. Once data were worked with, they were sifted, sorted and further rationalised in order to create a manageable quantity of data.

Table 3.10 Codes and categories for analysis of transcripts (adapted from Radnor 2002)

Code	Theme	Categories
AG	Agency	1 perceptions of power expressed by agency 2 passivity
GE	Gender	1 being female 2 not being female 3 caring
ID	Ideologies and values	1 how I would like to work 2 value ascribed to what I do, by self and others 3 altruism 4 personal philosophy 5 aspirations 6 ethics 7 the ideal early years worker
KN	Knowledge	1 reification of knowledge 2 epistemologies of early years work
ED	Education, training and qualifications	1 achievements 2 qualifications 3 education 4 value ascribed to education, qualifications, achievements 5 effects and outcomes from education, qualifications, achievements
PR	Being a professional	1 titles, interpellation
RO	Roles, role models, responsibilities	1 my role where I work 2 role models 3 role and responsibility compared to others
RE	Relationships	1 where I work 2 relationships with people where I work 3 the influence of others where I work 4 belonging to the workplace 5 relationships with other professionals outside the setting
SE	Self, biography, stories about self, personal narratives	1 personal history 2 personal characteristics 3 confidence and self esteem 4 family – people and events 5 ethnicity 6 feelings and emotions 7 sense of self
ST	Status	1 conditions of service 2 conditions of service compared to others 3 hierarchies
PO	Impact of policy, perceived impact and view of policy	1 structures in the workplace 2 my position in relation to political initiatives 3 political initiatives unspecified 4 impact of political initiatives

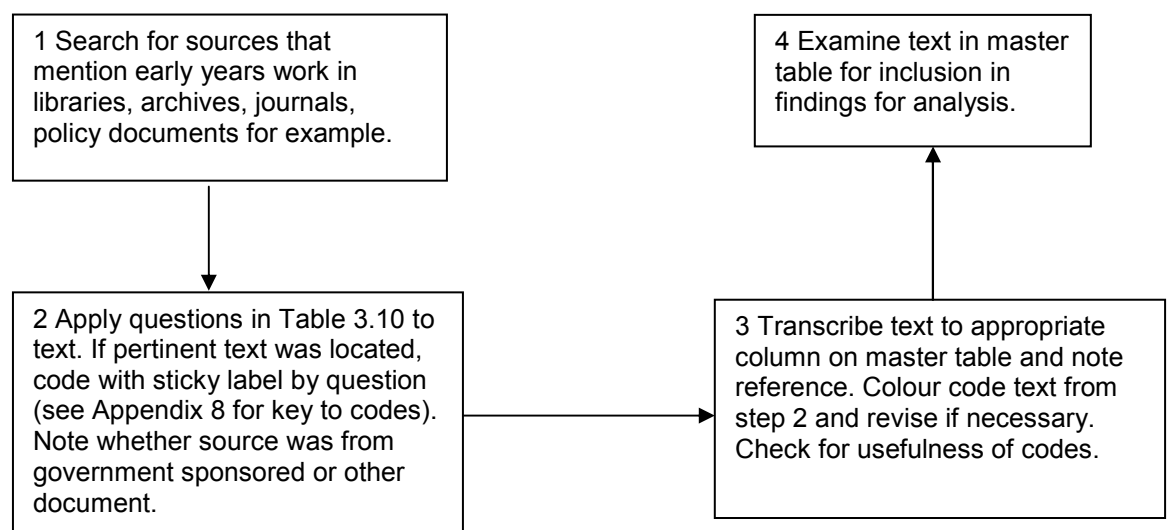
The method of data analysis for the documentary analysis has already been explained; the algorithm in Figure 3.3, similar to that in Figure 3.2, illustrates the process by which data were selected as findings for analysis.

Figure 3.2 Algorithm to show process of data analysis of interview transcripts
(Adapted from Radnor 2002: 84)



Once the algorithm had been worked through for the interview transcripts, the data had been sifted several times, and the resulting material for the researcher to work with existed as hard copies of cut-up sections of transcript conversation between researcher and participants, clipped together and labelled by code and category (Table 3.10, page 164). Silverman (2007: 63) uses the metaphor of ‘chopping up trees’ to describe the process of working with transcripts. He emphasises the criticality of taking a searching, in-depth approach to data analysis rather than ‘the scattergram approach of simply quoting favourable instances’ (Silverman, 2007: 64). It was the strategies of sifting, sorting, coding and re-reading of transcripts that offered some reassurance that the method of discourse analysis was not at risk of anecdotalism. Figure 3.3 illustrates a similar process in selecting text to generate responses to the research aim and questions.

Figure 3.3 Algorithm to show process of data analysis for documentary analysis



Data after the final step in each algorithm were still too great in volume to be presented in meaningful form for analysis, so further working with the data was

required. The approach taken at this stage of the discourse analysis was informed by the work of Gee (2005), and, to a lesser extent, Fairclough (2003). The researcher used these techniques to seek which social, cultural, political contexts apparent in the literature as critical to identity construction were detectable through data analysis.

Gee (2005) integrates key themes into a process of discourse analysis: the situatedness of discourse, which can be local, subjective or cultural; how identities are socially constructed through discourse and ways in which 'discourse models' (Gee 2005: 71) mediate between meso-, micro- and macro- levels of interaction. Such themes and political influences were particularly salient to this research. In addition, Fairclough (2003) and Peräkylä (2005) describe techniques by which utterances can be analysed through genre, styles, relational contexts, representation, action and identification. How their approaches, alongside those of Gee (2005), have contributed to the design of techniques applied in the interpretation of findings here, are presented in Table 3.11 on page 168.

Table 3.11 A description of the techniques used in discourse analysis

Technique	Description
Conversations	Public debates, debates in society or specific groups where those engaged in the debate or 'conversation' recognise the sides taken and who usually positions themselves on which side (Gee 2005). Conversations have been used to highlight macro-, meso- and micro-positions emerging within the data.
Social languages	Languages that 'allow us to express different socially significant identities' (Gee 2005: 35); ways in which early years workers, decision makers and early years students use language to talk about what they do, who does what, how groups or individuals are named, for example
Intertextuality	Where there may be appropriation; when a participant or author uses the text, phrase, term of another, directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly (Gee 2005).
Representations	Used by Fairclough to show how social events are represented. In this research, it has been applied where there is exclusion, inclusion and prominence in the data; what has been filtered and kept in or omitted; the use of nouns /pronouns for example to show something or someone being 'activated or passivated' (Fairclough 2003: 145).
Internal conversations	Ways in which individuals mediate between the structures of the external world and the internal meanings and interpretations through 'self' (Archer 2003).

This stage of the data analysis process was fraught with challenges as much, if not more than others as the researcher wanted to sustain elements of post-structuralism, particularly deconstruction as stated in the thesis title, on the selected discourse. The approach taken to deconstruction of discourse has already been noted in the introduction to Chapter Two and is similar to that posited by McQuillan (2000). There is no mystery to deconstruction; 'Rather, deconstruction is a reading which is sensitive to what is irreducible in every text, allowing the text to speak before the reader, and listening to what the text imposes on the reader' (McQuillan 2000: 5).

The reading of the discourse that has been undertaken in the selection of data for presentation in Chapter Four has demonstrated deconstruction: the discourse of the other has been produced in that moment of space, time and context, and is reproduced from transcripts on the premise that, in this thesis, it provides a narrative that pertains to the construction of professional identities.

The aim of Chapter Three has been to articulate the research paradigms and the methods of data collection and data analysis, demonstrating how the research questions can be responded to through selected methodology. The researcher should not lose sight of the interpretive paradigm at this stage; the subjectivities and perspectives that have been explored so far in all chapters are integral to the aim of the study. The aim of the next chapter is to present the interrogated, coded, sifted and sorted data, using techniques commensurate with the subjectivities and perspectives of the research paradigm. It needs to continue to narrate the story of the research and to tell the reader what has emerged in relation to the construction of professional identities and what can be asserted from the data, but not just from the position of the researcher.

The nexus of the position as white female academic/ student/ tutor between the positions of participants and the data becomes apparent once again. If critical theoretical perspectives underpin the techniques of interrogation as they have shaped the methodology, then dissonance, deviance, omission, ambiguities and contradictions have to be located in the analysis (Seale 1999). Critical theory offered an approach that examines resistive, counter-hegemonic knowledge that may be apparent in 'oppressive material and symbolic relations of dominance'

(Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006: 35, previously cited in this chapter). Discourse analysis had the potential to reveal feminist, historical, dialogic, socio-cultural and economic perspectives within the early years workforce and associated decision makers. The researcher describes next how the data provided opportunities for arguments to be made, not problems to be solved (Dressman 2008).

Chapter 4: A deconstruction of research findings

The aim of this chapter is to report the findings in response to the research questions. Techniques of discourse analysis (see Table 3.11 on page 168), such as conversations, social languages and representations, were applied to coded excerpts of discourse to facilitate a 'dialectic deconstruction', in other words, a multi-levelled reading and interpretation. The researcher has presented findings as excerpts, or a series of 'conversations' derived from the themes in the data analysis phase (see Table 3.10 on page 164) with associated analysis. The themes were status and gender; roles; relationships; ideologies; education, qualifications and training and being/ becoming a professional. They were selected for clarity and cohesion in the narrative of this chapter; they also mirror those in Chapter Two and thus exist as significant threads throughout the study. A reconstruction of professional identities from the analysis of findings is presented in Chapter Five through the prism of the ecological systems model.

Italics in the excerpts, unless stated otherwise, represent the researcher's interjections. The length of excerpts locates the socially situated discourse of participants; it is also congruent with an interpretive paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Guba and Lincoln 2005; Seale 1999). Presenting contextualised excerpts aligns with a strategy that allows the researcher to 'treat what they hear as a contingent narrative or account and examine the cultural resources which speakers skilfully deploy' (Silverman, 2007: 130). It allows certain techniques of discourse analysis, as illustrated in Table 3.11 on page 168, to be

applied for appropriation, intertextuality and representation and is aligned with a process of a deconstruction.

The quandaries encountered in coding and categorising discourse analysis have already been acknowledged in Chapter Three, but it is important to note that the selection of themes does not indicate exclusivity within each. It was apparent, as data were worked with, that there was overlap between themes but discourse within each had the potential to illuminate different perspectives, angles or influences on professional identity construction.

For this reason, some voices are favoured more than others in the discourse; they have meaning for the researcher in the context of the research aim and questions as well as the theoretical models and perspectives presented in Chapter Two. The researcher has continued to draw on sociology, psychology, social policy and the sociology of education to inform the analysis. Indeed, a multi-disciplinary approach to research brings benefits through difference and eclecticism: it takes the researcher into unfamiliar territories. It also chimes with the work of the *bricoleur* (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005), a notion returned to at the end of this chapter, even though it risks taking only a superficial perspective on what these disciplines offer. To begin the process of deconstruction, status and gender set the scene for an interpretation and deconstruction of discourses from the research data.

4.1 Status and gender

Status was a theme that recurred amongst the discourse with influences apparent at macro-, meso- and micro-levels, determined by positions, power, ideologies and habitus. The connection between status and gender and associated feminist agendas were visible in Chapter Two in the genealogy section. Government rhetoric claimed attempts to address status and qualifications in the early years workforce. Children's workforce reform was tied in with the re-configuration of children's services, and the launch of associated initiatives positioned early years and childcare in the spotlight of specialist media (see sections 2.6 and 2.7, pages 58-66).

Policy makers and their advisers whose remit was to manage and deliver on workforce reform also placed the workforce in the spotlight. It is a macro-level conversation, from the official position first, that demonstrates a particular construction of the early years workforce by policy makers, that is, a discourse of neo-liberal ideological values (Tucker 2004).

Tony Blair, Prime Minister at the time, delivered a speech to launch the Green paper, *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003) and the following statement referred to children's workforce reform,

We will introduce a graduated career ladder ... and the new framework will also look at pay (Blair 2003).

The discourse conveys ambivalence, with reference to pay as an afterthought. There is no statement of strategy or outcome to resolve inequities or low pay. Juxtaposed to this, in the same year, the GMB Trade Union, in a position to be an advocate for the early years workforce, published a report on findings from research into perceptions of teaching assistants and nursery nurses on their work,

Respondents feel that their status within schools is generally low, reflected in lack of understanding and consistency when it comes to job titles and roles. Many feel they are treated as 'second class', 'invisible', 'spare parts' or 'servants' (GMB 2003: 2).

The contrasting positions between the GMB union and the politician signifies rupture between unions and politicians. The conversation from the official, or macro- position continued in 2005. Ed Balls, then Senior Research Fellow at the Smith Institute, delivered the Second Daycare Trust Annual Lecture and he stated, in terms of pay,

So it is time to establish parity of esteem between early years and primary school teachers. Rather than aiming recruitment at very low qualified people and training them on the job, our goals should be that early years workers of the future are well-educated with the financial rewards to go with that status (Balls 2005: 10).

Two years later, Ed Balls delivered a speech to the Daycare Trust Conference, this time as Economic Secretary to the Treasury. The stark shift in his position, between 2005 and 2007, demands critical interrogation of the discourse and

underlying intentions. In terms of a 'high quality workforce' Balls refers to his speech in 2005 and states,

The second challenge I raised was ensuring that we have the right workforce in place, and achieving parity of esteem between early years workers and primary school teachers. We know from evidence how much better outcomes for children can be when settings have more qualified staff. [...] More childcare workers are qualified to level 3 than ever before, more settings are led by graduates, and the Transformation Fund provided £250 million over two years to improve staff development (Balls 2007).

This section of Balls' speech delivers a different message to his previous one. He evades any previous intention to implement strategies that might finally provide the equity which he had stated as a goal in 2005.

The policy of the Transformation Fund to contribute to costs of higher education (see Nicholson *et al.* 2008) from 2005 to 2007 explicitly targeted the PVI sector, excluding early years staff who work in the maintained sector. This suggested strategic, laudable government policy to support those in the least well-paid sectors (DfES 2006; Nicholson *et al.* 2008), but Watson (2008) suggests that government was reneging on its intentions to resolve inequities in pay and conditions,

A spokesman for the Department of Children, Schools and families said that it was not the government's role to intervene in the pay and conditions offered by the private, voluntary and independent sectors (Watson 2008: 8).

In addition, the following excerpts from specialist media reportage in the context of early years workforce reform continue a narrative of avoidance. 'The Children's Minister has failed to address concerns over pay and status at the first national event for early years professionals' (Watson 2009a: 6) and 'Early years leaders have expressed their dismay at the government's failure to use last month's updated childcare strategy to finally put the status of early years professionals on an equal footing with teachers' (Watson 2009b: 4).

The conversation from the position of the politicians on pay in the early years workforce therefore shifted from acknowledgement of the need to address low pay, to avoidance, resorting to the 'inertia of the past' (Foucault 1972: 12). The unions and the workforce failed to exert sufficient influence to bring about change in pay and conditions. Such resistance by the government maintains the low status of early years workers through oppression; it avoids radical reform and investment and this contributes to the 'grim' landscape of wider workforce reform noted by Coffield (2002). Avoidance confirms the esteem in which the workforce was held within government, shaped by its historical legacy (Miller and Paige-Smith 2004; Penn 2000; Sylva and Pugh 2005).

Elsbeth, a decision maker, was a trade union officer, so her contribution to the conversation is pertinent at this point. The influence of hierarchical statuses, professional ideologies, passivity, power and agency in the education sector were visible,

I think the teachers are where they are because of the teacher unions, they're very strong and I haven't yet in all the years I've been an officer

met a teacher who isn't in a union, it's nothing more than a protection in the workplace because it's a very vulnerable position particularly as days and time goes on. It seems very easy to point the finger but I think because of that and because the teachers' unions are so organised in that way they can drive their agendas about pay and terms and conditions and not just pay, terms and conditions but moving the education agenda the way forward that they believe it should be.

I think we've a long way to go because people are so reticent about standing up for themselves, I still feel that many [early years workers], not all, but many feel that they accept it as their lot as it were and they're reluctant to look at change and many will say to me I don't want to make an issue because I don't want to lose my job and I think that's really sad that they feel that vulnerable in their work.

Class, low value attributed to early years work and lack of agency were reinforced by Elspeth in their influence at macro-level through the power of the teacher unions. In comparison, the conversation is continued by Elizabeth and Janice from Midshires children's centre. Their discourse showed how power through similar hierarchies and subsequent inequities was exacerbated by the ruptures across the private, statutory and voluntary child care sectors, noted by Ball and Vincent (2005) and Penn (2007).

Elizabeth was manager of the pre-school provision, a micro-system within the community of Midshires children's centre. Elizabeth's discourse showed ambiguity, ambivalence even. There was a nuance of dissent between Elizabeth and the ambiguous others: 'people say we are', but the social language was 'we are not',

There are tensions now because people say we are working as one as one big staff team and it is not equal pay. My staff are on less money, they haven't got the holidays, we are open 51 weeks of the year so we get 21 days holiday, they are looking at staff that .. sort of 13 weeks holiday, umm longer hours, shorter dinner, we have 30 minutes and we are sitting having our lunch with staff that have 45 minutes. My staff have no non-contact time so it is never going to be equal is it?

Janice had been a nursery nurse at the nursery school before the merger between the pre-school and the nursery school that became Midshires. She had therefore not been part of the micro-culture of the pre-school, but instead had been working within the micro-culture of the nursery school. She had achieved a BA (Hons) degree followed by QTS and was working as a teacher in Midshires children's centre. Janice also commented on status and the perception of early years work as 'second' class, echoing findings reported by GMB (2003),

I think certainly working in the private sector you're kind of just there to cater to the needs of people that are more professional if you like. Do you know what I mean? And we were kind of almost like the second class citizen. You're doing that job because somebody with a much better job wants you to look after their children. Does that make sense?

The conversation from Janice's and Elizabeth's positions, at the meso-level of the community at Midshires, constructs identities in terms of class and hierarchies. Janice reinforced how being female and having low status are associated with the low position of those who work with, or look after, young children.

Thomas, also a teacher in Midshires, offered a solution to the disparity of status. He ascribed value to the title and role of teacher, reinforcing how the latter has a professional habitus and status that is lacking for early years workers,

Well my ideal model would be that everyone who works with a child is a teacher for a start, I think that would just, people are well paid and people are working on an even playing field and their professional development is taken seriously and so that to me would be an ideal model.

Findings here suggest that the entrenched positions ascribed in education establishments by Janice, Thomas and Elizabeth are resistant to change, and are perpetuated by those who have internalised where they and others exist in terms of status, determined by pay, habitus and class. It reinforces fragmentation within and across the private, voluntary and statutory sectors and exacerbates fractured identities according to Dahlberg and Moss (2005) and Penn (2007).

Beatrice, a decision maker, used a discourse of interpellation and representation to ascribe status of four categories of worker: 'senior early years educators'; 'normal nursery nurse'; 'family leaders' and 'teacher'. Who belongs to communities or groups; who does not; the occupation of and movement between inside and outside positions all influence identity (Brown 2004). Beatrice's contribution demonstrates how she, as a decision maker, constructs and ascribes positions, but also recognises the implications of inequities within the local workforce,

I think my senior early years educators are paid more than a normal nursery nurse are paid and I'm really worried that in the phase 2 pay re-grading that their salaries are going to go down. That's a huge implication for them and their families. Yes and their family leaders, they do the reports, they do the assessment records; you can't tell the difference between them and the teacher.

Beatrice also talked of effort, aspirations and passive acceptance. A dilemma emerges: there may be perceived achievement from completing a Foundation Degree, but the benefits are severely limited in terms of status, and concurs with the findings of Carey *et al.* (2009), Cooke and Lawton (2008) and Wilson Sherrif (2008). Beatrice suggests that compliance, dedication and acceptance determine early years workers' decisions to undertake a Foundation Degree, as well as a mismatch in perceptions of levels of labour,

I do think that they think that they work hard, and they do work hard. There are huge, huge issues around pay and conditions. I think career aspirations are quite varied, many see the pathway to obtaining a foundation degree as something as they've got to do because that's the way it is now. I think for some mature students it's a huge personal achievement and it does change the way they value themselves and their status because they have a degree that they will then come back and say, well I've got this degree but actually where's it going to take me?

Limited progression opportunities was a concern shared by Ann, a local authority workforce development officer. Both Ann and Beatrice made decisions relating to quality, funding and professional development and therefore mediated between the structures of central and local government. They were in positions of power to be able to adopt an advocacy role on behalf of the

workforce, to resist on behalf of the workforce or to promulgate the 'official' neo-liberal, ideological discourses (Tucker 2004) as well as to move between all of these. Ann was more vehement in her discourse compared to other decision makers,

So many think it's a dead-end job, love what they do, but with no thought of going further, this is all linked to pay and status. 'I love the children', the government response is by saying, there is a great deal about the 'love' not about pay, more the rewards of job satisfaction and this is why they stay, regardless of pay and status. This is an exploitation of women in the workforce. I could say a lot more. CWDC commissioned a report, Rewards, remuneration.... Their response to this is typical of how they fudge issues, may say they [EY workforce] do it for the love; only women, they'll be alright, but why should the workforce be looked at like that? Would we say the same about schools and work with older children?

Both Beatrice's and Ann's conversations express concern about status, attrition and motivation, but Ann is overtly critical. She emphasises the intrinsic rewards in choosing early years work despite poor pay and low status of the workforce and reinforces the perceived higher status of those who work with older children (Eraut 2000; Goldstein 1998).

Differential levels of agency are also apparent within the decision makers through Carrie's contribution to the conversation that follows. Carrie, also a local authority adviser and decision maker, articulates a lack of agency, paradoxical considering her role as power-broker. She positions herself passively as a member of a group that does not have the power to influence pay and notes the rupture between sectors,

Better pay and that's the sticking point because the pay is still so low obviously it isn't like the maintained sector who were doing the same job, same expectations, same Ofsted and they're being paid minimum wage some of them, and when you do something about the pay, but we can't. It's out of our control isn't it?

Carrie and Ann worked for different local authorities, had different biographical trajectories, habitus, motivations and professional identities themselves but Carrie reproduced a discourse of passive acceptance of low pay for the workers she advised; Ann did not.

Gender issues appear explicitly in some participants' contributions, such as Ann's, and perpetuate constructs of the early years workforce as being feminised but not adopting any feminist stance in its work. Gender and feminism are visible and critical influences on professional identity construction (see Chapter Five). Any expectation that early years workers will take a feminist position and challenge the patriarchal regime that perpetuates staff roles, power and hierarchies is absent in the discourse so far.

Conversations in this section contribute to the perpetuation of passivity in the professional identity of early years work, as did Fealey's research with nurses (2004). Implicit and explicit forms of domination, subjugation and patriarchy are masked by expectations that early years workers will seek intrinsic rewards for their labour. Explicit resistance or even subversion of their status, despite inequalities, low pay and poor conditions would be seen as a betrayal of their dedication by decision makers and policy makers.

Indeed, Ann shows how feminised perspectives shape the construction of identities in response to the question 'Are there more men in your local authority (LA) now than there used to be?'

No change; only one male who is a FD student, and 1 EYP. This is sad and is indicative of the issues in the workforce. I believe it is a gendered workforce and it mitigates against it. I worked with a male nursery nurse; he was chosen because he was male. Another candidate was my preference but the manager over-rode this in order to appoint the male. It is a gender thing working against itself and there is the child protection thing working against men too. Male breadwinners, it's not sustainable; status, how they're perceived. Biggest is the whole pay and conditions situation.

Ann's experience substantiates subversive decisions in recruitment and corroborates with findings of Ecclestone *et al.* (2005) and Robb (2001) in terms of how gender subverts recruitment to the workforce through resistance and findings ways to fit. Male early years workers are construed as 'other' on the basis of low pay, risk in terms of child protection and imbalance in number (Sumsion 2000). The repercussions of this for female early years workers and decision makers reinforce post-structural ideas once more in terms of identity construction. Such 'othering' is explained in Foucauldian terms as resistance to change, a means to retain an identity as a feminised workforce and to sustain homogeneity.

Sarah, Megan and Monica, all workers in Midshires children's centre, talked about men in childcare. Sarah reinforced stereotypical perspectives firstly of men and women in childcare through forms of social language with reference to

‘a wishy-washy job’; ‘just...play with them all day’; ‘women...who have a bitch and a whinge’ for example. Sarah then makes reference to a new male recruit to the pre-school team she manages and the credentials she sought were located in candidates’ interpersonal and verbal abilities,

I think it’s lovely that more men seem to be coming into it, and perhaps that will also give us the status that actually, no, it’s not just a wishy washy job. If men are doing it as well I don’t know, I don’t know perhaps it does, but I think they must find it even harder to be honest because I think people see women as, you just look after children, that’s all you do, you play with them all day. I think men must get an awful lot of stick for doing that job.

He was lovely in his interview, didn’t give perhaps always the best of answers but used you know, you look for the key words that you want. They were all there and he’s got such a lovely way with the children. We’ve got an awful lot of children that haven’t got daddies, or father figures, or anything at home, so how lovely that they can spend some time with a man at the preschool, it’s lovely. I think it makes it easier having a bloke working in the setting as well as opposed to just women who you know we do tend to have a bitch and a whinge don’t we? I mean if you’ve got a bloke there you can’t do it, can you, to a bloke? They’ll look at you thinking, you’ve gone crackers, so yeah it is, it’s lovely having him work with us, it’s really nice.

Sarah constructs men as ‘other’ in terms of their relationship and identity in interactions with children, the dynamic within the gendered micro-culture of the pre-school team; this resonates with Sumsion’s findings (2000). The issue of representation is similarly noted by Monica who is from an ethnic minority background,

And I think when I first started I did notice that I was the only practitioner from an ethnic minority background as well, I think it's good in an EY setting they should address erm the needs of ..erm male It was nice to see they have got men in EY setting as well, you have got Peter, Thomas and you have got students as well coming in and I think it's also important to get people from ethnic minority backgrounds into the setting as well.

These conversations focus on the need for representation and the dynamic of men in a gendered workplace and such post-structural perspectives implicate where power and reproduction may occur. Megan was working towards a personal theory in terms of gender, but did not elucidate on the difficulties for her colleague,

I was actually working with a member of staff who I'd trained, a male member of staff who was a nursery nurse and he found great difficulties working in that environment and it was kind of a shame but it did become a bit of a live study on why actually he didn't succeed in it and you can't draw a complete theory from it, but you see certain things that are going on for men in that setting so, from that point of view, I've been kind of interested in the gender issues that surround men in this field of work.

I mean I think we're lucky because particularly with Peter arriving. He was coming in a very different position from a nursery nurse, he was coming in a position of power so you know that was giving him some authority whereas I think when you're in a different role it can quite difficult but that has had a huge impact with the other members of staff who are men coming along so there's lots of different influences in there and some of that you have to put down to personality and life experiences and others it's about the support networks that exist.

Megan's reference to power and gender perpetuates patriarchal dominance in workforces, particularly the early years workforce, but also acknowledges biographical, psychological and social influences on individual men in the workforce (Sumsion 2000). A dualism appears: some members of the workforce have enthusiasm for more men to balance the gender mix and to provide male role models; others are more circumspect and understand the resistance and struggles that impose barriers to men in childcare. Reasons for this dualism can be ascribed to experience, education or position of influence or power (Hodkinson *et al.* 2004) and what might be perceived by individuals to potentially undermine their positions of power.

It is apparent in the conversation presented here that gender and power intersect in a way that places legitimate, authoritative and explicit power in the hands of men as long as they are managers. The conversation propagates the feminised, legitimate position of early years workers as acceptable 'as a nursery nurse' if they are female but by implication not acceptable as a nursery nurse if male. The boundaries of 'acceptability' are being determined by workers in the community of Midshires children's centre, and such boundaries mirror the wider field of early years work (Cameron *et al.* 1999; Sumsion 2000).

The official, macro-level position presented at the beginning of the conversation in this section, alongside structures that reinforce the status of the teaching profession, passivity within the early years workforce, unionisation and deeply rooted, sociologically situated stereotypes and roles perpetuate the low status of early years work and low value of childcare. Politicians and similar power-

brokers who have the ultimate power to introduce structures that deal with pay and status in a way that has been done for teachers, are resisting doing the same for early years workers – why? Government rhetoric has sought a more representative workforce in terms of gender, disability and ethnicity (DfES 2005), but fails to address the reasons for not recruiting from under-represented groups. Reluctance, resistance and avoidance prevail, arguably due to hegemonic influences.

Ruptures within the workforce, across the private, voluntary and statutory sectors have emerged in the conversation too as illustrated by the divides between the care and education micro-cultures at Midshires children's centre. Issues of status were apparent when workers such as Thomas talked of isolation; Elizabeth of inequitable conditions; Janice of being a second class citizen. These interpretations of position and status could be said to be part of the glue that binds groups of workers in a workforce together and signifies a basis for constructing professional identities. The glue is arguably a form of resistance at the level of the individual, resisting being an individual (Foucault 1982).

To summarise the conversation about status and gender, positions are situated and ascribed on socially shared constructs of the workforce as being female, low-paid and low achievers, sustained by power brokers, politicians, policy makers and advisers. The conversation in this section has also illustrated the influence of decision makers through their own professional identities, agency and positions. Decision makers such as Ann and Megan have been shown to

vary in their ideologies (returned to shortly), perceived roles and how they ascribe status and membership. It illustrates structuration (see Chapter One) and how individuals acquire a professional habitus, influenced by gender, power and policy, as a means of mediating between structures and exercising agency.

The intersection of decision makers, individual early years workers and students, their respective roles within the early years workforce, expectations of others, membership and participation in communities and implications for the construction of professional identities is the basis for the next conversation.

4.2 Roles

The socially situated context for professional identity construction has been inferred from the literature review through the work of Eraut (2000), Goffman (1959) and Wenger (1998) for example. This section presents discourse from participants relating to roles at the meso-level of influence that pertain to leadership, management, apprentice and apprentice-master as these have been shown in the literature to shape identities through performativities and reproduction. How the self mediates between agency and structures contributes to the acquisition of professional habitus too.

The titles ascribed to research participants by the nature of their job and occupation, and thus partly defined by the organisation in which they work, are presented in Tables 3.4 and 3.5, pages 130 and 134 respectively. Roles have implications for the identities of the individuals themselves as well as those who

share the meso-system of the workplace; these are evident in children's centres which have often been created through combining private and voluntary childcare with statutory provision.

It is from three contrasting positions within the meso-system of Midshires children's centre that begins the conversation about roles. The conversation illustrates how structures, other people and roles pose difficulties for Elizabeth, Thomas and Sarah. Elizabeth manages the pre-school provision in Midshires children's centre that had been, prior to the creation of the children's centre, privately run provision. Elizabeth perceives that colleagues have difficulty accepting this change in Elizabeth's membership of groups and her associated roles within the community of Midshires,

I think Megan considers me as part of her senior management team and I think that was really hard for me coming in this side and staff seeing me as a senior like member like staff as well. I just think they are used to seeing me as like um who just led the pre-school and now it is just like a whole centre and Megan included me as part of her like senior management, I think some of the team has found that quite difficult, not so much the girls I worked with but I think members over in the over 3s are seeing that quite hard.

The issue of membership is critical in identity construction according to Wenger (1998); Elizabeth is making a transition in membership from belonging to the pre-school provision 'team' to also becoming a member of the 'senior management team.' She notes the transition from one 'side' to another, as before in her discourse about status. Elizabeth projects the conflict emerging

from change onto others. It can be inferred from the conversation that Elizabeth attributes the 'difficulty' to the fact that she is from the pre-school team, not the nursery school team, and thus the fissure between the two groups is evident in Elizabeth's view.

The second, contrasting position is from Thomas, a teacher in Midshires children's centre. Thomas found his role an isolating experience, lacking membership of a group or position to which he attributed power,

I found it really difficult, a really challenging role and quite a lonely role and quite an insecure time to me as a professional because sometimes I felt that I didn't have the legitimate authority to impose change and from a professional point of view that was frustrating but I knew that you can't impose change and change evolves slowly.

Thomas communicates a lack of agency possibly due to the structures, regimes or restrictions at the meso-level of the children's centre. Janice and Thomas were appointed as teachers at Midshires, and both the manager and deputy manager also had qualified teacher status (QTS) thus shared identity. Groups within the community may inadvertently restrict membership by gender, qualification, provision or title (Wenger 1998).

Thomas's conversation suggests that his professional identity was constrained by lack of membership of communities within and beyond the children's centre, lack of legitimation and lack of agency. These findings are congruent with Fox (2005), Marsh and Forde (2005) and Wenger (1998); the nuance of passivity

and acceptance from the position of peripheral participation is apparent but paradoxically from a teacher and a male, both positions of power.

Such a paradox may be explained by powerful macro-, meso- or micro-level influences in different directions on Thomas, such as the newness of the model of children's centres, but specifically the role of teacher in a children's centre. A line of inquiry opens here for further research into inter-professional roles and identities in children's centres.

The third, contrasting position is that of Sarah, who worked in the micro-community of the pre-school provision at Midshires children's centre alongside Elizabeth. Sarah bemoans the loss of 'deputy' in her title, and expresses uncertainty and frustration about her position and level of 'professionalism' associated with the acquisition of the title 'senior practitioner' (Miller 2008b),

Our roles have disappeared. The deputy's role is no more and that does miff me a bit because I'm still doing the same job and if Elizabeth's not there I still step into Elizabeth's shoes and if the phone rings it's always me that answers it. It's always me that makes the decisions and that annoys me a lot. We're both senior practitioners along with one other girl now and then there's the newer staff that are practitioners. *And what determines who has senior practitioner title?* I think it's because we were deputies they felt they needed to give that to us. I don't think it's for any other reason, they felt they needed to still make that difference. I don't know perhaps that's why I make this thing about being a deputy. Perhaps I felt more professional being a deputy, I don't know, I've never really thought about that. I don't know.

Some of the conflicts and struggles of those working within the framework of a children's centre are apparent in this conversation. These macro-structures are common across the workforce in England. Title is significant for Sarah; there's a sense that part of her professional identity has been eroded with a change in title. There is conflict between how Sarah constructs her role and how the intervention of management in creating new titles and roles has not enhanced her status.

Sarah's conversation reinforces how the micro-culture of the group of workers in the pre-school provision at Midshires had their own hierarchy that was self-sustaining. The fragmentation within the workforce can be attributed to the divisions between maintained provision and private, voluntary and independent provision. This was significant in the previous section too.

Fragmentation can also be attributed to styles of management and leadership, particularly when there is significant macro-level intervention in the styles and structures of children's centre management in the guise of the NPQICL (see 'professionalisation' in Chapter Two). A democratic style may be aspired to in early years (Oberhuemer 2005; Moss 2006), but is contingent on leaders being reflexive, and/or having access to learning themselves.

Elizabeth is negotiating a unique professional identity, from a new reference point in the senior management team, different from the group on which she had previously founded her identity. The implications for how early years workers' professional identities are constructed within multiple teams and roles

within children's centres is an under-researched area in early years specifically, but also in the wider field of education (Gore 2001).

However, findings from Frost (2005) and Malin and Morrow (2007) confirm difficulties for newly constructed teams to manage professional boundaries, cultures, ideologies and practice. Scrutiny of how Thomas, Elizabeth and Sarah engage in a conversation about roles reveals how assumptions within the hegemony of the 'official' discourses (those of NPQICL, the vision for children's centres, the reconfiguration of children's services and multi-professional teams, for example) may be borne of an ideology that lacks congruence with the reality and ideology of the day-to-day lives of early years workers (Tucker 2004).

The boundaries in Figure 2.2 on page 75 become rigid, preventing exchange, co-construction and dialogue between levels of influence and points to a need to blur and soften the boundaries, to facilitate boundary crossing (Guile and Young 2001). Research, induction and supervision, co-construction of identities, shared reification of work and similar democratic processes can assist with boundary crossing (Moss, no date). The implications for leaders and managers in early years settings thus become apparent too, and is a further site for research and development (Muijs *et al.* 2004).

Juxtaposed against Thomas's, Sarah's and Elizabeth's conversation about changing roles is that from a decision maker's perspective, but not connected to Midshires. Carrie, a local authority adviser, had views about the imposed and changing roles as perceived by early years workers in the authority where she

worked. There is resistance from the workers, as well as dissonance between Carrie's perception of how the workers see themselves, and how she would like them to be,

Some started off when their children were at playgroup and think that they're just there to run the playgroup. We've got some practitioners like that, that are fabulous with the children but that's all they want to do and that's vital, but they're not moving forward now and perhaps taking on board all the new initiatives that are coming because they see that that's not their role. Their role is to provide, you know, the social aspect in the old playgroup systems. I've got practitioners who are in denial about being a manager and the roles and responsibilities that that brings, and that's our most challenging part of the job at the moment, is to work with the managers so that they see the importance of supporting their staff and providing professional development for their staff and actually having a vision for their group.

The professional identities of the pre-school workers in Carrie's conversation, likewise for the pre-school workers in Midshires children's centre, are constructed by both the workers and decision makers on the basis of practices and traditions. The social network of playgroup workers sustains agency and resistance through shared membership to what Carrie is seeking to impose. Carrie perceives stagnation, whereas the workers to whom she refers are secure in the predictability of their work and the reassurance it offers.

The pre-school workers are resisting macro-level pressure to take managerial roles, to embrace new initiatives and become apprentice-masters. The pre-school workers seek to retain the prevailing identity they have already co-

constructed between them. Carrie's role as adviser, thus apprentice-master or bureaucrat is sustained through her position in terms of the pre-school workers.

Carrie's conversation later resorted to transmitter of 'state apparatus' (Althusser 1971) in the next excerpt in emboldened font and reinforces technicianist notions about what the early years workforce is for, that is, to enforce standards and assessment regimes (Moss 2006; Stronach *et al.* 2002),

Our big focus is working with managers supporting them in writing their own improvement planning in line with the **SEF** [self evaluation form required for inspection by Ofsted] looking at the **5 outcomes**, looking at a vision, if we support the manager because that's the key person it should make our life easier with the practitioners, we're still rolling out a vast training programme we're looking now at **progress matters**, we're looking at adapting **the transfer profile**, we've got **the quality tool kit** which has come from **the strategy materials** that we're calling '**reaching for the stars**' so that's to support again as a **management tool** so we're putting in place **lots of tools** for managers to enable them to achieve their vision.

Carrie imposes the 'official' vision of government onto managers, suggesting they have ownership of it; her discourse endorses the hegemony of policy, and without criticism or contest. Control through instruments of regulation such as 'tools', 'strategies' and 'inspection' is drawn into the arena. Passive acceptance, resonating with Foucault's notion of docile bodies (Rabinow 1982) and compliance is expected of the early years workers Carrie comes into contact with. Carrie risked alienating herself from the workers in how she manages competing priorities. Indeed, Marx noted how capitalism risks alienation as workers become subordinated into the accumulation of capital (Giddens 1971).

This is reinforced in Carrie's later conversation when it conveys the nexus between the macro- and micro- levels of early years work, a difficult position to reconcile for Carrie,

things that are going on in the wider picture and expectations now more than ever from strategy so when national strategy advisers used to come a few years ago, you'd say oh we've got the rooms and we've done this documentation and all these lovely things and now they want to come and say, yes that's all very lovely but let's look at the impact, let's look at your data and they start always with data.

Carrie's ideology of how 'good practice' is manifested in the early years environment and documentation is in conflict with how advisers construct 'good practice'. Carrie's sense of nexus is shared by Diane, another local authority adviser, although Diane similarly interpreted her role as promulgator and as mediator,

I have the remit to sort of localise the strategic vision that comes from national strategy around the workforce. As well as making it [national initiatives] real for colleagues a lot of the time it's about us understanding it for ourselves and then disseminating and sharing that information with practitioners and making sure they can see that this is not something else, it's as well as.

I still love empowering people, however I think it needs to be at a national level because sometimes I think they're [at national level] sitting in their ivory tower you know ? Because actually you've got all these targets, and how practical is that going to be on the ground? I still have battles with CWDC sometimes about the things that they, and you can see what they're trying to do sometimes, however you're thinking, and there's still so

much conflict in relation to LSC [Local Skills Councils], all the government bodies.

The conversation articulated by Carrie and Diane, both decision makers, confirms their positions at the macro-level as mediators between policy makers and the workforce, and their priorities in order to conform to the structures of inspection and regulation but at the same time maintaining relationships with workers. Such priorities influence the professional identities of those whom Carrie and Diane work with in terms of promulgating official discourses which are received with resistance or compliance as well as contributing to their own professional habitus and identities.

The role and influence of decision makers leads to a conversation about roles of apprentices and apprentice-masters in early years. How roles are socially constructed; peripheral or full participation (Lave and Wenger 1991), membership in the workplace, learning practice and being socialised into workplace cultures all contribute to how recruits to early years work may construct their professional identities (Wenger 1998 and see Table 2.5, page 99). How performativities are shaped by apprentice-masters is also pertinent in this context.

This aspect of the conversation about roles begins with Beatrice who notes competing demands and expectations which compromise her ability to be an apprentice-master and to facilitate the process of socialisation into the workplace,

Unless they have a role model who asks them those questions, they won't learn to do it and I can't do that with them when I'm worrying about whether there's rusty hinges on the gate. If you can get them young and shape them with brilliant role models, you've got them, on the other hand if you get them when they've got the maturity that's really, really good but can you alter their practice because of their previous experience?

Being an apprentice-master brings elements of control in the moulding of performativities for Beatrice and the following conversation is designed to illuminate the contrasting roles of 'student', 'trainer' and 'mentor' in early years work. The extent to which apprentice-masters assume a role position of control or laissez-faire towards their apprentices may indicate personal imperatives competing with ideologies and values. The juxtaposition of students and workers who support them on placement highlights the value ascribed to being a trainee in early years work firstly by a student, followed by the value ascribed to being a trainee by a worker and thirdly the value ascribed to being a trainee by a manager. Students are distinguishable by an initial, not a pseudonym, for reasons explained in section 3.7.3, page 131.

R was a student on a level 2 early years course,

When I had a bad day I don't feel like it [going to placement] so I just miss the day I would just say that 'cause when I am like enthusiastic with children, yeh, I am enthusiastic but like sometimes when I get moody or something comes up it just comes down well it affects my work and stuff so I try to miss a day.

The conversation for R as an early years student places her own needs and feelings as the determinant as to whether she chooses to attend placement. Altruistic motivations are absent, but she does acknowledge that mood affects her work. R does not talk about what she is learning from whom at placement, nor did she offer any indication of what she seeks or expects to learn. The impact on professional identity construction of divergent and competing ideologies between apprentices and apprentice-masters, is returned to later in the chapter, but Sarah, an early years worker at Midshires, reproduces identities of low class and low academic achievement of early years apprentices in this conversation,

You tell them to get off their **** and do something, I mean they'll sit there and we'll make a point of motivating them, you know, you've got to do something, but you can see people aren't interested. I think they do it because they see it as an easy option. I think it still seems a really easy option. When I was at school, people who did child care were the ones that were too thick to do anything else do you know and I think it's still perceived as that as well and I think that's quite a shame.

Students, or apprentices, working alongside Sarah are perceived to have made an 'easy' choice, so not be attending placement to pursue a professional, graduate career. The stereotypical childcarer is perpetuated in what apprentices learn in this work environment. Beatrice similarly offered her perspective on the role and expectations of trainees in her role as an early years manager/decision maker. There is resonance with Sarah's frustrations,

The other thing I see quite a lot though is I have work experience students from the school. I have students from a FE [further education] college and I've got the two full time students that have come from [a local school] and those conversations again are very interesting because I will say to them why do you want to be here? 'Oh well I like children.' What is it that you like about children? And you don't really go any further than that. I say to them that it's quite demanding. Have you got lots of energy? Are you passionate about being with children? Do you become excited by seeing what they can achieve?

The contrasting contribution from each participant in this conversation is sharply defined by desires, choices and values. There are similarly undertones of class, reproduction and hegemony. Divergence emerges in what Beatrice seeks in an apprentice and what R, as an apprentice, believes to be important in her decisions about attending placement. R is likely to have constructed her identity as an apprentice on the basis of the expectations of family, friends, and the discourses within school and further education. R describes herself as enthusiastic with children and bears out Penn's research (2000) which revealed a belief held by early years students that natural, innate qualities and dispositions are the requisites for effective early years work, not the acquisition and application of knowledge.

To conclude this section, the conversation about roles has demonstrated that there is conflict experienced by those in intermediate positions as well as early years workers. Decision makers are caught in the nexus of mediating between the official state apparatus of strategies, inspection, standards, funding, being apprentice masters and implementing workforce reform on one hand, and early years workers on the other. With reference to the previous conversation around

status and gender, findings suggest that early years workers are negotiating multiple professional identities that are shaped by habitus and class, by the expectations of the role in which they are positioned in the workplace, either by fellow group members or managers and by 'traditional' expectations of the workforce.

Other influences on the construction of professional identities for workers and potential workers emerge from this conversation: titles and nomenclature; change and transition, isolation and legitimation associated with roles and divergence in ideologies between those occupying various roles and positions. The next conversation examines discourse for meaning and interpretation of relationships, within and between the layers of micro-, meso- and macro-levels of influence.

4.3 Relationships

Roles and relationships should not be conflated in their influence on professional identities although overlap is evident in the discourse. Roles and relationships exist within and without the place of work; work roles are often determined by the organisation, but relationships arise from choice as well as proximity to others at work (Fox 2005; Wenger 1998).

Relationships will shape practice; newcomers may fashion what they do as influenced by apprentice-masters and others, then forge their own identities. Practice can be propagated by micro-cultures where relationships can be tightly

bound and resistant to external pressures for reasons explained in Chapter Two (Foucault 1982). Individuals, according to Foucault, seek to exert power through those immediate to them, in this case, co-workers. Struggles, in the context of resistance, will be apparent in how individuals 'attack everything which separates the individual' (Foucault 1982: 211).

Lave and Wenger (1991) place emphasis on how legitimate peripheral participation can ascribe positions, power and relationships in the workplace determined by a dependency on others for internalising learning, acquiring performativities, negotiating meaning and membership of a community of practice. The aim of this section is to present a conversation which illustrates how relationships are enacted for participants in the research, and to infer their influence on professional identities.

The interface between macro- and meso-systems is apparent in Midshires children's centre. Firstly, it is a community of practice created from government policy; secondly it is a place where the manager and deputy manager had undertaken the NPQICL; thirdly it is a place where private provision had merged with statutory provision. The impact of these influences on relationships within the micro-community of the pre-school at Midshires children's centre were voiced by Elizabeth, the pre-school manager, and Sarah and Noreen, both deputy managers of the pre-school provision. Elizabeth reinforces again how influential Megan has been,

I think Megan has been a major role model for me. I was absolutely devastated when she said she was leaving, I cried all weekend, yes I was

absolutely terrible. Yes I think she had a major influence on everything, the way I manage people.

Sarah likewise reflected on her relationship with Megan and how Megan had attempted to close the division between the pre-school provision and the nursery school that had merged to form Midshires children's centre. Italics have been used to demonstrate Sarah's representation of Megan's verbal instruction and intervention,

I think Megan had a huge influence on that, you know it wasn't sort of you *can* come through if you want, well, you *will* come through and you *will* have your lunches [there]. I think it was always sort of if there'd been a staff room there but you could use that... there was a lot of history between the two settings.

There is resistance to Megan's strategies to ameliorate the divide in Sarah's conversation and the micro-culture of the pre-school recurs in Noreen's conversation about her relationships with Sarah and Elizabeth. Noreen also notes how her line manager Elizabeth, and her colleague Sarah (who is also a senior practitioner alongside Noreen), have assisted Noreen to extend her learning in the workplace, to negotiate and create an identity reified through her work with children with special needs,

Between me and Sarah we're quite close friends from work and she [Elizabeth] could of just said you know it could have been one of those situations whereas she [Elizabeth] knows Sarah longer than me she said to me why and I think you should and you'll be great at it and you know it's little things like that you know some people will say oh forget it then move

onto the next person. And she's [Elizabeth] encouraged me with lots, like the special needs children and stuff you know, helped me along the way it's like my passing to do to work the special needs and Elizabeth like not because I said I want it but she said you're just fantastic with them I think you should work alongside them more often.

Noreen's conversation infers a shared, culturally located partnership with Sarah, to which Elizabeth has a level of participation as apprentice-master to Noreen. The partnership with Sarah and Elizabeth creates a bond, or glue, for Noreen on which she constructs her identity. This is critical to identity formation according to Wenger (1998). Noreen is negotiating her experience as someone who works specifically with children with special needs, and this secures her full, as opposed to peripheral, participation within the community. This micro-community provides security for Noreen; it is a base from which she resists the meso- and macro-level politics in the wider community of the children's centre (Lave and Wenger 1991). This is pursued in a different context by Janice.

Janice's self-perceived positions as an ex-insider as a nursery nurse, but now an outsider in her role as a teacher at Midshires offer a different perspective on the conversation about relationships, membership of groups and negotiating a new professional identity,

I think it does make a difference doesn't it? You're not seen as one of the crowd and do you know what I mean? I'm sure there are lots of conversations that once I would have been party to, not in a negative way but just, just general friendly banter and conversations that probably I'm excluded from now that I probably wouldn't have been before. Yeah nothing, you get, yeah I think I had a few digs from a couple of people in

the early days, but I think you have to kind of rise above that don't you? *Is it the title that seems to make such a difference?* It is, isn't it, it does make such a difference and quite rightly.

I'm earning a lot more money than they are to put it crudely. You should earn your money shouldn't you really, and part and parcel of that is that you help to manage staff and you help them with their development and people are at all very different stages in their thinking in terms of sort of a philosophy. Here is very different to where they've been previously so they're all at very different stages in their training and their thinking so it's trying to bring people on board with you rather than saying to you, well look this is what we do and this is what you must do. It's trying to bring people with you of their own volition rather than being dragged, kicking and screaming and making room for other peoples' opinions and suggestions.

Janice articulates her professional identity from a stance of being supportive, leading, managing and influencing the work of her colleagues, as well as with a note of distance from her colleagues and between micro-cultures. Janice acknowledges potential resistance from others, just as Carrie did, but articulates strategies to mitigate it. Janice seeks to justify her increase in pay and status that partly defines membership of a new professional group along with new knowledge and new professional habitus (Ecclestone *et al.* 2005). She makes assumptions about hierarchical positions in the workplace. Relationships, for Janice, are constituted on and justified through such structures. These positions have facilitated the shaping of a different professional identity for Janice now as a teacher compared to when she was a nursery nurse.

In addition, Janice also talked of the impact of self-reflection and the nurturing role of others, as did Carrie, as apprentice-masters in shaping practice and thus identities as a professional,

It's encouraging that level of reflection in other people isn't it and like I said people are at very different stages in their thinking and their training and that reflection does take a long time to come and it's an ongoing process, isn't it, of really refining those skills and it's just kind of nurturing them in other people if you like.

If the emerging professional identities of Janice and Noreen are juxtaposed, influences can be inferred more specifically. Their trajectories are different: Janice was employed as a nursery nurse in the statutory, nursery school provision that existed on the site that is now Midshires children's centre. Noreen was employed as a deputy manager in the previously privately run pre-school provision, immediately adjacent to where Janice worked. Janice completed her BA and QTS while working at the nursery school, during its transition to a children's centre, and was then employed as a teacher to support practice in Midshires.

Teacher support is part of the model of children's centre provision and reinforces the model of hierarchies and who the apprentice-masters and apprentices are: 'Building on current work undertaken by the CWDC, an early years professional or graduate leader will have the opportunity to work shadow or take up joint training with primary school teachers' (DCSF 2007: 90). Noreen declined undertaking the Foundation Degree, for reasons presented later in the section on 'education, training and qualifications'. Noreen's day-to-day work

occurs in the pre-school provision; Janice's day-to-day work takes place across all provision in the children's centre. Both are searching for and negotiating new professional identities through titles: Janice as a teacher, Noreen as a senior practitioner. Hierarchies in education are evident again here in the guise of titles (Adams 2008; Miller 2008b).

In terms of relationships, Noreen remains influenced by immediate colleagues alongside whom she has negotiated meaning, reification and membership for some years. Janice is negotiating meaning and her professional identity with new colleagues, new membership and new ways of reifying her work. Levels of agency, intrinsic motivation, membership of work communities and the ways in which colleagues have supported each to negotiate meaning and reification of their work reinforce Wenger's (1998) notions of identity construction noted in Table 2.5 on page 99.

It is therefore apparent from the conversation about relationships that the respective micro-cultures of the nursery school and the pre-school in the community of Midshires are influencing Janice's and Noreen's professional identities. The conversation considers different aspects of the community of Midshires in the following section. It illustrates how values and ideologies influence professional identities of participants.

4.4 Values and ideologies

A quote from Henderson and Lucas (1989: 96) from two decades ago constructs an archetypal early years worker,

She must be warm and outgoing and sensitive to the needs of others. She must be mature enough to acknowledge her own weaknesses, delegating jobs to others who show a specific competence. Coexisting with her maturity there must be a childlike relish for the joy of playing. She must show resilience in the face of difficulties, meeting the inevitable bad patches with good humour.

In Chapter Two, a genealogy of the early years workforce demonstrated how history has shaped contemporary constructions of professional identities, specifically in terms of status, divisions, gender and marketisation. Henderson and Lucas (1989) endorse the conceptualisation of an early years worker, specifically a pre-school worker such as Elizabeth, Sarah and Noreen, as being female, childlike, warm, sensitive and resilient, concurring with Colley (2006) and Goldstein (1998). These are arguably personal traits and dispositions as opposed to professional competences and knowledge acquired through higher education, a debate posited in Chapter Two. Do both constitute qualities and dispositions still sought by employers?

As noted earlier, credentials or labour market signals according to Freidson (2004) may indicate what is sought by employers, and be determined by ideological influences. The ideology of the pre-school worker as warm, caring, feminised and nurturing may be inferred from Carrie's discourse earlier, and to

characterise the pre-school workers in the local authority where Carrie works. However, an alternative ideology of early years workers as highly educated, managerial professionals, was aspired to by Janice, Megan and Beatrice. As managers and decision makers they have accumulated cultural and political capital through associated positions, but such capital is not so accessible to early years workers (Colley 2006; Penn 2000).

Thus questions arise as to where there may be differing and/or competing ideologies, how they are acquired, and how they shape professional identities. To inform this line of inquiry, ideologies of workforce reform and Gramsci's notions of hegemonic discourse, noted in 'epistemological and ideological influences' in Chapter Two, are applied in the interpretation of the following conversation. It was noted at that point that the methodology should examine issues of ideology, particularly any tensions between realised and idealised identities (Ecclestone *et al.* 2005). Conversations in this section reveal what is imagined, what is real, and the relations between them.

Peter, deputy manager at Midshires, speculated on reasons for others choosing early years work. His views resonate with Beatrice's conversation earlier and also with retention and career attrition research reported by Purcell *et al.* (2005) who found that teachers had entered the profession for economic or circumstantial reasons, without examining their affinity for children and families,

I wonder what the motivation is of people entering the profession and if they're truly motivated by the interests of children, children's rights and

those of families or if there are other factors such as income or status yes or wanting to please other people, expectations.

This was a point also made by Stephen, a project officer,

Some people choose it because there are expectations on them from people around them that this is what they will do but I imagine that some people, you know, may not even like children first, for goodness sake, but to give people the opportunity to really examine that, I think, is a level of introspection and reflection than can be absent from the day to day work. You can be very focused on it so to achieve the takeover of their day- to-day actions at the time to reflect and think I think is absent.

Reasons for choosing early years work, as noted from consideration of R's conversation in the 'roles' section earlier, are likely to be informed by expectations of family and friends, regimes in schools and further education, media and personal motivations. Professional identities emerge from these influences for newcomers to early years work, and continue to be fashioned by others around us. The value of early years work is low in Marxist terms (Colley 2006); similar values reproduced by workers, apprentice-masters, decision makers and bureaucrats shape professional identities through discourse (Gee 2005) and agency (Foucault 1972).

Peter's and Stephen's conversation suggests a dilemma for some workers. There is an expectation by their families and / or themselves that workers will undertake the feminised role of caring work with children, but an interrogation of self in terms of an affinity for children, an introspective, internal conversation about the day-to-day demands of early years work seems to be absent. Its

absence can be explained through regimes, or state apparatus, in schools and further education in terms of careers advice that perpetuates stereotypes of early years work. As long as the credentials of warm, caring and sensitive are apparent, then entry to the workforce is assumed.

As Penn (2000) found, young newcomers to early years work believed it was personal qualities that determined their suitability for early years work, not any epistemological foundation. It is the social interactions, noted in Table 2.5 on page 99, such as practices in negotiation of meaning, the micro-communities of family, a shared history of learning such as in schools and colleges, boundaries and landscapes determined by leaders (Wenger 1998: 150) that are potentially influential on the identities of early years students as well as workers. These reinforce the influence of ideologies on identity construction.

The way in which workers come to understand the work they do, that is, how they reify and make concrete their interactions with children and families, similarly shapes identities as illustrated next. The reification of early years work is also at risk of being subjugated by the hegemony of government through sponsored projects such as EPPE (Biesta 2007; Sylva *et al.* 2004) as well as the discourse of mediators. This latter point is illustrated by Carrie's reliance on official discourse in the conversation earlier; certain ideologies of 'effective early years practice' are lauded through EPPE research reports and government documents.

The following excerpts present multiple positions on how early years workers and students are constructing an epistemology and reification of early years work. Through such narratives, it is possible to explore whether the conversation shows congruence or divergence with the official discourses and how they shape identities in our day-to-day work (Keltchermans 1993). For Linda, a family support worker at Midshires, struggles, competing demands of her day-to-day work and how she rationalised decisions, dominate,

But that was quite challenging just the paper work and writing everything up, and getting back to people, and making phone calls, and having the time to do all that time management was a big one for me. Trying to get everything in was so hard, there is never enough hours in the day, there still isn't now but I am just thinking, if I can't get that done, then I can't get that done.

I have come to realise now, you know, there are some things that will have to wait , and it is like with parents you can't help them all and if you see one that desperately needs help but doesn't want your help you have to learn to think well I can't help them then and that is quite hard, you know you try and help them but they don't want it and you do have to think well I am sorry but I did try but they didn't want my help and I have got to accept that.

Linda's idealised identity is one who is able to meet the needs of all the parents in the community, but the realised identity is of one who seeks to rationalise why she cannot. Linda is constructing a personal narrative that reconciles different reifications of caring as noted by Noddings (2003), compared to an early years worker, but within the constraints of her work role as family support worker and therefore critically how she is seen by parents. The communitarian

model of children's centres is challenged, and Linda's professional identity is thus influenced by both macro-politics and meso-cultural influences in her day-to-day work.

Early years students in Group 2 (see page 134) were constructing a different ontology and emergent epistemology of early years work through their placement experiences. These participants are apprentices, and the following discourse suggests how apprentice-masters, in the settings where students are learning how to 'become' an early years worker, are perpetuating a discourse incongruent with that of official neo-liberalism communicated through the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007) which pronounces on establishing and meeting individual needs and routines as opposed to uniform routines, identical for all children, for example. The reality of day-to-day demands in the nursery creates dilemmas for students and practitioners in how they interpret early years work and how they understand competing ideologies,

J - In the nursery ...they enjoyed it like a children's TV [programme] they all sort of oh wow oh like clapping your hands and running around and stuff, and I didn't know that I was like that until I started working with the children.

N -The parents as well they are very demanding, want you to do this, want you to do that is not a nursery rule, they want you to do it the way they do it at home.

J-I think when they bought out that birth to three I remember my mum saying shall I record and they said let the children eat their dinner when they want to eat and my mom said like we have got 20 kids in a room can't

have them all eating at like 20 different times during the day it just doesn't happen.

K -It is the same like the children who go to sleep at a set time and are able to sleep then some children are having their lunch and I think should I wake the others up and make them eat or no, no, they say leave them until they wake up but sometimes you could be waiting one and a half to two hours and you think what about the dinner? The other children are going to go to sleep or go out to play, but what about the others who are asleep?

The students' discourse concurs with Penn's (no date) conclusion that early years students are faced with the dilemma of not having the confidence or knowledge to respond to the demands and reality of early years work, laying a shaky foundation on which to construct professional identities. Meeting competing demands of parents and children's individual needs seems impossible to achieve in the real world of the nursery, a further example of competing idealised and realised identities (Ecclestone *et al.* 2005).

Similarly, Simms (2009) reported exploitation of young early years workers in the private sector, with employers expecting the rewards of working with children to be sufficient motivation to stay in an exhausting and frustrating job, a point made by Ann already. The conversation constructs a landscape of competing ideologies, a divergence between apprentices who are entering the workforce and the apprentice-masters who have already staked their place. This recurring theme in the findings is given a fuller analysis in Chapter Five in terms of understanding the biographical, socio-cultural influences that have

fashioned personal values and ideologies and their interface with the self and emerging professional identities.

The following conversation explores personal values and ideologies and values about caring for children. Janice articulated the reification of her early years work thus,

I mean it's also taking that step back and thinking to yourself well to this child now what does that look like and what effect is what's being said or being done to him, what effect is that having on you know him / her, things that other children say and things that are often wouldn't mean anything but to some children with, depending on what their circumstances are can make a huge difference and it's just thinking 'what does it look like to them'?

But value was ascribed differently by Noreen,

You've got somebody with special needs, you think, you know, you think differently. I, you think these kids you know you want to work more and give them a lot, it's when they just smile and achieve something you just feel so deep down. I'll tell you what it just I might sound pathetic now but makes you, it gives me such a buzz I don't know the nice way of putting it, but it does when they've achieved something.

Noreen focuses on special needs as before, and places emphasis on outcomes for herself, a different emphasis compared to Janice. Again, this may reflect different micro-cultures shaping alternative ideologies and identities for Noreen. Noreen's biography, her family, her reflexive narrative of self, has constructed a professional identity founded on care, nurturance and emotional labour, all

traditional constructs of early years work (Noddings 2003). How early years workers construct the client groups they work with impacts on their own professional identities (Goldson 2003). Discourse pertaining to children and families from early years students, Noreen and Linda construct early years work as redemptive (Moss 2006).

Megan, as a children's centre manager and holder of the NPQICL, articulated her values in the context of being a leader and her identity as a nursery school head-teacher, but intertextuality and ideological discourse prevail in the desire to create a 'learning culture',

So in terms of establishing a learning culture here it's been made very clear as part of my vision for us as a school and children's centre that everybody is learning and I think that is something that's probably quite unique to a head-teacher's pedagogy and approach towards their setting is that there will be this commitment to constantly having a far deeper understanding of practice and I don't and I've had six years experience in the private and voluntary sector and I don't see that same mind set. I see glimpses of it but....

Megan's aspiration of creating a learning culture (Hodkinson *et al.* 2004) implicitly assumes that staff in the children's centre share the vision and will choose to participate in its realisation. Realised or idealised notions suggest a potential source of shared or divergent ideologies, but it has become apparent in previous conversations that there are separate micro-cultures within Midshires children's centre. These are likely to disrupt attempts to construct a shared vision but are not acknowledged by Megan.

The rupture and fissure created by the private / statutory sector divide, noted earlier, therefore recurs in Megan's conversation. Megan attributes a qualitatively different reification and meaning to the work of those located in the statutory sector compared to the private and voluntary sector. Megan was a decision maker, apprentice-master and manager, creating structures informed by a macro-level of influence to shape the practice in the meso-community of Midshires. Megan seeks to establish shared ideologies rooted in the statutory sector. Peter, deputy to Megan, also holder of the NPQICL, talked of values and ethos in Midshires, and notes the same rupture as Megan, but with different representation,

There are a certain amount of assumptions that you make about particularly ethos. I suggest it's the single thread that's most difficult for people to appreciate in a short time frame and there's only so much you can do to bring people on board. A difficulty I find often everybody needs to be heard, there needs to be a culture where everybody has the opportunity to voice their feelings but there comes a time when a line has to be drawn when we say we have reached an agreement. There may be some dissenting voices in the crowd but we have to meet an agreement and move on. Some of those difficulties arise, I feel, when people are not prepared to do that. They have nagging personal doubts that need to be left behind but they find it very difficult to do.

The ideology of a democratic community of practice is evident in Megan's and Peter's contribution to the conversation. Moss (2006) and Oberhuemer (2005) envision the 'democratic professional' in the early years workforce. Both assert the need to understand structures and develop leadership based on shared, ethical values about early years work that move away from gendered,

stereotypical positions. The conversation indicates that the senior leadership team at Midshires aspires to creating space for democratic debate about early years work, but shared ideologies and identities in early years work for members of the community remain nascent or even absent.

Those in positions of power such as decision makers have already been shown to influence interpretations of identity through interventionist regimes. Values and ideologies are shaped by mediators as well as other influences identified by Carrie who talked of how she perceived tensions in the values placed by some on early years workers and their work,

Where there's poor provision, some day nurseries where and it's down to kind of work conditions isn't it, of long hours, you know fewer staff, very inexperienced staff and if you've got inexperienced staff and nobody there whose experienced they can use as a role model or a mentor and it's a downward spiral often. So if I was working in some of these rooms in a poor setting an uninspiring environment from half past seven till six o'clock with no money and no resources I would find it hard to stay motivated, and again it's the leader isn't it?

It's hard for settings where the owner is off site and the owner isn't an early years person and they're there to make money and they're not valuing their staff and they don't pay the salary and they won't invest in quality, where they've employed somebody from the local newsagent coz she seems alright but she's cheap as well so long as they stay in ratio and they've got the required number of qualified staff.

Carrie attributes conflict in values as arising from market forces, and acknowledges dilemmas for managers and their employees. Penn (2007) notes

these for the private and statutory sector. Marxist interpretations on how the low value ascribed to early years work by workers themselves as well as the bureaucrats, in this study, equated to decision makers. Conflicting ideologies have emerged from the aspirations of managers which are divergent from those of their employees. The reproduction of low academic achievement to gain entry to the workforce has recurred in this conversation. This macro- and meso-influence on professional identities in terms of expectations of newcomers as well as how workers such as Janice construct meaning in their day-to-day practice as shaped by their managers and leaders' style of leadership (see 'professionalisation' in Chapter Two).

Noreen's and Linda's contribution to the conversation illustrated the impact of biography and micro-culture experiences on their professional identity construction, and how notions of redemption, communitarianism, emotional labour, caring and gender create significant tensions for individuals. Indeed, Miller (2008b) and Stone and Rixon (2008) recognised how roles, practices and standards impose themselves on the day-to-day lives of practitioners. As noted in Chapter Two, how we situate ourselves in the workplace, the culture of the workplace, the influence of others in creating our self-image, and the nature of the work tasks undertaken all have been shown to contribute to the construction of professional identities.

The notion of value continues in the next section in terms of its influence on how education, training and qualifications contribute to the construction of professional identities.

4.5 Education, training and qualifications

The literature review, specifically 'epistemological and ideological influences' highlighted tensions between education and training. These arise from hegemonic discourses and a divide between vocational and academic courses and further and higher education. This divide extends to knowledge domains and inadvertently reinforces privileged epistemologies (Bernstein 2000; Penn 2000). Participants in this conversation are decision makers and early years workers and the conversation also draws attention to government rhetoric. Issues of reproduction, class and habitus are apparent, interconnected to self and internal conversations.

The conversation begins with a reinforcement of the nexus for decision makers mediating between interventionist regimes and early years workers in terms of qualifications and training. For example, the policy of introducing Early Years Professional Status (see 'professionalisation' in Chapter Two) triggered apprehension from Beatrice. She was vehement in her view on EYPS as well as status ascribed to level three equivalent early years qualifications,

Don't start me on the EYP conversation. I think it's a blind alley. I've seen a lot of it with regard to EYP which we've touched on. There's still the historical 'well have you got an NNEB or are you NVQ3?' everywhere I go. There's still the perception that the old NNEB was the qualification to have.

Carrie also had a view of EYPS and associated threats to the retention of more highly qualified staff. She switches from we/us to them/they, to emphasise

where she positioned herself in terms of membership. Overt resistance and a nuance of perceived stagnation within groups of early years workers is apparent again,

There are still quite a few groups that have just said 'when the time comes we will close rather than employ a graduate' or 'there's nobody wants to do EYP, there's nobody wants to do their degree, so we'll bide our time', often ladies that are near retirement and 'then we might finish'. They think they're too old, they don't want to do it, 'we've done it for 30 years and if we weren't good enough' that's the kind of response.

The forward thinking groups have already got plans in place, more and more people are doing their foundation degree and there's a big upturn in the number of people doing that. My concern is they'll get their degree and leave or they'll go and do their teaching qualification and move on and they've got to start all over again, and you get that with managers.

Issues of power and knowledge are enacted through the discourse of these two decision makers. It seems that they perceive control slipping from their remit as a result of conflict between macro-pressures to establish graduates in every setting and micro-level resistance from workers in settings. The position for decision makers is characterised by frustration arising from attrition, resistance and the actions of managers.

Beatrice notes the lack of progression opportunities beyond studying for a degree and associated reasons for attrition, a point already made by Beatrice in the conversation about status,

And part of me also thinks that once they have obtained this foundation degree they don't think there's anywhere anything else they need to learn, a comment last week was 'Oh well when I've done the third year in the degree I'm going to train to be an NVQ assessor coz then I can tell other people how it should be done'. It's a means to an end.

Beatrice seems ambivalent about the impact of higher education in the next excerpt. When Janice talks later in this section about her experience of doing a Foundation Degree, the conversation reveals difference between the value that Janice, an early years worker, ascribes to higher education and the value ascribed by Beatrice, a decision maker and power broker in terms of funding and access to higher education. Difference may arise from varying levels of professional habitus, differing roles, biographies or ideologies, and all or some of these,

My foundation degree girls, they know they're learning and they do, I'm being too hard on them, they do say to me 'I've really learnt a lot from doing that assignment' but I don't know yet if I can see that applied to their practice.

Megan's conversation has similar nuances of ambivalence, differential impact of education, training and qualifications on practice as well as readiness of her colleagues to undertake higher education degrees. Conflict is exacerbated by perceived inequity of status of level three qualifications. She makes a similar point to Penn (no date) about the epistemological gap between level three and level four qualifications,

A lot of people who work in the early years particularly those who have gone on more traditional courses, question a little bit more than NVQ 3 because it's a bit more yeah you do this and yeah you do that without actually knowing necessarily the understanding of the pedagogy behind it. I think with Sarah, she had done the Foundation Degree but she probably kind of like wasn't ready like Janice, Elizabeth and Linda. They were ready for it but she had the opportunity to do it and you know that's quite a step from NVQ 3 to a foundation degree and she hadn't had the whole of the practice to support her but she got her opportunity to think, and yes it was drip drip but one of her biggest suddenly, you know when the eureka moment happens, was sending her to Reggio and she came back like a new woman and similarly with Elizabeth actually.

Megan had made strategic decisions about what was to be learned by whom and why. The value ascribed to specialised knowledge, in this case, the pedagogic philosophy reified in the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia, is explicit. Megan also notes the difficulties experienced by early years workers making the transition from education at level 3 to level 4, as did Penn (no date) . Privileged epistemologies are apparent in terms of specialised knowledge and qualifications.

The conversation continues with a focus on other inequities, particularly in access to education, qualifications and training. Structures have been introduced as part of children's workforce reform to devolve responsibility for decisions and funding to local authorities (DCSF 2009). Fragmentation is evident in the structures for access to education in early years, by sector and by region, and is considered at the end of this section.

Elsbeth, a trade union officer, notes that,

Some boroughs are very keen and actually pursue and support and help and finance people from their NVQs 1 and 2, right through to their BAs. It varies from authority to authority, it depends on what structures are in place for the early years practitioners to progress to access training or indeed to access training where it's paid with release because if you are one of the most low paid it's difficult to find funding for BAs etc isn't it, without support from local authority or early years groups and I think that holds a lot of people back.

Stephen, a project officer, was asked about variation by local authority and how their role was envisioned in workforce reform,

Yeah I think colleagues elsewhere decided that it's the right thing to do, well first of all local authorities' duties are to manage the market as a result of that to manage the workforce and qualifications needed, that's local control which in other words transforms into a postcode lottery. It was decided perhaps that localisation was the way to go and that's the impact of it.

Variability in terms of geographical location of employment is apparent; issues of equivalence and inequity in the context of qualifications emerged for Monica. Monica had recently completed a BA (Hons) degree in early years and was working as a temporary classroom assistant at Midshires. She had experienced confusion arising from her query as to whether she had qualified status for early years work. Confusion and uncertainty was confounded by her colleagues, the local authority and national organisations,

I was being told by the Deputy Head that I need to do an NVQ 3 to be equivalent, although we had the degree they didn't think the degree was equivalent to NVQ 3, the EY degree [that is] so I was quite shocked because I thought I have got a degree, and then Peter the Deputy Head said I have to go and re train to level 3 NVQ and I don't think that was fair, and then I showed the email to Megan and it was a long drawn out thing. Megan sent it to the local authority, and they still said our degree was not valid. Then I phone up Skills for Schools and then at that point they said we don't have to do the NVQ3 after all that.

This conversation reinforces the uncertainty of some who are in positions to employ and advise early years workers of the validity of a relevant degree. Although an NVQ at level three lacks equal status to the 'old NNEB' in the views of some, a level three qualification is still the benchmark for legislative requirements. A contradiction is apparent. Although a degree is higher in terms of level, it is not acceptable in terms of practice, posing a dilemma for new recruits and potential early years workers when career and education choices have to be made.

Janice and Monica, as early years workers, have demonstrated active professional habitus in their pursuit of identities. What motivates them in their levels of agency can again be explained by considering the interface between need- dispositions and systems or structures, (Archer 2003; Parsons and Shils 2001) in terms of the individual mediating between the desire to *want* to and the imposition to *have* to undertake a qualification. Rewards and/or intrinsic motivations are not evident in all early years workers as shown in the next contribution to the conversation which offers a different insight into how higher education is perceived.

Noreen and Sarah, the two deputies in the pre-school provision in Midshires, and Elizabeth, the manager, constructed higher education differently. Noreen first,

Elizabeth did ask me, my manager, about the Foundation Degree and I did say with home circumstances at the moment it's a lot of work, coming to work as well and it's not as though we'll get time to just go aside and do it and I don't know if you know about our assessment. We get a lot of paperwork with children's folders and doing that and doing a Foundation Degree is just I couldn't stress myself and I get very stressed it's just with the kids' folders as well and at the moment I've got a passion about caring for children with special needs so I have like most of the children with the IEPs in my group and that's a lot of work as well, when trying to work yourself, so I've said at the moment, no, but I will think of it sometime in the future.

An internal conversation shapes Noreen's perceptions about higher education, firstly in terms of the demands of paperwork, her own stress levels and the needs of children with individual education plans (IEPs). Archer (2003) proposed that internal conversations offer a means by which private knowledge, internal deliberations and levels of reflexivity engage with the macro-level of influence to shape our actions. We use internal conversations to mediate between self, agency and structures, deriving a *modus Vivendi* that predicates self-knowledge, an awareness of what is important to us and what we care about. Internal conversations construct a self-awareness of what is important in working relationships, work and identities, and for Noreen it is personal health and workload. Sarah also engages in an internal conversation about why she decided not to pursue the Foundation Degree, and there are echoes of

Noreen's internal conversation. Their friendship may also sustain an alliance of resistance to higher education,

I was going to do my foundation degree and I did when Elizabeth first started it. I did go with Elizabeth but I'd got a lot of things going on at home at the time. My dad wasn't very well and my dad moved in with me and it was just time constraints were just an absolute nightmare since then my dad's now not living with me but, nightmare, home life has just changed drastically and I just, at this moment in time, I can't see me doing anything for the next, I don't know how long. I mean it depends when home life sort of settles down. I don't know, so at the moment, no, I'm not taking on any more training because there's just too much stuff going on at home.

Elizabeth's intentions moved her in a different direction as she seeks legitimate membership of the senior management team. An internal conversation about prior low academic ability juxtaposed with recent academic success is evident, and Elizabeth places higher value on management knowledge domain than early years,

I wanted to do something more on the management side, I felt that, that professionally that's my professional development that is the way I needed to go because of all the changes, sometimes on the management side of it, now that I am a part of the senior management team sometimes I felt a bit out of my depth. When we went to meetings like with Megan the children's centres that is why I didn't go on and do my BA because I had a lot of tutors ringing me up to make sure I was actually doing it and pestering me at the end and I did feel really flattered because they kept saying, because I got really good marks when I was doing my FD though I wasn't very confident.

The worse I did I got a B+ so I did really well with it, but when I looked at it, it wasn't what I really wanted to do. I needed to do something that was just concentrating on the management side of it I think that is why Megan wanted me to do this NPQI[CL] because she said I think that is the road maybe you need to go down.

Further analysis of the conversation from Sarah, Noreen and Elizabeth are considered at the end of this section but how each participant interprets and values their own and others' needs and motivations; the value ascribed to knowledge domains and the value ascribed to higher education are pertinent for identity construction. Different intrinsic motivations influenced Janice compared to Sarah and Noreen. She placed value on how higher education had had an impact on the reification of her work, and how it had provided opportunities to construct, interpret and re-interpret meaning. Such interpretation and re-interpretation is a feature of the social self according to Mead (1934) and Giddens (1991), as well as being reinforced through research into the professional identities of teachers (Day *et al.* 2006; Paetcher 2001; Stoll and Seashore Louis 2007),

I'm really glad that I did the foundation degree and didn't do the BA, as I think you can do it over 4 years can't you part time but I think just from the, what's the word, the content in the foundation degree was just brilliant in that it covered such a range of things and just really challenged your thinking and your ideas and what you knew previously. It can throw a lot of it out of the window and kind of make you think differently about lots of things, so I'm really glad that I did it that way just for those reasons really.

Elsewhere in the interview, it became apparent how Janice's professional identity was shaped by dialogic reification of early years work with a colleague

as a result of the Foundation Degree experience, and, as above, contributed to the acquisition of professional habitus,

We just used to have some really good debate and dialogue and we'd bring things back and just say do you know we were thinking about this, you know, what do we think about that, and just brimming. But actually it was really interesting for us to challenge our thinking as well. Do we always need to follow this line or does that, can there not be elements of other things that are inter-woven? And I think we had some really interesting discussions about that.

Such discourse can suggest that Janice has acquired the scripts (Goffman 1959), or uses the dialogism that characterises a particular environment at a particular point in time (Bakhtin 1981), or is able to 'talk the talk' (Urban 2008).

In Chapter Two, the argument for how epistemology and ideology influence the construction of professional identities focused on values ascribed to education, qualifications and training. Janice has demonstrated how she sought opportunities for the reification of her work using habitus and knowledge domains acquired through higher education. She privileges epistemologies in her conversation, as do Megan and Elizabeth. Literature showed how, for early years, the socio-political landscape has been characterised by workers with low level qualifications, nascent knowledge domains, interventionist and transmission models; inequity; fragmentation and low pay in a gendered workforce (Colley 2006; Moss 2003; Osgood 2006b). The culmination of such influences for the early years workforce generally is to blur the landscape in terms of choices, trajectories, careers and education. The tensions between

education and training have been rehearsed in 'epistemological and ideological influences' in Chapter Two, so with reference to the conversation here, and applying hermeneutic techniques, several points for analysis can be made.

There are associated expectations with traditional occupations such as medicine, nursing, teaching and law. For medicine and law, for example, the expectation and requirement is for high academic achievement and higher education. For others such as nursing, the expectation is a sense of vocation and to become qualified through training. Recent public debate when it was announced that nursing, a gendered, 'caring' occupation, was to become a graduate profession has elicited some derisory responses in the public domain (Marrin 2009; Tallis 2009) and reinforces the influence of history and socio-political/cultural forces (Foucault 1972; Gillis 1981; Griffin 1993).

Early years workforce reform requires a shift in public perception as well as those who constitute the workforce if there is to be a change in expectations about requisite levels of education. This is the crux of one of the debates (returned to in Chapter Five) about professional identities that emerges from the conversation and from the literature: if and why a shift is needed, and how it can be achieved. Resistance to undertaking higher levels of education is evident in the contribution to the conversation from members of the early years workforce. There may be a fear of the impact of higher education held by some decision makers and early years workers, rooted in creating individuals who question, challenge and become more subversive, less compliant. Ambivalence is evident in decision makers and power brokers towards the value and impact of some levels of education and training. Structures for pursuing further and higher

education and progression are limited and fragmented for several reasons which are posited next.

Firstly, those in the private sector struggle to gain access to the resources to pursue further and higher education (Cooke and Lawton 2008; Sauve Bell 2004b) so commodification and marketisation are significant, compounded by variation in funding regimes between local authorities. Secondly, progression beyond Foundation Degrees is limited by pay and status, with EYPS not being seen as worthwhile (see next section).

Thirdly, some early years workers do not have the capital or confidence to envision themselves as students undertaking higher education, and are able to justify their decisions from a personal needs position (Parsons and Shils 2001). The limiting and fragmented context for further and higher education is compounded by the expectation of newcomers and the confusion they encounter regarding qualifications and requirements, illustrated by Monica's experience.

Fourthly, the corpus of the nascent knowledge domain relating to early years care, early years work and early years education takes time to become part of the academy (Fealey 2004). If and when it does, power in the form of privileged knowledge, restriction of entry to those who demonstrate the required credentials and control is enacted by those in associated positions (Moss 2006).

Early years work is not yet perceived as a graduate profession (see next section), and those who have already entered the workforce may, intentionally or otherwise, propagate expectations and acceptance of low level qualifications and low value placed on higher education. As Moss (2006: 38) states, 'She [the worker] may decide that the concept 'professional' cannot be reconceptualised and 'washed' of its former meanings, opening up instead a politics of occupational identity and values that moves beyond the dualistic 'non-professional/professional divide'. Moss captures a dilemma for early years workers which is pursued shortly.

The debate here is why change this embedded position of early years not being 'professional' in the first place, and how should it be changed, if indeed there is consensus that it should be changed. The implications for professional identities are pertinent too. The interface of meso-, macro- and micro-influences demands careful consideration as to how workers acquire capital and habitus possibly through education, how they become socialised into performativities, acquire certain knowledge domains, how they cross boundaries and how aspects of self become influential.

Credentialism, as already noted, is considered by Freidson (2004: 80) to be how 'labour market signals' permit individuals to conform to the requirements of employers. Credentials are determined by socio-political factors, but for early years work, they are tied into variables such as gender, age, qualifications, experience and dispositions. As change from workforce reform initiatives take effect, credentials may change and become aligned with other workforces

undergoing reform. The race to achieve a degree is an opportunity not to be missed. However, attempts to bring about change in the guise of 'professionalisation' of the early years workforce is arguably resisted not just by some members of the workforce but also those that have the power to initiate change (see Balls 2005, 2007 at the beginning of this chapter). This argument is pursued next.

4.6 Being / becoming a professional

This final conversation includes contributions at the macro-level of 'official' discourse, as did the first conversation about status. Debates related to the introduction of Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) have been noted in the previous section and Chapter Two; they relate to structures of standards, assessment regimes, selection of potential candidates and organisations that deliver the EYP programme. Stronach *et al.* (2002) caution against the potential universalism of professionals through structures such as assessment standards for EYPS, and Coffield (2002: 488) offers a critique of the policy of workforce reform, deriding the obsession with 'increasing the supply of skills'.

The award of a status, not a qualification (CWDC 2008), sidesteps the need to establish national pay scales and conditions, which returns the conversation to where this chapter began: with avoidance on behalf of the government. Those with EYPS are expected to lead early years provision in the setting in which they are employed, but without necessarily being paid in recognition for their leadership position. The conversation about EYPS continues in this section,

starting with some brief 'official' utterances at macro-level (Tucker 2004). It is understood that this debate is tightly bound to issues of control through codified knowledge and privileged positions in terms of epistemological considerations and as Urban (2008: 143, original italics) argues, any framework (and he relates this to evidence based practice as a form of codified knowledge) is 'by no means as *neutral* as it may appear'.

Target recruitment was not being met for EYPS in 2007; the reasons, or barriers, according to CWDC were not pay or status related but concerns about 'the length of time taken to get from L3 /L4 to EYPS; lack of recognition of experience; Maths and English requirements; academic level; confidence' (CWDC 2007a).

In the Children's Plan (DCSF 2007: 90), the relationship between EYPs and teachers, and who will be learning from whom is quite explicit,

Building on current work undertaken by the CWDC, an early years professional or graduate leader will have the opportunity to work shadow or take up joint training with primary school teachers.

The phrase 'change agents' appears in the official discourse of CWDC, both in text and talk,

Early years professionals are key to raising the quality of early years provision. They are change agents to improve practice' (CWDC 2008: 4).

Stephen appropriated the term 'change agents' and talked about the vision of EYPs as 'excellent practitioners and leaders of others',

It's part of the EYP assessment process that is all built in and I think it's again probably an example of a CPD [continuing professional development] investment into the sector to make sure people can identify those skills and effect change. It is about being change agents.

Sceptics of the discourse of 'change agents' could ask, change for whom? Such subjectification of the early years workforce suggests that it is the early years workforce that the government is seeking to change through 'upskilling' whereas it is assumed in the official discourse that, as change agents, early years workers are becoming agents of change for children and families. The contradictory demands made on the workforce create a potentially confusing landscape. To add to contradictory and muddled discourse about EYPs, Ann described recent advertising activity to recruit EYPs. She had a particular view about the media campaign to promote becoming a professional as part of early years workforce reform,

CWDC are doing a big advertising campaign about professionalisation, all mainly to do with EYP. I have been invited to be on an interview panel; a marketing company had been commissioned to come up with an idea to promote the professionalisation campaign and they came up with the idea of a 'sponge', shaped like a child but looking like a cut out Weetabix – there was such a hue and cry about this. I sent an email to CWDC. This militates against everything we believe about how children learn and how adults co-construct with children. They removed the sponge from it!

Then I was invited to a telephone consultation with local authorities across the country to look at different images. One was a 'hero' with tiny children sitting under a tall guy, with arms folded; another was made up of handprints, which built into a flower and then a butterfly. NOT what is wanted, I told them. They do not engage with the workforce about this and it isn't helping the workforce reform. There is no fairness. Why not do a competition? And see the responses from the EY workforce themselves?

What Ann's contribution to the conversation suggests is firstly that the bureaucrats' construct of early years work is not congruent with constructs held by early years workers or those directly connected to them. In addition, the bureaucrats' construct of children retains historical, stereotypical images of them as empty vessels by using a 'sponge' metaphor. Secondly, Ann berates the exclusion of workers from being consulted about the media campaign. Reasons for their exclusion can be only speculative, but history has indicated a level of invisibility of the early years workforce. Such invisibility compounds how the early years workforce is constructed in the public domain, similar to Fealey's (2004) findings with nurse identities, and this point is endorsed by Ann's experience, again related to early years workforce reform,

I was asked by [a local] university careers service to go and give a talk on changes in early years care and education. It was a big audience, a regional consortium, lots of professional looking men, who were AGOG – they could not believe what I was saying about a professional workforce in early years. 'Are you actually saying that EY is becoming a professional workforce?' they asked. They were incredulous!

The conversation thus far has included decision makers and the 'official' regarding EYPS, and has drawn attention to emerging contradictions. Before

moving to early years workers themselves, more of the macro-level discourse is presented that reinforces the 'not good enough' conversation, not just related to EYPS, but the early years workforce in general, and risks a discourse of pathologisation (Ecclestone *et al.* 2005) and problematisation (Tucker 2004),

The single most important factor in delivering our aspirations for children is a world class workforce ...so we will continue to drive up quality and capacity of those working in the children's workforce (DCSF 2007: 83),

We will continue to upskill and professionalise the early years workforce and make it a profession of choice for a wide range of people (DCSF 2008: 23),

Our vision of high quality is highly-skilled practitioners delivering excellent play-based learning adapted to the development needs of each individual child. [...] this requires a first rate workforce that is professionalised at all levels and has the skills to engage positively with parents as well as children (DCSF 2009: 39).

However problems of attrition in the early years workforce was addressed by some providers thus and are likely to be received with scepticism by those who attribute being a professional to having higher education, vocational training and experience in related fields (Evetts 2003). The conversation reinforces pay differentials between certain sectors too,

Early years providers are attempting to recruit bankers and lawyers who have lost their jobs in the recession....But Steve Alexander, chief executive of the Pre-school Alliance warned that bankers must be prepared for a big pay cut' (Watson 2009c: 3).

Having presented the conversation about professionalisation from the official, macro-position, the meso-level of interpretation of what it means to be a professional illustrates different positions. The conversation concludes with several staff from Midshires children's centre conveying an ontology of the construct 'professional'. Linda's conversation suggests her construction of 'professional' is contingent on social responses of others,

So I think just being, yes I do think the training that I'd done and now training people up I do think people look at me with some sort of respect and thinking that I know what I am on about, and they come to me sometimes with I am doing this am I alright and I think they look at me, I feel like I am a professional.

It was also contingent on how she constructed her position in the workplace and her dispositions and credentials, in other words, how she constructed professional habitus,

I like to think I am a professional simply because, I have been here a long time, I am quite experienced I can't say what I do now but the children I have got all that experience and because I have been here a long time and I still see myself as being fresh and open to new ideas, people can be at a place for a long time and just be stale but I still think you know I am like the children still full of awe and wonder, some of the things that they say to me I think wow you know I am still learning from them and I think that is part of being a professional is your constant learning all the time, you don't stop, you go on about training but you don't stop learning, learning from the children and the parents and from each other I think that is part of being a professional.

Sarah's contribution to the conversation suggests a different position to Linda, one of not seeing herself as a professional, concurring with the findings of Carey *et al.* (2009). Speculative reasons as to why Linda does not ascribe membership of professional groups may be attributed to how she, and others, constructs her role in the community where she works and historical traditions. How Sarah has created meaning from her biography and experiences in the pre-school contribute to how she constructs her professional identity,

I still find it hard, I would never refer to myself as a professional person I wouldn't because I think I come from that sort of background where you know I said earlier you were the 'thickos' that did childcare and stuff and I think I think it's sort of in your mind set isn't it that that's how people still perceive you and I would never say well I'm a professional person I work with children. Perhaps if I worked in a school perhaps I would, perhaps I think I probably make it out not to be as an important job as it is as a professional at all I always find it quite hard when people say that to me, I don't know whether I am really.

The recurring issues of status in education hierarchies, low academic achievement, constructs in the wider, public domain are influential for Sarah's conceptualisation, and Monica's that follows, of being a professional, concurring with Beck *et al.* (2006) and Penn (2000),

When you say early years, you go out and talk to people about early years, and I feel that an understanding, it's not out there, when you say early years professional. The professional status, they need to start from ground level but the belief within yourself but I think at government level as well. I hope at some point early years practitioners can be recognised out there, because within myself I have to have this belief although I have got

the degree and everything, I want to see this whole sort of, I don't know, this shared understanding.

Alison similarly draws on the socially situated responses of others to construct herself as a professional. The trajectories and roles for Monica, Ann and Alison share gender only, but the emerging consensus is significant,

I think I didn't feel like I was a professional until I thought about it and I think I am not brilliant, but I think I am good professional and it's only after talking to Megan and I thought wow I am [a professional] because you don't think of [it], I just come in and do my job and I love doing it and then when Megan said you're a professional, I don't want to lose you, you need to be recognised, she said we're going to upgrade you because you've done so much but you don't realise until you sit down and somebody says it to you, so yeah, I think I'm doing alright at the moment.

Official discourse about being a professional is dominated by the idea of a highly skilled, therefore technicianist workforce (Dahlberg and Moss 2005). The notion of being a professional is influenced at the meso-level by the socially contingent responses of managers, peers and client groups; likewise at the micro-level of dispositions and motivations and self ascribed status contingent on length of time in the job for example. The quote from Moss (2006), cited in the previous section, has pertinence here. Moss suggested early years workers may not be able to re-conceptualise being professional; in the context of contemporary initiatives and opportunities for new identities, findings from this study concur. They are considered further in Chapter Five.

The wider public does not envision early years workers as professionals, just as workers do not envision themselves as students in higher education because they are not academically able. Workers re-story themselves through internal conversations in order to justify avoidance of higher level study. The paradox is the extent to which the official discourse promulgates early years as a 'profession'. In Chapter One, the rationale given for associating 'profession' with early years work was its specialism, its service provision and its ideologies.

Apparent in this conversation are shared positions and perspectives on early years as a profession and early years workers construing themselves as professional. There are dominant patriarchal perspectives, manifest in public perceptions of the low value of early years work and associated neo-liberal discourses. These exist at the micro-level too: Janice and Sarah have both articulated a self perception of being low class. The patriarchal hierarchies that prevail in education as reinforced by Megan, along with the gendered nature of early years work are also reinforced by Janice. Official discourse relating to early years workforce reform, patriarchal education hierarchies, a gendered workforce that is not a unionised workforce all contribute to the construction of professional identities in the early years workforce (see Chapter Five).

The organisation of this chapter into the categories of status and gender; roles; relationships; ideologies; education, qualifications and training and being/ becoming a professional provided the researcher with a framework within which conversations could be deconstructed to inform responses to the research questions. These influences now require a reconstruction with reference to the

literature review, the interpretive paradigm, its associated theoretical perspectives of ecological systems theory, social and critical theory and the research aim and questions.

A reconstruction is therefore the purpose of the next chapter in response to the research aim which was to explore how professional identities emerge within the early years workforce, and understand what factors contribute to the construction of such identities. In addition, how do early years workers themselves shape the construction of their professional identities and how do professional identities impact on practice?

Chapter 5: Professional identities reconstructed

The researcher presented a hermeneutic deconstruction of discourse in Chapter Four (Derrida 2000). This chapter now offers a *reconstruction* in response to the research aim to explore how professional identities emerge within the early years workforce and understand what factors are likely to contribute to the construction of such identities. The process of reconstruction sought reference to the analysis of findings in the previous chapter as well as aspects of the literature review and methodology. What has emerged from the reconstruction are recurring, multiple and competing professional identities. These identities are introduced in the next paragraph then expanded throughout the chapter. The framework of macro-, meso- and micro-systems is used to structure this chapter as the ecological systems theory helps explain influences on professional identity construction.

A recurring professional identity throughout is that of *feminine childcare*. Feminine, in the context of this research, is construed as signifying those behaviours, attitudes, dispositions, in other words performativities, that are not exclusive to females but are socially constructed as being female (Colley 2006, Gilligan 1982). Performativities, as noted earlier, exemplify how the power of discourse reproduces what it regulates and constrains (Butler 1990). Performativities are acquired through socialisation and normalisation practices in a workplace and thus are determined by the micro-communities of practice (Wenger 1998) where peers, managers, leaders and advisers such as Carrie, Diane and Megan have influence and power. In turn, practice in micro-

communities and decision makers' agency are shaped and influenced by macro-forces. It is the multi-layered ecological systems model that takes account of social, historical and cultural conditions of early years work that shapes the identity of the individual early years worker.

The term *feminine childcarer* intentionally signifies feminised identities that prevail in early years work, incorporating the performativity of caring and mothering behaviours, acceptance of patriarchal regimes and 'othering' of men as illustrated in Chapter Four. *Childcarer* has been intentionally chosen in preference to educator or pedagogue as 'caring' is visible in the discourse of Carrie (page 205) and Linda (page 211) for example. Caring is contestable but reproduces a recurring, requisite disposition for early years work in the research findings and its use deliberately perpetuates the ideological and political divide between education and care. Pedagogue was not chosen as it is an unfamiliar term in the UK as evidenced in Adams' findings (2008). Evidence for the identity of *feminine childcarer* is explicated later in this chapter.

Six categories from the data analysis were used for the organisation of Chapter Four: status and gender; roles; relationships; ideologies; education, qualifications and training and being / becoming a professional. These were used to select excerpts of participants' discourse in response to the research questions. The organisation of this chapter is predicated on the ecological systems model for two reasons. Firstly, the model has been applied consistently throughout the thesis so far; it informed the literature review, the methodology, such as the selection of participants, and the analysis of findings in Chapter

Four. Secondly, it is validated by the work of others, specifically in the context of how identities are shaped and constructed by Paetcher (2001), Parsons and Shils (2001), Tucker (2004) and Urban (2008). How the multiple identities of feminine childcarer, passive/resistant worker, idealised and realised identities are constructed at each level of influence is posited in each section.

It is in this context of competing internal and external influences on professional identity construction that *bricolage* (Denzin and Lincoln 2005) or an appropriation of multiple theoretical perspectives is applied. There is no single theory that satisfactorily explains how professional identities are constructed. Thus, in keeping with the interpretive paradigm, this chapter has appropriated aspects of action theory, structuration theory, post-structuralism and communities of practice, alongside the ecological systems model, as they offer the most useful theoretical basis for analysis.

To begin the reconstruction of how professional identities emerge within the early years workforce, and to understand what factors contribute to the construction of such identities, Tucker (2004: 84, already noted in Chapter Two), proposed that any framework which considers professional identities must 'explore the impact of ideological effects on the socio-political terrain' and the conditions of day to day work. It must also,

Assist analysis of those forms of discourse that are used to define particular forms of work; show how ideas are struggled over and contested at various levels of experience; and demonstrate how such matters

directly impact upon the professional identities which individuals and groups adopt in their everyday work (Tucker 2004: 84).

These factors are usefully taken into account here. In addition to the work of Tucker (2004) and Miller's (2008b) reinforcement of the impact of epistemologies on professional identity, the socially situated context of communities of practice (Wenger 1998) aligned with the socially situated context of self (Archer 2003; Parsons and Shils 2001) have also been used in Chapter Four to interpret influences on professional identities evident in the data but there is more to be said from *this* research about how and what professional identities emerge within a workforce, and the factors, ecological or otherwise, that contribute to the construction of such identities.

It is the macro-level of influence on the emergence of professional identities that is considered first with reference to the literature review and findings. This is followed by an analysis of meso- levels of influence. It is these perspectives that ultimately resonate with the interpretive paradigm in their interface with reconstructed professional identities at the micro-level of early years workers in the final section.

5.1 Macro-level influences on professional identities in the early years workforce

This section starts with a reminder of the socio- historical, neo-liberal and oppressive factors that have constrained the development of the early years

workforce in England over recent decades. The early years workforce was unknown; historically ruptured by the division between care and education provision; subjected to divide and rule (Gramsci 2002) as well as surveillance by those in power (Foucault 1979). It was under-resourced, subjected to poor working conditions, feminised and subjugated into patriarchal regimes.

Normative practices, values and attributes in early years work in general presented in Chapter Two and statistical data in Tables 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 on pages 52-56 specifically, illustrate macro-trends and normative characteristics that perpetuate how the workforce is constructed by policy makers, the public at large and the workforce itself. Low pay, low level qualifications, low aspiration to higher level qualifications and reliance on unpaid workers characterise the workforce. These constructs that characterise early years work are internalised by members of the workforce such as Sarah, Noreen and Janice; the final section of this chapter presents a fuller analysis of such internalisation.

Therefore a professional identity thus framed at the macro-level of influence is that of stereotypical *feminine childcarer* characterised by being female, feminine, service class and passive in its acceptance of the status quo. Additional evidence for this assertion follows. Women in the workforce endorse maternalism too through the privileging of caring dispositions as requisites for early years work, as exemplified by Janice, Alison, Sarah, Noreen and Elizabeth. In their conversations about expectations of students and intrinsic rewards through caring for children with special needs for example, and returned to in the final section of this chapter, they demonstrate maternalistic

ideologies. Explanations for refusing a feminist position are also pursued shortly.

Opportunities for constructing new professional identities are also refused by early years workers such as Linda and Alison as well as the wider public (see section 4.6, page 233). Re-envisioning or re-conceptualisation beyond the prevailing identity of feminine childcarer is refused because the workforce does not have the desire, confidence, political or cultural capital to move beyond it. Passive acceptance of the identity of feminine childcarer is so deeply ingrained into the landscape of early years work arguably for three reasons (and Elspeth reinforces these points on page 174).

Firstly, demands made to government for improved conditions have fallen on stony ground. Secondly, demands have not been made by the workforce itself, but by others, such as unions and academics, on their behalf, so begs the question as to whether the workforce desires change anyway. It is not a unionised workforce (Daycare Trust 2008) so has chosen not to make a collective response to impositions.

Thirdly, early years workers are socially construed as passive (Cooke and Lawton 2008), and workers sign up to an *identity of passivity* when they enter the workforce, or even before. It is expected that children, particularly girls undertake family babysitting duties as a form of labour, arguably more in families who cannot afford childcare costs (Morrow 2003). Such duties offer a role rehearsal for passive acceptance of domestic responsibilities that cross the

boundary into work roles too. The identity of subjugated early years worker is constructed through capital acquired and reproduced as part of the social learning that takes place in the families of prospective early years workers (Bourdieu 2000; Bronfenbrenner 1979; Colley 2006), shaping later career decisions.

One explanation for such passivity is through resistance and agency (Foucault 1982). Identities of passivity and resistance exist alongside feminine childcarer. Power is not overtly visible through lobbying or unionisation for example. Power is exerted subversively instead through *passive resistance* and non-participation within workforce reform. This was evident in Carrie's discourse about the pre-school workers in her authority as well as Noreen and Sarah in resisting management interventions and higher education (see next paragraph). This point, alongside evidence in Tables 2.3 and 2.4 on page 56, reinforces how new identities, such as a graduate workforce, are defiantly refused by workers. Instead, they act to construct an alternative identity, as passive resistant worker. The resistant worker identity competes with the identity of passivity as the former requires agency but the latter arguably does not. Early years workers reconcile the incompatibility by subversive means; agency through passive resistance.

Sarah's response to a new title and structures, arising from the macro-structure of children's centres and the divisions between maintained provision and private, voluntary and independent provision, reinforce the identity of resistant early years worker. Sarah and Noreen resisted interventions by management in

Midshires, sustained by the social construction of shared identities through friendship and mutual roles. Carrie explicitly construed the pre-school workers she worked with as resistant in their reluctance to 'move forward' and 'take on new initiatives'.

Carrie's role as apprentice-master or bureaucrat is sustained through her 'othering' and positioning of the pre-school workers. Social class is visible in its contribution to the professional identity of passive resistant worker through Sarah's, Elizabeth's and other apprentice-masters' discourse (page 177 and 198). With reference to Foucault (1982), resistance to neo-liberal, official discourses and interventionist regimes at the level of the individual provides unity, a collective 'glue', and binds individuals together within the groups of the pre-school workers Carrie worked with and the micro-community of the pre-school at Midshires. Further explanations of individual constructions of identity at the micro-level are returned to in the final section of this chapter.

Attempts at the macro-level of influence to recruit more men to early years work have also met with resistance. Ann and Megan, both decision makers, and Sarah, an early years worker, demonstrated how men were 'othered' by early years workers. Othering men creates agency as a means to co-construct and sustain a shared identity as a feminised workforce, resistant to masculinised identities and behaviours. The passive resistant identity refuses attempts by men to co-construct professional identities through feminised and masculinised behaviours (Sumsion 2000). The complexity of gendered identities has yet to be fully grasped by those who manage recruitment in the early years workforce;

government departments stubbornly persist in attempting to attract men into childcare (CWDC 2009) without examining reasons why they fail.

Normative characteristics of the early years workforce contribute to wider social constructions of professional identities of the workforce. In turn, schools, colleges, careers regimes and recruitment campaigns propagate an archetypal or idealised early years worker as someone with ‘a genuine liking for and interest in children and their development; patience and professionalism; a helpful, caring and understanding nature and a sense of fun’ (CWDC 2010).

Archetypes are reproduced in epistemologies at the macro-level of further education courses and curricula (Colley 2006; Penn 2000); they propagate the identity of feminine childcarer. Such idealised professional identities are further reproduced by those whose role requires them to mediate between official discourses and the personal epistemologies such as Stephen, Megan and Carrie. Additional evidence of how decision makers reproduce identities of feminine childcarer and passive-resistant worker is presented next.

5.2 Meso-level influences on professional identities in the early years workforce

Decision makers are different in their construction of their own professional identities, shaped by biographies, values, ideologies and interpretation of role. The multiplicity of roles identified in Chapter Four included promulgator, advocate, apprentice-master, power broker, gatekeeper, stakeholder and

friend/critical friend. As mediators they are in a nexus between structures at the macro-level and individual early years workers at the micro-level of their day-to-day practices. Decision makers' needs, motivations and dispositions determine interpretation of role and outcomes for early years workers, as do their own imperatives and personal narratives in order to sustain a professional identity that secures and signifies to others their position as power broker (Foucault 1982; Goffman 1959). Carrie's discourse of a need to nurture on page 205 belies regulation and control but through such agency, her identity is secured.

As already noted, the resistant worker identity was reinforced by Carrie and Beatrice who both constructed early years workers as resistant to change, using the example of workforce reform. Resistance was also apparent in Sarah's and Elizabeth's responses to Megan's attempts to bring two teams together in the children's centre. Carrie did not take an advocacy role on behalf of the early years workers she worked with in her authority, whereas Ann and Diane did. There was a difference in how decision makers negotiated their mediating position which is attributable to different dispositions and motivations (Parsons and Shils 2001) or a need to avoid anxiety and risk (Giddens 1991).

The implication of such interpretations is significant as workers grapple with variations between decision makers, who in turn grapple with inequity across local authorities in terms of funding regimes, pay scales and conditions of service. These structures again demonstrate subjectification at the interface between macro and meso-levels of influence as decision makers' discourse 'others' the workforce and problematises them as being resistant and

subversive. In addition, the emphatic reference to interventionist tools, measures and standards in Carrie's discourse pathologises early years work. It demonstrates the power of discourse in constraining and regulating (Butler 1990) and economies of performance (Stronach *et al.* 2002). It reinforces Carrie's position of power and in turn sustains workers' resistant, passive and subversive identities (see 'micro-level' section).

Apparent powerlessness of some decision makers, paradoxical in their positions as power brokers, was evident in the discourse of Ann, Megan and Carrie who were aware of resistance to men working in childcare by early years workers, but they lacked motivation, interest or desire to exert change (see 'feminised identities' in Chapter Four). They, like early years workers, were subjugated into embedded patriarchal regimes and class divisions at the macro-level of influence and they reproduce the identity of early years workers as feminine childcarer. The decision makers' discourse reinforced gender performativity but also transmission and technicianist models (Beatrice on page 197); reinforcers of state apparatus (Diane and Carrie, pages 194-197); gender performativities (Megan, Stephen, Peter, Beatrice, pages 180-185) and hierarchical regimes (Elspeth, page 175-176; Elizabeth, page 177 and Beatrice, page 179).

The impact of discursive and dialogic practices on identity construction is compelling according to Foucault (1972), and it is evident how opportunities for re-conceptualising the professional identities of early years workers are denied by decision makers. Decision makers' discourse in the previous paragraph not

only reproduced a professional identity of feminine childcarer for the early years workers they worked with, but it also sustained their own professional identities and positions as power brokers, gatekeepers and so on.

This is arguably a significant motivation for decision makers. Personal imperatives and narratives are not necessarily altruistic but motivations are determined by decision makers' needs to affirm their position, power and status as 'bureaucrats'. In turn, early years workers are positioned by decision makers as labourers to meet the needs of the ruling classes through caring for their children while they work (Baldock *et al.* 2009). These positions are further evidenced by decision makers through privileging certain epistemologies (see Chapter Four, 'education, training and qualifications'), through 'othering' students on placement and through the associated role of apprentice-master. This latter point is pursued in the 'micro-level' section.

The discourse of decision makers through interpellation, performativity and hegemonic discourses, combined with how they perceive the early years workforce to be resistant, is evidence of subjectification of early years workers (Rose 2000). This is a critical element in the construction of professional identities of early years workers, by workers and decision makers. The position of decision makers is strengthened through such processes; their power is reinforced through interactions with a workforce characterised by being female, feminine, service class and passive.

Decision makers' professional habitus is strengthened as their multiple roles accumulate cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 1990). Their professional habitus likewise reproduces masculinised regimes, according to Colley (2006) and Osgood (2006b). It is this position specifically that perpetuates the identity of feminine childcarer, and denies any re-conceptualisation of new, feminist identities for early years workers. Habitus is therefore a critical factor that contributes to the construction of professional identities in the early years workforce; it is evident in the next section too.

The chapter now moves to a synthesis of micro-levels of influence and takes account of its interface with the meso-level. It is apposite that, as an interpretive paradigm shaped the methodology, there is most to be said about the micro-level of experience for individual early years workers.

5.3 Micro-levels influences on professional identities in the early years workforce

It has already been shown how professional identities at the micro-level are influenced by structures such as class and social practices as well as aspects of self such as agency, biography, dispositions and motivations. The intention here is to confirm forces between meso-, micro- and macro-levels of influence that *reproduce*, in a social theoretical context, multiple, recurring and competing professional identities of feminine childcarer, an identity of passive-resistance and realised versus idealised identities and how these compete implicitly within the identity of feminine childcarer.

The identity of feminine childcarer is not a unitary identity at the micro-level of influence. The *idealised* early years worker, idealised in the macro and meso-level discourse and constructs of early years workers, decision makers, politicians and the wider public, competes with the *realised* early years worker. The realised early years worker at the micro-level struggles with the demands, expectations, structures, roles, relationships and so on of their day to day work as shown next.

Competing idealised and realised identities were evident in Midshires children's centre, as the impact of ruptured micro-cultures as well as Megan's attempts to reconcile them was significant. Embedded and co-constructed professional identities for Sarah and Noreen, no longer as deputies but as Senior Practitioners in the pre-school alongside reconstructed professional identities for Janice as teacher and Elizabeth as member of the management team showed the impact of isolation, changes in titles and commensurate erosion of power and status (see Roles, page 188). It shows again how interpellation and official titles matter to individuals; they shape how they are known to others, such as parents and other professionals as well as how they ascribe status to themselves (Bourdieu 2000). Early years workers such as Sarah, Noreen and Janice grappled with competing realised and idealised identities of how they are known and how they would like to be known.

Noreen's professional identity was similarly sustained by her and her peers' narrative about working with children with special educational needs. Noreen sought a realised identity on this premise and it was contingent on others

endorsing her identity as 'good with children with special needs'. This identity offered Noreen security and mitigated the risk of anxiety created by new, imposed structures, such as title, teams and routines. It is explained by Giddens (1991) in terms of how we seek to protect our self identity from risk and anxiety through avoidance and deferment, or through resistance according to Foucault (1982). Competing identities associated with the identity of feminine childcarer at the micro-level of influence are reconstructed on the following evidence too.

Workers in this research have been shown to be subjugated into hegemonic discourses of the past, associating low academic achievement and service class labour with a career in childcare. Monica and Sarah, both early years workers, grappled with public perceptions that construe early years workers as not academically able (see section 4.4, page 208) and these constructions were reproduced by decision makers (see Sarah, page 199). Similarly, Sarah and Janice positioned themselves as part of a service class, employed to meet the needs of those with a better job. There is congruence between Sarah's and Janice's construction of early years work with the hegemonic discourse of governments past, as in the Plowden Report (CACE 1967) for example, and present (see section 4.1 page 173).

Pervading maternalistic ideologies and stubborn social constructions of women, motherhood, 'mother work' (Ladd-Taylor 1995) and mothers who worked at the time of the Plowden report were shaped by economic determinism, as argued in the 'genealogy' section in Chapter Two. The Plowden report promulgated a discourse of early years work as providing redemption, intervention and

maternal substitution for working mothers. Such constructs prevail. Thomas's view that early years workers are not the same as a teacher, but should be, perpetuates the hierarchical, power-ridden environment that characterises education settings, a view reinforced by Janice. Such multi-voiced heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981) is compelling evidence for the construction of the identity of feminine childcarer.

Personal narratives and imperatives, the reflexive project of the self (Giddens 1991), the micro-communities of home, culture and family are as influential as the workplace community on how professional identities emerge. These influences are further evidenced by Sarah and Noreen as the intersections of roles, relationships and wider social constructs of women and early years work create conflict in identity construction. Competing identities as early years worker and daughter were evident for Sarah, and also for Noreen as early years worker and aunt, as were competing ideologies of maternalism and professionalism (see Chapter One). Personal imperatives, in both cases, were to take care of family members.

Commensurate female and feminine identities; associated caring and mothering performativities were significant in how Sarah and Noreen were seeking to manage competing realised and idealised identities. Both early years workers reconciled competing identities by privileging family needs, values and roles of daughter and aunt over the role of early years worker and its associated ambiguities and change. The interface between personal narratives of who we are beyond the workplace and competing priorities, contingent on self, culture

and values, were apparent. They reinforce the identity of feminine childcarer through the implicit requisites of female family roles and associated behaviours. These factors are returned to shortly.

The impact of others on identity construction was also evident in how Elizabeth, Sarah, Janice and Noreen had experienced the influence of peers as apprentice-masters on the reification of their work (see Roles, page 188). Goffman (1959) talked about the dramatic realisation of our work, in other words, how we use visual signals that convey the purpose of being and doing. Janice was talking the talk of a teacher shaped by the normative practices of other teachers in the setting and professional learning. Sarah and Noreen talked the talk of the pre-school community of practice, resistant to higher education, resistant to becoming part of the wider team at Midshires children's centre, reluctant to accept new titles. Associated professional habitus and normative practices of the pre-school culture and community were reproduced through discourse and reification, but resistant worker identity is clearly evident. They are re-conceptualising their professional identities in order to secure and protect their position and power just as decision makers do (Giddens 1991, and see previous section).

Similar socially situated factors that constructed competing and multiple identities were identified by Linda who was only just constructing her identity as 'a professional'. This dynamic shift in self-construction was due to the influence of peers and decision makers in confirming her credentials and professional habitus. Linda was grappling with neo-liberal discourses imposed by her role

and its reification apparent in her relationship with parents. Linda's multiple identities emerged from the professional who undertook face-to-face interaction with parents, competing with the professional forced to deny support to some parents, which in turn competed with the professional who was refused by parents. In order to construct multiple professional identities, Linda had to mediate the intersection of feminine childcarer and competing idealised and realised identities in her work role; an intersection of macro- and meso- forces.

Shared workplace cultures and practices create a glue to bind workers together, according to Wenger (1998). Shared identities are reified through the relationships and interactions with children and the way in which roles are forged and known by their colleagues. Communities of practice account for the impact of participation and belonging on identity, but do not acknowledge the significant impact of structures. The way in which relationships in Midshires Children's centre between Elizabeth, Sarah and Noreen in the pre-school community created shared scepticism of management interventionist structures (see section 4.1, page 173) and thus a shared identity of resistance was apparent. However, fear, uncertainty and hostility (Cooke and Lawton 2008) were implicit emotional responses to the prospect of higher education voiced by Noreen and Sarah through internal conversations to justify reasons not to undertake higher level study and to reconcile competing identities.

Citing family reasons as a justification for refusing higher education demonstrates resistant and even refused identities to conform to the impositions at macro and meso-level of pressure from management at Midshires children's

centre and CWDC. Early years workers do not have the capital or confidence to envision themselves as students undertaking higher education, and justify their decisions from a personal needs position (Parsons and Shils 2001). Mutual relationships and security within the community of practice of the pre-school at Midshires children's centre have strengthened the agency and thus shared professional identities articulated by both Noreen and Sarah. Resistance and passivity are evident in their responses to intervention.

The recurring identity of feminine childcarer demands clearer analysis from a feminist perspective before the chapter concludes. The influence of gender has been shown to be critical in the construction of professional identities in the early years workforce. References to gender were explicit and implicit in the discourse in Chapter Four, from early years workers, decision makers and politicians. At the micro-level of experience for workers in this research, Sarah, Monica, Noreen and Elizabeth exemplified manifestations of gender influences as tensions between feminine and masculine identities. Men were 'othered' (Sumsion 2000), constructed in multiple other roles: as role models for boys without fathers, as foils for feminine behaviours, as token male employees. Through these socialised behaviours in the workplace, constructions of male childcarers are visible in how early years workers perpetuate feminine, not feminist, identities.

Performativity through feminine behaviours, resistance through men as 'other', binary signifiers of men / women in the workforce and the privileging of feminine attributes, at all levels, have been shown in this research to be critical factors in

the construction of professional identities. Early years workers and decision makers construct child-caring as exclusive to those with feminine characteristics and attributes and men are thus excluded from membership of the early years workforce.

The impact on workers' practice is to reproduce associated behaviours and attitudes in the workplace with children and families. The socially constructed professional identity of feminine childcarer is reproduced for all who are co-located in workplace communities (Wenger 1998). Mothering and caring behaviours are enacted through workplace identities as well being evident in the discourse of personal narratives, family roles and resistance to higher education. Being a feminine childcarer is resistant to change due to enduring genealogical and sociological structures while passivity conforms to maternalistic behaviours at work and home.

Students who participated in this research constructed emerging professional identities from their socialisation into communities of practice, specifically placement, and all the performativities and normative practices therein. Apprentice-masters in this research include Elizabeth, Sarah and Noreen in the micro-culture and practice of the pre-school at Midshires children's centre, and also Beatrice and Megan, both children's centre managers, whose ideologies were rooted in micro-culture and practice of nursery education and its hierarchies. They perceived students as not suited to the work and/or early years work being an easy option for low academic achievers.

Students were constructing realised identities of early years workers as uncertain, grappling with competing demands of parents, children and curriculum frameworks. College had not prepared them for the mismatch between theory and practice and this questions the current epistemological premise for early years training and qualifications (Penn no date). In the communities of practice where students undertake placement, apprentice-masters such as Elizabeth and Sarah reproduce idealised professional identities of being female, feminine, caring and low class. They position students on the periphery of the community (Lave and Wenger 1991) and sustain a maternalistic ideology of early years labour as intrinsically rewarding, a point pursued next.

Students N, J and K's competing professional identities were constructed through interpreting early years work as a compromise between what policy states and the pragmatics of day-to-day work with young children. Their identities were also shaped by the type of provision and ideologies of the apprentice-masters. The examples of discourses from apprentice-masters constructed a deficit model of early years students, not making choices on the basis of 'approved' ideologies, and not academically able. Students choose early years work anyway because they seek its rewards in maternalistic roles. This meets their needs and motivations as well as those of their families. They have already internalised the identity of feminine childcarer from their family, school and further education cultures and communities. Through these identities they were able to rehearse the requisite practices for motherhood, privileged by their families (Morrow 2003).

Students, like early years workers in decades before them, reproduce the identity of feminine childcarer (Bourdieu 2000). Low level qualifications, low class, low levels of achievement are considered acceptable to enter the field of early years work; that children do not need a well-qualified workforce is implied. As long as children have a low-paid mother-substitute, then economic determinants are satisfied. Marxist theory is compelling: women contribute to the labour market without investment in childcare services and early years workers' rates of pay

Thus, at the micro-level of the ecology of early years work, there are multiple, complex, intersecting influences on how professional identities emerge, are constructed and shaped, and have an impact on practice. There are mutual but different forces exerted on and by each level of influence. It seems reductive to attempt to encapsulate their multiplicity and complexity into a few sentences but firstly, a reiteration of the competing and multiple identities that have been identified in this chapter is essential for confirmation. These are feminine childcarer and its associated idealised identity of maternalism and realised identity that reflects economies of performance, but also the identity of passive-resistant worker.

The identity of feminine childcarer has emerged from all levels of influence: structures at the macro-level that are historically, socially and politically enduring reproduce the identity of feminine childcarer as female, working class, low paid and low achieving. Requisite dispositions and qualities for entry to the

early years workforce continue to be associated with ideologies of maternalism and neo-liberalism, not feminism.

Decision makers who mediate between the macro-level of influence and individual members of the workforce at the micro-level reproduce hegemonic discourses and structures, sustaining the identity of feminine childcarer. Their motivations for taking on multiple roles of promulgator, gate-keeper, advocate, critical friend and adviser, for example, are not necessarily altruistic. Through their accumulation of roles and associated power, they are able to acquire professional habitus as a means of structuration or negotiating for themselves a position that contributes to their own professional identities.

In turn, decision makers, through their actions and discourse, problematisation and pathologisation, sustain both the identity of feminine childcarer, and passive resistant worker. Early years workers resist structures and identities imposed by decision makers, including re-conceptualisations of professional identities as 'graduate' or 'being a professional' or 'manager'. Thus at the micro-level of the individual early years worker, an identity of resistance and passivity is a means by which they can exert power (Foucault 1982). An identity of passivity prevails as a result of the significant power of class and hierarchies in education.

Collective action and unionisation has not been chosen; professionally, the early years workforce has not been able to bring about change in conditions, pay and status, despite others advocating such change on their behalf. Instead, the glue that binds the workforce together is the identity of collective passive

resistance to new titles, new professional identities, feminist identities and higher education. What is most compelling from the research findings is how issues of class and gender are complicit in professional identity construction in the early years workforce, and how usefully the ecological model explains the multiplicity of forces at all levels in its construction.

A critical re-examination of the author's working definition of professional identities, in addition to the reconstructions and analysis presented in this chapter, responds to the research questions. It has reconstructed recurring, competing and multiple professional identities in early years work and identified factors that influence their construction and their impact on practice. So, the definition of professional identities is now re-cast as follows. Professional identities are socially situated, influenced by ecological elements of self identity, external impositions and cultural conditions; they are multiple and dynamic, as these influences shift depending on conditions, culture and community. A sense of who we are, the self at work, the identities we shape and are shaped into through *discursive* interactions with others in our work contribute to the construction of professional identities. Recurring, competing and multiple identities emerge from varying micro-, meso- and macro-levels of influence within and beyond the early years workforce. A recurring identity as feminine childcarer is apparent. Multiple and competing identities are situated as passive but resistant worker alongside idealised and realised early years workers within workplace communities. These compete with personal narratives and imperatives.

There is no one theoretical explanation of how professional identities are constructed. The ecological systems theory was useful as a framework, but other theories have been useful too. The over-arching theme of power and inherent struggles arising from gender, resistance, class, hegemony and history highlight the limitations of communities of practice (Wenger 1998) as a theory of how identities are constructed through social learning. Self identity and the reflexive project of the self (Giddens 1991) takes account of the need for security, and how we take protective action in constructing personal narratives and biographies. Such agency has been apparent in the discourse of this study.

A criticism of structuration theory, including reproduction and the formation of habitus (Bourdieu 1977) is that it fails to recognise how personal needs, motivations and desires shape identities. The researcher as *bricoleur*, as already noted, has appropriated aspects of these theoretical positions to inform the responses to the research questions and to contribute new epistemologies to the field. An evaluation of the study and implications of these recurring, multiple and competing professional identities at micro-, meso- and macro-levels for early years workers, decision makers and the academic community conclude the thesis in Chapter Six, alongside suggestions for future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the study, identify opportunities for future research and conclude the thesis. Responses to the research aim and questions were presented in Chapter Five: the researcher has identified multiple, recurring and competing professional identities in early years work and what influences their construction, including how early years workers themselves shape their professional identities.

To facilitate a critical evaluation of the study, six questions are posed and the chapter is structured around them. Were the research aims and questions commensurate with the researcher's original premise for the study? How has the methodological paradigm informed and influenced the research outcomes? What has the study contributed to the field? What potential future research and lines of inquiry emerge from the study? What has been the impact on the researcher of doing the research and finally what are the implications of findings for decision makers and early years workers?

Firstly, were the aims and questions commensurate with the researcher's original ontological and epistemological premise for the study? The formulation of the research aim and questions around the notion of professional identities required investigation at the outset of the study. A review of the work of others in the field of professional identities convinced the researcher that an investigation into professional identities was timely and necessary. The conversations with further education students had prompted a study with

potential to contribute to emerging studies into children's services and workforce reform. A multi-disciplinary study that drew on sociological, psychological and political theories to explain the construction of professional identities went beyond superficial assumptions. Instead it excavated to the core of firstly what early years work means, secondly how professional identities are constructed and thirdly how they can be defined. The definition of professional identities and the multi-disciplinary nature of the study are significant in terms of what they contribute to the field and these points are returned to shortly.

Secondly, how has the methodological paradigm informed and influenced the research outcomes? Any interpretive research is reductive through the process of reporting and analysis but this shortcoming is redressed through hermeneutic techniques. Strategies for data collection did not seek discourse about professional identities *per se*, because they are ephemeral, contestable and open to interpretation and assumption. The research strategies instead sought discourse connected to professional identities such as relationships with others, experiences and perceptions about education and qualifications and work role for example.

The data offered insight into professional identity construction, exploring structure and agency; discourse that inferred hegemonic policy; discourse that revealed feminist and feminisation influences on professional identity construction. The methodology generated data that located the socially and historically situated, discursive and dialectic nature of professional identities. Discourse emerged from multiple voices, a *heteroglossia* (Bakhtin 1981) and at

multiple levels, reinforcing relative positions and power for decision makers and early years workers (see Figure 2.2 on page 75). How issues of power, class and hegemony were evident in the data, and how these were played out by early years workers, students and decision makers were critical to and distinctive in the research. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model of macro, meso- and micro-levels of influence facilitated a dialectic approach to both generating discourse and its analysis. This is a significant and original feature of the study.

Discourse analysis, as the sole method of data analysis, promoted a process of deconstruction through examination of assumptions and interpretations within the discourse. The social and historical situatedness of how professional identities are constructed was a central premise of the research. Deconstruction as a reading of the data through a lens of subjectivity for power-knowledge relations (Foucault 1972) and hegemony (Gramsci 2002), as noted in the previous paragraph, showed how they were reproduced by decision makers and early years workers. Discourse contained within documents juxtaposed participants' discourse as a point of hermeneutic comparison and confirmed contributing factors at the macro-level throughout the study.

A challenge for the researcher in terms of critical theory was her initial conceptualisation of 'voice' and emancipatory agendas in feminist research at the beginning of the study. Planning and implementing the methodology and examining the research findings forced a confrontation of issues of power, resistance, masculinised and feminised identities. The dynamics of working in

the field while gathering data and interrogating power relationships at macro, meso- and micro-levels have brought the compelling influence of gender on professional identities to the forefront of the study. Feminism, gender and early years work offer a rich seam for further investigation, a point returned to.

Thirdly, what has the study contributed to the field? It makes a significant contribution in terms of developing an understanding of social theoretical perspectives in early years work in terms of gender, structures, reproduction and ideologies in the construction of workplace identities. Adopting critical theoretical perspectives, working with subjectivities and seeking sources of oppression and hegemony (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005) in early years work have narrated a particular story in the context of contemporary workforce reform in the field of early years.

The significance of the work of others in the field of professional identities is not underestimated, but is added to through this study. Epistemologically, the work of Colley (2006), Dahlberg *et al.* (2007) Moss (2003, 2006), Miller (2008a, 2008b), Osgood (2006a, 2006b), and particularly Tucker (1999, 2004) provided useful and stimulating ideas throughout the research and writing processes. Their analysis of issues of class, gender, labour, roles and policy, for example, have contributed to the interpretation and construction of the professional identities asserted in this study, but it is the contribution of the participants themselves, particularly the early years workers, which adds a distinctive dimension to existing work.

The findings, their analysis and the work of others in the field of professional identities contributed to the formulation of a definition of professional identities as composed on page 266. It locates the social, personal and cultural elements of professional identity construction within the ecological systems framework. It recognises the significant influence of macro- and meso-forces on the identities constructed in the workplace. The interacting, multi-levelled influences articulated in the definition makes a contribution to cognate fields of academic work.

The reconstruction of professional identities as feminine childcarer and passive-resistant worker is discomfiting as it is a stark reminder of oppressive forces and hegemonic regimes which some may prefer to ignore or deny. However the findings from this study: the genealogy, the discourse of practitioners, decision makers, politicians, advisers and students consistently construct such identities. It is this multi-levelled, multi-disciplinary approach that makes the study original in its contribution to the field.

Fourthly, what potential future research emerges from the study? There are several ways in which this study has prompted ideas. For example, one line of enquiry is the impact on early years workers' professional identities of undertaking higher level education. Another example relates to home-based care. For this research, it was decided that home-based provision, as provided by nannies and child-minders, creates a qualitatively different professional identity compared to those who provide group-based care. Nannies and child-minders were therefore excluded but an investigation into their professional identity construction and how

they relate to the structures imposed by the reconfiguration of children's services and workforce reform has potential in extending this study.

Comparative research in countries with different socio-, political and historical landscapes for early years work offers the opportunity to confirm or review the factors that have emerged in this study as contributing to the construction of professional identities. The embeddedness of maternalistic and neo-liberal ideologies is apparent in the United Kingdom and arguably other Western nations. As this research has drawn significantly on social theory, located in Western epistemologies, comparative research has the potential to challenge epistemological and ontological perspectives that are salient to what is known about professional identities, professionalism and the idea of profession, for example.

In attempting to define professional identities for this study, it became apparent that the notion of 'being a professional', 'professionalisation' and 'professionalism' are all problematic. There is no shortage of research into these notions in a generic context such as Beck and Young (2005); Eraut (1994); Evetts (2003); Freidson (2001); Hoyle (2001); Hoyle and John (1995) and Johnson (1972), but seeking explanations and understandings of professionalisation and professionalism in the early years workforce offers another line of inquiry.

Ball and Vincent (2005), Coffield (2002) and Stronach *et al.* (2002) reinforce the interconnection between market forces, the creation of 'new professionals' and workforce reform. The impact of commodification, the mixed economy of childcare,

the newly created model of children's centres, the integration of new teams from old, private with public provision, health with care and education have all entered the frame here, and warrant further exploration.

Workforce reform and the implications of new ways of working were both 'hot' topics for academics working in fields associated with inter-professional and multi-agency working at the time of reform and reconfiguration of children's services in England following the Green paper: Every Child Matters. The impact of these initiatives on professional identities of early years workers, in children's centres specifically, has potential for investigation.

In terms of the genealogy of the early years workforce, more literature and data were gathered than has been used in the final writing of this study. It has potential to contribute to the field of early years work nationally and internationally as a point of reference for policy and practice. Where gender is a factor in other workforces and where oppressive regimes prevail, genealogical research such as that undertaken for this study, offers a method that reveals sources of power and power relations. Contemporary political ideologies and good intentions can obscure hegemonic forces as illustrated by the introduction of EYPS.

The gendered aspects of early years work have interested the researcher particularly in this study. Studies which investigate gender in education in general (Francis *et al.* 2008; Jones and Myhill 2007; Skelton 2009) and early years particularly (Goldstein 1998; Noddings 2003; Sumsion 2000; Vandenbroeck and

Peeters 2008) pose challenging questions for researchers and practitioners working in education and early years. Maternalistic ideologies, class, family and culture steer some young women towards early years work as it prepares them for caring and mothering later in their lives (Morrow 2003). These forces are significant but unsettling; they are in direct opposition to feminist positions.

Using feminist standpoint epistemology to develop an understanding of early years work and oppression; to explore women's perspective on social reality in early years work; to understand how women position themselves to create unity and resistance; notions of masculinity, masculinised behaviours, femininity and feminised behaviours and what other forms these may take in addition to the resistance found in this research, are all points of intrigue for further investigation.

So, fifthly, what has been the impact on the researcher of doing this research? Higher education institutions have an expectation that staff will achieve doctoral level degrees. It denotes membership of an academic group and the researcher has to prove herself to be worthy of joining. However, the study was not undertaken for this arguably instrumental reason, although it was a driver. The sense of achievement from completion of a MA in 2004 was an incentive and contributed to the researcher's own professional identity.

The researcher has constructed new epistemologies and ontologies as an outcome from this doctoral study. With these comes a realisation that, again in keeping with critical theory, there is a need to understand any position that the

researcher wanted to promulgate through the research, or any story she wanted to tell. Has she told it? Does it protect or expose the researcher or anyone else? Scrutiny of subjectivities exposes prejudices and expectations submerged throughout the research process.

In Chapter One, conversations with students in further education which generated ideas for the study were acknowledged. The researcher questioned why students did not express an aspiration to champion the rights or well-being of children, or a professional career in childcare, but instead looked for convenience and career paths of least resistance to suit family demands. It is evident that the impact of structures, class, gender and reproduction on not only those who work for low pay, have low status and are subjectified by government hegemony, but also those who work in further and higher education too. Forces that drive young women into early years work, and forces that reproduce their professional identities in the workplace have become explicit through the research.

Finally, what are the implications for early years workers and decision makers? What are the ramifications of the research findings for media, publicity and recruitment campaigns, policy makers and government ministers? It is tempting to propose utopian aspirations for those in positions of power, for them to acquire an understanding the reality of the day-to-day work in the early years sector; to acknowledge the extent to which feminised identities are inscribed in early years work sociologically, and how hegemony in general, but patriarchy specifically, shapes identities in education and care work.

Recruitment campaigns which promote early years work as intrinsically, but not financially, rewarding will fail to address the imbalance of men and women in the workforce. Perpetuating low pay and poor conditions with no financial recognition for achieving graduate status will not motivate the workforce to aspire to higher education, because it sustains agency through resistance - and they cannot afford the fees.

Those in power, the decision makers in this research, have the professional habitus and capital to promulgate official, hegemonic discourses about early years work. Those at the macro and meso-levels of influence exploit and oppress the workforce as it secures and protects their position. They contribute to the ontological and epistemological cycle of low status, passive acceptance of what it means to sign up to early years work, but history suggests it is an impenetrable cycle. It is indicative of what Foucault (1972: 12) termed 'the inertia of the past'.

Early years workers choose the work, or have it chosen for them, for reasons already stated: they are low achievers from low class families and have maternalistic dispositions. They reproduce the identity of feminised childcarer for the children in their care, the families they work with and co-workers in the ecological system of the early years workplace. Normative practices and performativities, shaped by decision makers, similarly sustain the identity of feminine childcarer. Decision makers, at the same time, accumulate their own professional habitus and capital. It is this ecological analysis that offers a unique and original insight into influences on professional identity construction in the early years workforce.

It has been suggested by Boddy *et al.* (2005), Cameron (2004) and Moss (2003), for example, that a re-conceptualisation of early years work can address the inequities of class, status, pay and qualifications of the workforce. Similar demands have been made by professional associations (GMB 2003; UNISON 2006) but again these are on behalf of the workforce, not by the workforce, and the collective voices of others have not brought about change anyway. The workforce has not taken collective action so far and begs the question as to whether it is likely to in the future.

At the time of writing, a general election recently led to the creation of a coalition government intent on severe public sector cuts. The level of interest shown in early years workforce reform in 2005 and 2006 has waned and employment opportunities are likely to be severely depleted. A continuation of resistance to government impositions by the early years workforce is the means by which they become powerful. The final quote is therefore from Foucault (2000: 167, original italics):

When we deal with the government, the struggle, of course, is not symmetrical, the power situation is not the same; but we are in this struggle, and the continuation of this situation can influence the behaviour or non-behaviour of the other. So we are not trapped. We are always in this kind of situation. It means that we always have possibilities; there are always possibilities of changing the situation. We cannot jump *outside* the situation.....So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance. So I think that *resistance* is the main word, *the key word*, in this dynamic.

Resistance to the power of others and their associated structures, according to Foucault, is not futile. It is the agency by which those in early years work ultimately demonstrate their power and desire to construct new professional identities, but not those imposed by government, or promulgated by decision makers. They are not attempting to 'jump outside' the landscape that has positioned them where they are, but instead they seek to re-conceptualise and create new professional identities *for themselves*. It is time to recognise the oppression of the early years workforce, time for them to construct their own professional identities without others doing it for them. It is *their* conceptualisations that have potential for future research.

Appendices

Appendix One	Timeline of research activity
Appendix Two	Sample of consent letter, including information provided to participants
Appendix Three	Sample of prompt questions for interviews
Appendix Four	Sample of text from documentary analysis

Appendix One: Timeline of research activity

Planning	Date	Outcome
Decisions made regarding selection of types of sources, location of sources, access to sources for documentary analysis	From 2004 to 2008	Documentary analysis undertaken as part of MPhil research
Decision to select a group of early years workers as the first group of participants, and to use semi-structured interviews for data collection.	January 2008	
First meeting with the children's centre manager to negotiate access, agreement and consent	February 2008	Permission granted. Timetable and processes agreed.
Meeting with staff at the children's centre to explain aims and process of the research	March 2008	Six staff briefed on the research aims and process. A 'snowball' process was discussed and agreed with staff who attended.
	April to July 2008	Thirteen interviews with ten staff undertaken
Communication by email with FE college curriculum manager to negotiate access to EY students on full time training courses	June 2008	Permission granted.
	June and July 2008	Two focus group discussions took place in a further education college
Protocol developed for selection of 'decision maker' participants. Decision to use semi-structured interviews.	September 2008 to May 2009	Protocol led to a list of eight possible individuals for this phase of the research
Individual communications, negotiations with decision makers. Specifically these were : 2 local authorities 1 trade union 1 government agency with responsibility for children's workforce reform 1 Connexions adviser	July to September 2009	Eight individuals were approached, seven consented to participate. Seven interviews took place with 'decision makers'; two telephone interviews, five face-to-face
Using strategies of analysis and de-construction to interpret findings	September to November 2009	
Preparing reporting of findings to check with participants for confirmation and agreement.	November to December 2009	

Appendix Two: Sample of consent letter, including information provided to participants

Dear colleague

I am writing to ask if you would consider assisting me with my doctoral research. I have outlined the context for the research on the following pages, for your information, along with my contact details. I would be delighted to expand on any details that you think might help.

I am currently seeking participants who agree to allocate time (probably about 20 minutes) to respond to the questions as outlined. My request is for an interview / conversation to take place that allows us to create a dialogue that is framed around the questions but that also allows for other points to be considered as needed. (A conversation is preferable to a questionnaire).

I am flexible as to how and where the interview takes place, either over the telephone, in your place of work or at Newman University College; recorded or as notes. This can be discussed, following your agreement.

I know that the next few weeks are likely to be interrupted by annual leave, but I am more than happy to negotiate a time that suits you.

At this stage, it would be extremely helpful if you could reply, indicating a response, either a definite yes, a tentative yes, or no thank you. No offence will be taken if it's the latter! If it's one of the first two, please let me know possible dates / times that are convenient for me to contact you to begin to arrange the interview / or discuss further.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours

Gill

Gill McGillivray

Senior Lecturer, Early Years, Newman University College

Birmingham, B32 3NT

g.m.mcgillivray@newman.ac.uk

www.newman.ac.uk

PS: Please ignore the automated reply that may be sent to you from my work email address.

Working title: Practitioner to Professional: De / re-constructions of Professional Identity in the Early Years Workforce

Context: There has been considerable change in the early years workforce in the last 12 years, possibly attributable to the National Childcare Strategy introduced by the Labour government in 1998 (DfEE 1998). As current trends nationally are to increase the professionalisation of a variety of workforces associated with health, education, social care for example, and specifically to enhance access to higher level qualifications for early years workers, policy is articulating initiatives to promote such change. Alongside these changes are the drives to more effective multi-agency and inter-professional working to improve outcomes for children and their families. Historically, those working with young children have been perceived as low status. My research is borne from these changes, and is an attempt to explore how the changes are having an impact on how early years workers themselves perceive themselves, but also how others see them as change unfolds.

I have already undertaken interviews with early years workers and am now seeking to extend the scope of interviews to include those who work closely alongside early years workers and / or those who are considering a career working with children.

My research aim is to investigate how professional identities emerge within the early years workforce, and understand what factors contribute to the construction of such identities. Subsumed into the overarching aim are three questions. First, what contributes to the construction of professional identities in the early years workforce? Second, how do early years workforce themselves shape the construction of their professional identities? Third, how do professional identities impact on practice?

My plans for the period August to the end of September 2009 are to undertake interviews with the following personnel: Connexions personal advisers; local authority early years training team members; local authority early years advisers; representatives from CWDC; school and further education college based careers advisers.

Please note the following ethical considerations:

All participants are assured of anonymity; presentation and interpretation of responses will be confirmed with all participants before being included in the thesis; ethical procedures will be followed prior to, during and after the interviews (informed consent, right to withdraw, de-briefing), all interview data are kept confidential, and will only be shared once approved by participants.

PhD Supervisors

For your information, my supervisors for my research are Professor Stan Tucker and Dr Dave Trotman, both colleagues at Newman University College (S.A.Tucker@newman.ac.uk or D.Trotman@newman.ac.uk). Feel free to contact them if verification is needed that I am a bona fide researcher as well as a member of staff at Newman University College.

Interview questions (these may change slightly, as they are piloted and / or adapted for specific participant groups)

The questions that will frame the interview schedule for the above group of participants are:

1. Please could you outline the context in which you work with / alongside early years workers or those who may be considering a career in early years?
2. My research is investigating aspects of professional identity as held by early years workers. In your experience, how would you describe, overall, how early years workers see themselves (for example, their career aspirations, their relationship with other professionals, their work with children, their work with families)?
3. Or, if you advise those who are considering a career in early years, what do young people say to you about how they see early years work?
4. What are **your** views about work in early years (for example, what suits some people to this career; what are the career prospects)? Why do you think people choose EY work?
5. What do you consider are significant factors in how the workforce overall, as well as early years workers you may know individually, is responding to change? What difficulties, barriers, opportunities, challenges exist?

6. How do you think the changes are seen by others who work with them (managers, advisers, local authority colleagues, the families themselves who early years practitioners work with).

Consent

Please read the following statements carefully and tick those that apply before signing below.

It is entirely your choice at this stage as to how the interview is recorded, and you are free to change your mind or withdraw at any time.

- ☐ I agree to the interview being tape recorded.
- ☐ I agree to the interview being recorded by written notes.
- ☐ I understand that excerpts may be cited in the thesis, but that they will be anonymous, and checked and agreed with the interviewee first.
- ☐ I understand that recordings (taped or notes) will be treated as confidential material. This means that they will be kept in a secure location, to which only the researcher has access. They will be destroyed on satisfactory completion of the thesis.
- ☐ I understand the purpose and aims of the research.
- ☐ I understand that there are likely to be several audiences for the research findings as they are potentially presented at conferences, in journal articles and book chapters.
- ☐ I understand that I can ask for an update or any other information regarding the research from the researcher at any time.

If you are happy to do so, please sign to give consent below

Name in capitals.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Gill McGillivray, Newman University College, Genners Lane, Bartley Green,
Birmingham, B32 3NT

g.m.mcgillivray@newman.ac.uk mob: 07757 632095

Appendix Three: Sample of prompt questions for interviews

Question	Prompts
Please could you outline the context in which you work with / alongside early years workers or those who may be considering a career in early years?	How long? Own background, experience and quals? Involvement with workforce reform if any?
My research is investigating aspects of professional identity as held by early years workers. In your experience, how would you describe, overall, how early years workers see themselves (for example, their career aspirations, their relationship with other professionals, their work with children, their work with families)?	Aspirations for the children? Historical influences as to how the workforce has evolved? What influences these perceptions?
Or, if you advise those who are considering a career in early years, what do young people say to you about how they see early years work?	As 'academic' or not? As something for a caring person to do? ie: determined by dispositions? As a means to cope with or meet their own needs? As gendered? Have you seen change in their perceptions?
What are your views about work in early years (for example, what suits some people to this career; what are the career prospects)?	As 'academic' or not? As something for a caring person to do? As a means to cope with or meet their own needs? Have you seen change in their perceptions? As gendered?
What do you consider are significant factors in how the workforce overall, as well as early years workers you may know individually, is responding to change?	What might influence responses to change? Welcome opportunities? Better pay / conditions / status? Resilience? Political interference? Expectations held by? Communities where they work? Lack of confidence? Resistance to....? Life stories?
How do you think the changes are seen by others who work with them (managers, advisers, local authority colleagues, the families themselves who early years practitioners work with)?	Needed, because.... Political? Economical? Sociological? Transitory?

Appendix Four: Sample of text from documentary analysis

Year	Policy initiative (England)	Policy commentary	Alternative commentary
1996	Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Act SCAA Desirable Outcomes published.	The Desirable Outcomes states, of the adults in nursery settings, ‘Adults in each setting take responsibility for identifying and, where appropriate, meeting their training needs’ (SCAA 1996: 6).	Penn (2000) reports research findings from interviews undertaken in 1996/97 with students in FE colleges doing childcare courses. She suggests that ‘Students, especially women, felt that they all brought intrinsic talent to the job of childcare, and that this talent was at least as important, if not more important than any knowledge they acquired in the course of their training’ (Penn 2000: 118).
	The Audit Commission publishes ‘Under Fives Count’ and Counting to Five’ which reported on spending on education of under fives.	‘One way of making use of existing expertise in the education system is to place teachers in day nurseries to help introduce an appropriate curriculum. In some cases, this has not worked well, because nursery staff have felt undermined rather than supported by such ad hoc intervention, a view exacerbated by differences in pay and conditions of employment between qualified teachers and permanent day nursery staff’ (Audit Commission 1996a: 69).	
2005	Common Core published Children’s Workforce consultation document published	‘The Common Core reflects a set of common values for practitioners that promote equality, respect diversity and challenge stereotypes’ (DfES 2005a: 4) ‘Our goal is to improve outcomes for all children and young people. Success depends in large part on the capacity and quality of those who plan, manage and deliver services at the front line. We need a skilled and more stable workforce in sufficient numbers, led and deployed effectively around the needs of children and young people’ (DfES 2005b: 3).	‘If you expect people to be qualified to degree level then you have to pay them appropriately... Costs would go up way beyond what any but the richest parents could pay, let alone the workless and low paid whom the government most wants to benefit from an expansion in childcare places’ (Hayter 2005: 17). ‘Low quality childcare provision will fall by the wayside as the childcare sector expands, children’s minister Margaret Hodge said’ (Curnow 2005a: 4). ‘Ms Calder says, ‘The early childhood studies degree answers all needs and we are aiming to attract many 18 year olds who want to work in the field of early childhood as possible. However, we still have to combat the problem that prospects of poor pay put off many candidates. At the moment, both go on to do the PGCE – so they can become teachers’ It seems that if the UK wants to fulfil its ambition to move to a well-qualified workforce, it will have to invest in raising the status and career prospects of a profession which has for too long suffered from being second best’ (Faux 2005a: 11).

Colour key for Appendix Four:

Terms and terminology

Socio-political and economical context (status, pay, gender) including careers, training and qualifications

Values, ideology and principles, personal qualities

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